Southeastern Michigan
**Fun Food**

Kids can order muffins and yogurt sundaes at Afternoon Delight (251 East Liberty St., 734-665-7513), an upscale cafeteria open for breakfast and lunch. Or they can eat at Zingerman’s Deli (422 Detroit St., 734-663-3354), where made-to-order was never so exciting. Friendly staff are happy to let you taste olives, meat, and cheese. Take home a loaf of chocolate-cherry bread, my kids’ favorite.

**Field Tip**

Wild Swan Theater, a unique children's theater, offers original plays, often based on children’s stories, using masks, mime, puppetry, music, colorful costumes, and continuous American Sign Language interpretation. They also offer behind-the-scenes tours and provide audio-description guides for those who are blind. Plays are performed at Towsley Auditorium, Washtenaw Community College, 4800 E. Huron Dr., Ann Arbor Twp. 48105. For a Wild Swan schedule, call 734-995-0530.

Go Blue! Cheer on your U of M teams. For tickets to sporting events, call the University of Michigan Athletic Office, 734-764-0247.

Dinosaur lovers and mini-paleontologists should check out the University of Michigan Exhibit Museum, 1109 Geddes Ave. On campus, at the corner of North University and Geddes, the museum offers many dinosaur and mastodon skeletons and bones, plus static exhibits of wildlife, Michigan geography, and Native American life. The planetarium (734-764-0478) offers changing shows about the seasonal sky and weather.
The Ann Arbor Hands-On Museum is a giant four-level playground where kids explore and become young scientists. In the Preschool Gallery, a huge self-contained room, toddlers wear firemen’s hats and climb on a red fire truck; sit at kid-sized tables to look at leaves and insects; play with pots, pans, and plastic food in a small climbing house; and tumble around a play area full of colorful, cushioned blocks. Best of all, at the water tables, toddlers put on aprons, belly up to the troughs, and play with water toys—plastic sharks, boats, and gears. When they are finished, there are dryers to dry off hands and clothes. (Older children will appreciate their own water tables across the hall from the Preschool Gallery.)

The museum has other kid-pleasers. On the second floor, older children climb on the climbing wall, while all ages play music on gigantic piano keys, fool around at sand and bubble tables, and become surrounded by a giant soaplike bubble in the bubble capsule. The Discovery Room is perfect for budding paleontologists. It’s full of shells, skeletons, rocks and skulls, magnifying glasses, and discovery books.

The third and fourth floors are very small and should remind you of their original use as the upper level of a firehouse. You’ll find a light harp and shadow wall on the third level. The fourth level lets kids build geometric shapes and become television hosts.

In addition to traveling exhibits, the museum offers special family days during school vacations, with such engaging workshops as making and eating ice cream.

The well-stocked gift shop has robot, dinosaur, and slime kits; plush toys, kaleidoscopes, costumes, puzzles, books, telescopes, rocks, and crystals; and a lot of inexpensive toys that would make great party favors. The museum offers birthday parties, camps, and scout badge workshops.
Fun Food

At Al-Ameer’s (12170 W. Warren, 313-582-8185), kids enjoy the colorful murals and Mideastern foods—falafel, shish kebab, fatoush salad, chicken shawarma, and specialty juice smoothies. For upscale Arabic and French pastries and Kashta ice cream (which tastes a little like fragrant gelato), be sure to end your visit at Shatilla Bakery (14300 W. Warren, 313-582-1952). Order at the counter and take some treats home, but enjoy part of your snack in the center of the bakery, surrounded by twinkling lights and palm trees.

Field Tip

The gift shop is a virtual bazaar representing wares from all over the Arab world. Kids will find dolls, stuffed animals, T-shirts, candy, Arabic children’s books, music, and jewelry. The museum offers tours and workshops. At 2–4 on Sundays, Target sponsors free craft workshops for children.
This new museum is for families who value diversity and those with Arabic backgrounds who would like to share their culture with their children. Located across the street from the Dearborn City Hall, the airy museum’s three levels tell a story of the many cultures, lands, and people who historically and currently make up the Arab world.

Start by listening carefully in the mosaic-tiled and domed atrium. Hear trickling water from the center fountain and haunting music. Glass cases holding historic artifacts ring the room and introduce kids to the arts and architecture of the historic Arab world and the three religions—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—that make up monotheism. Kids enjoy pressing buttons and hearing the sounds of a takht—a small Arabic musical ensemble including a tablah (handheld drum), riqq (tambourine), nay (flute), ud (stringed instrument), quanun (zither), and violin.

As you walk up the grand staircase to the second floor, there’s a huge map of the current Arab world and a slide show of the many faces of Arabic people. The second floor’s two large galleries contain artifacts—many static and some participatory—explaining when, how, and from where Arabs came to the United States. Arab Americans can trace their own roots and find Syrian, Lebanese, Chaldean, Palestinian, or Egyptian stories, among others.

On the third floor, learn about famous Arab Americans in every walk of life, like astronaut/teacher Christa McAuliffe, heart surgeon Dr. Michael DeBakey, political activist Ralph Nader, and race car driver Bobby Rahal.
Fun Food

Drive two miles east to Eastern Market (2934 Russell St., 313-833-1560) and park in the main lot. If you go on a Saturday in summer, expect lots of traffic and congestion. Bring your stroller or wagon to pull the kids through the outdoor farmers’ stalls and load up on fresh fruits and vegetables. Other times during the year are quiet. There are several good restaurants for lunch. My favorite is the Russell Street Deli (2465 Russell St., 313-567-2900), a noisy, unadorned restaurant with large sandwiches.

Field Tip

The museum offers Black History Month events during February, sponsors the African World Festival at Hart Plaza in August, and has a family day for Kwanzaa in December. School and community groups can also schedule workshops and tours.

To learn more about Berry Gordy Jr. and the Motown Sound, take a tour of the nearby Motown Historical Museum (2648 West Grand Blvd., Detroit 48208; 313-875-2264).
This beautiful gold-domed building is the largest African American History museum in the country. Its new core exhibit is a wonderfully evocative high-tech, animated journey from an African village to Detroit in the 20th century. For schoolchildren, it makes history come to life.

Walk slowly through the two-level space, with its 22 galleries, life-sized casts, interactive kiosks, time lines, and simulated historical scenes. You come face-to-face with an African marketplace, the horrors of a slave dungeon and slave ship, a slave auction block, and a Southern plantation. You learn about the Underground Railroad from talking mannequins of Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass.

You learn about the Great Migration through a simulation of the Ford Rouge foundry, see a street in Black Bottom, and step into the Paradise Theatre to watch short film clips by African Americans. You learn about the sports and labor histories of the city from eavesdropping near a barbershop and then meet barrier-breaking doctors—including Charles H. Wright, who started the museum. Walk into a church and learn about Detroit’s role during the civil rights movement, watch the 1967 riots on a television screen, hear the Motown sound, and, finally, at the end of the journey, meet a life-size cast of Detroit’s first black mayor, Coleman A. Young.
Fun Food

Eat lunch at The Common Grill (112 S. Main St., 734-475-0470), the most famous restaurant in town, upscale and always consistently good. Satisfy your sweet tooth with chocolates and chocolate drinks at Gourmet Chocolates (312 N. Main St., 734-475-1071); there’s even a children’s play area where kids can read, play in a little kitchen, and ride a rocking horse.

Field Tip

If your kids like teddy bears, stop at Chelsea Teddy Bear Co. (310 N. Main Street), across the street from the milling company. In this huge retail outlet, you’ll find bears of all sizes, shapes, and colors, as well as their clothes. Tours of the glassed-in factory area are at 11, 1, and 3 on Saturdays or may be scheduled. The outlet also holds birthday parties and workshops. For tour reservations, call 734-433-5499 or visit www.chelseateddyybearcompany.com.
The Chelsea Milling Co.’s Jiffy Mix Tour is good, old-fashioned fun. Ushered by a friendly guide into the small auditorium, you watch the history of the milling company and all of its special Jiffy mixes in a slide show on a screen pulled down from the ceiling, with a tour guide with a bullhorn enunciating the audio portion. Next you have your choice of hot or cold drinks and at least three different tasty Jiffy Mix snacks at tables set up in the reception room, which is wood-paneled like a 1950s den.

You then put on your hairnet and file out of the den, up the stairs, and into the plant, which hasn’t changed much in its 75-plus years. It’s clean and airy and smells like raspberry chocolate. Your tour guide continues to point out parts of the factory, shouting through the bullhorn. Actual workers glide past you; the floor vibrates under you; conveyer belts near you and above your head slowly and methodically fill boxes with mix, close them, put on their labels, and pack them. The little boxes sashay along their path, and everyone from tour goer to employee is smiling and happy. After the tour, take home several boxes as freebies. More boxes are available for purchase.
Fun Food

The Big Cat Court and concessions throughout the park offer a variety of foods, from Little Caesar’s pizza and hot dogs to salads and fries. Across the street, in Foxtown, is Johnny Rockets (2239 Woodward, 313-471-3446), a 1950s diner with hamburgers and milk shakes. Take Red Wing fans and out-of-towners to Hockeytown Café (2301 Woodward, 313-965-9500).

Field Tip

Kids 14 and under can become Tigers Kids Club members and be privy to lots of Tigers freebies and perks, including an official badge with lanyard, two complimentary passes for upper box seats for a game, player posters, a Detroit Tigers sticker sheet, a magnet, newsletters, and the opportunity to go to the front of the line to run the bases on Sundays. Sign up online or call 313-471-2224.

Tours of Comerica Park for groups of 15 or more are available on nongame Tuesdays and Fridays, June–September, at 10, noon, and 2. Call 313-471-2074.
For small children, enjoying a baseball game requires food and team paraphernalia and a funny mascot. The Detroit Tigers have all that and more. At Comerica Park—part theme park, part stadium—kids have fun whether or not the team wins, which is something the Tigers front office cemented in the dreary years before the team became a World Series contender.

Ride a hand-painted tiger or a chariot on the Big Cat Court’s carousel, or ride a baseball 50 feet into the air on the Brushfire Grill’s Ferris wheel. Paws, the team mascot, his behind bobbing to the music, is always up for a photo and a hug.

On Kids Day, every Sunday during the season, face painters are on hand, children 14 and under ride the Ferris wheel and the carousel for free, and after the game kids can run the bases. There’s a mammoth water fountain in center field that spouts colorful water whenever the Tigers hit a home run and after the Friday and Saturday evening games there are fireworks.

Regale your kids with Tigers lore by looking at the six larger-than-life sculptures along the left center field wall. They include Ty Cobb, Charlie Gehringer, Hank Greenberg, Willie Horton, Al Kaline, and Hal Newhouser.

Arrive early and show the kids the outside of Comerica Park, where orange and blue Pewabic tiles share the decor with mounted tiger faces who’ve caught baseballs in their mouths. Take a picture of the kids next to the giant tiger at the Gate A entrance.

Best of all, teach your kids that summer means wearing your sunscreen and Tigers caps, sitting in the stands, eating a hot dog, and cheering for the home team.
Fun Food

Drive south on Woodward into Birmingham, under 10 minutes away, and you’ll find lots of restaurants. Kids do well at Leo’s Coney Island (154 S. Woodward, 248-540-8780).

Field Tip

If you are artsy or encourage the arts, you’ll want to take your children to the museum’s family days, great afternoons of unusual art projects.
Cranbrook Art Museum features arts and crafts items from the Cranbrook Collection and famous modern art from its newer collection, plus small traveling shows. It’s intimate and cozy, with two floors of small galleries, often a video pertaining to an exhibition, and a great gift shop. Connected to the Cranbrook Art Academy, where students can receive an MFA, the museum is also a showcase of the avant-garde and witty during twice-a-year student shows. Surprising, colorful, and amusing pieces of art offer children a wonderful first-time art experience.

Visit in good weather and be rewarded by the vista to the south, outside the museum’s door. Eliel Saarinen, the academy’s first president and architect of the Cranbrook community, laid out a symmetrical walkway of reflecting pools and landscape. Explore the outdoor sculpture on all sides of the museum. My children enjoyed seeing the Orpheus Fountain, which they thought were “people taking a shower.”
Fun Food

Take hungry mini-scientists to the Reflections Café, the museum’s upscale coffee shop, where you’ll also find sandwiches, soups, pizza, and snacks.

Field Tip

The Bat Zone, in a separate small building behind the main museum, is the home of more than 90 bats, all rescued and hanging upside down in large cages. Walk into their warm and semi-darkened world and learn how they help the environment (they eat thousands of mosquitoes, for one thing) and aren’t the scary predators of popular culture (these bats are all fruit-eating). Friendly handlers from the Organization for Bat Conservation put on public shows daily Memorial Day–Labor Day and at 1:30, 2:30, and 3:30 Sat. & Sun. the rest of the year. The Bat Zone is sometimes also home to an injured sloth or flying squirrels.
A visit to Cranbrook Institute of Science has always been a way to reinforce science for school-age children. Under one roof, you’ll find a life-sized *T. rex* skeleton, a gigantic furry mastodon, lots of stuffed birds, a slice of a giant redwood tree, a huge rock collection, dinosaur bones, botany specimens, evolution dioramas, weather games, physics gears, and a beautiful new audio about Native Americans. There are buttons to push and even a dome to enter to see an audiovisual presentation on how birds are related to dinosaurs. Kids enjoy the Motion Room, with its gears and Rube Goldberg contraption; the Observatory, where, on a clear night, you can look through the telescope and see Saturn; and the Weather Station, where you can stand in the middle of a rainstorm. There is even a science play area for toddlers, complete with books, puzzles, and a Little Tykes computer.

Catch an astronomy or musical laser show in the planetarium. Children three and under might find the absolute darkness frightening. Buy your tickets ahead or when you first enter. Shows are offered Saturday and Sunday year-round and daily during the summer and school holidays.

The excitement is ratcheted up three times a year when the museum hosts a hands-on traveling exhibit that teaches kids through fooling around, touching, and having fun. The museum offers classes, workshops, field trips, birthday parties, and seasonal events, such as the Maple Syrup Festival in March, the Bat Fest in August, Chemistry Day and Halloween Science in October, and special daily activities during Thanksgiving weekend and December school break.

This is one gift shop where you’ll want to set each child’s monetary limit before you enter. It has an incredible amount of science-related toys, games, books, plush toys, kits, and even insect-laden candy.
Fun Food

Walk west two short blocks along Kirby into the Wayne State Campus for Jimmy Johns, Starbucks, and Einstein Bagels, all waiting for you on Anthony Wayne Dr. Or drive south along Woodward less than a mile to Union Street Saloon (4145 Woodward, 313-831-3965) for salads, soups, and sandwiches.

Field Tip

Be sure to come back to the museum for special events highlighting Detroit history and featuring crafts, snacks, and live entertainment. These include African American Family Day in February, Detroit’s Birthday Party in July, and Treats in the Streets in October.

For multicultural programs, craft projects, and intimate Starlab planetarium shows, head over to the Detroit Children’s Museum (6134 Second Ave., 313-873-8100, www.detroitchildrensmuseum.org).

The Mosaic Youth Theatre is also nearby. For a schedule of their award-winning season of public and school performances, call 313-872-6910 or visit www.mosaicdetroit.org.

Take a spin on the brand-new River Carousel, whose 19 colorful animal figures are based on Detroit River wildlife. The carousel is located in the new Rivard Plaza at the foot of Rivard and the RiverWalk, the new 3.5-mile-long walkway alongside the Detroit River, between Renaissance Center and Belle Isle. The carousel is open during spring, summer, and fall. Rides are $2.
Parents and grandparents who grew up in Detroit know all about this museum’s spooky Streets of Old Detroit. Located in the museum’s lower level, the streets are just as wonderful as you remember them. Walk along cobblestones and then bricks as you go through Detroit in the 1840s, 1870s, and 1900s. Kids can peek into the storefront windows of drug, toy, and shoe stores and see old-fashioned merchandise. Three sites have talking mannequins, which make the era come alive. In the blacksmith shop, overhear a conversation about the Underground Railroad; in the bank, a widow applies for a loan after her husband has died in a cholera epidemic; in the fire station, horses neigh, and firemen get ready for action.

Adjacent to the Streets is Glancy Toy Trains, four levels of an expansive collection of moving trains amid city and country buildings, bridges, a circus, a Wild West show, and much more. Kids can press buttons to hear stories or music and can see close-ups on video screens.

There are two major exhibits on the main level of the museum, From Frontier to Factories and Motor City. Both reward patient children with a look at the history of Detroit through hands-on displays, walk-into exhibits, and video screens. Kids press buttons to hear specific stories of the past, told through the eyes of people representing Detroit’s diverse population. Learn how Detroit went from fur trading post to stove capital to motor city. Walk along the catwalk of the old Chrysler plant and look over the car factory displays. On the museum’s top floor, you’ll find changing exhibits featuring pop culture or fashion.

The gift shop is a great place to find history-based toys, games, and activity books. You’ll also find snacks, miniature cars, posters, books, and puppets.
You can find something for everyone at the CaféDIA, an upscale cafeteria serving hot and cold entrées, sandwiches, salads, soups, desserts, and drinks. Or have a snack and drink at the Kresge Court Coffee Shop.

The DIA has worked very hard to become family friendly under its new visitor-friendly mandate. There are art workshops, storytelling, puppet shows, and special family events on weekends; colorful treasure hunt sheets; a youth component on the audio tour; and, best of all, “I Spy” labels hung at child’s eye level to help children find items of interest in the galleries. The museum also offers art classes and workshops, day camps, and special holiday events during the summer and December school break.

The Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit (4454 Woodward Avenue, 313-832-6622) offers free family workshops each month in conjunction with their exhibitions.
Take your children to the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) at an early age and keep visiting. Soon they’ll have their favorite installations and galleries. It might be the inscrutable mummies; the otherworldly African, Oceanic, or South American masks; the cases of splendidly engraved armor; the galleries of colorful and minimal contemporary art; or the aristocratic family meal—a video display in the French Decorative Arts gallery. Be sure to introduce them to Artie the Donkey, the only piece of art in the museum that can be touched (he sits on the second floor in the family area, near the elevator right above the Farnsworth Entrance). Snake down the spooky spiral staircase found in the first gallery on your right off the Great Hall.

Bring a pad of paper and some pencils and let your mini-artists sit on the floor and sketch what they see. Help them really look at a painting or sculpture. Have them mimic the painted subject’s pose, gesture, or facial expression.

Since the DIA is so huge—30 percent more gallery space was added during renovations completed in November 2007—only stay for a short time with your children. Have a snack or a meal, buy something in the gift shop, and leave with them wanting more. The gift shop has a huge inventory of art-oriented children’s books, kits, games, puzzles, plush toys, and puppets.
Walk over to Campus Martius Park and order sandwiches, soup, salads, and cookies at Au Bon Pain (800 Woodward, 313-226-6600). Or treat the kids to Detroit's own Hard Rock Café (in the Compuware Building, 45 Monroe St., 313-964-7625), also within walking distance.

During the summer, Campus Martius features movies; you can rent ice skates and skate on the pond during the winter. Enjoy early February’s annual Detroit’s Winter Blast, held along Woodward from downtown to Campus Martius, featuring a big ice slide and other outdoor winter games.

To see giant papier-mâché puppet-type heads, tour the Parade Company (9500 Mt. Elliott, Studio A), responsible for America’s Thanksgiving Parade. To schedule a tour, call 313-923-7400 or visit www.theparade.org.
PuppetART is the creative endeavor of three Russian émigrés, all formally trained in Russian theater arts and puppetry. The troupe offers a monthly repertoire of puppet shows in their cozy Detroit Puppet Theater. Each puppet show is an international folktale or original story performed in a sophisticated manner using music, dialogue, and beautifully dressed handmade marionettes and other puppet forms. Adults will realize that puppet shows are perfect for them, too.

In the last ten years, Detroit Puppet Theater has grown. The intimate theater with its puppet stage and tiered seating is just one part of the whole puppetry experience. Now there’s a museum of puppets from around the world, including Japan, Russia, Sicily, Czechoslovakia, and Yoruba, Africa. On display are also many of the puppets created for PuppetART shows and, on loan, a collection of Meredith Bixby’s famous puppets.

The front room houses a gift shop with snacks, drinks, and inexpensive puppets and puppet paraphernalia. It also functions as a birthday party room or workshop area, perfect for staying after a puppet show to create your own puppet, celebrating a child’s birthday, or bringing in a scout troop for a puppet workshop.

PuppetART offers a repertoire of eight puppet shows, performed on Saturdays, September–May. These include “The Firebird,” “Close the Window,” “Crane Maiden,” “Oh, Ananse!” “Turtle Island,” “Book of Esther,” “Kolobok,” and “Banana for Turtle.” Three annual festivals in February (African Folklore), April (Puppetry Month), and December (Holiday Month) may feature guest puppeteers or special programming.
Fun Food

Take a break with your mini-scientists and eat at the museum’s Science Café, where they sell sandwiches, salads, soups, and snacks. Or, if you’re finished fooling around with science, drive four miles west to Mexican Town and treat the kids to authentic Mexican food and large portions at Xochimilco (3409 Bagley Street, Detroit 48216; 313-843-0179) or Evie’s Tamales (3454 Bagley, 313-843-5056).

Field Tip

The Detroit Science Center’s gift shop is a treasure chest of science toys, kits, and books; telescopes, plush toys, T-shirts, and gifts representing traveling exhibits. Kids will even find inexpensive pencils, erasers, rubber animals, and dinosaurs, priced just right for their allowance.
The Detroit Science Center’s three floors of exhibits, shows, and demonstrations are airy, colorful, and spacious. There’s so much going on at one time, it’s important to plan your visit, because what you do and see depends greatly on the age of your children.

Check out the times of the IMAX Dome Theatre’s movies and the planetarium’s shows, and buy your tickets when you first come in. As the lights go down in the 360-degree domed theater, a huge movie wraps around you in sight, sound, and movement. Soar to the top of a snowcapped mountain, swim with a school of fish in the ocean depths, kayak down the crashing Nile, or walk weightless on the moon. The movement and darkness might be too upsetting for children three and under, but older children will want to experience more. In the technologically updated Dassault Systemes Planetarium, kids dramatically learn about the night sky or the universe on a wide, three-story-high dome with surround sound.

If you are visiting with preschoolers, make a beeline for the SBC Children’s Gallery, where kids can explore dinosaurs, play with water and real plants, crawl through honeycomb cells, look at bugs under microscopes, curl up with science books, make a simple science project, dress up, and pretend with puppets. All ages enjoy the silliness and wonderment of the electrifying DTE Energy Sparks Theater and the audience-participatory Chrysler Science Stage. Older kids can wander through a rain forest and become amazed by the cascading two-story interactive waterfall, learn about heart health and the marvels of manufacturing, play with gizmos and levers, create tornadoes, make a hot air balloon rise, refract light, and hear sound from a laser harp.

At least two times a year, the museum features not-to-be-missed traveling exhibits. It also offers birthday parties, special family workshops, summer camps, and, for grades K–12, group tours, workshops, and traveling science shows.
Fun Food

During the summer, concessions located throughout the park sell soft drinks, water, ice cream, hamburgers, hot dogs, garden burgers, pizza, chicken tenders, and other snacks. During the winter, only the Arctic Food Court is open, selling soup, among other things. Bring a picnic and eat in the three-acre, 40-table main picnic grove behind the Wildlife Interpretive Gallery. Or go into downtown Royal Oak to Comet Burgers (207 S. Main Street, 248-414-4567) and introduce the kids to a 1950s diner complete with juke box, pink vinyl stools, and a full menu of hamburgers, fries, malts, and Sander’s hot fudge sundaes.

Field Tip

The Wild Simulator Ride, located in the Ford Education Center, takes kids at least 36 inches tall and five years or older on a seated motion-simulated thrill ride in a big-screen theater. Four movies are rotated—Dino Island, Dino Island II, Wilderness Adventure, and Deep Sea. Check at the entry for movie schedule and times.
At the Detroit Zoo, kids run down floral trimmed paths and bump into outdoor areas of grazing camels or deer, flamingos, and wild horses. They can find lions napping in the sun on a bleached rocky outcrop or tigers sitting in the shade. At the Australian Outback Adventure, kids walk through a dusty Australian habitat for an up-close view of kangaroos and the wildlife they live among. At the Arctic Ring of Life, they walk through a clear Plexiglas, water-filled tunnel and come face-to-face with floating sea otters and polar bears diving for food.

They can check out the chimps and gorillas frolicking in trees and grassy areas at the Great Apes of Harambee. At the Wild Life Interpretive Gallery, there’s a coral reef aquarium and an attached butterfly garden, where velvety butterflies land on you. At the connected Free Flight Aviary, kids see large nests and exotic birds. They stroll through a rain forest at the National Amphibian Conservation Center and see all sorts of frogs, toads, salamanders, and newts.

That’s just the tip of the iceberg, so to speak. There are hundreds of animals behind each twist and turn, in state-of-the-art indoor and outdoor exhibits. There are also a miniature train and colorful and inviting playscapes. You can also feed giraffes at the new Giraffe Encounter.

The zoo offers birthday parties, overnights, summer camps, group outings, and special events, including Wild Winter Weekends in January and February, ethnic festivals and concerts in the summer, Zoo Boo in October, and Breakfast with Santa in December. The main gift shop, near the entrance, is stocked to the gills with animal- and conservation-themed toys, books, plush animals and puppets, lunch bags, back packs, sippy cups, games, puzzles, and clothes.
Fun Food

Prolong the pastoral feeling by bringing a picnic and sitting at covered picnic tables. Kids can feed crusts to the ducks in the pond. If you are part of a group, you can order Domino’s Pizza ahead: $3.50/person includes two slices of pizza and a beverage.

Field Tip

Have a down-on-the-farm birthday, complete with farmhouse party room (available on Saturdays or Sundays). All packages include a hayride, the petting farm, and a pizza lunch. Pony rides are available at an additional cost. Call the group number to arrange a party.

   If your children would like to see lots of cows up close and also tour an ice cream production facility, go to Cook’s Farm Dairy (2950 Seymour Lake Road, Ortonville 48462; 248-627-3329).
Domino’s Petting Farm offers young children a friendly first-time experience on a farm. The barns and adjoining area are clean, the animals docile, and the farmer-guides welcoming. Take a tractor-drawn hayride around 15 acres and watch for the Domino’s herd of buffalo. Sit on haystacks in the red barn for an audience participation animal show. You’ll learn what to call female and male cows (heifers and bulls), how to feed a baby cow (with a bottle of milk), and all sorts of silly animal facts. After the show, walk slowly through the barn, meeting and petting horses, donkeys, sheep, goats, chicken, rabbits, pigs, and llamas. Depending on the season, you might even see baby animals (most are born in spring and summer). If you visit during the winter, you’ll find the barn open to visitors, but no show or hayride.

Domino’s Petting Farm holds a huge Easter Egg Hunt for kids ages 1–10, with more than 20,000 eggs, plus hayrides, pony rides, animal demonstrations, and a visit from the Easter Bunny. Proceeds benefit Make-A-Wish Foundation.
Fun Food

The farm market sells quarts and half quarts of cider, plus cider slush and hot cider, caramel apples, hot dogs, nachos, cinnamon doughnuts, and the Erwin specialty—pumpkin doughnuts with autumn sprinkles. It’s fun to sip on cider and eat doughnuts at a picnic table in the sunny autumn weather.

Field Tip

Until the developers catch up with them, there are still many farms offering U-pick fruits. The season starts in June with strawberries and runs through summer cherries and blueberries and fall raspberries, apples, and pumpkins. For a directory of U-pick farms, visit www.mda.state.mi.us/market/u-pick/index.asp. Here are my favorites:

Blake’s Big Apple Orchard, 71485 North Ave., Armada 48005; 586-784-9710.
Blake’s Orchard and Cider Mill, 17985 Armada Center Rd., Armada 48005; 586-784-5343.
Erie Orchards, 1235 Erie Rd., Erie 48133; 734-848-4518.
Spicer Orchards Farm Market and Cider Mill, 10411 Clyde Rd., Fenton 48430; 810-632-7692.
Wiard’s Orchards, 5565 Merritt Rd., Ypsilanti 48197; 734-482-7744.
Take the kids to Erwin Orchards, where dwarf apple trees are just the right size. After a five-minute wagon ride (free of prickly hay), children are ready to become farmers for a day. Kids two and older quickly recognize the fun of plucking ripe reddish-green apples from drooping branches and stowing them carefully in a plastic bushel or peck bag. Within 20 minutes, you’ll fill your bag and be ready for the bumpy ride back to the farm market and play area. Put the fruit in the car and come into the fragrant farm market. It’s time for your annual cider and doughnut fix. You can eat your treats while basking in the sun in the picnic area, then watch the kids as they explore the play area. There’s a hay bale maze, caterpillar balloon crawl, and trike trail, plus lambs and goats to pet and feed, a working beehive to watch, and a few cardboard tableaux—featuring Johnny Appleseed and animals—for children to stick their little heads through for a parental photo opportunity. In October, there’s a Barn of Horrors for older children and a Children’s Spooky Barn for small children, both running noon–5 Saturday and Sunday.
Fun Food

Eat at Henry Ford Museum’s Michigan Café. Be sure to ask for the Kid Cruiser. It comes with a choice of PB&J, chicken tenders, or a hot dog, plus cookie and chips, served in (what else?) a car. (See Henry Ford Museum for more options.)

Field Tip

Be sure to make this an intergenerational outing and tell your kids about your family’s connection to the car industry. Many men immigrated to Detroit in 1914 and later to cash in on Ford’s offer of work for $5 a day. Your child’s own great-great-grandfather may have been one of those men.
Bring the kids to the only car tour left in Michigan. The Ford Rouge Tour—part theme park, part real factory tour—sums up Detroit’s and Henry Ford’s automobile legacies. The fun starts with a 25-minute bus ride. A video on the bus sets the scene and identifies the historic buildings of the Rouge Plant complex.

Then step inside the spacious visitor center, where friendly greeters hustle you into the Legacy Theater for a 12-minute film outlining the history of the Rouge Plant. Learn about Henry Ford’s invention of the assembly line, how immigrants flocked to Dearborn to work in his car manufacturing plant for $5 a day, how the labor union formed, and battles they fought at the plant. Next, you’re ushered into Theater Two for the highlight of the tour. Buckle your seatbelt and enjoy a multisensory, multiscreen, theater-in-the-round, where you watch a car go from design to test drive. You feel the heat of the blast furnace, see the sparks of the welding machine, are misted with sweet-smelling “spray paint,” and feel the floor rumble beneath you as the car takes to the open road.

It just gets better as you walk into the truck plant on a one-third-mile catwalk, high above real people working on real trucks on real assembly lines. You can meander and read some of the kiosks, try the buttons on the computer videos, and learn about truck manufacture today.

From the environmental Observation Deck, get a bird’s-eye view of the plant, see its living, green sedem roof, and learn how the plant is becoming environmentally sustainable. The 90-minute tour ends in the Legacy Lobby, where five famous Rouge products are on display—a 1929 Ford Model A Roadster, a 1932 Ford V8 Victoria, a 1949 Ford Club Coupe, a 1956 Thunderbird, and a 1965 Mustang. Hit the gift shop for car paraphernalia, toys, games, kits, and clothes. There are even Ford Factory Tour badges for scouts.
Go Box

Waterford Oaks County Park
1702 Scott Lake Road
Waterford 48328


Mid-December–mid-March: 5–9 Mon.–Tues.,

$2.50 for single ride. All-day passes, $4 children 30–43 inches tall, $7 Oakland County residents over 43 inches tall, $10 nonresidents.

Free on site

Riders must be at least 30 inches tall. Children 11 & under must be accompanied by an adult. Mittens or gloves required.

Fun Food

Lookout Lodge, located near the base of the Fridge, is a great place to warm up and have pizza, nachos, hot dogs, snacks, and hot cocoa. Special programs include movie nights, snowshoe treks, puppet shows, and opportunities to meet Oakie, the Oakland County mascot.

Field Tip

A lighted Kiddie Sledding Hill is located near the Fridge toboggan run. Bring your own sled.
The Fridge is a wild ride that makes kids long for winter’s cold weather. Dress warmly and get ready to scream. While the staff provides the four-person toboggan, it’s your responsibility to carry it up three flights of stairs to the top of the tower. This heightens your excitement and anticipation. Get settled (small children can nestle between adults), then rocket down a 55-foot drop and whoosh along 1,000 icy feet at speeds sometimes greater than 30 miles per hour. The whole ride takes only 30 seconds, much less time than your wait in line. But while you’re screaming, time is suspended, and the ride seems longer. Teens love the Fridge at night, twinkling with colored lights; as they zip through the tunnel of lights, it seems otherworldly.
Fun Food

Travel back to a stagecoach inn in the mid-1800s at the Eagle Tavern for family-style dining. Waitresses in era dress serve you authentic era dishes, such as Italian macaroni and effervescing drinks. For a quicker meal, the cafeteria-style A Taste of History restaurant offers kids a hobo lunch—a sandwich, string cheese, and a cookie, held by a kerchief on a stick.

Find Southern goodies—such as fried okra, hush puppies, and catfish—at the outdoor Mrs. Fisher’s Southern Cooking. Stop at the Guild Beer Hall to snack on buttery popcorn or roasted peanuts and drink cream soda or root beer from the tap. You’ll find ice cream, custard, and lemonade stands along Main Street and giant cookies and candy by the pound at Sir John Bennett Sweet Shop.

Field Tip

Be prepared. For little ones, you need a stroller or wagon to walk through the village. Bring hats, sunscreen, snacks, and water. Be sure to plan your visit by taking a few minutes when you arrive to read through the daily events and look at the village map. Save the Greenfield Village Store for the end. There you’ll find a wide selection of historic gifts, games, coloring books, kits, clothes, cars, train paraphernalia, and dolls.
Greenfield Village brings history to life for kids and celebrates individual courage and ingenuity. Visit during Summer Festival, usually mid-June through August, and you’ll find a village full of strolling costumed characters, reenactments in homes and farms, a play in the Town Hall, historic games on the Village Green, and historic baseball games at 1 p.m. each weekend. There are also special weekend festivals, including Motor Muster and Fourth of July concerts.

During Summer Festival, kids meet Orville and Wilbur Wright in their home and Thomas Edison in his Menlo Park Complex. They can ride a steam engine, Model T, or carousel. They learn about slavery at the Susquehanna Plantation and about life as freed former slaves at the Mattox Family Home. They can enjoy the Cotswold Cottage Tea, where children have their own drink and food. They can make a basket, candleholder, or glass flower in the Liberty Craftworks area. Or they can listen to stories and watch farm chores at the Firestone Farm.

Come back for Halloween in Greenfield Village, featuring 800 carved pumpkins, treat stations, elaborately dressed characters, storytelling, and the Haunted Horseman. In December, during Holiday Nights, the village is decked out in Victorian decor, with musical performances, storytelling, ice-skating, and fireworks. When the village opens in April, kids are invited to Meet Thomas the Tank Engine, a special event with storytelling, train rides, character meet and greet, and crafts.
Fun Food

Treat your mini-historians to the Michigan Café’s Kid Cruiser meal, served in a cardboard vintage car. Kids have their choice of hot dog, chicken tenders, or PB&J, with chips and cookie or string cheese and applesauce. You’ll also find macaroni & cheese and other hot or cold meals, drinks, and snacks, such as old-fashioned puddings, homemade apple strudel, and brownie sundaes, all served cafeteria style. Or enjoy a regular or jumbo foot-long hot dog with all the fixings in the Wienermobile Café. Fixings are serious and include—to name a few—chili, cheese, onions, and jalapeños for the Texas Dog; baked beans and cheese for the Beanie Wienie; and cheese sauce and tortilla chips for the Nacho Dogero.

Field Tip

Be sure to treat the kids to an IMAX movie experience. The Henry Ford IMAX Theatre offers both regular and 3-D IMAX movies (you need to put on black plastic glasses to have dinosaurs and rocks look like they are tumbling out of the screen to hit you on the head). You’re in for a wow experience both visually and aurally, with a screen eight stories wide and six stories high and state-of-the-art, wraparound digital sound.

The Genius at Play store offers an assortment of books, kits, cars, and dolls—all innovative and educational—just for kids, starting off with baby toys. You’ll also find a huge selection of gifts and souvenirs at the Henry Ford Museum Store.
This museum offers restless kids a spacious place to explore and learn about the American experience. Five of the permanent collections—Automobile in American Life, Your Place in Time, Made in America, Heroes of the Sky, and With Liberty and Justice for All—have special activities for kids.

All ages enjoy creating K’NEX cars in Automobile in American Life. Kids are encouraged to test their driving machines for speed and safety along a lane and down a ramp. While in this exhibit, pick up a “Pilot Log” scavenger hunt list from Lamy’s Diner to use in Heroes of the Sky, where you will walk along an elevated viewing platform to see planes from on high.

Play with toys from other generations in Your Place in Time. There are Etch A Sketches, Mr. Potato Heads, and Lincoln Logs. Children can also pretend to be Madonna or the Pointer Sisters as they dance and sing in a karaoke setting and watch themselves on a screen.

The whole family can get into the act of creating model cars at the assembly line set up in Made in America. In Liberty and Justice for All, students in grades 4–12 can use their “Student Exploration Guide” to direct them through the exhibit and make rubbings. Be sure to go inside and listen to the audio at the Rosa Parks Bus and to stop at the Lincoln chair and Washington’s camp bed.

Come back during December for a wonderful fairyland, gift-wrapped magically with toy trains and gingerbread houses and featuring hands-on crafts, stories, and Santa. Celebrate Black History Month in February with dramatic speeches, songs, hands-on crafts, and the actual bus where Rosa Parks made civil rights history. Macy’s Second Mondays (10–noon the second Monday of each month) feature special activities and crafts for toddlers and free museum entrance for children younger than five.
For those who love chain restaurants, M-59 (or Hall Road east of Van Dyke) is heaven. From the I-75 expressway on the west to the I-94 expressway on the east, there are almost 20 miles of uninterrupted chain restaurants (and chain stores). Take your pick of ribs, burgers, pasta, fried chicken, hot dogs, or tacos.

**Field Tip**

If your children have a sweet tooth, they will enjoy the Morley Candy Makers and Sanders Tour (23770 Hall Road, Clinton Township 48036), during which they can watch “Oompah Loompahs” in the candy kitchen through the large windows of an observation walkway. They will also enjoy the free sample at the end of the tour and, of course, buying candy at the gift shop. Call 586-468-4300 for free one-hour tour times. If you aren’t part of a group, ask if you can join a small one.
All aboard! In 1900, Joshua Lionel Cowen opened a clothing store in New York City and put a motorized toy train car in his storefront window. Shoppers were interested more in the train than in his dry goods. The rest is history, and you can read this history on a 52-foot-long artifact wall at Lionel Trains. There are great photos of Joshua Lionel Cowen and his first trains.

But what captures kids the most are the bells and whistles of the interactive 14-by-40-foot train layout. There are 10–15 trains working simultaneously, chugging along villages and cities, through tunnels, and over bridges. Kids can press more than 30 buttons on this setup or run the trains themselves on the special kids-only, 6-by-8-foot train layout.

The hour-long free tour starts with a short video outlining the product and how Lionel began. The next stop is the railroad community, and the final destination is the gift shop, where you’ll be hard-pressed to leave without at least one model train and a blue and white striped train engineer’s cap.
Fun Food

Sit at the counter and swing your legs while you enjoy burgers, fries, grilled cheese sandwiches, and old-fashioned chocolate malts at Knapp’s Dairy Barn (304 Main St., 248-651-4545).

Field Tip

Stop at Halfway Down the Stairs Children’s Book Shop (114 E. Fourth St., 248-652-6066), a wonderful, independently owned children’s bookstore.

If your kids are into nature or history, you’ll want to explore two sites in adjacent Rochester Hills: Dinosaur Hill Nature Preserve (333 N. Hill Circle, 48307; 248-656-0999) and Rochester Hills Museum at the Van Hoosen Farm (1005 Van Hoosen Rd., 48309; 248-656-4663). Both offer classes, summer camps, and special events.
Meadow Brook Hall is the Michigan equivalent to North Carolina’s Biltmore Estate. The country’s fourth largest historic house museum, it was built between 1926 and 1929 by Matilda Dodge Wilson (widow of auto pioneer John Dodge) and her second husband, lumber baron Alfred G. Wilson. It’s a 110-room, 88,000-square-foot mansion, complete with original furnishings and art. The house tour isn’t for small children (in fact, strollers have to be checked at the cloakroom), but older children with a fondness for romantic history will enjoy the rich furnishings and stories. The mansion offers six Girl Scout programs for all levels, beginning with five year olds; each program includes a badge or patch, dress-up time, and a tea consisting of lemonade and cookies.

During the Holiday Walk, Santa presides over Knole Cottage, a six-room playhouse built to three-quarter size for the Wilson daughter. Kids will want to explore this cottage.

If your children ask to see more homes of auto barons, visit the Henry Ford Estate—Fair Lane (4901 Evergreen Rd., Dearborn 48128; 313-593-5590), the Edsel and Eleanor Ford House (100 Lake Shore Rd., Grosse Pointe Shores 48236; 313-884-4222), or the Fisher Mansion (383 Lenox, Detroit 48215; 313-331-6740). All three home tours bring the owners and their families to life with stories and offer special events and programs.
Fun Food

Order breakfast any time of day at The Breakfast Club (30600 John R, Madison Heights; 248-307-9090), a cozy place to take kids for comfort food, such as pancakes, waffles, omelets, and grilled cheese.

Field Tip

The Nature Center offers birthday parties and a variety of classes, workshops, and day camps. You’ll also find wildflower walks, bird-watching, Saturday-morning movies, and summertime hot dog lunches on Fridays. Call to be placed on the mailing list.

See pond life—frogs, turtles, fish, and aquatic insects—up close. The Environmental Discovery Center at Indian Springs Metropark (5200 Indian Trail, White Lake 48386; 800-477-3192 or 248-625-7280) allows you to walk underneath a pond through a Plexiglas dome.
Nestled in the midst of nearly 40 acres of the George W. Suarez Friendship Woods, this small nature center in a log cabin is a perfect place to take small children for their first introduction to nature. Friendly volunteers enjoy sharing their knowledge with kids and letting them explore. Kids can touch and feel fur, hides, skin, bones, and skeletons and view aquariums full of snakes, turtles, and fish. There are live animals and taxidermy mounts. There is a computer inside a small cave, and there are lots of seasonal nature displays. A small gift shop sells snacks and nature gifts that make great stocking stuffers or party favors. On a sunny day, you can take a stroll on marked trails through the woods.
Fun Food

After shopping or creating at a workshop, bring your hungry children next door to Mark’s Midtown Coney Island (3672 State St., 734-747-6707), where they can eat breakfast any time of day or choose salads, sandwiches, and soups at modest prices.

Field Tip

A similar nonprofit store in Detroit is Arts and Scraps (16135 Harper Ave., 48224; 313-640-4411), offering artistic scraps, kits, workshops, classes, birthday parties, and scout badges.

Show your little ones work by real artists at the University of Michigan Museum of Art (1301 S. University Ave., Ann Arbor 48104; 734-763-8662; www.umma.umich.edu), which is occupying a small temporary exhibition space during restoration and renovation, scheduled to be complete in fall 2009.

Go Box

581 State Circle
Ann Arbor 48108

734-994-4420. www.scrapbox.org

10–6 Tues.–Fri., 10–2 Sat.

$5 for a large bag of artistic scraps, $3 for a small bag. There are also inexpensive arts & crafts supplies and kits for sale.

Free on site

2 & up

My Notes
The Scrap Box has made recycling artistic. You can shop at this nonprofit store for scraps that have been recycled from businesses and manufacturers—remnants, samples, cutouts, and seconds. Picture bins and bins of tubes, punchboard, foam tubes, Styrofoam shapes, paper of all sizes and colors, and carpet, fabric, and wallpaper swatches. Crafty moms, preschool teachers, Sunday school teachers, and scout leaders will recognize good scraps and turn this useful material into learning games, projects, mobiles, and puppets. Sample projects and ideas are on display around the store, just in case your creative genes need a push.

The Scrap Box offers birthday parties, field trips, drop-in activities during school vacation, and classes and workshops for adults and children. Up to 60 people can be accommodated.
Fun Food

Walk one block east on Monroe to the heart of Greektown and have your pick of Greek restaurants, including New Parthenon (547 Monroe, 313-961-5111), New Hellas Cafe (583 Monroe, 313-961-5544), and Pegasus Taverna (558 Monroe, 313-964-6800). Be sure to stop for baklava and other Greek baked goods at Astoria Pastry (541 Monroe, 313-963-9603).

Field Tip

Learn the role Ann Arbor played on the Underground Railroad with tours given by the African American Cultural and Historical Museum of Washtenaw County (1100 North Main St., Ann Arbor 48104; 734-996-0603).
The Second Baptist Church in Detroit, established in 1836 by 13 former slaves, soon became a stop on the Underground Railroad. From 1836 to 1865, more than 5,000 fugitive slaves passed through the 12-by-13-foot windowless, cellar room. They stayed in the claustrophobic room with a dirt floor for a day or two, until it was safe to be bundled in the bottom of a hay wagon and driven at night to the banks of the Detroit River. A ferry took them across to Canada and to freedom. Detroit was known to the fugitives as “Midnight,” because it was the end of the line, ultimately leading to Canada.

Many famous African Americans have addressed the congregation regarding slavery and abolition, including Sojourner Truth, John Brown, and Frederick Douglass. On the tour, learn about the history of the church and its famous members, then continue down a narrow staircase into the once barren room. Colorful murals now tell the story of the church’s role on the Underground Railroad.
Fun Food

Milk and Honey (248-661-2327), located in the Jewish Community Center, right across from Shalom Street, is an upscale kosher dairy restaurant.

Field Tip

If it’s a warm day, make time to play on Shalom Playground, located north of the building, near the Drake Road entrance. Here you’ll find everything for infants and toddlers: baby swings, a teeter-totter with four seats, a bouncy airplane, sandy areas and toys, and two climbers—one with a bridge, for older children; one with a truck steering wheel, for younger children. Ringing the whole playground are benches for watchful parents or grandparents.

To learn all about health, go to the Saint Joseph Mercy Health Exploration Station (1600 South Canton Center Rd., Suite 10, Canton 48188; 734-398-7518; www.healthexplorationstation.com), a creative playscape made up of parts of the body.
Shalom Street is designed as an interactive museum of Jewish life, culture, and values. It offers both high-tech and low-tech displays to explore the core Jewish value of Tikun Olam (tee-koon oh-lam), loosely interpreted as “fixing the world.” Tikun Olam encourages kids to make their home, community, natural environment, and relationships with loved ones and strangers as whole, calm, and positive as possible.

In the Adventure Travel exhibit space, kids can mug in front of the video camera and turn up on a television screen as visitors to many different countries. They can plunk their coins into a tzedakah box (used to collect coins for charity), here designed as a noisy, colorful Rube Goldberg contraption of levers and pulleys on a wall.

At the Home exhibit, they can build a home’s foundation by choosing from bricks inscribed with such words as “respect,” “not bullying,” or “seek peace.” A phone in the exhibit tells a story with an ethical dilemma, and they can decide what they would do about cheating or squealing on friends. Inside the home, they can use their sense of smell to try to identify foods. In a quiet corner, they can relax with books and puzzles and play with seasonal holiday toys.

In addition, there are craft tables and space for traveling exhibits, live entertainment, and birthday parties. School and community groups are encouraged to visit for teaching diversity.
For fantastic upscale brunch food, try Detroit's Breakfast House and Grill (1241 Woodward, 313-961-1115).

Field Tip
Come to Meadow Brook Music Festival during July–August, when the Detroit Symphony Orchestra plays. Your kids will love staying up late, lying on blankets, and watching the stars while they listen to music.
Super Saturdays at the Max combine Tiny Tots concerts and Young People’s concerts on the same day, with KidZone activities held in between the concerts. On any Super Saturday, the Max is full of youngsters and their parents and grandparents. There is a palpable excitement and high noise level in the Music Center’s atrium lobby and halls.

KidZone spreads its hands-on activities onto each of the three levels of the center. There are face painters, clowns making elaborate balloon animals and hats, and tables of crayons and coloring sheets. Kids can try playing instruments and meet Thomas Wilkins, maestro of the Young People’s Concert Series. There are also kid-oriented foods, such as Rice Krispy treats, hot dogs, mini-muffins, juice boxes, and milk.

Tiny Tots concerts in the intimate Music Box are informal. While they are geared toward children ages 3–6, many families bring along their infants to 2 year olds. You can sit on pads on the floor near the stage or in chairs in the back of the small room. The show goes on while families go back and forth from the floor to the chairs, kids cry, parents feed infants their bottles, and little ones eat Cheerios and other snacks. The entertainers—usually a combination of local and national children’s performers—know their audience’s quirks and sing and perform in loud voices and elicit audience participation.

The Young People’s Concert Series is a bit more formal. It’s held in the proper Orchestra Hall, where children are expected to mind their concert manners. Yet Maestro Wilkins has fun with his youthful audience, talks right to them, gets them to participate, and doesn’t expect them to sit perfectly still. This concert series, featuring the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, usually offers a learning experience for parents and children.
Bring your own picnic or buy kid-pleasing concession food—ice cream, pizza, fries, nachos, hot dogs, and pop. There are shady picnic tables spread around the area, some even in a covered area.

**Field Tip**

Southeast Michigan has an indoor water park at the Warren Community Center in Warren (5460 Arden, 586-268-8400) and a variety of outdoor water parks:

- Belle Isle Waterslides, Belle Isle Park, Detroit 48207; 313-852-4059.
- Chandler Park Family Aquatic Center, 12600 Chandler Park Dr., Detroit 48213; 313-822-7665.
- Indian Springs Metropark, 5200 Indian Trail, White Lake 48386; 248-625-7280.
- Metro Beach Metropark, 31300 Metropolitan Parkway, Mt. Clemens 48046; 586-463-4581.
- Rolling Hills Family Water Park, 7660 Stony Creek Rd., Ypsilanti 48197; 734-484-9653.
- Southgate Splash Park, 16777 Northline Rd., Southgate 48195; 734-282-9622.
- Troy Family Aquatic Center, 3425 Civic Center Dr., Troy 48084; 248-524-3514.
- Veterans Park Waterslide, 2150 Jackson Rd., Ann Arbor 48107; 734-761-7240.
There are some hot summer days when you can only sufficiently cool off at the nearest water park. Pack up the kids, a cooler full of snacks and water, sunscreen, towels, hats, and sunglasses. Come early to get a spot and an inner tube for the wave-action pool.

Waterford Oaks is a water park with all the amenities. The Big Bucket children’s water playground features more than 30 interactive activities, including a colorful plastic climbing playground with waterfalls, sprays, and a giant bucket that tips water on screaming kids every few minutes. Parents can set their chairs in the shallow water at the periphery of the area and keep an eye on their children.

If you are at least 43 inches tall, you can go on the Slidewinder waterslides and whoosh down 340 feet into the warm water of the wave-action pool; once in the pool, you can body surf the three-foot waves or hop onto a park-owned tube to ride wild waves as they alternate with calm ones. Or, if you are at least 30 inches tall, you can choose to go on Ragin’ Rapids, a four-person raft ride that starts at a height of three stories and drops 515 feet through twists and turns, ending in a three-foot-deep splashdown pool.

Waterford Oaks also offers a bathhouse, swim lessons, and birthday parties.