

Tallahassee, well worth the trip

Upon landing in Tallahassee, this small under-the-radar Southern capital reminded me of Richmond—all in a good way, of course! First of all, it's a humid city located on a river, close to an ocean, and easily accessible by interstate. Most importantly, Tallahassee is teeming with kid-friendly activities. You'll be hard pressed to take it all in, but have fun trying!

Once you arrive in the "Big Bend" of northern Florida, a great way to orient yourself is to head downtown. There you can tour the restored historic Old Capitol, guided by the charming Andy Edel, a local historian who role-plays the former Florida Governor Jennings circa 1902. The interesting exhibits explore Florida's political history and show how our governmental system works its way from the governor's office all the way to the Supreme Court as well as the House and Senate.

Just catty-corner from the Capitol is the Mary Brogan Museum of Art and Science, offering a great interactive science experience for kids in addition to an impressive art collection for your own edification. Only two blocks farther down the street is the Museum of Florida History with its enormous skeleton of a mastadon, an extinct mammal with large tusks resembling a woolly mammoth, as well as "Auntie's Attic" with entertaining vintage toys.

The next stop is blast-off to the Challenger Learning Center with its space mission simulator, planetarium and digital dome theatre, museum, and IMAX shows. The simulator offers kindergartners to adults the next best thing to a real space flight. It's a unique opportunity to work as scientists and engineers with the Mission Control Center (similar to the NASA Johnson Space Center) and an orbiting space station (designed like the lab on the International Space Station). There are three mission options: Rendezvous with a Comet, Return to the Moon, and Voyage to Mars.

Just when you think you've maxed out the museum circuit, Tallahassee Automobile Museum is an



other sure-fire hit for any young aficionado of cars, trucks or trains! This remarkable one-of-a-kind museum contains an extensive collection of over 130 magnificently restored antique cars, including the oldest known car in America, an 1894 Duryea. It also boasts of three original Batmobiles, the Yellow Duck, and the Bat Boat from the movies and TV series. In addition to a separate Model Train Museum, there are many other collections as well, such as pedal cars, sports memorabilia and Indian artifacts. Plans for a Tractor Museum in the near future are underway.

If you and your kids are itching

to get outdoors, don't fret because outdoor activities abound at the beginning of the Panhandle. First off is the Tallahassee Museum, one of my hands-down favorite attractions. More of a living museum or zoo, it has a vast network of raised boardwalks that traverse its 52 stunning acres of woodlands and unique cypress swamps along Lake Bradford.

The Tallahassee Museum showcases many indigenous animals, such as the endangered Florida panthers and red foxes, as well as black bears, white-tailed deer, and river otters, all living freely in their spacious native habitats. The exhibits

are quite informative, and the dedication and passion of the employees are truly inspiring. If you are there in late October, don't miss the Halloween Howl with haunted nature trails galore.

Head out to experience the world's largest and deepest freshwater springs located at Wakulla Springs State Park. While you're there, enjoy the lodge, beach and picnic/swimming area near the infamous diving dock. Be sure to take the riverboat tour on a glass-bottom boat for an unmatched vantage point of the fish swimming below. For those of you with older seaworthy kids, take in some easy-paced kayaking on the Wakulla River with Wilderness Way Outfitters. Kids and adults alike will have a ball observing the many manatee, osprey, and alligators en route.

After taking in all these amazing Tallahassee sights and activities, you'll be ready for another vacation! **RPM**



Libby Carty McNamee is a local freelance writer, traveler, and mother looking forward to taking her five-year-old son to the Challenger Learning Center but wondering how she will ever lure him out of there. Ah, the Tallahassee Automobile Museum will do the trick!