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101 FREE Things to Do with Kids in MICHIGAN

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MICHIGAN IS AWESOME

By Stephanie Pearson

I know I'm a little biased, but really, Michigan is the best. For starters, our peninsulas mean we basically have two great states in one. And who else is bordered by all the Great Lakes? Or boasts *sand dunes*? Or provides the headquarters for so many great companies that make useful things and tasty treats?

Michigan is overflowing with so many fascinating things—history, nature, invention, art—that you'll never tire of finding something to do in this great state. And since we don't think adventure needs to break the bank, we raised the stakes a little and compiled a list of **purely FREE (or nearly free) things to do with your kids in Michigan.**

Where will your next mitten adventure take you?

State-Wide

- Take a road trip! Follow the [Great Lakes Circle Tour](#), a scenic road system connecting all of the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence River. Pick a portion or enjoy the entire 6,500 miles!

- Visit one of Michigan's 34 [lighthouses](#) that are open to the public. The exterior views are FREE, but admission rates may apply if you want to go inside.
- Go fishing! The Michigan DNR offers [Free Fishing Weekends](#) twice each year.
- Stop by a [Michigan Farmers Market](#).
- Play disc golf at one of [Michigan's 286 courses](#).
- Ride your bike on the masses of beautiful [Bike Trails](#), Michigan has to offer!
- Fly kites, build sandcastles, splash in the water, or take in the wonder of winter water at one of Michigan's hundreds of [beaches](#).
- Enjoy the dynamic fall colors of a trillion trees by taking a Michigan [color tour](#).
- Go on a real life treasure hunt – try [geocaching or letterboxing!](#)
- Go [hiking!](#) The [North Country National Scenic Trail](#) connects 7 states and headquartered in Lowell, MI!
- Use your library card to check out a FREE one-day pass, valid at any of [Michigan's State Parks!](#) With your library card, you can also check out a [Michigan Activity Pass](#), good for discounts and FREE passes to cultural attractions across the state!

- Visit a local fair or [festival](#). Whether it be music, art, ice, syrup, tulips, chocolate, kites, cherries, or magic, you can find one that suits you in Michigan...and many are FREE!
- Enjoy FREE kids admissions to select movies, during Celebration Cinema's [Flick's Family Film Festivals](#).
- Get a free [Krispy Kreme doughnut](#) when the light is on (at participating locations, including). Download the Hot Light app and get notified anytime a light is on in your area!
- Go bowling...or roller skating...FREE! [Kids Bowl FREE](#) all *summer* long and [Kids Skate FREE](#) all *year* long at participating alleys and rinks all over the state!
- Build something at [Lowe's Build and Grow Clinic](#) or [Home Depot's Kids Workshops](#). The events are FREE, but pre-registration is required (and they fill up fast).



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Grand Rapids

- Explore [Rosa Parks Circle](#), a public art space in the heart of downtown my renowned artist, Maya Lin. Many FREE events and concerts take place here all year long, and (almost FREE) outdoor ice skating is offered in winter months.
- Strap on your walking shoes and go on a [Grand Rapids Tag Tour](#).
- [Millennium Park](#) offers 15 miles of paved and natural-surfaced trails, fishing, recreational areas, and great playgrounds. Also available is a great beach and splash pad, paddle boats and more. However please note, unlike the rest of the park, these water-based features of the park are fee-based.
- Take a ride on [Motu Viget, a giant tire swing](#).
- Visit the World's first LEED certified art museum, the [Grand Rapids Art Museum](#), and enjoy FREE admission all day on Tuesdays and Thursdays evenings.
- Experience the [Meyer May House](#), a meticulously restored Frank Lloyd Wright prairie house, complete with

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- original furnishings.
- Built to aid spawning fish in their struggle to swim upstream, the [Fish Ladder](#) is great place to watch fish jump.
- Watch planes take off and land at the [Gerald R. Ford International Airport Viewing Area](#). Take advantage of their provided picnic tables and bring a sack lunch.
- Foster a natural curiosity in your family for the great outdoors by joining one of [Calvin Ecosystem Preserve](#) Education Programs for families.
- Download the [GR Walks app](#), and have FREE guided walking tours in the palm of your hand! Additional tours can be found at [Experience Grand Rapids](#).
- Although seasonal, [ArtPrize](#) is too good not to include. An international art competition, open to any artist and decided by public vote, it fills the city of Grand Rapids with art and visitors from all over the world for 19 days!

Muskegon

- Explore the universe at the [Carr-Fles Planetarium](#).
- See a life-size mastodon, sawmill, Great Lakes Schooner and more at the [Lakeshore Museum Center](#). Admission is FREE and includes visits to the [Fire Barn Museum](#) and [Scolnik House of the Depression Era](#).
- Explore the important roles African Americans played, that shaped Muskegon County at the [James Jackson Museum of African American History](#).
- Enjoy a movie on the deck of the [USS LST 393](#), a historic warship located in Muskegon. Movies are shown on Friday nights all summer long.

- For just \$1 per person (almost free), cross the Kalamazoo River by a hand-



- cranked [Chain Ferry](#) in Saugatuck.
- Visit the [DeKlomp Wooden Shoe and Delftware Factory](#) in Holland and talk with artists as they produce wooden shoes and paint Dutch pottery right in front of your eyes.
- Take in the sights and sounds of the [World's Largest Musical Fountain](#) in Grand Haven. These FREE shows run nightly at sunset each year between Memorial and Labor Day.
- Hike or ride to the top of the [Silver Lake Sand Dunes](#) and transport yourself to another world!
- Get lost at [Nordhouse Dunes](#) in Ludington, the only designated

- 'Wilderness' in the Lower Peninsula (FREE with a Michigan Recreation Sticker)
- Voted "The Most Beautiful Place in America" in 2011, the [Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore](#) in Empire, is not to be missed! Bike, hike, float, drive and explore the miles of sandy beaches, bluffs, and forests.
- Visit [Cherry Republic](#), a cute shop downtown Traverse City offering FREE samples of all things cherry.
- Take in an (almost) free, \$0.25 kids matinee, every Saturday morning at the [State Theatre](#) in Downtown Traverse City.

Find a huge list of hikes and beaches to visit across west Michigan on [grkids.com!](#)



West Coast

- Climb, swim and play in the sand at [Warren Dunes State Park](#) in Sawyer, MI.
- Explore the [Silver Beach Amusement Park Museum](#) in St. Joseph and experience the delightful past of the park that graced the shores of Lake Michigan from 1891-1971.



Southwest (Kalamazoo & Beyond)

- Take a walk through the [Leila Arboretum and Children's Garden](#) in Battle Creek and discover 2,500 marked trees and plants, dozens of gardens and walkways, art and more!
- If you're in Niles, visit the [Fort St Joseph Museum](#) and [Historic Chapin Mansion](#).
- The [Kalamazoo Valley Museum](#) is a hidden treasure located in Kalamazoo, full of family friendly exhibits, play areas and demonstrations.
- If you're in downtown Kalamazoo during the holiday season, hop aboard the FREE San-Francisco style [Holly Jolly Trolley](#). It runs every Friday-Sunday in December.
- If you're into history, visit the [Old Jail Museum](#) in Allegan. In lieu of handcuffs and bars, you'll find a variety of artifacts donated by people in Allegan County that reflect the lifestyle of the early 1900's.
- [Fort Custer State Park](#) in Augusta, is a recreation area comprised of over 3,000 acres of natural land including 3 lakes, the Kalamazoo River and an excellent trail system.
- Visit the robotic milking viewing area and Michigan Garden at the [Dairy Center Kellogg Biological Station](#) in Gull Lake.
- Bike or hike the [Lillian Anderson Arboretum](#); 140 acres of marsh, meadow, pine, and deciduous forest in Kalamazoo.
- Attend a [Wednesday Night Cruise-In](#) at the Gilmore Car Museum for free!
- Be amazed at lifelike houses, dolls, toys and more, on a miniature scale at the [Midwest Miniatures Museum](#) in Hickory Corners (between BC and Hastings).

Lansing

- Tour public areas of the [State Capitol Building](#).
- Learn about Michigan's judicial branch by touring the [Michigan Supreme Court Learning Center](#), a FREE museum-like education center filled with exhibits, a mock-courtroom, computer programs and more! And if you visit on a Sunday, head to the nearby [Michigan Historical Museum](#) where admission is FREE from 1-5PM.
- Take a hike on over 4 miles of paved, handicapped accessible trails at the [Carl G. Fenner Nature Center](#).
- For more art, head to the [Lansing Art Center and Education Center](#), a FREE showplace dedicated to promoting the works of Michigan artists.
- Hike or climb the eponymous sandstone quartz [Ledges of Grand Ledge](#).
- Take a FREE [Walking Tour of Historic Marshall](#).
- Watch a vintage [Walker Wheels Baseball game](#) where the players done old-fashion jerseys and play under 1860 rules, at the [Walker Tavern Historic Site](#) in Brooklyn.

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East Lansing

- Learn about and enjoy plants in a beautiful setting at the [MSU Beal Botanical Gardens](#).
- Explore the [MSU Children's Garden](#). In addition to a large variety of plants, you'll find compilations of mazes and play structures.
- Park on the lawn outside Beaumont Tower, home of the [MSU Carillion](#), and hear one of MSU's most recognizable sounds in concert form. Weekly performances take place all year long, and concerts are held in July, when the tower also opens for FREE tours and demonstrations.
- Visit the new (architecturally awesome) MSU Eli and Edythe [Broad Art Museum](#). Not only is it FREE everyday, it also offers Family Days on the first Saturday of every where children of all ages can enjoy making art with professional teaching artists.

Great Lakes Bay (The Thumb)

- Head to Midland's [Alden B. Down Museum of Science & Art](#) in Midland, where you'll find a variety of hands-on exhibits in the Hall of Ideas, a Foucault Pendulum and a 450-gallon Saltwater Aquarium.
- Enjoy and learn about the environment and how to be responsible stewards of the land, water and air at the [Chippewa Nature Center](#) in Midland.
- [Pioneer Log Village in Bad Axe](#) is the largest collection of authentically restored pioneer log buildings in Michigan...all open for FREE Sunday afternoons between Memorial Day and Labor Day.
- Check out a unique, fun collection of over 2,000 works by [Marshall M. Fredericks](#), Detroit-based public sculptor, at his museum in University Center.
- Explore a full-size replica wooden Great Lake schooner and shipwreck, without getting wet at the [Great Lakes Maritime Heritage Center](#) in Alpena.
- View Michigan's only know prehistoric rock carvings at the [Sanilac Petroglyphs Historic Site](#) in Cass City.
- Step inside the [Castle Museum of Saginaw](#). Stored inside the landmark building (which is an artifact in itself), are artifacts offering fascinating information about Saginaw's history. Admission is (almost) free, at \$1 per adult and \$.50 per child.
- Visit Michigan's Little Bavaria, [Frankenmuth](#), where it's Christmas year round!



Ann Arbor (U of M)

- Go on a [Fairy Door hunt](#) – there are 10 located throughout the city of Ann Arbor.
- Uncover a wide variety of habitats, trails, formal gardens, a conservatory and a great Children's Garden at the [Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum](#).
- Stop in [The University of Michigan Museum of Art](#), a small, but

architecturally beautiful building that contains the works of Rodin, Picasso, Monet and more!

- Walk among dinosaurs at the [The University of Michigan Museum of Natural History](#).
- Enter the ancient world at the University of Michigan [Kelsey Museum of Archaeology](#), where you'll find an Egyptian mummy coffin, magical amulets, Greek pottery and more.

Detroit

- Enjoy the sights, sounds, aromas and scenery of [Yates Cider Mill](#) in Rochester Hills.
- Head to the [Cranbrook Institute of Science](#) in Bloomfield Hills, on the first Friday of the month between 5 and 10:00 PM for FREE admission and to get an up-close look at bats, a trip through the stars, and lots of hands-on experiments!
- Visit the [Detroit Historical Museum](#) and take a trip through America's Motor City, the Underground Railroad, the Kid Rock Music Lab and more!
- Take the bridge to [Belle Isle](#) and discover 200 acres of woodland, trails, swimming, recreational facilities and much more!
- While on Belle Isle, visit the [Dossin Great Lakes Museum](#) which showcases the story of the Great Lakes.
- Also on Belle Isle is the landmark [Anna Scripps Witcomb Conservatory](#), which features an 85' high dome providing a home to a tropical wonderland. Visit and discover one of the largest owned orchid collections in the country.
- Once celebrated as the finest aquarium in the world, the [Belle Island Aquarium](#) is open while being restored and FREE to the public. Or, for an up-close and personal view of Michigan's wildlife, stop by the [Belle Island Nature Zoo](#).
- Hop in your car and take a Detroit [Architectural Tour](#), or choose from many other FREE self-guided tour maps are available.
- Take in an open-air art environment in the heart of an urban community and be amazed – explore [The Heidelberg Project](#).

- Watch expert candy makers create luscious treats, while you indulge in them, at the [Sanders Candy Factory Tour](#) in Clinton Township.
- Be amazed as you explore coin operated oddities and antiques at [Marvin's Marvelous Mechanical Museum](#) in Farmington Hills.

Mackinaw

- Witness the galaxy at [Dark Sky Park](#) in Mackinaw City, open every day FREE of charge.
- Visit our state's crown jewel and the 5th longest suspension bridge in the world, the '[Mighty Mac](#)' and learn all about it at the [Mackinac Bridge Museum](#). Admission to the museum is FREE.
- Go back in time at the [Surrey Hill Square Carriage Museum](#), complete with a working blacksmith shop.

Upper Peninsula

- Visit [Fayette Historic Townsite](#) in Garden, a real Michigan Ghost Town, preserved from the early days of iron mining.
- Take in the splendor of the [Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore](#) in Alger. And, if you find yourself there in the winter months, head west about an hour to Hiawatha National Forest Rock River Canyon Wilderness Area where the [Eben Ice Caves](#) reside!
- Discover the story of the state's iron mining history and the people who worked in it at the [Michigan Iron Industry Museum](#) in Negaunee.
- Copper Harbor's [Fort Wilkins Historic State Park](#) features a restored 1844 army military outpost and Copper Harbor Lighthouse Visitor Center, one of the first lighthouses on Lake Superior. Admission is FREE with Recreation Passport.
- If you're looking to learn a little more about Calumet's beginnings and it's explosion into a major copper mining boomtown, visit the [Calumet Visitor Center](#).
- Fish, hike, ski or drive through the [Seney National Wildlife Refuge](#); 95,000 acres of diverse habitats which provide a

home to a wide variety of plant and wildlife species.

- Ride over the world's widest and heaviest [double decker vertical lift bridge](#) on Portage Lake.
- Observe ships at Soo Locks Observation Platform and [Visitor Center](#) in Sault Ste. Marie.
- Find a unique collection of 'Junkyard Art' at [Lakeneland Sculpture Park](#), near Marquette.
- Head to Paradise (Michigan, that is) and visit [Tahquamenon Falls](#) where you'll find 48,000 acres of wilderness and 2 of Michigan's most beautiful waterfalls.
- Stop by [Castle Rock](#) in St Ignace and snap a picture with Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox. While you're there, pay the (almost) free \$1 fee and climb to the top.
- Explore hundreds of spectacular waterfalls in the [Porcupine Mountains](#) on the coast of Lake Superior. There you'll also find pristine, sandy beaches, lighthouses, copper mines, hundreds of miles of trails, and the awe-inspiring Lake of the Clouds.

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