

FEATURE :

Atlanta Family Travel: Activities, Parks & More

Family Fun in Atlanta

Take the kids to this sprawling city in the South packed with amusement parks, historic sites and the world's largest aquarium.



- Kids can't resist the fountain in Centennial Olympic Park in Atlanta.
-  [RMac_Photography](#)

Ask someone if they've been to [Atlanta](#) and most people answer affirmatively—meaning they've passed through [Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport](#) (ATL). But there's much more to the city than runways and terminals (or for being known as the home of Coca-Cola and CNN). Atlanta offers a novel brew of Southern hospitality and urban sensibilities that provides plenty of options for a memorable family vacation.

Atlanta is more than a city—it's the center of a huge metropolitan region that covers more than 20 counties, stretching to [Georgia](#)'s borders with [Alabama](#), [Tennessee](#), [North Carolina](#) and [South Carolina](#). The city of Atlanta is the focal point of the area, surrounded by a series of neighborhoods in the largely urban areas of Fulton and DeKalb counties. Most of Atlanta's growth in recent years has been north of the city in Gwinnett and Cobb counties, with more development in Clayton County south of the city around the airport.

Getting Around

Whatever your family wants to see on your Atlanta vacation, you will probably need a car to explore the metro area. [Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority](#) (MARTA), the rapid transit system that includes rail and buses, serves only Fulton and DeKalb counties. Other counties have bus systems that link to MARTA, but it can be difficult for visitors to navigate the various systems. Your best bet for a family vacation to Atlanta is renting a car or driving your own.

It can be tricky getting around Atlanta—particularly during its notorious rush hours—but arriving in the city is much easier. Hartsfield-Jackson is the busiest airport in the world. However, the volume of traffic also means connectivity—Atlanta's airport offers direct flights to many cities across the country and around the world. Delta Air Lines—the largest carrier in the world—calls Atlanta home and has its main hub here.



- Atlanta's skyline glows in the distance.
-  coka_koehler

Amtrak's Crescent train stops in Atlanta as part of its service between [New York](#) and [New Orleans](#). Interstates 75, 85 and 20 also provide easy access to Atlanta from most of the eastern United States.

Atlanta Hotels and Restaurants

For where to stay and eat when exploring Atlanta and its metropolitan area, read [Atlanta Slumber Party: Best Family Hotels](#) and [Kid-Friendly Dining in Atlanta](#). For more recommendations, see our [Atlanta College Visits](#) article, for families checking out the city's universities.

Next: [Key Atlanta Attractions—Olympic Park, Georgia Aquarium, Coca Cola, Puppets](#)

Center Stage: Downtown Atlanta

A review of Atlanta's appeal to families should begin downtown. The city's newest attractions are being constructed around [Centennial Olympic Park](#), which commemorates the **1996 Olympic Games**.

Adjacent to the park are the city's newest family attractions. The [Georgia Aquarium](#) is the world's largest aquarium, featuring more than 60 aquatic exhibits. *Admission: \$26 for adults 13 to 64; \$19.50 for ages 3 to 12; \$21.50 for seniors 65 and over. 225 Baker St. NW, tel. 404-581-4000.*

www.georgiaaquarium.org

The [World of Coca-Cola](#) contains memorabilia and interactive displays related to the Georgia-bred beverage giant.

Admission: \$15 for adults 13 to 64; \$10 for kids 3 to 12; \$13 for seniors 65 and over. 121 Baker St. NW, tel. 800-676-2653. www.worldofcoca-cola.com

For Younger Children

If you're traveling to Atlanta with younger kids, two destinations are particularly appealing. The [Center for Puppetry Arts](#) is the largest such organization in the United States. Muppets founder Jim Henson and Kermit the Frog cut the ribbon to open the center in 1978, and Muppet exhibits remain a strong part of the downtown facility's offerings.

Puppet shows are presented throughout the year that target kids of all ages. *1404 Spring St. NW, tel. 404-873-3089. www.puppet.org*

[Imagine It! The Children's Museum of Atlanta](#), located near Olympic Park, will intrigue children ages 2 to 8 with hands-on activities featuring such characters as Bob the Builder. *Admission: \$11 for everyone age 2 and over; free if under 2. 275 Centennial Olympic Park Dr. NW, tel. 404-659-5437.*

www.imagineit-cma.org



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- Kids can see how puppets are operated at the Center for Puppetry Arts.
 -  Joe Boris, Courtesy of the Center for Puppetry Arts
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For Older Kids

For older children, I suggest the [CNN Studio Tour at CNN Center](#) near Centennial Olympic Park. Media mogul Ted Turner launched the first global cable news network here in 1980. CNN still has a major presence in Atlanta, and the studio tour provides an exciting behind-the-scenes peek at how a working newsroom operates. *Admission: \$13 for adults; \$10 for ages 4 to 18; \$12 for seniors 65 and over. 190 Marietta St. NW, tel. 877-426-6868. www.cnn.com*

For more information on downtown Atlanta attractions, see [Top Things to Do With Kids in Atlanta](#).

Neighborhood and Nearby Attractions

Moving out into Atlanta's neighborhoods, you'll find many more opportunities for family fun. [Zoo Atlanta](#) in [Grant Park](#) features some 1,000 rare and exotic animals. The giant pandas are the major draw here, but there can also be long lines for the limited viewing hours, so be sure and check out the tigers, lions, zebras and orangutans as well.

Admission: \$18.99 adults 12 and over; \$13.99 for kids 3 to 11; \$15.99 for seniors 55 and over. 800 Cherokee Ave. SE, tel. 404-624-5600. www.zooatlanta.org

Another venue mainly known to locals is the [Children's Garden](#) at the [Atlanta Botanical Center](#) near [Piedmont Park](#). You can relax in one of the many rest areas while your kids tiptoe behind a waterfall, find a gnome hiding in a grotto or explore the child-sized maze.



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- One of the dinosaur exhibits at the Fernbank Museum of Natural History in Atlanta.
 -  hoyasmeg
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The **Fernbank Science Center** and **Fernbank Museum of Natural History** in DeKalb County include a planetarium, IMAX theater, dinosaur exhibits and other venues designed to bring science and history to life in a family friendly environment. *General admission to the Center is free; public planetarium shows are \$4 for adults over 13, \$3 for kids 12 and under. 156 Heaton Park Dr., tel. 678-874-7102.*

fsc.fernbank.edu. Museum admission: \$15 for adults 13 and over; \$13 for kids 3 to 12. 767 Clifton Rd. NE, tel. 404-929-6300. www.fernbankmuseum.org

Read more about these science and nature centers in our **Top Natural History Museums** article.

Next: [Atlanta Parks & Playgrounds and Historic Sites](#)

Atlanta Parks and Playgrounds

Atlanta is the hub of a sprawling metropolitan area with a number of family friendly destinations. The most popular tourist attraction in Georgia is **Stone Mountain Park**, a natural setting that boasts the world's largest relief carving. Families flock to Stone Mountain Park for the nightly laser show, train and boat rides, and a variety of activities for kids of all ages. *One-day admission: \$25 for adults over 12; \$20 for kids 3 to 11. One-day vehicle entry: \$8. U.S. Highway 78 East, Exit 8; tel. 800-401-2407.*

stonemountainpark.com

Theme park lovers will be drawn to **Six Flags Over Georgia** (275 Riverside Parkway SW, tel. 770-739-3400) and the largest water park in the South, **Six Flags White Water** (250 Cobb Parkway North, tel. 770-948-9290).

Historic Atlanta

If your clan is interested in American history, Atlanta has plenty of sites where you can travel with kids and have a great time. For Civil War buffs, the **Atlanta Cyclorama & Civil War Museum** in Grant Park brings the 1864 Battle of Atlanta to life. *Admission: \$8 for adults 13 and over; \$6 for kids 6 to 12; free for kids under 6. 800 Cherokee Park SE, tel. 404-624-1071. www.atlantacyclorama.org*

Atlanta is best known to the world for *Gone With the Wind*, the bestselling novel by Margaret Mitchell and subsequent Academy Award-winning film. While Scarlett O'Hara and the Tara plantation are fictional, the novel has real roots in Atlanta and nearby Clayton County. The **Margaret Mitchell House and Museum** (990 Peachtree St. NE, Atlanta; tel. 404-249-7015) and the **Road to Tara Museum** (102 N Main St., Jonesboro; tel. 800-662-7829) are two opportunities to bring the antebellum South to life in an entertaining fashion.



- The Atlanta Cyclorama & Civil War Museum was built in 1921 to house the cyclorama of the Battle of Atlanta, which was made in 1885.
-  wharman

Atlanta gained global attention for its role in the Civil Rights movement. The life and legacy of Atlanta's first Nobel Peace Prize winner are preserved at the **Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site** in the **Sweet Auburn** district. Families from around the world continue to pay tribute to the fallen leader at the **King Center**, which includes the burial sites of Dr. King and his wife, Coretta. *449 Auburn Ave NE, tel. 404-526-8900.*

www.thekingcenter.org

For more information, read **Historic Atlanta: From Civil War to Civil Rights**.

Next: [Outdoor Family Activities](#)

Outdoor Atlanta

If your family likes to get outdoors, there are plenty of spots around Atlanta to get back to nature. The **Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area** in the Atlanta suburbs offers picnic areas and 50 miles of trails. Rent a raft and “shoot the ‘Hooch” just like the locals do. For lake adventures, visit **Lake Lanier** or **Lake Allatoona** north of the city to enjoy **fishing**, **camping** and **boating**. Climb to the top of Stone Mountain or the peak in **Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield** for vistas unseen from any other vantage point.

Most times of year are great for outdoor activities, but don’t forget the sunscreen. Spring and fall provide the most comfortable temperatures, while the mild winters rarely see the thermometer dipping below freezing. July and August can be brutal, when heat and humidity suffocate the city like a scratchy blanket. The dog days of summer are a great time to head for the rivers, lakes and streams in the countryside—or to seek out air-conditioned museums and swimming pools.



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- Kids canoeing on the Chattahoochee River in Georgia.
 - © Georgia Department of Economic Development
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There are several local visitors’ bureaus for additional information for planning a great family vacation in the Atlanta area.

Atlanta Convention and Visitors Bureau: www.atlanta.net

Alpharetta Convention and Visitors Bureau: www.awesomealpharetta.com

Clayton County Convention and Visitors Bureau: www.visitscarlett.com

Cobb County Convention and Visitors Bureau: www.visitcobbcounty.com

Gwinnett County Convention and Visitors Bureau: www.gcvb.com

Marietta Welcome Center & Visitors Bureau: www.themariettasquare.com