

ARIZONA

Spring things in Scottsdale

Family activities in to do in this lush and lively Arizona desert town



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This little guest is all ready to take in an evening “Dive-in” movie at the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess. (LORI KNOWLES/QMI Agency)

Time and again, Arizona's sprawling, sophisticated Scottsdale community is rated highly by travel and parenting magazines for its family friendly features, including hotels with both a waterpark feel and a desert zeal. Arizona can be coolish in winter and sweltering in summer -- it is North America's hottest desert -- but Scottsdale's average springtime temperature is a pleasant 25 C. Here are five top Scottsdale spring adventures for sun-seeking families:

1. Hotel adventure

For family fun, Scottsdale's expansive resorts rank up there with Orlando's. These are destinations in themselves, where a family could easily spend its entire vacation on the hotel property, floating along a lazy river, jetting down a waterslide and sucking on frozen grapes in a private poolside cabana.

Of note are the pink-coloured Fairmont Scottsdale Princess and the earth-toned Westin Kierland Resort, both of which happily welcome kids and encourage camaraderie among visiting families.

Bobcat Billy's Clubhouse at the Fairmont turns its visiting kids into mad scientists on Mondays and takes them fishing on Fridays, with the promise of swimming and ice cream at the end of every activity. The Westin Kids Club immerses children elbow-deep in cookie dough in the resort's giant kitchen, then follows up with scavenger hunts, zoo presentations, campfires and family challenges (pie eating, water-balloon tossing) at Kierland's OK Corral. End the day at either hotel with a Dive-In Movie, which allows you to watch kids classics such as Finding Nemo while afloat on an inner tube.

See fairmont.com/scottsdale and kierlandresort.com.

2. Hot air ballooning

When in Rome, do as the Romans do; when in Scottsdale, go ballooning. Scottsdale's Sonoran Desert is astounding no matter the viewpoint, but at sunrise it is particularly pretty. Hot Air Expeditions Inc., offers early morning balloon adventures for kids and their families. Flights over the desert present a bird's eye view of, coyotes and jackrabbits, and the ubiquitous Saguaro cactus. The act of filling the balloons with air is simultaneously the most terrifying and the most beautiful of ballooning experiences. Afterward, propose a toast during an outdoor champagne breakfast in the midst of the desert.

See hotairexpeditions.com.

3. Musical interludes

Scottsdale isn't all desert and pool. Its new Musical Instrument Museum -- known locally as The MIM -- is one of the community's top family stops, with an eclectic collection of musical instruments from nearly every country in the world. This museum is a lively, interesting and interactive place where kids can try most of the instruments and learn about their use through an inventive mix of audio and video. MIM literally brings obscure instruments to life.

See themim.org.

4. Cut the ties

Every town has its local joint, and Scottsdale's is Pinnacle Peak Patio. For more than 50 years, this Western barbecue hangout has been serving up mesquite steaks and baby back ribs with cobs of corn and sides of beans. The patio's picnic tables and live country music produce a free-spirited, dance-friendly atmosphere that's a whole lotta fun for kids of all ages. The indoor decor is an eye-popping showcase of cowboy culture. Kids especially love the cut-up neckties hanging from the ceiling. Pinnacle Peak Patio is a casual place: Wear a tie and the cowgirls at the bar will cut it off for you.

See pppatio.com.

5. Fore laddies and lassies

Thanks to its fair weather, 330 average annual days of sun, rolling terrain and Scottish roots, it's no surprise there are 200 golf courses in the Scottsdale area. Start with a family warm-up clinic at the Westin Kierland's Troon course, where families can actually rent kilts to wear while playing the links. At sunset, sip Arnold Palmer iced teas as a traditional Scottish bagpiper -- kilt and all -- serenades you from the fairway.

See kierlandgolf.com.

Five more fun ideas

- Hop in a Hummer for a bumpy tour of the Sonoran Desert.
- Board a smooth-riding Segway to shop the cowboy stores and art galleries of Old Town Scottsdale.
- Ride the carousel, tour the new model railroad building, then picnic at an outdoor concert at Scottsdale's McCormick-Stillman Railroad Park.
- Sip milkshakes and malts at the Sugar Bowl Ice Cream Parlor, featured in artist Bill Keane's Family Circus.
- Ride a "skycycle" on a tightrope at the Arizona Science Center.

More info

For a free, downloadable Scottsdale activity book, visit ExperienceScottsdale.com.

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