

AUSTIN FAMILY-TRAVEL GUIDE

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Austin family-travel guide

by Becca Hensley



(Photo: The Austin Convention & Visitors Bureau)



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What kids love about Austin is what Peter Pan loved about Never Never Land. This is a place where youngsters are king and the rules seem tilted in their favor. The city's casual ambience facilitates parents carting their little ones to restaurants, festivals, concerts, parks and even adult-oriented spaces like galleries and museums. This gives Austin children a sense of inclusion and an exposure to more sophisticated things. The result? Kids who march to a different drummer, just like their parents.

That mood manifests itself most lucidly at The Thinkery, a multi-level, state-of-the-art children's museum. Just minutes from downtown in a lovely neighborhood wedged into a swath of park landscape, The Thinkery lures youngsters to exercise their imaginations in room after room of hands-on, bi-lingual creative space, ranging from a Mexican village showcasing tamale- and piñata-making to Currents, where exploring fluid dynamics can be a drenching experience (hint to parents: bring extra clothes for the kids).

In **Zilker Park**, board the vintage Zephyr Miniature Train that chugs around Lady Bird Lake. Afterwards, dive into **Barton Springs Pool**, fly kites or explore the lake on a fairytale-worthy Swan Boat. Nearby, youngsters tee off with a coterie of characters from kiddie literature at Peter Pan Mini Golf on a lazy afternoon. Families can leave the car at home and pedal between activities on easy-to-rent Austin B-Cycle bikes, found in pods all over town.

While many downtown hotels make families feel at home, the Hyatt Lost Pines, about a half-hour drive east of downtown, provides a rural feel and caters to families traveling with children. Besides being anchored by a 1,000-foot lazy river, water slides and splash pads (complete with a sandy beach), the hotel provides opportunities for folks to meet the property's hoofed and horned mascots, including Percheron draft horses, miniature donkeys, alpacas, and a pair of Texas Longhorns. The resort also offers nightly s'mores, bicycles, archery, trap shooting, 180 miles of trails, and a spa with its own pint-sized treatment menu.

When hunger pangs hit, locally-owned **P. Terry's Burger Stand** turns out stellar chicken, veggie and hormone-free beef burgers and root beer milkshakes at its eight locations around the area. At cozy Home Slice, on South Congress, tots receive a sticky mound of dough to sculpt at the table while families wait for pizza. They'll toss the dough aside, though, when the gooey New York-style pies

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arrive. Eat breakfast all day at [Kerbey Lane Cafe](#) (four locations, open 24 hours), where you'll swoon over the gingerbread pancakes. End any day on a sweet note at [Amy's](#)

, where homemade ice cream, blended with your choice of candy or fruit mix-ins, is flipped into bowls by skillful servers.

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