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Arizona: It's a Family Affair

With its many outdoor playscapes, from desert zoos and resort pools to state and national parks, its good, clean – well, as clean as horses can be – Western romps, its train rides, astronomy camps, historic parks, and more, Arizona is a great place for kids to bring their parents.

The Great Outdoors

Hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, Jeep touring, swimming, river rafting, skiing ... Arizona abounds in sports for the active family, at every skill level. And because the state is so large and geographically diverse, it offers a dazzling array of outdoor activities year-round. And talk about amazing playgrounds. Arizona's **national parks and monuments** include the world's most impressive chasm (**Grand Canyon**), towering, multi-armed cacti (**Saguaro**), and a volcanic field (**Sunset Crater**). Among the **state parks** are splashy ones like **Lake Havasu**, near the transplanted London Bridge, and **Slide Rock**, named for a natural rock formation on a river. Navajo-land sights such as **Monument Valley**, with its strange buttes and spires, and **Canyon de Chelly's** soaring sandstone walls combine great scenery with Native American culture, as does **Sunrise Ski Resort**, on White Mountain Apache lands. From the flooded canyons of **Lake Powell** and Ponderosa pines of the **Coconino National Forest** to the **red rocks of Sedona** and soaring **Santa Catalina peaks**, Arizona has a landscape to suit your family's sense of adventure.

Want to wake up near nature? In addition to its many **campgrounds** and **cabins**, Arizona also offers some more unusual places to bed down: **houseboats** on Lake Powell, **Navajo hogans** (traditional six-sided dwellings with a small roof opening) near Canyon de Chelly and Monument Valley, and **yurts** at Lyman Lake State Park, just to name a few.

The Tamer Outdoors

Got citified kids? Greater Phoenix and Metropolitan Tucson lay on loads of outdoor adventures in or near town. The **Phoenix Zoo** and Tucson's **Reid Park Zoo** are both excellent, as is the **Out of Africa Wildlife Park**, near Camp Verde, but for viewing critters in their natural habitats,

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Family Affair

Page 2

it's hard to beat Tucson's huge **Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum**. Mostly critter-free but interesting for local plant life are Phoenix's **Desert Botanical Garden** and Tucson's **Sabino Canyon**, the latter with a tram ride to the top.

At **Deer Valley Rock Art Center**, north of Scottsdale, ancient Native American artwork is on display. You can visit **Tempe Town Lake**, currently reverted back to its natural state of a dry riverbed between Tempe and Phoenix but is expected to re-open for a cruise, kayak, or buzz down by November 2010.

Or enjoy the balmy weather just outside your hotel room. Most resorts in Greater Phoenix and Tucson have large water complexes – often with kids' pools, slides, and "lazy rivers" – and anything from tennis to croquet or miniature golf. Even the modest places have swimming pools.

The Wild West Experience

There's nothing like horseplay when it comes to family fun, and Arizona will get you giddy (up), right fast. For the full-on Old West experience, bunk at one of the state's many dude ranches, with all meals and, generally, horseback rides included. Or visit historic **Tombstone**, where many buildings have bullet holes and there are daily shootouts at the O.K. Corral. Kids can be as rowdy as they like at such fake Western towns as **Rawhide** near Phoenix, **Blazin' M Ranch** outside Cottonwood, and **Old Tucson Studios**, where many classic cowboy films were shot; as well as at the state's many Wild West-themed steakhouses (at some, they snip off city slickers' neckties).

Trains, Planes, and Things that Move besides Automobiles

Hop aboard the scenic **Verde Canyon Railroad** in Clarkdale and expect to see everything from the Easter Bunny (fake) to bald eagles (real). An Old West robbery adds to the fun on the **Grand Canyon Railway** ride from Williams to you-know-where. The ride on the miniature train at Scottsdale's **McCormick-Stillman Railroad Park** is short, so kids won't ever be bored.

Small planes and **helicopter** rides give a bird's eye view of sights like the Grand Canyon, Lake Powell, Monument Valley, and Sedona. And you can go up, up, and away in a **hot air balloon** outside of Scottsdale, Phoenix, Sedona, and Tucson. **Jeep tours** are available all over Arizonabut especially around Sedona; in Scottsdale, there's one featuring night-vision goggles.

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Family Affair
Page 3

Education without the “Eh”

Science and history lessons are a blast in Arizona, what with so many outdoor classrooms. Along with places to learn about plants and animals, mentioned earlier, there are:

Earth Encounters: At **Petrified Forest National Park**, you can see dinosaur bones and pieces of the trees that grew when dinosaurs roamed the area. The living cave system at **Kartchner Caverns State Park** was kept secret by its discoverers for years so it wouldn't be spoiled, and Tucson's **Colossal Cave** is so big it's never been completely explored. Go underground, too, to tour the **Queen Mine** in Bisbee and the **Gold Road Mine** near Oatman, where wild burros roam.

Starlight, Star Bright: Arizona takes its night skies seriously. Among the places where you can peer through telescopes with star guides include the **Lowell Observatory** in Flagstaff, **Discovery Park** in Safford, **Kitt Peak National Observatory** west of Tucson, the **Flandrau Science Center and Planetarium** in Tucson, and the new **SkyCenter** atop Mt. Lemmon, just outside of Tucson. Some resorts in Tucson and Greater Phoenix also offer astronomy programs, Tucson's University of Arizona Alumni Association runs **astronomy camps** for teens (and grownups, but not at the same time).

The 550-foot-deep **Meteor Crater**, showcasing a hot rock that hit Earth some 50,000 years ago, gives you a different take on sky watching.

It's History: To get a taste of what happens to those that misbehave, **Yuma Territorial Prison State Historic Park** offers a glimpse into the lives of the nearly 3,100 prisoners that resided there in the late 1800s and those that are rumored to still haunt it today. Arizona's pioneer history comes to life at the **Sharlot Hall Museum** in Prescott, named for the intriguing woman that made her way from Kansas to Arizona in 1882 and expressed her fascination with Arizona frontier life through prose and poetry.

Cool Museums: Arizona's indoor institutions of informal learning also offer plenty of family amusement. Phoenix's **Arizona Science Center** features a large-screen theater and

–more–



Family Affair

Page 4

planetarium, and nearby, the **Arizona Natural History Museum** has the largest collection of dinosaur fossils in Arizona – not to mention a gold-panning program. Toddlers to pre-teens should enjoy **Arizona Museum for Youth**, also in Mesa. Catering to more specialized interests are the **Hall of Flame Firefighting Museum** and the **Arizona Doll & Toy Museum**, both in Phoenix.

Take a self-guided tour through miniature models of enchanting lands both real and imagined at **The Mini-Time Machine Museum of Miniatures** in Tucson. Then, visit the **Tucson Children's Museum** which has playscapes that'll keep youngsters occupied, while the small **T-Rex Museum** nearby claims to have the most fully stocked dinosaur gift shop in Arizona. That may be true, but it doesn't have a life-size Dilophosaurus, like the **Museum of Northern Arizona** in Flagstaff does.

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