

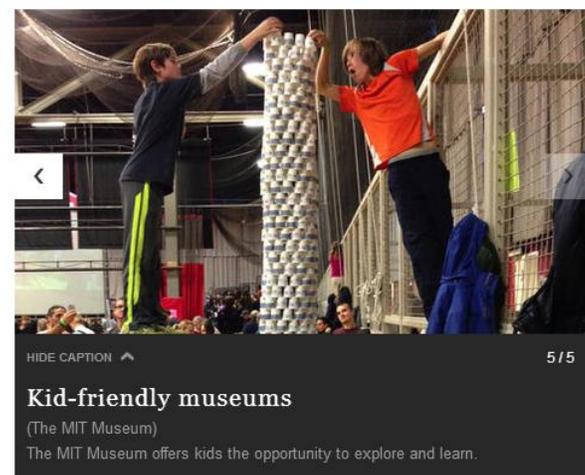
# Chicago Tribune

## Taking the Kids -- and making time for smaller museums

By Eileen Ogintz

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Let's play!

In one room the kids are busy making creatures out of clay and then seeing them come to life in a Claymation movie they create with a computer program and different backdrops; in another, they're performing in music videos.

They are working at a LEGO wall and making their faces look silly with Photoshop.

"This doesn't feel like a museum," said Ilan Bachmann, 11. "It's like a big indoor playground."

Welcome to the Children's Creativity Museum in downtown San Francisco right at Yerba Buena Gardens, which is unlike any children's museum I've ever seen. For one thing, it appeals to all ages. "I love it here," said Rena Victoria, 16, who was busy meeting a challenge, creating something only with the ingredients in a Mystery Box in the Innovation Lab.

"I like how no one has to tell you what to do," said Nyxa Aquina-Thomas, 11. "You let your imagination go free and no one tells you don't touch!"

Sure San Francisco has lots of wonderful museums -- the hands-on Exploratorium (read what I wrote about a recent visit here) and the California Academy of Sciences, among them -- that are always packed with families. But I realized when I stopped at the Children's Creativity Museum near where I was staying, how much fun a visit to a smaller museum can be for visiting families.

You're bound to meet local families. You may learn something about the culture and traditions of the city you are visiting. You won't feel guilty if you duck out after an hour -- if you can get the kids to leave.

Maybe you have one last weekend -- or week -- before the kids start school. Maybe friends or relatives are visiting -- or maybe you're visiting them. Take the time to explore some museums and attractions, based on the kids' interests -- cars, arts, local history, science and math -- and the neighborhoods that surround them. Sign on for a special workshop.

Here are some of my favorites across the country:

In New York, don't miss the Tenement Museum on the Lower East Side, the place to learn about the history not only of this neighborhood, but of the pivotal role it has played -- and continues to play -- in New York City's immigrant history. The museum tells the stories of the people who have lived and worked at 97 Orchard Street where the museum is located from the time it was built in 1863. Over the years, it was home to nearly 7,000 immigrants -- Germans, Irish, Italians and Irish among them. Another hit with visiting families is the interactive The Museum of Mathematics.

In Denver, everyone visiting should stop at History Colorado Center downtown, which makes Colorado history relevant and gives those families visiting a way to connect with Coloradoans past and present, whether "driving" a Model-T, "visiting" a pioneer town or pushing the 7-foot-tall "Time Machines" that Colorado Artist Steven Weitzman created around the Great Map of Colorado that is embedded in the floor of the museum's atrium. As you move the "Time Machine" around and hit a hot spot in the floor, it will tell you stories from that part of the state at different times. (FYI: The Grand Hyatt Denver, just a couple of blocks away, is offering a new Parents Stay Free Package starting at \$213 for two adults and two children. The offer is valid now through December 30, 2014.)

In Chicago, the DuSable Museum of African American History is the oldest museum dedicated to African-American history, culture and art. The museum is free on Sundays. Check out the exhibit on the history

of blacks in the armed services and "Funky Turns 40: Black Characters in Animation Art." Learn all about the Great Chicago Fire or dress up like a Chicago-style hot dog at the Chicago History Museum.

In Los Angeles, the Petersen Automotive Museum is the place where kids can race Hot Wheels cars and, of course, this is the place to see all kinds of cars -- from Model-Ts to buses. There is an entire Discovery Center here just for kids.

In Boston, head across the Charles River to Cambridge and the MIT Museum that includes a student showcase of inventions, robots and 5,000 Moving Parts, sculptures that are entirely based with motion. While you're there, check out all the giant sculptures on campus. Kids also like checking out the dazzling glass flowers at the Harvard Museum of Natural History. There are 3,000 of them.

At the Children's Creativity Museum in San Francisco kids and their parents were busy "creating" everywhere you looked -- solving puzzles in "mystery boxes," designing creatures they can make come to life in the Claymation Studio and working on computers. "There's a lot to do with your hands everywhere," explained Ilan Bachmann. He and his twin sister, Shira, brought a whole group of friends to celebrate their 11th birthday here.

Parents seemed to be having as much fun as the kids. "We come here to create together," said Paul Moraga, here with his 10-year-old daughter Savannah. They were in the Design Studio working side by side at computers. "I'm having as much fun as she is," he said.

Museum-going doesn't get better than that.

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