



Balance and strength are paramount when navigating the giant lily pads in Big Foot Pass. PHOTOS: CURT WOODHALL

FAMILY TRAVEL

SCOTTSDALE'S GREAT WOLF LODGE KEEPS KIDS ENTERTAINED

Water park, dryland activities make pups howl with glee, Mhairri Woodhall writes.

Within seconds of hearing the telltale howl indicating swells are imminent, a maniacal mob rushes Slap Tail Pond. The once calm pool is now a comical bedlam of kids hurling themselves, with delight, into the onslaught of waves, while parents dodge flailing limbs to stay within arm's reach. My daughter Brooklyn, however, has opted for a slightly unorthodox response to the wave pool's thrilling alert. Never shying away from a dramatic opportunity, she's crouched in the shallows, head flung back, eyes squeezed shut, howling like a wolf. Her spirit animal has been discovered.

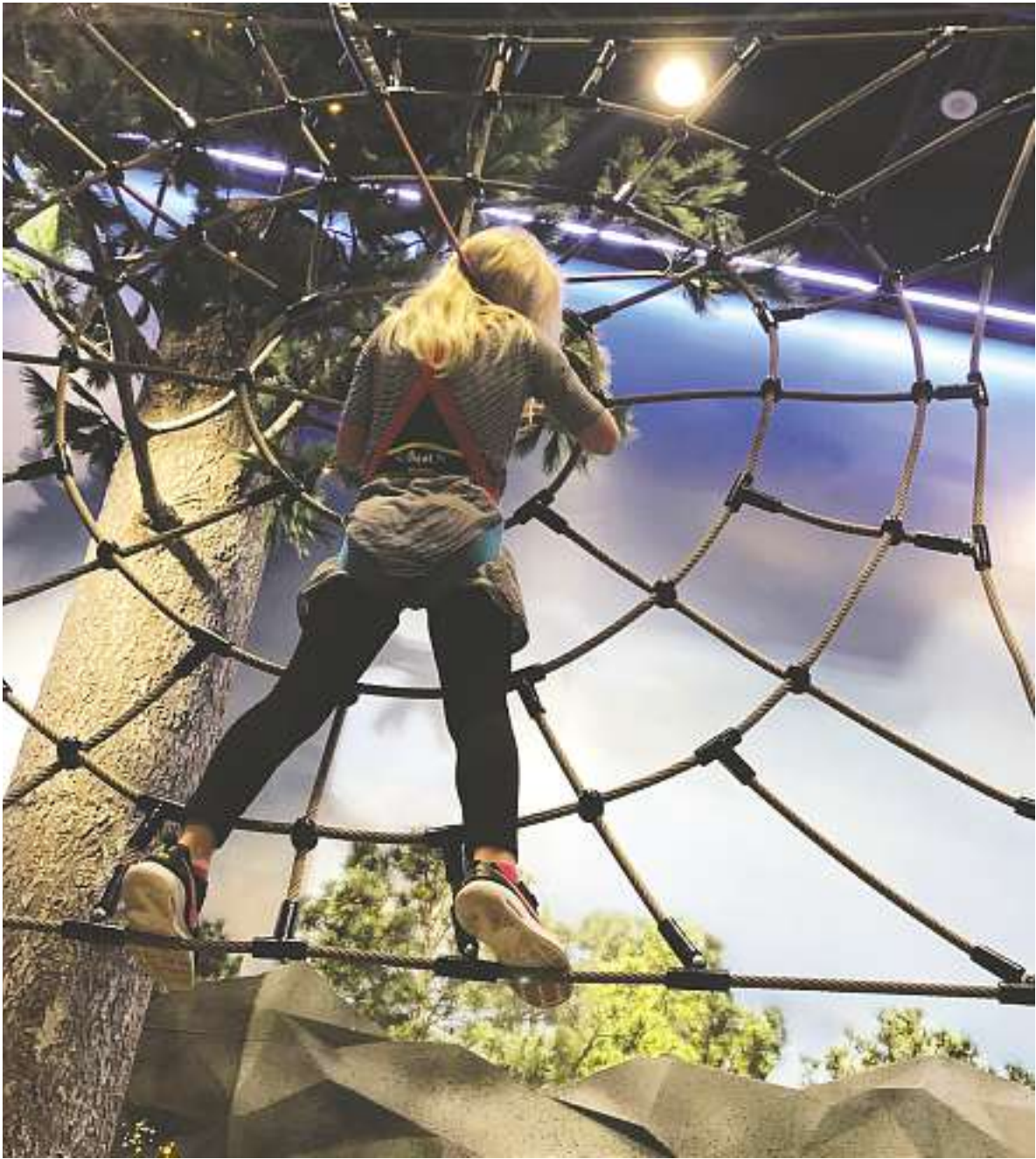
Great Wolf Lodge Scottsdale at Talking Stick opened in October and, based on the full parking lot and waterslide lineups, it appears to be a raving success. This comes as no surprise, of course, given that the resort is the equivalent of Las Vegas for kids. I can attest to this because after donning the customary fuzzy grey ears provided at check-in, I've yet to see a clock and have barely slept.

Boasting 13 slides and multiple pools and splash zones, the 85,000-square-foot indoor water park is Great Wolf's biggest draw, and it's where we've spent most of our time. Highlights for my seven-year old — in addition to perfecting her wave pool howl — include whizzing down the Alberta Falls and Diamondback Drop raft rides, dumping buckets of water onto unsuspecting slide passengers in the Talking Stick Treehouse and using me, awkwardly sprawled across an inner tube, as her bumper-boat on the Crooked Creek lazy river. Somehow, she's maintained momentum for six hours a day; only taking brief breaks to refuel on street corn and nachos from Timbers Tacos.

After transforming into a human-sized prune at the water park, I hoped for a reprieve on my chaperoning duties. An improbable dream as our Wolf

Passes are packed with hours-upon-hours of dryland entertainment. The pass, which costs US\$69.99 per person and has no expiry date, provides excellent value for guests who stay more than one night or plan to visit on multiple occasions. A one-time admission to the resort's mini golf course, 10-pin bowling alley, climbing wall, ropes course and Moonstone Mine mirror maze; as well as a single scoop of Ben & Jerry's ice cream, \$5 Northern Lights Arcade game card, and an empty cup to fill with bulk treats at the Candy Shop (a whopping \$12 value) are included features. However, it's the wizard's wand, which activates the resort's multimedia adventure MagiQuest, that's clearly the most coveted inclusion. During our stay, I spotted many enthusiastic toddlers, children and fathers harnessing the spirit of the game by casting their wands about the resort. My little "Magi" was a passionate player and together we clocked an inordinate number of steps trying to defeat the Shadow Lords and protect Vellara, the realm of imagination.

Great Wolf's restaurant options are as equally plentiful. Timber's delicious poolside street tacos were my lunchtime staple, and I'm still trying to re-create the pozole (a rich pork and hominy soup) served at Barnwood, the resort's signature seasonally focused restaurant. While we ate most of our meals at Great Wolf, I successfully convinced Brooklyn to dine out twice. Rusconi's American Kitchen is one of our favourite restaurants in greater Phoenix and we always, without fail, order the Chardonnay steamed mussels and braised short-ribs. When we're craving seafood, Ocean Prime's Sunday Surf & Turf is exceptional. The portions are large, so we typically share a meal, which includes a starter, 8 oz filet, choice of scampi, crab cake or scallops and a side for \$55. My husband also



Bowling, rock climbing and a towering ropes course are a few of the adventure activities at Great Wolf Scottsdale.

inhales at least half of Brooklyn's macaroni and cheese, and we'll finish with the 10-layer carrot cake.

The only caveat to dining off-property was that we returned by 8 p.m. to attend the nightly story time, which always includes a character visit and photo opportunity. Afterwards we'd yawn sleepily and head back to our room for bed. Just kidding. After a full day of trekking up stairs to waterslides, diving into waves, rock climbing, casting Magi spells and howling at imaginary moons, we weren't tired. Furthermore, the pajama dance party starts promptly at 9 p.m. One last chance to exhaust our wiggles before drifting into dreamland.

Full disclosure: Great Wolf Lodge is 100 per cent focused on delighting children. But, with the right perspective and a little assistance from caffeine, parents have just as much fun. If you'd like to experience the waterpark but are either visiting family or have booked to stay elsewhere, the Scottsdale location is now offering day passes that start from just \$30 per person, or \$25 for a half-day.

Visit www.arrivalstravel.com to follow Mhairri's family travel adventures.



Striking gold in MagiQuest is the hottest dryland adventure at Arizona's hottest new resort for families