



Galveston Island's Pleasure Pier features a roller coaster and over a dozen rides in a carnival atmosphere



Stephanie, Alex, and Erica Slauter enjoy events at LaCenterra at Cinco Ranch

Photo by Adventure Photo & Design

and cheap

Free Family Fun

Some of the most memorable family moments are those spent with your kids. But you don't have to travel long distances or spend tons of money to have a good time! Create new memories this spring exploring the area within a short driving distance from Katy while keeping your wallet happy.

Art Car Museum Free
 140 Heights Blvd., Houston
artcarmuseum.com

Those who cannot wait for the Houston Art Car Parade in April can attend this museum which is always free to the public. Kids will be excited seeing the different art designs as well as other arts there. The venue is open Wednesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and closed on Mondays and Tuesdays.

Baytown Nature Center
 6213 Bayway Dr., Baytown
baytownnaturecenter.org

The center is made up of two connected peninsulas, surrounded by three bays, and occupies 450 acres of land on the west side of Baytown. Fishing and crabbing on San Jacinto Point, bird watching, a butterfly garden, and hiking and biking on the gorgeous nature trails are just a few of the many refreshing outdoor activities to enjoy. Admission is \$3 for adults, and children 12 and under are free. The center is open every day from sunrise to sunset with exception to extreme weather conditions.

Buffalo Soldiers National Museum Free
 3816 Caroline, Houston
buffalosoldiermuseum.com

Founded in 2000 by Vietnam veteran and African American military historian, Captain Paul J. Matthews, this museum is the only facility dedicated primarily to preserving the legacy of the African American soldier throughout the U.S. Admission is free on Thursdays from 1 to 5 p.m.

Central Green Park at LaCenterra Free
 23501 Cinco Ranch Blvd.
lacenterra.com

After a delicious lunch and high-end shopping at LaCenterra, head to the Central Green lawn and experience a rejuvenating Tai Chi class, live music, mommy and me time, and even free family movies, all presented by the Willow Fork Drainage District.

Chick-fil-A Family Nights
 Multiple Locations
chick-fil-a.com

Be the family hero and suggest nuggets and sweet tea for dinner. Each Katy location has family nights on the third Wednesday of the month from 5 to 8 p.m. Family nights feature fun activities designed to encourage positive character traits such as kindness, determination, honesty, and leadership.



The Katy Heritage Museum offers free admission and showcases vintage items from Katy's history



Photo by Houston Zoo/Stephanie Adams

Families can enjoy the Houston Zoo with free admission after 2 p.m. on the first Tuesday of the month from September through May

The Katy families' guide to free or cheap fun in and around Katy

Written by Wendy Teng and Katy Magazine's Editors

Children's Museum of Houston



1500 Binz, Houston
cmhouston.org/freefamilynight

The museum waives all admission fees on Thursdays from 5 to 8 p.m. Families can experience hands-on exhibits, cultural arts, and science and math programs for free, and have story time at 5, 6, and 7 p.m. in the Parent Resource Library. Parking is \$3.

Chinese Community Center



9800 Town Park Dr., Houston
ccchouston.org

If you and your family would like to learn about the Chinese culture, the Chinese Community Center hosts educational events and programs year-round. Families can also visit for the Asian heritage tour on weekdays from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Learn treasures about Asian culture, explore Hong Kong City Mall, and enjoy lunch at Ocean Palace Restaurant with your tour guide.

CiCi's Pizza

multiple locations

When it comes to entertaining a gaggle of kids for cheap, you really can't go wrong with a pizza buffet, arcade, flat screen TVs, and a salad bar. The children's buffet is only \$4.49 for kids ages 10 and under and includes a drink. Adults eat for \$5.99 each and children under 3 years old eat for just 99 cents.

Cinco Ranch Branch Library



2620 Commercial Center Blvd.
fortbend.lib.tx.us

Drop by to check out a new book and participate in free activities. Adults will love the weekly book club meetings and helpful tutorials. Kiddos can assemble fun crafts while watching cartoons at the craft carnival, bond with mom or dad at toddler time, or take painting lessons just for school-agers.

Cockrell Butterfly Center

5555 Hermann Park Dr., Houston
hmns.org

Walk through a living butterfly habitat and marvel at living examples of some of the world's largest and weirdest arthropods. Discover spectacular preserved specimens and enjoy interactive games and quizzes. Admission is \$7 for children ages 3 to 11 and \$8 for adults.

Discovery Green



1500 McKinney, Houston
discoverygreen.com

Families and pets alike can experience beauty, fun, and exposure to the arts in the heart of Downtown Houston. Catch a family-friendly movie on Friday night, or the Wings of the City art exhibit. Most activities are pet-friendly. They will also host the FUNomenal Family Festival on March 7 featuring baby Olympics, games, and moonwalks. Admission is free and includes Baby Olympics, obstacle courses and rides, guest appearances, and fun prizes.

An * denotes that this venue offers free admission or events during certain days and times. Please confirm with each venue.

Downtown Aquarium

410 Bagby St., Houston
aquariumrestaurants.com

When you see the neon blue Ferris wheel from afar, you'll know you're in the right place. As a 500,000-gallon aquatic wonderland, upscale dining locale, and six-acre entertainment complex all rolled into one, this is the perfect place to educate and entertain kids of all ages. Stingray Reef is now open, where you can touch and feed live rays for under \$6 per person.

Fort Bend County Museum

500 Houston St., Richmond
fortbendmuseum.org

Explore galleries depicting what life was like for settlers in 1821, and learn about the great Stephen F. Austin and his role in the settlement that eventually became Fort Bend County. Adult tickets are \$5 and children ages 5 to 15 are \$3. Children age 4 and under are free.

Galveston Ferry Ride and Seawall Free

Galveston Ferry Landing, Galveston
galveston.com/galvestonferry

Climb aboard the Gibb Gilchrist, the R.C. Lanier, or the Ray Stoker ferries for an 18-minute ride across the nation's largest inland port and spot ocean-going ships or even a family of dolphins at no charge.

George Ranch Historical Park

10215 FM 762 Rd., Richmond
georgeranch.org

Just a 35-minute drive from Katy, this 20,000-acre working ranch features historic homes, costumed interpreters, and livestock. Add some Texas flavor to your Saturday with barbecue at the 1930's Bachelor House or a traditional Victorian meal at the 1890's David Mansion. General admission to the park is \$10 for adults and \$5 for children ages 5 to 15.

Gerald D. Hines Waterwall Park Free


2800 Post Oak Blvd., Houston
uptown-houston.com

Take a short drive to uptown Houston and get a family photo in front of this 64-foot architectural landmark that circulates 11,000 gallons of water per minute. Then get some shopping done at the neighboring Galleria.

Health Museum Free

1515 Hermann Dr., Houston
thehealthmuseum.org

The Health Museum is a great place to visit for kids interested in human anatomy and physiology. You: The Exhibit has interactive activities that visitors can relate to such as the Body




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Scanner, Age-O-Matic, and Life-Span-O-Meter. The exhibit is called Beyond the X-ray and features medical imaging graphics and multimedia and will be featured until May 3. Admission prices are \$8 for adults and \$6 for children ages 3 to 12. Admission is free on Thursdays from 2 to 5 p.m.

Heritage Society Museum

1100 Bagby St., Houston
heritagesociety.org

The Heritage Society Museum complex is dedicated to collecting, preserving, and showcasing the diverse history of the Houston region. The museum gallery is open Tuesday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Admission is always free. Historic house tours are available Tuesday through Saturday at 10 a.m., 11:30 a.m., 1 p.m., and 2:30 p.m. The cost is \$15 for adults and \$6 for children 6 to 18 years old. Children 5 years and under are free.

Hermann Park

6001 Fannin St., Houston
hermannpark.org

Located within walking distance of the Houston Zoo, Hermann Park is a free, safe, and enjoyable public space that welcomes an estimated six million visitors per year. Unique and inspiring features attract families from all over the Houston area with multiple playgrounds, artistic landscaping and volunteer-led displays, a Japanese garden, picnic area, pedal boating, and a train ride. General park hours are Monday through Sunday 6 a.m. to 11 p.m., and hours for the train, boats, and other attractions are listed on the website and subject to change. Trains and pedal boats are \$3.25 per person.

Historic Downtown Katy

cityofkaty.com

Go window-shopping and look for a great deal at one of the many unique and inspiring antique stores or gift shops just across the railroad tracks in downtown Katy. With old-town charm and modern-day fashions, you could spend all weekend hunting for a great bargain.

Holocaust Museum Houston

5401 Caroline, Houston
hmh.org

Dedicated to educating people about the Holocaust, this facility honors the six million Jews and other innocent victims and celebrates the survivors' legacies by teaching the next generation important truths about prejudice. The museum is open to the public Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and on the weekends from 12 to 5 p.m. Admission is free for children and college students with a valid ID, \$8 for seniors and active military, and \$12 for adults.

Houston Arboretum and Nature Center

4501 Woodway Dr., Houston
houstonarboretum.org

A 155-acre urban nature sanctuary location on the western edge of Memorial Park that provides education opportunities and protection to native plants and animals who are threatened by commercial and residential development. Participate in Tyke Hikes with kiddos ages 18 months to 3 years every Monday at 9:30 and 10:30 a.m. for \$3 per child, or take a trip to the Discovery Room and use interactive exhibits, microscopes, and more to learn about the natural world.

Houston Art Car Parade

1500 McKinney St., Houston
thehoustonartcarparade.com

Powered by Orange Show Center for Visionary Art, the Houston Art Car Parade is free and open to the public on April 11 along Allen Pkwy. from Taft St. to Bagby St. The parade route will open at 10 a.m. for the public to look at all the entries. The actual parade will be from 2 to 4:30 p.m. There will also be a kids zone with many interactive art activities at the Sam Houston Park. Families can also enjoy live music, food, and children's activities at the sneak peek at Discovery Green on April 9 from 6:30 to 9 p.m.

Houston Museum of Natural Science

5555 Hermann Park Dr., Houston
hmns.org

With traveling exhibits on a variety of topics from Native American culture to space science, and satellite facilities like the George Observatory and the Burke Baker Planetarium, it's no wonder this is one of the most heavily attended museums in the nation. Admission to permanent exhibits is free on Thursdays from 3 to 6 p.m. where you can roam the Serengeti, walk with dinosaurs, and discover the world's mineral wonders without paying a dime.

Houston Ship Channel

7300 Clinton Dr., Houston
portofhouston.com

Brave the open waters of one of the world's busiest ports about the M/V Sam Houston, the Port of Houston Authority's free public tour boat. Tours are 90 minutes round-trip with sightings of cargo vessels, massive tankers, and dredgers as they enter and depart the channel.

Houston Zoo

6200 Hermann Park Dr., Houston
houstonzoo.org

Always a kid favorite, the Houston Zoo showcases hundreds of species and animal experiences. They offer free admission on the first Tuesday of each month from September through May after 2 p.m. This does not apply to special events and attractions.

Katy City Park

5720 Franz Rd.
cityofkaty.com

This newly renovated sports facility offers two tournament-sized baseball fields with professional lighting, a soccer and flag football field, tennis courts, and a covered basketball pavilion, all available for rent year-round. The park is also home to Katy Play Station, the state's largest innovative playground for impaired and deaf children that is designed to feature Katy's name sake the MKT rail line and has won multiple awards for design in aiding children of all physical abilities.

Katy Contemporary Arts Museum

805 Ave. B
katycam.com

This relatively new museum features modern, contemporary arts, bringing fresh perspectives for Katy families. Admission is free to the public. There are new and unique exhibitions every few months. Be sure to check out some "Made in Katy" and other local-inspired souvenirs at the gift shop while you are there.

Katy Heritage Society

5990 George Bush Dr.
katyheritagesociety.com

Interested in learning a little more about Katy history? Located at the Katy Heritage Park, three historic homes, the old Post Office, a Mess Hall, tool shed, and Bank Bandstand showcase over three decades of Katy history. The historic homes are free to the public on the first weekend of every month, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays, and from 1 to 4 p.m. on Sundays. There are many exhibits and displays about Katy's history to learn and explore.

Mary Jo Peckham Park

5597 Gardenia Ln.
pct3.hctx.net

This 32-acre park and recreation center has been delighting Katy families for decades. With two 18-hole miniature golf courses, jogging trails, two playgrounds, a picnic area, an off-leash dog park, fishing pier, fitness facility, and indoor pool, there is always something to do. All classes and events are free, just sign up for a membership at the front desk. Full-sized towels are required for entry to the fitness facility. Community Center hours are Monday through Friday 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., Saturday 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., and Sunday 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Maud Smith Marks Library

1815 Westgreen Blvd.
hcpl.net

Get a few friends together and check out the free family film Festivals Friday through Sunday. Borrow a book and participate in the library's free activities like book clubs, movie nights, computer classes, or story times.

Miller Outdoor Theatre

6000 Hermann Park Dr., Houston
milleroutdoortheatre.com

This venue provides professional-caliber performances for adults and children. Tickets for assigned seating performances may be reserved for no charge at the box office on a first-come, first-served basis between 10:30 a.m. and 1 p.m. on the day of the performance. Hillside seating is free and unassigned, and blankets and lawn chairs are welcome. Visit their website for a calendar of events.

Multiplicity

1306 Avenue A.
multiplicity.co

Nestled in the heart of historic downtown Katy, take a jewelry making or metal smith class, or hang out with friends on Ladies' Night Out when all the fun is complimentary. You can also schedule a special event in an enchanting, starlit garden. See ad on page 15

Museum of Fine Arts

1001 Bissonnet St., Houston
mfah.org

General admission is free Thursdays from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Children age 12 and under always get free general admission. General admission includes Spring Break at the Museum, which encourages families to sketch, write, and talk about works of art inside the museum, and family flicks, which features a 60-minute film on *Looney Tunes*, with show times on March 11 and March 18 at 12 and 2 p.m. Other free events at the museum to look forward to are Free Family Days at Bayou Bend, which offers music and games, and story time tours at Rienzi with interactive activities and stories. If your family enjoys visiting gardens, admission to Houston's annual Azalea Trail is only \$5 for a single-site admission from March 6 through 9.

Nature Discovery Center

7112 Newcastle Street, Bellaire
naturediscoverycenter.org

Ignite lifelong curiosity and respect for nature through education and fun programs like their free nature story time, kid-friendly tree identification walks, or junior science classes for explorers ages 6 through 10 years for \$12 per person per class.

Ohana Shaved Ice in Old Katy

5703 Second St.

Tucked away in the middle of historic Katy's antique shops is a little shack with tons of yummy flavors of ice. Treat the kiddos to a SpongeBob Square Pants or Batman flavored snow cone while you attempt the jalapeno flavor or a sugar-free option.

Rosenberg Railroad Museum

1921 Ave. F, Rosenberg
rosenbergrrmuseum.org

Take a fun, unique day-trip and learn all there is to know about trains, visit the mysterious Old City Jail, take a photo in front of a bright red caboose, or even schedule a birthday party for train-lovers ages 2 to 8 years old. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$4 for seniors 55 and up, and \$3 for children 1 to 14.

Saengerfest Park Free

2300 Strand, Galveston
galveston.com

Challenge a friend to a battle of wits using giant chess pieces, and gather around for a free family movie on the strand on the first Saturday of each month.

Showboat Drive-In Theater

22422 FM 2920, Hockley
theshowboatdrivein.com

You don't have to pay outrageous prices to see the newest flicks. Take a short drive to Hockley and watch two back-to-back films currently in theaters on their giant outdoor screens. Kids can play on the lawn, and you can hang out with friends before the show starts at sunset. Admission is free for children under age 3, \$4 for children ages 3 to 12, and \$6 for adults.

Space Center Houston

1601 Nasa Pkwy., Houston
spacecenter.org

Discover the wonders of the galaxy without leaving Earth. Star-gazers of all ages will learn about the history of NASA and its impact on the modern world with full-scale displays and replicas of shuttlecrafts, meetings with real-life astronauts, interactive simulations of space travel, science demonstrations, facility tours, and tons of fun activities for little ones. Children 3 and under are free every day. Tickets range from \$18.95 to \$23.95 based on age. Save \$3 when you purchase tickets online.

Sugar Land Heritage Foundation & Museum

198 Kempner St., Sugar Land
slheritage.org

Schedule a walking tour that guides you through Sugar Land's transition from modest beginnings as a sugarcane plantation to one of the fastest growing cities in Texas. Tickets are \$10 for adults and \$5 for children ages 12 to 18 years. Children 12 and under are free. **KM**

WENDY TENG is a freelance writer. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, writing, volunteering, trying new restaurants, and learning about organizations.

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