

TRAVEL

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TUCSON Family Fun

Oh baby, there's something for
a growing clan in southern Arizona



Stunning sunsets and mountain views make a stay at the Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa in Tucson one families will cherish for a long time. MHAIRRI WOODHALL/FOR THE PROVINCE

MHAIRRI WOODHALL
FOR THE PROVINCE

Travelling with our eight-month-old daughter can be like playing a game of blackjack; you never know which one of you holds the pocket ace. Trial, and painstaking error, brought me to the realization there are a few golden rules to follow when holidaying with a child under the age of one.

A vacation with an infant is really a precursor to family travel. Amusement parks, aquariums, museums and even zoos are of minimal inter-

est to these tiny humans. I learned early on that carefully-planned travel itineraries are absolutely worthless. Flexibility is key. You are no longer in charge.

With this in mind, I forged ahead with planning a weekend getaway to Tucson. Bursting with Southwest charm, Tucson offers a host of cultural, recreational and educational experiences, and has a fantastic foodie scene.

My feeling was that even if we only managed to see one attraction, the city's 350 days of annual sunshine would make the trip worthwhile.

We always end up spending more time than anticipated at our hotel, as even the simple task of getting out the door for breakfast takes an hour. So, I now start my destination research by looking for a full-service hotel with child-friendly amenities, recreational activities, day-spa, rooms with balconies and buffet breakfast, because kids are even less patient when they're hungry.

Staying at a property that offers these types of services allows my husband and I to take turns reading on the balcony during naptime while the other plays tennis, has

a spa treatment or relaxes by the pool.

The Westin La Paloma Resort & Spa fit the bill. Having recently undergone an extensive \$30-million rejuvenation, La Paloma is the ideal family retreat in Tucson.

The property has five pools, one of which has a huge waterslide, 10 championship tennis courts, yoga, Pilates and fitness studio, Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course and Red Door Day Spa. While most hotels limit the children's program to ages two and up, La Paloma's Kids Club Discovery Room welcomes babies

from six months of age, so my husband and I enjoyed a romantic, albeit early, chef's tasting dinner at the resort's Azul Restaurant.

Tucson is a recreational paradise, with activities ranging from rock climbing to horseback riding, and everything in between. The adventures I chose for our little family were slightly tamer, but we enjoyed ourselves nonetheless. I aimed for one activity per day and a nice restaurant for lunch, and I am happy to report that we all survived.

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History on display in Arizona



A desert sunset and cacti await at the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum. PHOTOS: MHAIRRI WOODHALL/FOR THE PROVINCE

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Natural history at Desert Museum

The Arizona Sonora Desert Museum is a must for kids of all ages.

The rolling hillsides covered in saguaro cacti on the drive from Tucson to the Saguaro National Park (to which the museum is adjacent) was some of the prettiest scenery we encountered while in Arizona.

Primarily an outdoor attraction, the museum is a unique blend of zoo, botanical garden, natural history museum and art gallery.

Old Tucson a Western fan's dream

My husband loves Westerns, so Old Tucson was on our itinerary.

Since 1938 more than 300 movies and TV shows were filmed in Old Tucson, including Gunsmoke, Bonanza, Little House on the Prairie, The Frisco Kid, Three Amigos and Tombstone.

The on-site Story Museum speaks to the history of Old Tucson and displays some of the original costumes from these productions.

Kids can pan for gold, ride a miniature antique car and take a spin on the carousel.

Check out Children's Museum

There is something for everyone at the fully interactive Children's Museum Tucson, and even pre-toddling kids will enjoy the bright colours, music and array of textures, sights and sounds.

Included in the many exhibits are the Enchanted Rain Forrest play area (for children four and under), and the Music Room where kids can beat drums and create their own sound.

Mini Time Machine memories

Although our daughter was too young to appreciate the Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures, this attraction is definitely worth a visit.

There are more than 275 miniature houses, room boxes and other collectibles showcased in three main areas.

The Enchanted Realm features magical snow villages, fairy castles and woodland creatures, the History and Antiques Gallery has historic miniature houses circa 1775, and the Exploring the World Gallery displays international miniatures from Italy, France, Japan, Thailand and beyond.

Dining you will surely remember

Ambience and quality are often compromised when you have to choose kid-friendly dining. We found two great restaurants in Tucson that we liked so much we ate there twice.

Hub Restaurant & Ice Creamery in downtown Tucson serves up a mean homestyle lunch, but save room for ice cream as that is main event.

El Charro Café, which has a few locations, takes the honour of being the oldest continuously family-owned Mexican restaurant in the U.S. The portions are large and the food is delicious, as are the margaritas.

Visit arrivalstravel.com for more destination information and resources.

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