

Family Getaway - CT

ARE WE THERE YET? YES!: KEEP IT CLOSE TO HOME THIS SUMMER WITH A FAMILY GETAWAY TO CONNECTICUT

Since my in-laws live in Connecticut, the state tops my list of great family vacation destinations. Beautiful beaches? Check. Nineteenth-Century wooden ships available for exploration? Check. Amusement parks that have been amusing customers for over a hundred years? Double-check. When it comes to summer, coming to Connecticut means more family-friendly activities for less trips to the gas pump. A diverse array of attractions and activities - ranging from the ultra-unique to the just plain fun - dot the state, inviting travelers to experience the fascinating and educational museums, programs and exhibitions that prove a summertime family getaway to Connecticut offers far more than the shore.

Following are just a few reason to pack the kids and go to Connecticut for a family vacation:

Connecticut's Kid-Conducive Beaches: Far More Than the Shore

Nothing means summer more than the sound of rolling waves, smell of suntan lotion and the feel of sand between your toes. Visitors to Connecticut are never too far from sun, sand and surf during the summer months and several of the state's beaches are particularly conducive to kids. Ocean Beach Park in New London has not only been voted one of the 12 Best Beaches in New England by National Geographic Traveler, but also features a family-friendly boardwalk amusement area complete with a towering water slide, miniature golf course, games, a classic carousel ride, food concession stands and more. Starting in June, Ocean Beach Park also offers open-air nighttime movie screenings right on the beach - bring a blanket and enjoy. (800) 510-7263

Another tremendous Connecticut beach is also its longest: Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison offers over two miles of beach to enjoy swimming, strolling along the boardwalk or just relaxing in the sun and surf. Hammonasset is perfect for parents interested in an outdoorsy, family getaway that still includes plenty of sandy sunbathing. The park offers camping, carry-in boating, surf fishing, bicycle and hiking trails, as well as a Nature Center with a season-long list of educational programs and events.

Mystic Seaport: The Quintessential New England Summer Spot

Almost nothing says summer quite like Mystic Seaport and The Museum of America and the Sea leads the way with high-profile family-friendly attractions and activities. Highlights include a re-created 19th-Century village, complete with museum educators who discuss each building's role in a coastal community. Steps away, the waterfront features tall ships and other historic vessels waiting to be boarded and explored. At the Preservation Shipyard, visitors can watch experts restore antique vessels using traditional methods and tools. The sprite-specific Children's Museum and Discovery Barn offer interactive, educational Maritime experiences for the young ones. And of course, boat rides touring the picturesque maritime area are readily available. Possibilities include cruising the Mystic River aboard the Sabino, a 1908 coal-fired steamboat and National Historic Landmark, and an excursion aboard the historic catboat Breck Marshall. (860) 572-5315

Look! It's a Great White...Alligator? Two Wild Exhibits at The Maritime Aquarium in Norwalk.

Special for the summer, The Maritime Aquarium in Norwalk features two exotic animal exhibits sure to give the kids a thrill. At the Great White Alligator exhibit (now through September 1), see a rarity that is virtually one in a million: an eight-foot albino alligator. Scientists estimate that only 44 of the 5 million American alligators today are albino. Also on display will be an alligator snapping turtle - a species that tops out at 150 pounds. Opening July 1, African Underwater Safari features fish and reptiles from the Nile River, Red Sea, lakes of Africa's Great Rift Valley and Africa's surrounding shorelines. (203) 852-0700

A Hundred-Year-Old Amusement Park?

Not too many playlands hit the century mark, but this summer Quassy Amusement Park located in the lower Litchfield Hills in Middlebury, is celebrating its centennial as one of only eleven remaining "trolley parks" in the United States - so named for the turn-of-the-(20th)-Century tradition of riding the rails to amusement parks on the outskirts of city centers. Quassy is short for Lake Quassapaug, the lake that has provided cooling summer swimming and boating for generations. And though some of Quassy's modern features -such as the Saturation Station water park and the playland's newest addition, the "Galleon" Pirate Ship ride - would surely amaze early visitors, an old-fashioned feel has been lovingly preserved. Many Victorian Era period buildings still stand and classics like the Tilt-a-Whirl and a Grand Carousel remain stars of the show.

And special for weekenders, Quassy Amusement Park offers money-saving deals on Fridays and Saturdays. Friday night is "25-cent Night" where ride tickets and snacks like cotton candy are a quarter apiece and hot dogs an amazing 50 cents each! Saturdays starting at 5:00pm, each carload of up to 10 passengers enters the park for just \$20 per car. From there, each passenger gets a bracelet and can go on rides at no additional cost. (203) 758-2913

The Litchfield Hills region also boasts an amusement park that predates the Civil War! Lake Compounce Family Theme Park in Bristol, America's oldest continuously operating amusement park and the state's largest water park, is open for its 162nd consecutive season in the sun. The park has seen many a milestone, from a picnic area for Union soldiers in the 1860s; to its first electric roller coaster in 1914; to the thrilling, state-of-the-art speed boat rides visitors took in 1929 for 15 cents apiece. Today, the park is a blend of thrill rides and waterslides mixed with family-friendly shows and special events. The park underwent a series of upgrades during the off-season, including re-tracking of its famous wooden roller coaster, Boulder Dash. (860) 583-3300

"When I Was Your Age...": Play "Pop Culture Pass-It-On" at The Barker Character, Comic and Cartoon Museum

At the Barker Character, Comic and Cartoon Museum in Cheshire, parents can share a slice of their childhood memories and heroes with their children - many of whom have stood the test of time to remain popular for a whole new generation. The museum includes comic book and cartoon collectibles spanning back decades. Highlights include a Roy Rogers lunch box, a Ronald McDonald phone, an authentic Charlie McCarthy puppet, a Flintstones Band toy and a Mickey & Minnie hand-car. Popeye, Donald Duck, Pinocchio, Pluto and Batman are just a few more famous faces perfect for parents looking to share their childhood fancies with their own children. What's more, the various collectibles are all labeled with their current market value - though none are for sale - instantly answering that question: "I wonder how much this is worth?" (203) 699-3822

Hit the Bricks at Architecture of the Imagination: The Lure of the LEGO® Brick"

From timeless cartoon and comic book characters to a timeless toy: through August 17, the Stamford Museum & Nature Center presents Architecture of the Imagination: The Lure of the LEGO® Brick featuring the astounding work of Nathan Sawaya, whose Lego-Land creations have been featured on the Today Show, Late Night with David Letterman and The Colbert Report. Sawaya's portion features human forms; a second part of the exhibition explores Legos as engineering tools and features a constantly evolving trainscape. During the run of the exhibition, visitors can come and watch students at work adding buildings and other elements to the layout. At the tour's conclusion, visitors are invited to try their hands at creating their own brick masterpieces (203) 322-1646.

For more information about family attractions and activities in Connecticut, call 1-888-CTvisit (1-888-288-4748) or log on at <http://cts.vresp.com/c/?M.SilverAssociates/91fae7b51c/9c9a1f208f/a610b1ba50>. Connecticut offers visitors a multi-faceted wealth of attractions, historical, cultural and recreational activities, diverse and beautiful natural landscapes, parks, beaches and wilderness sure to fulfill any getaway need - winter, summer, spring or fall.