

Oregon's Active Family Vacation Mecca

Seven Great Reasons to Visit the Bend Area

by Marie Sherlock



Mr. Bachelor's Pine Marten Express takes visitors on a breathtaking journey up to Pine Marten Lodge, beginning on June 30.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MT. BACHELOR

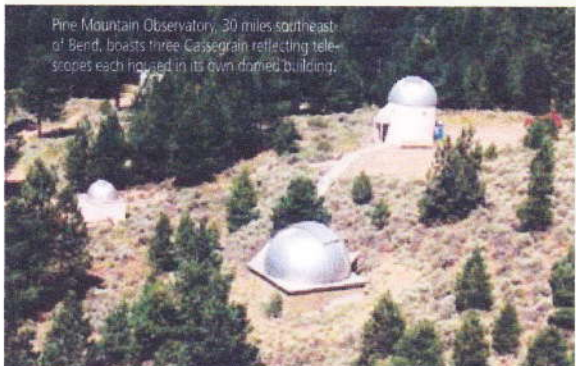
My family has been making annual treks to the Bend area for the past decade. In that time, we've hiked, biked, canoed, kayaked, white water rafted, cavorted in underground caves, worshipped the sun (and the stars!) – and there are still a host of activities and places in the area that we've yet to experience.

In short, the Bend area has just about every amenity an active family could possibly want in a vacation destination. You could almost think of the area as one humongous playground for your family. Here's a sampling of the sights and activities we've taken in over the past decade – and a few more that are still on our "to do" list:

1. The Stars

Most people would start this list with a different feature of the Bend area – say, for instance, the sun. But I've got this thing about the night sky – the infinite cosmos and all its wonders – and the Bend area is definitely THE place to view it. "Central Oregon's clear mountain air and minimal light pollution make for ideal conditions for stargazing," says Kristine McConnell, director of communications for the Central Oregon Visitors Association. In addition to surveying the heavens from your hot tub, there are two additional observation points close to Bend that you'll want to check out:

Pine Mountain Observatory (30 miles southeast of Bend). PMO is a world class facility, operated by the physics department of the



Pine Mountain Observatory, 30 miles southeast of Bend, boasts three Cassegrain reflecting telescopes each housed in its own domed building.

PHOTO BY MARK DUNAWAY, COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

University of Oregon. The public is welcome on Friday and Saturday evenings, from dusk until late night, weather permitting. While PMO's operators recommend that kids be at least 6 years old, our experience indicates that you

might want them to be a bit older, say 8 and up. pmo-sun.uoregon.edu/~pmo; 541-346-3481; \$5 suggested donation per visitor.

Sunriver Nature Center and Observatory (See more about Sunriver – 15 miles south of Bend – on page 30) offers a family-friendly anoremenly accessible stargazing experience.

Every night except Mondays, the observatory is open for night sky viewing. But first you'll be able to sit in the center's outdoor amphitheater and hear some of those amazing star facts in a multi-media presentation. www.sunrivenaturecenter.org; every night except Mondays; \$6 adults, \$4 kids; 541- 593-4394.

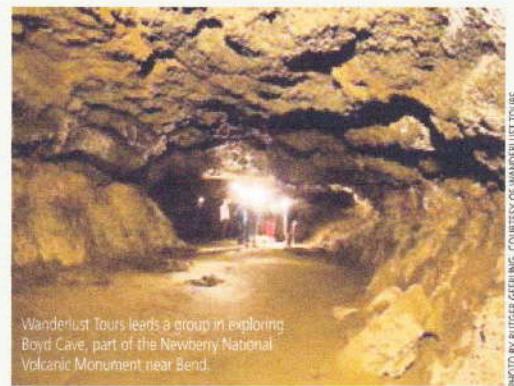
2. Newberry National Volcanic Monument

The terrain surrounding Bend always reminds me of the TV show *Bonanza* – think ponderosa pines, junipers and sagebrush set against the backdrop of the high desert.

And then there's the otherworldly – almost prehistoric – landscape of the Newberry National Volcanic Monument. This mammoth portion of the Deschutes National Forest, covers more than 50,000 acres impacted by Newberry Volcano's many eruptions and includes cinder and pumice cones, lava flows, caves, lakes, streams and waterfalls. Here are a few of the not-to-be-missed amenities of the area that families will love. www.fs.fed.us/r6/centraloregon/newberrynvm; 541-593-2421; \$5 day use fee per vehicle.

Lava Lands Visitor Center and Lava Butte (13 miles south of Bend). Along with self-guided interpretive paths (with great names like the Trail of Molten Land and the Trail of the Whispering Pines!) and displays and exhibits at the center, you can drive up to the top of Lava Butte for a panoramic view of the Cascade range and Newberry Volcano. Due to limited parking, cars at the summit are allowed by timed entry tickets on busy summer days. Sign up at the center.

Family Vacation Mecca continues on page 30



Wanderlust Tours leads a group in exploring Boyd Cave, part of the Newberry National Volcanic Monument near Bend.

PHOTO BY RUTGER GEELING, COURTESY OF WANDERLUST TOURS

Sun Country Tour's Big Eddy Thriller is an exciting introduction for families to white water rafting on the Deschutes River.



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUN COUNTRY TOURS

Kids as young as 6 can tackle the rocks at Smith Rock State Park, a climber's paradise 22 miles north of Bend.

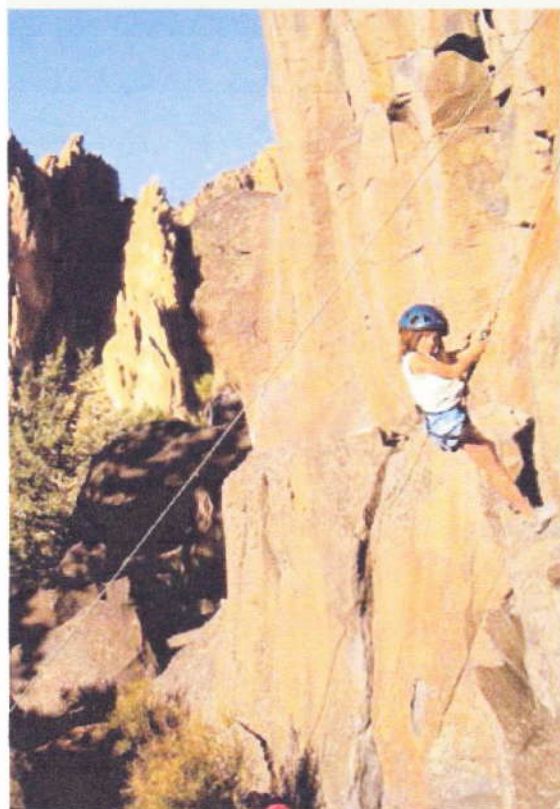


PHOTO BY JIM ABLAO, COURTESY OF CHOCKSTONE CLIMBING GUIDES

Lava River Cave (1 mile south of the visitor center). This experience is not for the claustrophobic – or young kids who spook easily. But for the rest of us, it makes for a fascinating exploration. The cave, discovered in 1889, stretches a full mile and was formed by lava flows eons ago. Bring flashlights or rent propane lanterns for a small fee (currently \$3).

Lava Cast Forest (3 miles south of visitor center). At this "forest" visitors can see molds of ancient trees and stumps that were frozen in time when lava erupted from Newberry Volcano 7,000 years ago. A one-mile paved and self-guided interpretive trail gives you geological information.

The Big Obsidian Flow is a bit more of a drive (about 40 miles from Bend, south on Hwy. 94 then east on Rd. 21) but it's well worth the trip. An easy one mile hike winds through the surreal landscape.

As if walking through the remnants of an ancient volcanic eruption weren't enough entertainment, during August hundreds of tiny frogs populate the flow (migrating up from Lost Lake). A definite kid-pleaser!

3. Rivers Wild – and Peaceful

For a relaxing boat outing for the entire family, consider renting a canoe at the Sunriver Marina and taking a leisurely "Family Float" down a calm section of the Deschutes River. At the pull out at Benham Butte, buses will shuttle you back to the Marina. www.sunriver-resort.com; 541-593-3492; \$50 for two adults, two kids.

If you're ready for something a little more exciting, the Big Eddy Thriller, offered through Sun Country Tours, is the perfect white water "starter" experience (recommended for ages 6 and up). Your trip on the upper Deschutes begins with some "warm-up rapids" (Class 1 and 2 on the six point scale). Before you reach the Big Eddy (which is actually a series of four Class 3 rapids), everyone goes ashore to scope out the excitement to come – and gets a last chance to chicken out! But don't. It's a wild but wonderful ride. You'll get totally soaked but you'll be totally thrilled. www.suncountrytours.com; 800-770-2161; \$44 each.



At the High Desert Museum, daily living history performances at the 1880's Homestead make the past more real to youngsters.

PHOTO COURTESY OF HIGH DESERT MUSEUM

4. Smith Rock State Park (22 miles north of Bend).

This state park draws thousands of serious rock climbers each year – it boasts more than 1400 (!) rock-climbing routes – but it's also one of the most visually stunning pieces of real estate you'll ever come across, with dozens of massive rocks dotting the landscape, rising from the Crooked River Canyon. If you'd like to try your hand at climbing the big rocks, Jim Ablao of Chockstone Climbing notes that kids as young as age 6 can participate.

Even if you're not interested in climbing, you'll enjoy a few hours here. You can hike, bike, picnic, watch the climbers or just take in the amazing scenery and look for wildlife. Bring your cameras – and your sense of awe. www.oregonstateparks.org/park_51.php.

5. Sunriver Resort (15 miles south of Bend).

Sunriver Resort is hands-down one of the most family-friendly vacation destinations we've ever encountered. I could cite myriad reasons for this conclusion – the two pools, tennis courts, horse stables, marina, nature center, ubiquitous hot tubs, and the proximity to so many other activities.

But in my mind all of these outstanding amenities pale in comparison to the omnipresent bike paths that parallel the roads and crisscross the development. Thirty-five miles of paved trails connect virtually every home in this planned community with every destination you want to reach. This is how all communities should be designed. Heavenly! www.sunriver-resort.com; 800-801-8765.


6. High Desert Museum (three miles south of Bend).

For several years on our annual treks to Bend, we'd drive by the entrance to this museum, vowing to stop and check it out. Don't make the same mistake.


When we finally visited several years ago, we discovered a world class facility. The High Desert Museum is a hands-on family museum, a living history site and a zoo – all rolled into one. Highlights include numerous indoor interpretive exhibits, the Birds of Prey Center, the 1880's Homestead, the Lazinka Sawmill (an authentic turn-of-the-century

Family Vacation Mecca continues on page 32

SUMMER CAMPS



Great Outdoors Academy




Expeditionary Learning in the American West
www.GreatOutdoorsAcademy.org • 503.281.3867

Intellectual and personal development for teens through safe adventure travel, writing, and appreciation of the natural world. Join GOA expedition teams in backpacking, rock climbing, river travel and more.

oregon washington utah idaho

Summer Young Performer Classes at Lakewood



CALL 503-635-3901
 Lakewood Center for the Arts • 368 S. State St. • Lake Oswego

Young Performer Classes

Ages: 8-17 yrs

Session 1: July 16-27, "Pirates of the Columbia"
 Session 2: Aug 6-17, "The True Story of the Dadeys Knights"


K-2 Summer Creative Dramatics

Ages K-2nd grade

Session 1: July 9-20; Session 2: July 23-Aug 3

T.V. & Film Classes

Ages 8-18, August 6-10



SUMMER CAMP

Hands-on Science Fun!

Ages 4-6

- Claws, Codes & Constellations


Ages 7-12

- Chemicals, Cells & Crime
- Moving with Science
- Rockin' Rockets & Aerodynamics

Ages 9-13

- Radical Robotics

- Locations throughout the Portland and Vancouver Area
- Full and half-days available
- Visit our website for complete details.



MAD SCIENCE

www.madscienceportland.com • (503) 230-8040
 Camps • In-class • After-School • Science Nights

Family Vacation Mecca continued from page 30

If You Go:

Location: Bend is about 125 miles from Portland, via Highway 26 east to Madras and then taking Highway 97 south to Bend.

More information: The folks at the Central Oregon Visitors Association can help you plan your trip. Visit www.visitcentraloregon.com or call 800-800-8334 for other "active family" ideas. You can also request that COVA's 84-page handbook, "The 2007 Central Oregon Visitors Guide," be mailed to you.

family lumber operation), daily educational lectures and tours, and a new and very hands-on "Dig, Crawl, Climb" area for kids. Without even realizing it – you'll be having too much fun! – your family will develop a deeper understanding of the area's geology, biology and history.

If you can plan your visit around one of the weekends that the Lazinka Sawmill is in operation (June 16 and 17 or July 21 and 22), your family is in for a treat. Breathe in the fragrant pine shavings and watch as skilled volunteers operate the big machines. www.highdesert-museum.org; 541-382-4754; \$12 adults, \$7 ages 5 to 12, free 4 and under.

7. Still On Our "To Do" List

Mt. Bachelor's Pine Marten Express. From June 30 through Labor Day, this chair lift will take you up to Pine Marten Lodge (altitude 7,200 feet). You can have lunch or dinner and take in the view. There are also designated hiking trails to explore before your trip down. www.mtbachelor.com; 800-828-2442; \$15 adults, \$9 youth.

Reindeer Ranch at Operation Santa Clause. Now that my kids are teenagers, I'll have a hard time coaxing them into stopping at this attraction in Redmond. But I would love to see the 70 (plus) reindeer at this site, the largest commercial reindeer ranch in the country. Those of you with young kids will have no such problem; your family might even see a few newborns in June. 541-548-8910; free.

There's much more to see and do in the Bend area. We'd love to take the Paulina Plunge, a "downhill waterfall mountain bike tour," and we've yet to enjoy the area's many winter activities. But we plan to continue our annual pilgrimages to Bend and, eventually, we'll do it all!

Marie Sherlock is the editor of Metro Parent.



Students ages 10 - 15 gain great technology experience and have a blast at Camp:TECH! Campers can register to learn scripting, digital photography, game design, programming, web design, Flash, and more this July and August!

RESIDENTIAL CAMPS **DAY CAMPS**
 Linfield College OGI Campus in Beaverton

Register online at camp.oetc.org or call 800.650.8250