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Taking the Kids



updated 1 hour, 9 minutes ago

Kid-friendly exploration in San Francisco

STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Kids can create their own mo
- The newly reopened Californi
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By Eileen Ogintz
Tribune Media Services

TEXT SIZE

(Tribune Media Services) -- Adults and kids are hunched over mounds of multicolored clay, fashioning little clay people and assorted creatures that will star in kid-produced animated shorts.



At Zeum, kids can star in their own music videos.

"This isn't your typical museum," says Mike Shomo, from Denver, Colorado, who's visiting with his wife and three kids, as he creates a sea lion.

Welcome to San Francisco's **Zeum**, where you're not only supposed to get your hands dirty but you and the kids can star in your own music videos, design digital artwork or compose digital music.

"This is the only museum I've been to where you can make your own movies," added 8-year-old Siena Starbird. Outside, a grandmother and her granddaughters play "Mary Had a Little Lamb" on a giant xylophone, while upstairs would-be Hannah Montanas belt out songs in a mock studio and choose the backdrops that will appear in their music video. (Red carpet or Hollywood sign?)

"I'm having as much fun as the kids," said the xylophone-playing grandma, Relda Thomas, from San Luis Obispo, California.

For Zeum's 10th anniversary, the hands-on multimedia museum will showcase original youth artwork on its Web site and in the museum and will celebrate the creativity of local kids and families all year long.

You'll love where Zeum is located -- in San Francisco's artsy, up-and-coming South of Market district, known as SoMa, which is also home to the [San Francisco Museum of Modern Art](#) and the newly opened [Contemporary Jewish Museum](#). One of the exhibits at the CJM includes artist interpretations of the Seven Days of Genesis, and artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles invites visitors to participate. How will we each repair the

world, the artist wants to know? Orion, 4, wrote, "To help mean people get better!"

Outside Zeum, there's a first-rate playground complete with a carousel, giant climbing structures and slides -- all part of an 87-acre urban renewal project. We stayed in the neighborhood at the new and oh-so-cool 550-room Intercontinental San Francisco, a soaring, 32-story glass tower. The Intercontinental is the first new hotel in San Francisco in three years, the largest built there in nearly two decades. And it's just a short walk from Yerba Buena Gardens and the hustle and bustle of Market Street. (The kids will love the indoor pool.)

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San Francisco, of course, has plenty to offer visitors, whether you're a junior foodie (more about that in an upcoming column), love chocolate (this is the home of Ghirardelli, after all) or enjoy museums or the outdoors. The City by the Bay, in fact, is home to several museums that offer unique experiences for kids and kids at heart.

Where else can you tour a prison, complete with documentary offered by former [Alcatraz](#) guards and prisoners, visit a museum devoted exclusively to [cable cars](#) or visit an [aquarium](#) that showcases the creatures that live right here in San Francisco Bay? (For a few dollars extra, you can sign on for a behind-the-scenes tour at the Aquarium of the Bay. It's right on Fisherman's Wharf so you can make faces at the sea lions that live just outside on Pier 39).

If you are planning to hit the top attractions and museums (maybe even ride a bike across the Golden Gate Bridge), get a [CityPass](#), which saves you significant bucks and provides extra benefits like a week on public transportation, including cable cars. (You can buy the passes online but if you plan to go to Alcatraz and want that included, purchase your pass by phone (415-981-ROCK) and you will also get a timed reservation.)

There's no better time than the fall or upcoming holiday season to visit San Francisco. After nearly a decade of planning, the [California Academy of Sciences](#) re-opened at the end of September in a glorious building in Golden Gate Park across from the de Young Museum. Now the California Academy of Sciences building houses an aquarium, planetarium, natural history museum and world-class research and education programs under one roof and is being touted as the "greenest" museum in the world, topped with a 2.5-acre living roof of native California plants and wildflowers.

There are hands-on learning opportunities everywhere -- from the Early Explorers Cove for young children, who can help tend a mini-organic garden or touch hermit crabs and other inhabitants of California's tide pools, to the Naturalist Center where in-house experts will answer your kids' questions. The kids will love the four-story Rainforest (check out all the butterflies!) and the albino alligator in The Swamp. You can measure the impact of your family's everyday decisions on a carbon scale, help polar bears move from one ice floe to another or find Nemo in the world's deepest living coral reef tank.

For more hands-on science, go to the [Exploratorium](#), which has long been one of my gang's favorites, especially the Tactile Dome where there is never any light and you've got to feel and touch your way through 13 twisting passages, chutes and rooms. (You'll need separate reservations for this one so call 415-561-0362.) You also won't want to miss Mind, an exhibition with some 40 interactive exhibits, where you'll get an opportunity to experience your own thoughts, feelings and actions in new ways. Come on certain dates in November and December and you might be able to join a conversation about altruism. (What makes some kids more generous?)

There are plenty of family programs at [The Asian Art Museum](#) where AsiaAlive includes artist demonstrations and hands-on activities designed to make the current exhibits and Asian cultural traditions more accessible. Come on Sunday for weekly storytelling or try YogiKids -- an adult/child yoga class held the first Sunday of every month.

But start with Zeum, which is really like no other children's museum or art center I've ever seen.

"No one tells the kids what to do and that's what they really like," said Valerie Sobel, Oakland, California.

Grown-ups too. [E-mail to a friend](#)  | [Mixx it](#) | [Share](#)

(For more *Taking the Kids*, visit www.takingthekids.com, where Eileen Ogintz welcomes your questions and comments.)

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