



Photos: Mhairri Woodhall/For Postmedia News

Stunning sunsets, mountain views and lots of activities for all ages make a stay at the Westin La Paloma Resort and Spa in Tucson one families will cherish for a long time.

Family fun blooms in the desert

Tucson offers plenty to do even with kids

MHAIRRI WOODHALL
FOR POSTMEDIA NEWS

Flexibility is key when travelling with an infant. Amusement parks, aquariums, museums and even zoos are of minimal interest to these tiny humans. I learned early on carefully planned travel itineraries are absolutely worthless. You are no longer in charge.

With this in mind, I forged ahead with planning a weekend getaway to Tucson. Bursting with Southwest charm, Tucson offers a host of cultural, recreational and educational experiences, and has a fantastic foodie scene.

My feeling was that even if we only managed to see one attraction, the city's 350 days of annual sunshine would make the trip worthwhile.

We always end up spending more time than anticipated at our hotel. Even the simple task of getting out the door for breakfast takes an hour. I start my destination research by looking for a full-service hotel with child-friendly amenities, recreational activities, day-spa, rooms with balconies and buffet breakfast, because kids are even less patient when hungry.

Staying at a property that offers these types of services allows my husband and I to take turns reading on the balcony during nap-time while the other plays tennis, has a spa treatment or relaxes by the pool.

The Westin La Paloma Resort and Spa fit the bill. Having undergone an exten-



Desert sunset and cacti from the Arizona Sonora Desert Museum are a must-see.

sive \$30-million rejuvenation, La Paloma is the ideal family retreat in Tucson.

The property has five pools, one of which has a huge waterslide, 10 championship tennis courts, yoga, Pilates and fitness studio, Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course and Red Door Day Spa. While most hotels limit the children's program to ages two and up, La Paloma's Kids Club Discovery Room welcomes babies from six months of age, so my husband and I enjoyed a romantic, albeit early, chef's tasting dinner at the resort's Azul Restaurant.

Tucson is a recreational paradise, with activities ranging from rock climbing to horseback riding and more. The adventures I chose for our little family were slightly tamer, but we enjoyed ourselves nonetheless. I aimed for one activity per day and a nice restaurant for lunch, and I am happy to report we survived.

Natural history at Desert Museum

The Arizona Sonora Desert Museum is a must. The rolling hillsides covered in cacti on the drive from Tucson to the Saguaro National Park (to which the museum is adjacent) was some of the prettiest scenery we encountered. Primarily an outdoor attraction, the museum is a blend of zoo, botanical garden, natural history museum and art gallery.

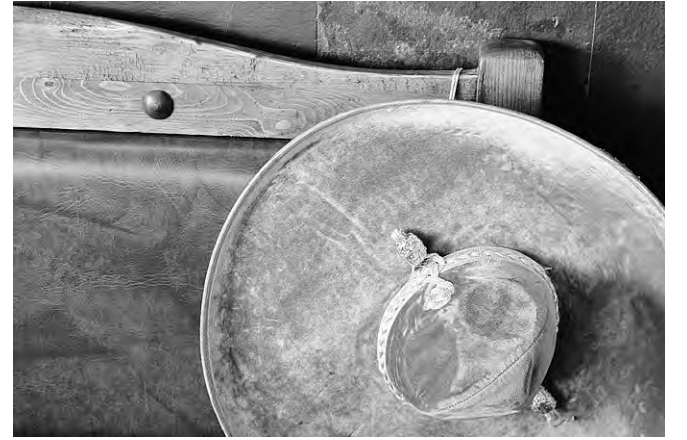
Old Tucson visit a Western fan's dream

My husband loves Westerns, so Old Tucson was on our itinerary. Since 1938 more than 300 movies and TV shows have been filmed in Old Tucson, including Gunsmoke, Bonanza, Little House on the

Prairie, Three Amigos and Tombstone. The on-site Story Museum speaks to the history of Old Tucson and displays some of the original costumes. Kids can pan for gold, ride a miniature antique car and take a spin on the carousel.

Check out the Children's Museum

There's something for everyone at the interactive Children's Museum Tucson. Even pre-toddling kids will enjoy the bright colours, music and array of textures, sights and sounds. Included in the many exhibits are the Enchanted Rain Forrest play area (for children four and under), and the Music Room where kids can beat drums and create their own sound.



Tucson is bursting with southwest charm.

Mini Time Machine makes world small

Although our daughter was too young to appreciate the Mini Time Machine Museum of Miniatures, this attraction is definitely worth a visit.

There are more than 275 miniature houses, room boxes and other collectibles showcased in three main areas. The Enchanted Realm features magical snow villages, fairy castles and woodland creatures; the History and Antiques Gallery has historic miniature houses circa 1775; and the Exploring the World Gallery displays international miniatures from Italy, France, Japan and beyond.

Kid-friendly dining you will remember

Ambience and quality are often compromised when you have to choose kid-friendly dining. We found two great restaurants.

Hub Restaurant and Ice Creamery in downtown Tucson serves up a mean homestyle lunch, but save room for ice cream as that is main event. El Charro Café takes the honour of being the oldest continuously family-owned Mexican restaurant in the U.S. The portions are large and the food is delicious, as are the margaritas.

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