

Have Kids, Will Travel

Take the family on adventures close to home

by Teresa Coates

JUST OUT TRAVEL

The kids are out of school and it's perfect weather for getting out of the house, but the problem is where to go. Portland is known for its kid-friendly attractions, but the summer offers freedom to get out of town.

The North Clackamas Aquatic Park (7300 Harmony Road, Milwaukie, 503-557-7873, www.clackamas.us/ncprd/aquatic) sits near Clackamas Town Center, so it's close enough to access for an afternoon excursion of water-laden fun. The big draw is the wave pool—the only one in Portland—which allows kids to surf the wave with a rented inner tube or on their own. Tweens and teens line up to ride each of the three water slides while tots can splash in their own shallow water-play pool. Moms and dads can hang out in the adult-only hot tub or swim laps while the kids use up their energy stores. All-ages open swim runs from noon to 4 p.m. daily with extended weekend hours.

Headsouth on Interstate 205 and you can't miss the End of the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center (1726 Washington St., Oregon City, 503-657-9336, www.endoftheoregontrail.org). The covered-wagon-shaped buildings sit just east of the highway. Throughout the center, men and women in costume explain the history and importance of the Oregon Trail, including multimedia presentations portraying life on the trail. Little ones can learn about pioneer-era toys and games. Open from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday to Saturday and from 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sunday.

Keep heading down the highway and you'll find the Family Fun Center and Bullwinkle's Restaurant (29111 S.W. Town Center Loop W., Wilsonville, 503-685-5000, www.fun-center.com). Popular for birthday parties, it's also a great place for an all-day visit. With plenty of activities to fill the hours, it's worth buying the day pass. The younger set will love the four-level soft play area while older kids are off playing laser tag or killing aliens at the video arcade. An attached restaurant dismisses any need to leave for food, so you can let everyone play as many rounds of miniature golf as they'd like. Open from 10 a.m.

to 10 p.m. Sunday to Thursday and from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

If you've grown up in Oregon, you're sure to have visited the beloved Enchanted Forest (8462 Enchanted Way, Turner, 503-363-3060, www.enchantedforest.com). Tucked into 20 acres of forested land, the Big Timber Log Ride provides a



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cooling splash for those warm August days. Here you can let your child slide through a witch's head, saunter the main street in Western Town and, for the braver ones, crawl through darkness of Alice in Wonderland's rabbit hole. Despite the vintage simplicity of the park, the Haunted House still scares the breath out of plenty of kids (and adults!). Open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday to Friday and from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Saturday and Sunday; open only on weekends after Sept. 1.


If you want to spend a weekend out of town, head south and visit the Oregon Vortex near Grants Pass (4303 Sardine Creek L Fork Road, Gold Hill, 541-855-1543, www.oregonvortex.com). Queer by anyone's description, it's noted for strange phenomena: Buildings lean precariously, people seem to shrink or grow at the swirling center of magnetic force, objects defy

gravity. But whether it's for real or just a manipulation of the senses is continually argued. Either way, it's fun. Open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily.

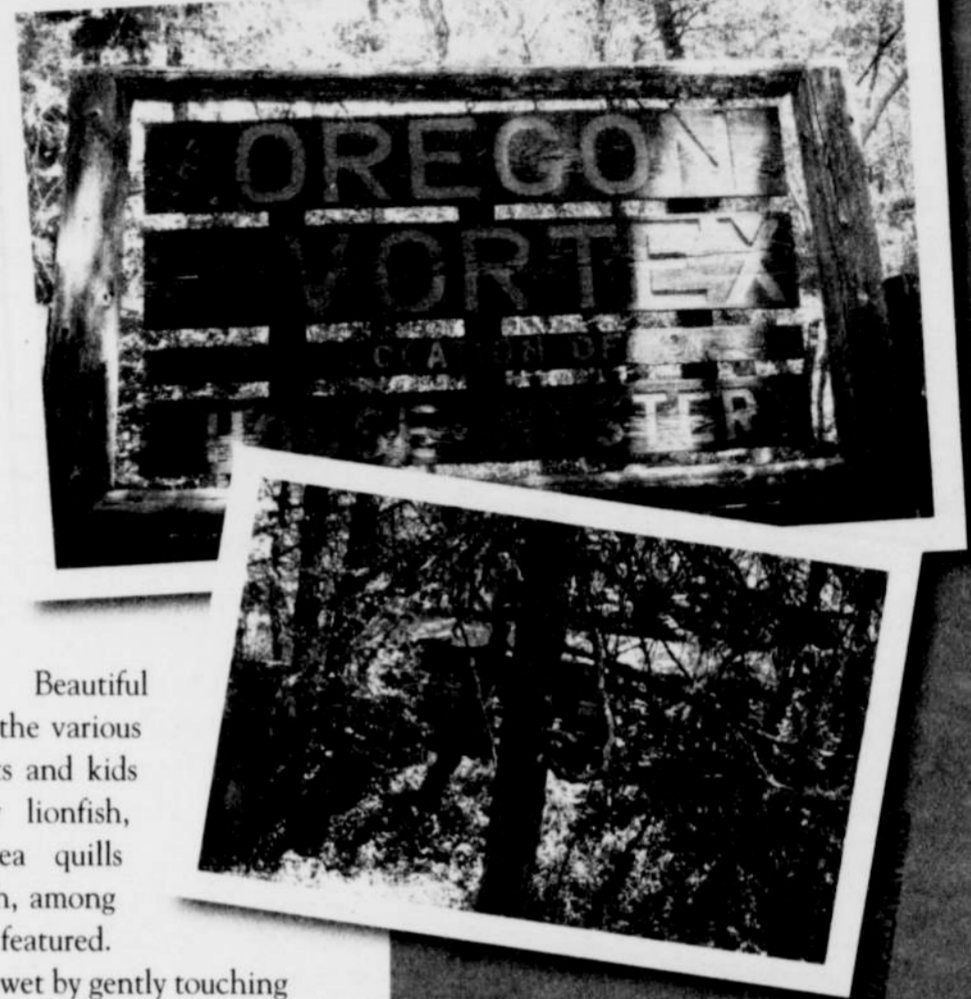
For those more inclined to watch the waves, drive west to check out the Oregon Coast Aquarium (2820 S.E. Ferry Slip Road, 541-867-3474, www.aquarium.org).

Beautiful glasswork complements the various strange creatures. Adults and kids will be enthralled by lionfish, stingrays, seahorses, sea quills and the array of jellyfish, among other animals that are featured.

Kids can get their hands wet by gently touching anemones and starfish. A constant favorite is the Passages of the Deep exhibit, where you walk through a tunnel surrounded by sharks, fish and sometimes divers cleaning the windows. Open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. through Labor Day; open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. thereafter.

You like the dry more than the wet? Then drive east and take the little ones camping in the 14,000-acre John Day Fossil Beds (20 miles west of Fossil on Highway 218, www.nps.gov/joda). Renowned for its remarkable variety of plant and animal fossils, the park combines geological studies with vacation. At the Thomas Condon Paleontology Center, children can watch paleontologists as they do their own studies and research, then the kids can pretend to be paleontologists with hands-on activities. Check out the Painted Hills with their natural rock formations and muted tones and spend an afternoon hiking through the majestic area. Open from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. daily; closed on federal holidays. 

TERESA COATES, Portland freelance writer and mother of two, is a fervent believer in showing kids the world.



ON THE CHEAP! TRAVEL TIPS

- Before you hop in your hoopty, drive through www.oregongasprices.com to get the lowdown on what statewide stations will suck your wallet dry at the pump, and which ones have the super-low prices worth an extra mile down the road.

- Lunch for two, for 7 bucks and change. Fill up on a heaping plate of Otis Cafe's "world-renowned German potatoes" (1259 Salmon River Highway, Otis, 541-994-2813, www.otiscafe.tripod.com), a sizable mound of crispy hash browns smothered in white cheddar and green onions, with meats and veggies for a few cents extra. On the way out, grab a two-pounder loaf of super-sweet black molasses bread (\$3.95) for the road.

—Stephen Marc Beaudoin



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