

Mind-expanding Science Museums

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AMERICAN COMPUTER MUSEUM Bozeman, Mont. "The huge collection starts with a reconstruction of Cro-Magnon art on cave walls," writes Bernice Karnop of Great Falls, Mont. "It then flows past Babylonian and Sumerian clay tablets and an original copy of Sir Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica* (the foundation of modern physics), slide rules, video games, vintage Internet items, and the computer from an Apollo moon mission." (406) 582-1288, www.compustory.com.

CHABOT SPACE & SCIENCE CENTER Oakland, Calif. "What could be more mind expanding than peering through a telescope at distant galaxies?" asks Teri Schlesinger of Oakland. "The hands-on exhibits inspire talk about space travel, the vastness of the universe, and what we can do to save the earth. In the planetarium I feel as if I'm in a quiet meadow under beautiful dark skies—I gasp with surprise and grin with pleasure." (510) 336-7300, www.chabotspace.org.

COMPUTER HISTORY MUSEUM Mountain View, Calif. "Not just for geeks—and it's free," says Marc Fontana of Santa Clara, Calif. "Spend a fascinating afternoon perusing early computers, including an Enigma encryption machine. There are 600 artifacts displayed, and an exhibit on computer chess." (650) 810-1010, www.computerhistory.org.

DISCOVERY GATEWAY Salt Lake City. "More fun than a theme park," writes Christina Sheldon of Logandale, Nev. "My kids' paper airplanes soared in a wind tunnel and their constructions were put to the test on an earthquake table. Best, they got to produce a TV news program." (801) 456-5437, www.childmuseum.org.

EXPLORATORIUM San Francisco. "My earliest museum memory is of this humongous warehouse where I was encouraged to touch everything," writes Jenny Hattori Noll of Salinas, Calif. "I was so excited about all the things to learn and how much fun it was—riding down an Olympic-style luge run or groping my way through the Tactile Dome." (415) 561-0360, www.exploratorium.edu.

FLEISCHMANN PLANETARIUM & SCIENCE CENTER Reno, Nev. "Out of this world!" says Patricia Coia of Reno. "Star shows, light shows, and large format films, plus interactive displays and astronomy-themed artwork—great fun for the whole family." (775) 784-4811, www.planetarium.unr.edu.

HIGH DESERT MUSEUM Bend, Ore. "A natural and cultural museum with native wildlife, interactive exhibits, and living history sections," writes Sara Caswell Kolbet of Newberg, Ore. "I visited with a hyperactive child and the place occupied him for the entire day—that's impressive." (541) 382-4754, www.highdesertmuseum.org.

IMILOA ASTRONOMY CENTER OF HAWAII Hilo, Hawaii. "This beautiful museum facility on the Big Island has wonderful guides and lots of interactive displays," says Chris Loafman of Milpitas, Calif. "You can see how the universe formed and navigate a

sailing canoe from Tahiti to Hawaii, then step into the planetarium for an amazing show." (808) 969-9700, www.imiloahawaii.org.

MUSEUM OF THE ROCKIES Bozeman, Mont. "My family loves the fabulous dinosaur history here," says Jill Hansen-Twardoski of Hamilton, Mont. "Our favorite—after all the dinosaurs, of course—is the outdoor Lewis and Clark walk-through. The kids' room during a traveling exhibit was just as educational. We dressed up like King Tut, built block pyramids, and wrote our names in hieroglyphics." (406) 994-3466, www.museumoftherockies.org.

OREGON MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY Portland. "You know a museum is fantastic when the children beg you to get on the train and endure a long, tedious ride just to get there," writes Linda Campbell of South Jordan, Utah. "Five exhibit halls, tons of hands-on activities for kids and adults, plus a planetarium, an Imax theater, an earthquake simulator, and a decommissioned submarine." (800) 955-6674, www.oms.edu.

PACIFIC SCIENCE CENTER Seattle. "I played tic-tac-toe with a robot here," says Alex Berlaga, age 7, of Redwood City, Calif. "Fascinated by dinosaurs? Check out *Dinosaurs: A Journey through Time*. Want to know more about insects? Go to Insect Village and the Tropical Butterfly House. And don't miss the chance to ride a bicycle 15 feet above a pond outdoors." (206) 443-2001, www.pacsci.org.

RANDALL MUSEUM San Francisco. "Small, free, and offbeat—great for the littlest kids," writes Karen Zuercher of San Francisco. "There's an indoor 'zoo' with birds, bees, and other native critters. Kids can pet chickens and bunnies, see model trains, or jump around in a low-key playroom. We love it on rainy days." (415) 554-9600, www.randallmuseum.org.

SCIENCE FACTORY CHILDREN'S MUSEUM & PLANETARIUM Eugene, Ore. "Colorful stripes on the building scream fun, and that's what children have here," writes Kerry Lutz of Eugene. "A meandering path on the museum grounds leads past ponds with frogs, fish, nutrias, and a great blue heron. In the planetarium I'm always awed by how each show has the right mix of humor, layman's understanding, and big, mind-blowing concepts." (541) 682-7888, www.sciencefactory.org.

SCIENCE WORKS HANDS-ON MUSEUM Ashland, Ore. "Imagine the wonder of finding yourself inside a bubble in the Bubble-ology Room," says Janet Boucher of Grants Pass, Ore. "The 80 exhibits explore energy, anatomy, chemistry, perception, motion, engineering, and more. Performances and activities change frequently." (541) 482-6767, www.scienceworksmuseum.org.

SEYMOUR MARINE DISCOVERY CENTER Santa Cruz, Calif. "Find all the amenities of a much larger aquarium," says Jeanette Hudson of Gilroy, Calif. "It has touch tide pools, a huge whale skeleton—even tours of a marine mammal research lab." (831) 459-3800, seymourcenter.ucsc.edu.

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