

Great Escapes: Six Weekend Road Trip Getaways

Written by Writtten by Lydia Martin

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Whether near or far in the region, a summer weekend of escape and family fun is only a car drive away.



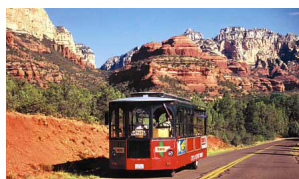
Animation Anticipation: JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort & Spa

Disneyland might not work out this year, but Nickelodeon can. Treat the kids to a fun and musical weekend of SpongeBob SquarePants or Dora the Explorer with the Nickelodeon Getaway Package at JW Marriott Desert Ridge Resort & Spa right here in Phoenix. The two-night stay includes a themed sleepover kit, two family breakfasts, photo ops with the cartoon stars, "dive-in" movies at the lazy river, games, arts and crafts and a Sunday morning "So-Long" from SpongeBob and Dora. Even if "mass sliming" isn't exactly Mom and Dad's cup of tea, they too can play golf and tennis, frequent the spa and fitness club, and receive complimentary self-parking and 10 percent discounts at retail shops. Available through Sept. 7. 480.293.5000, www.jwdesertridgeresort.com.



White Mountain Weekend: Greer

Wish you lived in the middle of nowhere? Venture off to Molly Butler Lodge in Greer and your wish will come delightfully true. State Route 373, "The Road to Nowhere"—and the only road to Greer—leads you to the 99-year-old Historic Molly Butler Lodge. Its rooms and private cabins overlook the beautiful Little Colorado River and Greer Meadow, where fly-fishing and kite-flying beckon. The Butterfly Lodge Museum, former home of writer James Willard Schultz and his artist son Lone Wolf, sits a few blocks south, and within an hour's drive are the Casa Malpais Ruins and Petrified Forest National Park. At the Lodge restaurant for dinner, sample Molly's special steak, prime rib or trout with a side of "Hot Dang Chili" and handmade pie for dessert. After a round of darts or Wii in Molly's Game Room, fall asleep pondering Teddy Roosevelt's stay here a century ago. 928.735.7226, www.mollybutlerlodge.com; 928.735.7514, www.wmonline.com/butterflylodge.html.



From Trolley Tour to Tour of the Universe: Sedona

Begin your day with a trolley tour of Sedona and its breathtaking surroundings. Spend the afternoon hiking, fishing, bird-watching or attending interpretation programs at Red Rock State Park, where picnicking is a pleasure and kids can complete the Junior Ranger Program. Back in town, peruse Southwestern gifts, art, books and toys at the copious boutiques tucked into Sedona's red hillsides, before enjoying a steak dinner or some international cuisine. After a lovely sunset, wrap up the day with an Evening Sky Tours "tour of the universe," glimpsing stars, planets and meteor showers with telescopes or the naked eye. 928.282.4211, www.sedonatrolley.com; 928.282.6907, www.azstateparks.gov/Parks/RERO; 928.203.0006, www.eveningskytours.com.

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Best Day Trip: Boyce Thompson Arboretum

Don't want to worry about packing the kids' suitcases, finding a hotel and boarding the dog? No problem. The Boyce Thompson Arboretum is a desert wonderland in Phoenix's own backyard. Multiple trails meander through a 320-acre "living classroom," bursting with cacti, succulents, trees, herbs, flowers, lizards, birds and rodents. Learn about the mysterious Sonoran landscape at the Smith Interpretive Center, then go overlook it from the High Trail. Explore Queen Creek Canyon and take a serene breather in the Wing Memorial Garden. Peek at Picketpost, William Boyce Thompson's 1920's mansion perched on a lava ridge. Don't forget a picnic lunch or a pack of franks for the available grills. You can even bring Spot and Fluffy, if they're leashed and well-behaved. 520.689.2723, www.ag.arizona.edu/bta/.



California Dreamin': La Jolla

As a Valley-dweller, odds are you've already submitted to the lures of San Diego. This time then, discover the village of La Jolla, nestled just twenty minutes north of America's Finest City. Drop off your bags at La Valencia Hotel, which exudes old-world Mediterranean charm and overlooks picturesque La Jolla Cove. The kid-friendly hotel offers an array of packages for couples and families, a pool and three impressive restaurants. Be sure to hit La Jolla's Museum of Contemporary Art, the Children's Pool (beach hangout of harbor seals) and downtown La Jolla's copious boutiques—all within walking distance of the hotel. Beautiful parks and ocean paths also await on the short drive to Birch Aquarium, where you can take in the Hall of Fishes and nosh on a peanut butter and banana wrap or Turkey Riptide sandwich at Splash! Cafe. La Jolla is ocean-side relaxation for the whole family. 858.454.0771, www.lavalencia.com; www.lajollabythesea.com; 858.534.3474, aquarium.ucsd.edu.



New Thrills in the Old Pueblo: Tucson

Whether you spend a day or a weekend, Tucson is the adventurer's town. Get out and bike the scenic six-mile Bajada Loop Drive through Saguaro National Park, but don't forget water—or helmets, which are mandatory for kids under 18 (especially since cars share this gravel road). If you'd rather play than ride, take the kids to the T-Rex Museum. They'll dig for fossils, split open geodes and enjoy a dinosaur film and popcorn at the end. Towards evening, get your vittles at the famous Pinnacle Peak Steakhouse in Trail Dust Town, a vestige of the Old West. Afterward, enjoy the Town's très affordable family entertainment: the C.P. Huntington miniature railroad, panning for gold, a 1920s carousel and the free, funny and thrilling Wild Wild West Stunt Show. If you're still not exhausted by 10 p.m., jet over to Lucky Strike Bowling for weekend Cyberbowl until 1 a.m. 520.733.5153, www.nps.gov/sagu; 520.888.0746, www.trexmuseum.org; 520.296.5442, www.traildusttown.com; 520.327.4926, www.vantagebowlingcenters.com.