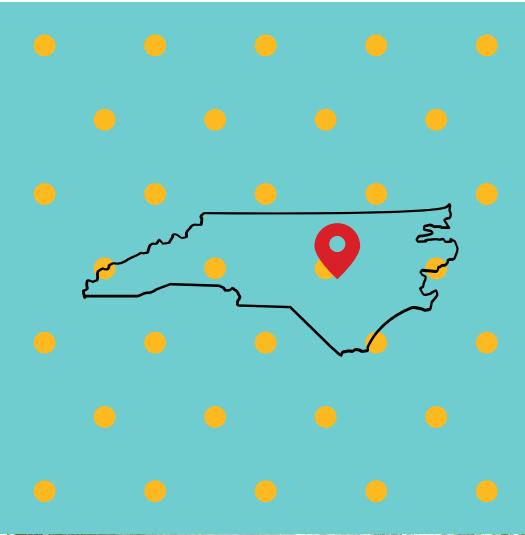




50+ FREE (OR CHEAP) THINGS TO DO NEAR RALEIGH



raleigh
cary
apex
durham
chapel hill
wake forest
fuquay-varina

PARKS,
SPLASH PADS,
MUSEUMS,
TRAILS, EVENTS,
& MORE

MUSEUMS & EDUCATIONAL SPOTS

01.

NC Museum of Natural Sciences



Huge free museum with dinosaurs, a butterfly conservatory, and many engaging exhibits. There's even a Discovery Room perfect for little ones to explore hands-on fun.

Ackland Art Museum



This free art museum in Chapel Hill has rotating exhibits and often hosts special family-friendly events. It's a great way to introduce kids to art in a quiet, creative space.

02.

03.

North Carolina Museum of Art (NCMA)



In addition to the museum itself, you can stroll the museum park's trails, explore giant sculptures, and play on musical swings—all for free! A fun and creative space to discover.

City of Raleigh Museum



Located downtown, this free museum offers fun exhibits on Raleigh's history—great for curious kids and a quick, educational indoor stop! They also offer Family Fun Days on select Saturdays.

04.

05.

North Carolina Botanical Garden



Wander peaceful trails, explore native plants, and check out the kid-friendly Discovery Room—all free and perfect for an adventure in nature. Located in Chapel Hill.

MUSEUMS & EDUCATIONAL SPOTS

06.

Marbles Kids Museum



This museum is amazing for kids. Regular admission isn't too pricey, but the "Play Late for Less" discount saves a lot: Weekdays after 3 pm (Mon-Fri), general admission is 50% off. On Thursdays, the museum stays open until 7 pm.

Historic Oak View County Park



Meet friendly goats, explore shaded trails, and check out a farm-themed indoor play space that is perfect for toddlers! Free fun with a bit of learning mixed in at this historic site.

07.

08.

Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University



This museum in Durham offers Family Day events on the 2nd Sunday of the month. The Nasher is always free, and on Family Days, parking is free as well.

Artspace - Downtown Raleigh



Explore free art exhibits and drop-in activities at this creative hub, or catch their mobile van, Artspace on the Go, bringing hands-on art fun to local schools, libraries, and events. Always free and family-friendly!

09.

10.

Historic Yates Mill County Park



Kids will enjoy the educational exhibits and learning about the history of the mill. The park also features scenic trails and a picturesque pond, perfect for a family walk.

OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

11.

Pullen Park



Free, historic park in Raleigh with playgrounds, walking paths, and paddle boats. Kids can ride a carousel and train for just a few dollars. A classic spot in the Triangle for families. [See our guide here.](#)

Umstead State Park



A free, peaceful spot in Raleigh where families can hike shady trails, bike, picnic, and spot wildlife. The short Oak Rock Trail is a great option for kids!

12.

13.

Eno River State Park



You'll enjoy scenic river hikes, shallow splash spots, and family-friendly trails at this beautiful state park in Durham. Free!

Prairie Ridge Ecostation



Prairie Ridge Ecostation is a free outdoor play and learning spot with trails, a mud kitchen, and nature programs like storytime and scavenger hunts—perfect for curious kids!

14.

15.

RDU Observation Park



Located at the airport, this is a fun, unique spot to bring kids! You can watch planes take off and land, plus enjoy a small playground and picnic area. Perfect for plane-loving littles.

OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

16.

Dorothea Dix Park & Gipson Play Plaza



Raleigh's largest city park, offering wide-open space for picnics, and bursting with sunflowers in the summertime. Kids will love the brand-new Gipson Play Plaza, featuring whimsical playground equipment, splash pads, climbing areas, and more.

Splash Pads

There are many of these all over the Triangle where kids can keep cool on a hot day. All are free or charge an admission of a couple dollars. [Check out our article on all the local splash pads.](#)

17.

18.

JC Raulston Arboretum



This beautiful botanical garden is free to visit and offers an ever-changing display of flowers, plants, and themed gardens from around the world. Kids can wander winding paths, spot pollinators in the butterfly garden, and enjoy StoryWalks.

Lake Crabtree County Park



A family favorite for outdoor fun, this park has playgrounds, picnic areas, trails, and a sandy lakeshore for building castles. You can hike, bike, or just enjoy the scenic water views while the kids burn off energy.

19.

20.

Pleasant Park



[Apex's massive new park](#) features a huge, impressive playground with slides, climbing areas, and swings for all abilities. Families can also enjoy open fields, sports courts, and a splash pad.

OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

21.

Hemlock Bluffs Nature Preserve



A shady, peaceful spot that feels like a mountain escape in the middle of Cary. Families can enjoy easy boardwalk trails, unique hemlock trees, and a whimsical children's nature trail with log tunnels and toadstool seats.

Lassiter Mill Park Waterfall



This hidden gem features a scenic waterfall along Crabtree Creek, perfect for a quick nature escape in the middle of the city. Bring a picnic, explore the short trails, and enjoy the peaceful water views.

22.

Piedmont Wildlife Center



This nonprofit in Durham rescues and rehabilitates native wildlife, and you can meet some of their ambassador animals during special events and programs. Wander the raptor enclosures for free!

Story Time at Haven Farm



A cozy, kid-friendly gathering where little ones can enjoy a story in a peaceful farm setting. Sing, dance, create art, and grab a treat from the farm store. Currently Wednesday mornings 10:15am. Free!

23.

Summer Boat Rentals at Lake Crabtree



From May through September, you can borrow canoes, kayaks, and stand-up paddleboards for free at Lake Crabtree County Park. It's a fun way for families to get out on the water and enjoy a sunny afternoon together.

24.

25.

OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

26.

Old Mill Farm - Open Farm



On select evenings, Old Mill Farm in Durham offers free entry, so families can visit the animals, stroll the grounds, and enjoy the laid-back farm atmosphere without spending a dime. Usually Wednesdays & Thursdays.

WRAL Azalea Gardens



27.

Tucked beside the WRAL-TV studios in Raleigh, this peaceful garden is filled with vibrant blooms, shady benches, and winding paths — a lovely (and free) spot for a quiet stroll with the kids.

28.

John Chavis Park & Carousel



This downtown Raleigh park has playgrounds, sports courts, a summer splash pad, and a community center, plus a beautifully restored 1923 carousel that kids can ride for just \$2.

Holding Park Aquatic Center



29.

This outdoor pool is open in the summer and offers affordable admission, with extra savings for Wake Forest residents. Kids will love the water slides, lap lanes, and splash zone.

30.

For Garden's Sake



Part garden center, part mini-farm, this spot has goats, chickens, and ducks for the kids to visit, along with pretty grounds to wander. Admission is free, and there's even an on-site bar for grown-ups.

INDOOR FUN

31.

Streets at Southpoint Indoor Playground



This mall in Durham is home to a nice and clean indoor play area for kids. Partially enclosed, it's a great spot to burn off some energy on a rainy day, or after a few hours of shopping. Located near Macy's.

Greystone Rec Center



Raleigh's free indoor playground! This space is probably best for ages 4 and up, and contains some climbing structures, sensory elements, and a rock climbing wall.

32.

33.

Cheap/Free Summer Movies for Kids

Theatres all over the Triangle offer a range of free and cheap movie options in the summer months. You can [learn more about those here.](#)

Kids Bowl Free (Summer)

Summer is prime time for some free activities. [The Kids Bowl Free program](#) gives kids free games of bowling every day throughout the summer. Parents can join in with an affordable family pass.

34.

35.

Open Gym/ Toddler Times

There are many spots offering free or low-priced Open Gym time throughout the week, especially for younger children. These include local gymnastics centers, town parks and rec programs, and more. Some to check out: SGA Gymnastics, Knightdale Gymnastics, and Town of Wake Forest.

INDOOR FUN

36.

Open Play at the Rainbow Party Room



Tots to Teens Furniture/ Rainbow Play of NC in Raleigh is home to the Rainbow Party Room that is rented out for birthday parties. They also offer select Open Play hours during the week for a very reasonable rate!

Woodplay of the Carolinas - Open Play



Just like Rainbow Party Room, Woodplay of the Carolinas has an indoor party/open play space for kids. Open Play is very affordable!

37.

38.

Hope Church Indoor Playgrounds



This local church has play spaces at their campuses in Apex and Raleigh open to the public on select weekdays. They're bright, clean, and perfect for little ones to climb, slide, and explore indoors.

SuperFun Saturdays at the Halle Center



Head over to the Halle Cultural Arts Center in Apex on the 1st and 3rd Saturday of most months for "super" fun with free arts & crafts for children. Ages 4-12.

39.

40.

Learning Express Gift Stores



More than just a toy store — kids can explore hands-on play areas and try out toys for free. Super friendly staff love showing off the latest finds. Multiple Triangle locations and frequent special events.

INDOOR FUN

41.

The Nest



Part of the North Carolina Children's Museum, The Nest is a lovely indoor space for little ones in Chapel Hill. Created for ages 0-5, it is a sensory-driven space with very affordable pricing.

Book Harvest Family Space



This amazing nonprofit does so much for the community. Their Family Space in Durham is a colorful area filled with free books, wall toys, a magnet wall, reading nooks, puppets, and more — all designed to make it easy for children and families to play, learn, and read together.

42.

Notasium



A music-themed indoor playground with affordable entry fees. Kids can climb on giant instruments, sing karaoke in sound booths, and bang on drums. Locations in Cary and Durham.

Daughter's Coffee & Books



A cozy café and bookstore in Durham with an adorable kids' play area and shelves of children's books to browse. Perfect for a quiet outing with a latte in hand.

44.

45.

The Gathering Place Games: Parents & Kids Day



On Saturdays, this board game café opens its library of hundreds of games for families to play together. Admission is free, and staff are happy to recommend kid-friendly favorites.

UNIQUE THINGS TO DO

46.

Toddler Tuesdays - Downtown Cary Park



Downtown Cary Park has a ton of great activities to offer! Every two weeks, Toddler Tuesday is home to free, fun activities designed for little ones, from music and story time to crafts and games. Advanced registration required.

Free Events

The Triangle always has a packed calendar full of kid-friendly fun! We share [**a roundup of Weekend Events that you can find here**](#). And if you're subscribed to our newsletter, you'll get it sent right to you!

47.

Toddler Nature Time - White Deer Park



Little ones and caregivers can enjoy nature time in a fun, safe, and relaxed environment. Drop in at any time during the program to enjoy easy, structure-free activities and crafts. Ages 0-3. Cost is a few dollars.

Local Story Times

Story times are one of the best free activities for kids. The libraries offer them daily, check their websites for latest schedule. There are also story times offered at places like Barnes & Noble, local bookstores, and even Chick-fil-A!

49.

50.

Partee Shack Tuesdays



On Tuesdays, kids play for free with a paying adult. It's a fun, budget-friendly way to enjoy ParTee Shack's colorful, over-the-top indoor courses. 2 Raleigh locations.

UNIQUE THINGS TO DO

51.

Buffaloe Road Aquatic Center



This indoor water park features a lazy river, slides, and a zero-entry pool perfect for little swimmers. Admission is affordable, with discounts for Raleigh residents.

Morrisville Aquatic Center



An indoor pool that's great year-round, with lap lanes, a shallow play area/splash pad for kids, and swim classes. Entry fees are low, and Morrisville residents get an extra discount.

52.

53.

Home Depot Workshops

On the first Saturday of each month, kids can build a fun wooden project for free, complete with their own apron and certificate to take home.

Lowe's Workshops

Held monthly, these free hands-on sessions let kids create a simple craft or building project to take home, often tied to seasonal themes.

54.

55.

The Scoop @ Willow Oak Farms



More than just an ice cream shop, The Scoop has farm animals, play areas, and events. It's free to visit the grounds, and you can grab a sweet treat while you're there. \$5 admits kids to the cute covered play area.

MORE HELPFUL RESOURCES

Want even MORE ideas on local things to do with kids? Below, I've listed some of our most popular and highly-viewed articles. These can all point you in the right direction for more FUN in the Triangle!

- [35+ Indoor Playgrounds in the Triangle](#)
- [18 Most Toddler-Friendly Playgrounds in the Triangle](#)
- [Weekend Family Fun Roundup - Updated Weekly](#)
- [Kid-Friendly Restaurants \(+ Where Kids Eat Free\)](#)
- [Farm Visits and Animal Encounters around the Triangle](#)
- [20+ Toddler Activities in Raleigh & the Triangle](#)
- [EBT Discounts for NC Family Fun \(Triangle + Beyond\)](#)

Have
Fun!