



Building robot WALL-E models is just one fun interactive activity at the Science Behind Pixar Exhibition at the Telus World of Science in Edmonton. PHOTOS: CURT WOODHALL

## EDMONTON JAUNT WINS BIG POINTS FOR FAMILY FUN

Learn, laugh and eat well during a trip to the capital, writes *Mhairri Woodhall*

Like most five-year-olds, my daughter is mesmerized by the magic of Pixar. And to be completely honest, I've fallen under the spell as well.

From the inspirational storylines and quirky yet relatable characters, to the vibrant, mind-bogglingly realistic animation, Pixar pushes the limits of our imaginations and captures our hearts.

It's that love for films such as *Finding Dory* and *Monsters, Inc.* that prompted our trip to Edmonton.

The Science Behind Pixar Exhibition, a ticketed event running until Jan. 7 at the Telus World of Science Edmonton, is a must-see for animated movie buffs of all ages. Little ones are star-struck posing beside the life-size models of Mike and Sulley, Buzz Lightyear, Dory and WALL-E. You'll also find 40 interactive learning stations that

help demonstrate the eight steps in Pixar's production pipeline — from the initial stage of story and art creation, right through to final rendering. You can even delve deeper to learn about the technical intricacies of rigging, surfaces, simulation and animation.

Our favourite activities included building WALL-E robot models and playing around with lighting on the miniature sets from *Up!* And there's much more to explore outside of Pixar. Families with younger kiddos will likely spend most of their time in Discoveryland. The gallery's Sky High "airport" model is fantastic and our daughter played for hours, checking luggage through the x-ray machine, loading cargo and flying the miniature plane.

There are five permanent exhibitions at the science centre, plus an IMAX theatre, so plan to visit for at least four hours if you want to experience everything.

Our hands-on learning adventure continued at the Marine Life Sea Caverns in West Edmonton Mall. Located beneath the lagoon at Sea Lion Rock, the underground aquarium is home to nurse sharks and black tip reef sharks, tropical fish, African penguins and sea turtles. You'll also find a few boa constrictors, lizards and frogs on display.

It's a small exhibit, best suited for younger kids, but our daughter was thrilled with the up-close-and-personal experience that allowed her to pet sea urchins and white-spotted bamboo sharks. Admission includes a seat at the sea lion show, where Pablo promises to impress with his flips, dives and dancing. If



Galaxyland in the West Edmonton Mall boasts carnival rides for people of every age and thrill tolerance.

you're feeling frugal, the twice-daily performance can also be viewed for free atop the bridge overlooking the lagoon, as well as from the second-floor balcony.

Inspired by Pablo's aqua tricks, we hit the five-acre World Waterpark to play in the colossal wave pool. The park's temperature is set at a balmy 31 C. Add in the sound of gently lapping waves and a tropical concoction from the Pina Colada Bar, and you can just about close your eyes and imagine winter away.

Younger kids go crazy for the pull ropes, slides and massive dump bucket in Caribbean Cove, while the more adventurous tweens and teens have a blast flying down the adrenalin-spiking slides like Sky Screamer Extreme and Cyclone.

For dryland adventures, check out the mall's amusement park Galaxyland, where you'll find attractions for every age and thrill tolerance. We visited after dinner on a Sunday night and practically had the place to ourselves. Within 90 minutes, we tackled all our favourite carnival rides at least twice.

Finding family-friendly restaurants that serve good food is one of our travel musts. In Edmon-

ton, brunch and coffee cravings were taken care of at Little Brick — a cosy cafe and general store in an old red-brick house in Riverdale. Highlights include the daily-made scones, organic rice pudding and potted French toast with lemon whip and berries. If you prefer a savoury start to your day, opt for the thick-cut bacon and soft-boiled eggs with apple cider hollandaise.

Take your coffee — and kid's steamer — to go, and walk off breakfast along the riverfront pathway across the street.

Another must-dine is the

kitschy-but-cool Blue Plate Diner, located off Jasper Avenue in the heart of downtown. Expect homestyle — kid and parent approved — comfort food that won't break the bank. Think rich and creamy mac 'n' cheese, real shepherd's pie and juicy roast chicken with all the fixings.

If you're in town on a Saturday, swing by the Old Strathcona Farmers' Market for an inexpensive lunch. It's a casual, family-friendly affair, with live music and plenty of samples from local makers and growers to keep the kids happy.

### IF YOU GO

Travelling to Edmonton in the new year? Plan your visit around one of the city's outdoor winter festivals, like the Fly Canoe Volant, celebrating French-Canadian culture, or the arts-and-sports-inspired Silver Skate Festival. Also, keep an eye out for the grand opening of the new Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton's Arts District. Once open in early 2018, it will become the largest museum in Western Canada. For family-friendly accommodation, the Hyatt Place Edmonton-West, near West Edmonton Mall, is perfect. This new property, with indoor pool and hot tub, has large, beautifully appointed rooms that sleep up to six. The bonus? A hot buffet breakfast, with eggs, bacon, pancakes and yogurt parfait station, is included. For more destination information, go to [www.arrivalstravel.com](http://www.arrivalstravel.com)

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