

San Francisco's historic waterfront boasts spectacular views and delicious seafood.



# urban PLAYGROUNDS

ARE YOU OR YOUR HUSBAND HEADING TO ONE OF THESE TOP CONVENTION CITIES? LET THE KIDS TAG ALONG—AND TURN WORK INTO A MINI FAMILY VACATION. **BY ELAINE GLUSAC**

## SAN FRANCISCO

**WITH ITS ZIGZAGGING AVENUES, FUNKY NEIGHBORHOODS AND COLORFUL STREET PERFORMERS, ECLECTIC SAN FRANCISCO BUZZES WITH EXCITEMENT.**

**Sights to see:** Start your tour by driving down one of San Fran's famous byways, either Lombard Street, with its hairpin turns, or Filbert Street, where stairways ascend to hidden houses, lush gardens and wild parrots. For a new twist on sightseeing, try a Segway tour; a guide will narrate the city's history while you twist and turn through the streets on an

electric scooter (electrictourcompany.com, \$70). Fisherman's Wharf is worth a stop, but skip the arcade and wax museum and head to the San Francisco Maritime National Historic Park, where antique schooners, tugs and square riggers—many of which you can board—line the pier.

**Family fun:** Set sail for Alcatraz—a.k.a. the Rock—from Pier 33 and learn about the history of the island famous for housing notorious criminals. Tickets often sell out so book them before your trip (alcatrazcruises.com). Then celebrate San Francisco's unique modes of

transportation on the F-line, a fleet of vintage streetcars from around the world. Follow the waterfront route, getting off at the Ferry Building Marketplace for a fish taco, garlic fries and a hand-scooped milk shake at Taylor's Refresher.

**Off the expense account:** The sunny Hotel Del Sol in San Francisco's Marina District is a stylishly refurbished motel that offers a children's video library and a walking tour of the area led by a Golden Gate Greeter (reservations required). Rooms from \$119.

**Info:** 415-391-2000 or onlyinsanfrancisco.com.

## WASHINGTON, D.C.

**A VISIT TO THE NATION'S CAPITAL BRINGS HISTORY TO LIFE. MUSEUMS HOUSE ART AND MEMORABILIA—SHOWCASING EVERYTHING FROM SCULPTURES TO SPACESHIPS—WHILE NEARBY PARKS AND PLAZAS PROVIDE OPEN SPACE TO PICNIC OR RELAX.**

**Sights to see:** The National Mall stretches from the Capitol steps to the Lincoln Memorial and affords picturesque views of the Washington Monument. Most of D.C.'s landmarks and museums are free, including the impressive United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, America's thought-provoking memorial to the victims of Nazi Germany. [The permanent exhibits require timed-entry passes, so get there early.] Then head to Georgetown to stroll through Georgetown University's campus and browse the clothing stores that line the area's European-style streets.

**Family fun:** Beat the heat—and the crowds: Go on a nighttime bicycle tour with Bike the Sites (from \$35 for adults, \$25 for children). Or, on weekends from September through April, the National Theatre has free Saturday morning programs; families can catch spooky Halloween stories or classics like *A Christmas Carol*.

**Off the expense account:** The funky Hotel Helix is near Logan Circle and features bunk-bedded rooms (mom and dad get a king bed), free board games and packages that include a pizza dinner with ice cream, from \$179.

**Info:** 202-789-7000 or [washington.org](http://washington.org).

Teach the kids a history lesson by visiting the nation's Capitol.



Public art meets the open air at Chicago's Millennium Park.

## CHICAGO

**SITUATED ON LAKE MICHIGAN, THE WINDY CITY IS KNOWN FOR ITS FANTASTIC SHORELINE, AMAZING ARCHITECTURE AND LEGENDARY MUSICAL SPIRIT.**

**Sights to see:** Skyscrapers were invented in this "city of steel"; the best way to learn about their history is by floating in a boat down the Chicago River. The Chicago Architecture Foundation offers tours that are educational for adults—and entertaining for kids (\$26; April through November 18). One of the city's top attractions, the Museum of Science and Industry, features a U-505 submarine exhibit (the only German sub captured by the U.S. Navy in World War II) and robots that make and assemble customized toys (\$11 for adults, \$7 for children 3 to 11; [msichicago.org](http://msichicago.org)). Window shop along the Magnificent Mile or

head to the Lincoln Park Zoo, free and open every day of the year. From November to March, rent skates for \$7 and glide around the McCormick Tribune Plaza and ice rink in downtown Millennium Park, the city's new architectural jewel, where works of art and sculpture by renowned artists, including architect Frank Gehry, are on display. **Family fun:** Chicago is famed for its music clubs. One of the best, Joe Segal's Jazz Showcase ([jazzshowcase.com](http://jazzshowcase.com)), has a family program every Sunday at 4 p.m. For more local flavor, try the Gospel Brunch at the House of Blues, featuring an unlimited buffet and enthusiastic performers ([hob.com](http://hob.com)). **Off the expense account:** Just a few blocks from Michigan Avenue, the Red Roof Inn Chicago Downtown has budget-friendly rooms in the heart of the action starting at \$119. **Info:** 877-244-2246 or [877chicago.com](http://877chicago.com). (continued)

## NASHVILLE

**NASHVILLE IS RECOGNIZED AS THE HOME OF COUNTRY MUSIC, AND THE TUNES ARE ACCESSIBLE TO EVERYONE. FREE COUNTRY PERFORMANCES ARE HELD ON THE OPRY PLAZA BEFORE GRAND OLE OPRY TAPINGS FOR THE GREAT AMERICAN COUNTRY CHANNEL.**

**Sights to see:** Families will love the Frist Center for the Visual Arts' ArtQuest, where 30 interactive stations on changing themes teach kids about art, color and drawing through applied activities. Save some time to explore Nashville's popular downtown area, "the District"; the restaurants, shopping and entertainment options appeal to tourists and locals alike.

**Family fun:** Hobnob with country stars of yesterday and today while enjoying a breakfast of biscuits and gravy at the Loveless Café, a Nashville favorite for more than 50 years ([lovelesscafe.com](http://lovelesscafe.com)). Then visit the Country Music Hall of Fame, where collections



Enjoy indoor gardens, waterfalls and more than 20 places to eat at Nashville's Gaylord Opryland Hotel.

devoted to legends such as Willie Nelson adorn the halls. The museum also offers programs like weekly instrument demonstrations and songwriting demos as well as Q&A sessions with up-and-coming artists

([countrymusichalloffame.com](http://countrymusichalloffame.com)).

**Off the expense account:** The Gaylord Opryland Hotel has 9 acres of indoor gardens and canals that wind through the grounds. From \$129.

**Info:** 800-657-6910 or [visitmusiccity.com](http://visitmusiccity.com).



Fountain Place bubbles around the base of a landmark building in downtown Dallas.

## DALLAS

**THE BIG D, AS LOCALS CALL IT, DOES THINGS IN A BIG WAY—FROM ITS SKYSCRAPERS TO ITS HATS.**

**Sights to see:** Look but don't touch the waterworks at Fountain Place downtown, which has 172 bubbler fountains that shoot water in different patterns. Then check out Pioneer Plaza Cattle Drive, with its larger-than-life bronze sculptures of steers and cowboys, before moo-ving on to the West End Historic District for world-famous barbecue at Sonny Bryan's Smokehouse ([sonnybryans.com](http://sonnybryans.com)).

**Family fun:** Treat the kids to an overnight at the Great Wolf Lodge

indoor water park, opening in Grapevine in late 2007. Then continue on to Dallas' twin, Fort Worth, just 30 minutes down the road. Explore the Fort Worth Stockyards, which has art galleries, clothing stores and the National Cowgirl Museum and Hall of Fame. Twice a day you can see the Longhorn Cattle Drive, when drovers round up a herd through town. On Fridays and Saturdays don't miss cow-roping and trick-riding at Stockyards Championship Rodeo ([fortworthstockyards.org](http://fortworthstockyards.org)). Before you leave, stop for a bite at Bonnell's Fine Texas Cuisine, where chef-owner Jon Bonnell uses ingredients from nearby farms and ranches.

**Off the expense account:** Kids get a kick out of riding 50 stories up the exterior glass elevator at the Hyatt Regency Dallas. At the top is a revolving restaurant (from \$119).

**Info:** 214-571-1000 or [visitdallas.com](http://visitdallas.com).





The exterior of the Georgia Aquarium was built to look like a ship breaking through a wave.



## ATLANTA

**SOUTHERN HOSPITALITY—AND HISTORY—KEEP THIS CONTEMPORARY METROPOLIS CHARMING.**

**Sights to see:** The Georgia Aquarium is the world's largest, teeming with more than 100,000 animals, such as African penguins, beluga whales, sea otters, four massive whale sharks and oodles of jellyfish, in 8 million gallons of water. (Buy tickets in advance at [georgiaaquarium.org](http://georgiaaquarium.org); entry times often sell out.) A new local attraction is the World of Coca-Cola, which celebrates the global growth of Atlanta's hometown soda. Be sure to stop in the sampling room, where visitors can taste-test different Coke-made beverages from around the globe ([wocatlanta.com](http://wocatlanta.com)).

**Family fun:** Housed in a former school

building, the Center for Puppetry Arts is a unique interactive museum that lets you get your hands on—and in—some of the museum's 350 ancient and contemporary puppets from around the world. Then spend the afternoon relaxing among the blooms at the Atlanta Botanical Garden, next to Piedmont Park. When hunger strikes, head over to Mary Mac's Tea Room. An Atlanta institution since 1945, Mary Mac's serves authentic southern cuisine like chicken and dumplings, and fried green tomatoes ([marymacs.com](http://marymacs.com)).

**Off the expense account:** A package at downtown's Atlanta Marriott Marquis includes four tickets to the aquarium—which is only five blocks away—and breakfast, from \$189.

**Info:** 404-521-6600 or [acvb.com](http://acvb.com). ●