

Traveling with Tots

By LIBBY CARTY MCNAMEE

Lovely Lynchburg: It's child's play



Above: Amazement Square in Lynchburg. Right: The Craddock Terry Hotel's resident dog, Buster Brown, plays with a guest. Photos by Loretta Sherwood.

Drive west for two peaceful hours past the open fields of Appomattox Court House, and you'll discover the stately city of Lynchburg. Once the richest city of its size in the nation, Lynchburg was also the only major city in Virginia that didn't fall to the Union during the Civil War.

As a result, Lynchburg is filled with charming historic sites, including its gorgeous 26-acre Old City Cemetery with 2,200 Confederate graves. Nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains, its location at the geographical center of Virginia makes it a fantastic launching point for day trips in every direction.

Lynchburg's Amazement Square is a fabulous hands-on children's museum. Located downtown in a renovated tobacco warehouse overlooking the James River, the museum lives up

to its name in every way. There's no way to take it all in during one visit, but it's a drive worth taking often for kids of a wide range of ages.

The Tower is a fascinating system of interconnecting tunnels, slides, and ladders to climb. It runs like a labyrinth throughout the four floors of the museum, making it the nation's tallest indoor climbing structure. There's also a zip line, quite sturdy and well secured. Don't miss the fifth-floor observation deck perched on the roof, accessible only by tunnel. The reward is bragging rights and a birds-eye view of Langley Fountain spraying water 70 feet into the air.

Kids love the feeling of independence as they dash into a tunnel, wondering where they'll be at the end of the chute. Thankfully there's only one museum entry/exit, so par-

ents know their children are always safe somewhere within the building. It is all part of the Amazement adventure. With the motto of "Be Kind, Be Safe, Be Thinking," kids can't help but think creatively during their visit. Even the stairs light up in rainbow colors with every step.

The museum offers lots of interactive exhibits and activities on global and regional topics as well as the arts, humanities, science, and health. As part of the "Your Amazing Body" exhibit, kids get to walk through the life-sized chambers of a human heart. They can also play doctor and pedal stationery bikes to see its positive effect on their health.

At the "On the James River" exhibit, kids direct tiny canoes downstream through the river, even damming it up. They can sound a real train whistle and literally make the clouds rain down on the city below. On Indian Island, kids can participate in an archaeological dig and also experience an authentically recreated Monocan village.

The museum's newest exhibition, "Child's Play," teaches kids about the daily life of children in Egyptian, Greek, and Roman cultures. Bugs University teaches kids about, you guessed it, all kinds of bugs. While at Once Upon a Building, kids can hand-operate cranes to "build" historic buildings. They can also create their own masterpieces by making stained glass pictures.

In the Kaleidoscope area, kids put on art smocks and make whatever mess they want. This is the ultimate in decadence for kids. Young artists can literally paint the glass walls of this enclosed room to their hearts' content. Raceways and Voltageville offer some serious motion commotion with circuit connecting. Kids can zip, swirl, and whirl to learn about inertia, gravity, velocity, and electricity.

Restricted to kids ages 4 and younger, the Big Red Barn is a secured farmyard area. Located on the entry-level floor with its own handy restroom, this is a wonderful and stimulating haven for toddlers. Last but not least, the museum shop known as the Kidz Warehouse offers a range of interesting educational



toys, snacks, and drinks, including fresh Keurig coffee.

For a memorable overnight stay, the boutique Craddock-Terry Hotel lies just a few blocks away. This former shoe factory has been transformed in a unique way, using a historic shoe theme. With suites available, this is an experience for both kids and adults to enjoy. The hotel's resident dog is an adorable terrier named Buster Brown, and guest dogs are welcome. Complimentary breakfast is delivered outside your door in an antique shoebox, and shoeshine is provided as well. Just out the back door you can walk - or rent bikes - to explore Percival's Island Natural Area, similar to our Belle Isle.

Located on the hotel's lower level, WaterStone is not your average pizza joint. Extremely hip and family-friendly, it has an array of fire-roasted pizza, salads, and pastas, all made with fresh ingredients. Even better, their draught beer is brewed right on the premises at the Jefferson Street Brewery. **RPM**

WANT TO GO?

Amazement Square

27 9th Street
(434) 845-1888
www.AmazementSquare.org
A membership to the Children's Museum of Richmond does not provide reciprocal free admission.

Craddock-Terry Hotel

1312 Commerce Street
(434) 455-1500
www.CraddockTerryHotel.com

WaterStone Pizza

1309 Jefferson Street
(434) 455-1515