

14 Off-the-Radar Winter Tours and Classes for Families - ParentMap

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14 Off-the-Radar Winter Tours and Classes for Families

Fuse fun and learning with these awesome Seattle-area kid-friendly tours

By Gemma Alexander



Museum of Flight Restoration Center

When it comes to fun, summer gets most of the love, but families don't have to resign themselves to the relentless school-year routine. We've put together a bucket list of off-the-beaten-path experiences to keep you — and your holiday visitors — entertained through the darkest months. Bonus: These activities are all prepped and packaged, so all you have to do is show up. Double bonus: Most are educational.

Planes, trains and... boats

Museum of Flight Restoration Tours

Kids don't have to be obsessed with airplanes to enjoy a walk around the 23,000 square-foot Everett facility where the Museum of Flight restores old planes to their former glory. Located at Paine Field, the museum's [Restoration Center](#) is open Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Saturday in the winter. Volunteers working on the planes are often happy to answer questions and show their work in process. \$3-\$5, 4 and younger free.

Pro tip: Children of all ages will enjoy seeing the old airplanes, but older kids will have more patience for learning the historical details.



Argosy Christmas Ship

Sailgating and song

In November, if you've already got your Huskies game tickets, show up in style on an [Argosy cruise boat](#), which departs from Chinook's at Fishermen's Terminal in Interbay (\$40/game or \$185 season) or from Ivar's Salmon House on Lake Union (\$85, including meal) on select dates. Not a sports fan? In November and December, join the [Christmas Ship Festival](#) and cruise Lake Washington, enjoying a choir performance at each stop (most sailings are \$25-\$39, 3 and younger free). Each sailing features a different choir and stops in different locations.

Pro tip: Like tailgating, "sailgating" is not especially kid-focused. The Christmas Ships are more family-oriented, with an onboard Santa and crafts.

Sunday Ice Cream Cruise

Surprise: This kid-friendly, surprisingly affordable [Lake Union tour](#) is open year-round. Departing from Lake Union Park, the cruise leaves on the hour between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. each Sunday, even in winter. On the lighthearted 45-minute, narrated tour, you'll see Lake Union's floating homes, take a peek at Dale Chihuly's studio and get a new perspective of Gas Works Park. Take note: It doesn't take reservations or credit cards. \$3-\$12 for cruise, \$2-\$4 for hot drinks.

Pro tip: It's short, there's no walking and food is available, making this tour appropriate for all ages. You can even bring your dog.

4T Trail, Portland

Give yourself at least half a day to follow Portland's [4T Trail](#), a great multimodal way to explore the city. The four T's stand for "trail," "tram," "trolley" and "train," the four ways you'll experience Portland from its highest point at Council Crest Park down to the shores of the Willamette. In bad weather, you might be tempted to skip the hike. That's OK, just double up on the tram, which is the safer than the roads when conditions are icy. (Check online for fares and schedules before you go: [4trail.wordpress.com](#).)

• **Pro tip:** The route involves about 4 miles of hiking trails with some steep inclines, so this outing is best reserved for older kids or fit parents who are willing to carry their little ones.

History, mystery and industry

Smith Tower tour

This new self-guided tour of Seattle's first skyscraper gives you a bird's-eye view of history, bringing to life the city's heady (and sometimes shadowy) days of the early 20th century. Speakeasies and gay bars may not keep your kids' attention, but ancient elevators and telephone switchboards might. View the entire exhibit in "[The Legends of Smith Tower](#)" tour or head straight to the observatory deck and the Temperance café and bar on the 35th floor. \$10-\$12.

Pro tip: Although there are fun interactive elements to the tour, most of the history is still on placards, which makes the history piece more appropriate for older kids.

Fire station tours

Did you know that Seattle's fire stations are open to residents for free tours upon request? Station tours last approximately 20 minutes and include viewing the fire engine and firefighting equipment, as well as [talking to the firefighters](#) about their job. Prepare for your visit with a downloadable [family fire safety packet](#). Other local cities including Renton, Kent and Everett also have tour programs for fire stations. Check your city's web page or call your city hall to find out if tours are available in your community.

Pro tip: Preschools and day care programs can take part in the Seattle Fire Department's [Smart Kids! Safe Kids!](#) program.

Stalking Seattle

If your kids would rather listen to Ever So Android and Telekinesis than Justin Bieber and Katy Perry, then [Stalking Seattle Tours](#) may be your family's jam. Stalking Seattle's small group tours can show you the city's under-the-radar spots that made music history, while teaching your kid about the downsides of the rock 'n' roll lifestyle (heroin! suicide!) from the safety of a minivan.

Pro tip: Not appropriate for younger family members, this tour will be a blast for teens and music-obsessed tweens.



Photo: Smith Tower

Strayboots scavenger hunts, Seattle

Still in development at press time, Strayboots' new [Seattle Art Museum scavenger hunt](#) looks like a fun way for families to engage with art together. The app is available for both Android and iPhone, and the entire challenge is downloaded at purchase (price TBD, but existing hunts are \$5 and \$12 per person on an honor system; museum admission separate), so reception isn't an issue. Scavenger hunts usually take from two to three hours, challenging players to find objects or sites, answer questions and take silly photos, and then rewarding completed challenges with new information.

Pro tip: Participants should be 8 years old to download the app, but all scavenger hunts are family-friendly.

How sweet it is

Dawn's Candy and Cake

You'll be begging your kids for treats after they attend the monthly Kids' Skill Building Club (\$20) at this [sweet candy-making and baking](#) school in Lynnwood. Each session focuses on a different technique (such as truffle making): kids can participate every month or register for just the topics they're interested in. A range of other classes is offered on demand: check the https://www.evernote.com/Home.action?_sourcePage=L4EAPlcYwF_iMUD9T65RG_YvRLZ-1eYO3fqfRu0fynRL_1nukNa4gH1t86pc1SP&__fp=oCRbyRRm...

calendar to join any class that still has open spaces.

Pro tip: While the hot sugar class is off limits for safety reasons, kids 5 and older are welcome in all classes, and even preschoolers have successfully completed Chocolate 101.

Portland's Foodie Field Trip

Calling all foodie families: Next time you're in Portland, consider this [Cycle Portland tour](#), which combines two of the Rose City's favorite activities: eating and biking. The easy but briskly paced 7-mile, 2.5-hour ride is broken up by multiple stops for gourmet snacks, including coffee (or cocoa), tastes at Portland's famous food carts and handmade ice cream. Bikes and rain gear are provided. \$59.

Pro tip: Minimum age for riders is 10. All riders must be at least 4 feet, 10 inches tall and proficient at riding on city streets. Some dietary restrictions can be accommodated; call ahead for details.

21 Acres

This under-the-radar [nonprofit in Woodinville](#) is part learning center for green design, part sustainable farm and part market — and 100 percent worthy of a visit. Stop by the market to pick up homegrown produce and locally made snacks (check website for winter hours); or take bimonthly Farm Walks to see sustainable agriculture in action in all seasons. It also offers occasional parent/child cooking classes.

Pro tip: Check the website for occasional Storybook Farm events (for ages 4–11), which give a hands-on introduction to the concept of "farm to fork."

Going wild

Kennedy Creek salmon journey

Every November, about 40,000 chum cram into the lower 2 miles of Kennedy Creek, near Shelton; a 1.5-mile [interpretive trail](#) is open on weekends. Access to the trail is free, and volunteer docents are on hand to answer all of your child's natural history questions.

Pro tip: This easy walk is appropriate for all ages and most of the trail is ADA accessible. Dogs are not allowed, however.



Annie Marie Musselman from *Wolf Haven: Sanctuary and the Future of Wolves in North America*, Sasquatch Books

Wolf Haven International

Add some wildness to your winter by making a reservation for a 50-minute guided tour of the internationally recognized sanctuary of [Wolf Haven](#) in Tenino. The tour takes visitors through the public portion of the sanctuary, which provides the opportunity (but not a guarantee) of sighting wolves at home in a naturalistic habitat. A bonus: With thicker winter coats and a higher activity level in the winter, wolves may be easier to spot. After the guided visit, walk a nature trail through the native Mima Mound prairie. Note: The tour may not be suitable for children ages 6 and younger due to its informative nature. \$6–\$8.

Pro tip: Prep for your visit by checking out [Wolf Haven: Sanctuary and the Future of Wolves in North America](#), the gorgeous new book by photographer Annie Marie Musselman and writer Brenda Peterson.





Rainier snowshoe walks

Each winter, rangers lead free, [perfect-for-beginners walks](#) on Mount Rainier that cover approximately 1.5 miles in two hours. It's first-come, first-served; sign up at the Jackson Visitor Center one hour before each walk; and rent snowshoes for \$5. Exact dates depend on the snowfall, but tours usually start in December and run through March, offered on weekends and holiday periods when the visitor center is open.

Pro tip: Children must be 8 years old to participate.

Arboretum family walks

The Washington Park Arboretum is beautiful any time of year, and now you can explore it with a guide through its new program of [weekend family walks](#), taking place every Saturday at 1 p.m. (except in December). Naturalists guide families on a 90-minute, seasonally themed walk, stopping for games, hands-on activities and lessons about the natural world. The program is free, and no preregistration is necessary.

Pro tip: The program is designed for children 2–12 years old and their caregivers. Check out the center's weekday nature classes (\$18) for preschoolers, too.

Ballard Locks Tour, Seattle

Spotting salmon at the Hiram M. Chittenden (Ballard) Locks requires good timing, but unlike the salmon, you can pass through the locks any time of year on a locks tour (\$19–\$40.75, ages 3 and younger free). This [two-hour narrated cruise](#) takes you around Elliott Bay and Lake Union, but the highlight is passing through the locks of the Lake Washington Ship Canal.

Pro tip: It's not like passing through the Panama Canal, but the slow-motion tension of passing through the narrow locks is a thrill for any age.

Learn and play



CenturyLink field. Photo credit: [Tiffany 98101, flickr cc](#)

Stadium tours

Bring your [Hawks superfans](#) for a 90-minute tour of CenturyLink Field Friday–Sunday (three tours daily) throughout the winter. Tickets must be purchased in person (\$8–\$14, kids 4 and younger free). If [baseball is your game](#), take a “behind the seams” tour of Safeco Field and gain access to areas such as the press box, owners' suite, field, dugouts, Visitors' Clubhouse and All-Star Club. Two tours are offered a day, Tuesday through Sunday all winter (\$10–\$12).

Pro tip: Team spirit has no age limit, but these tours involve a lot of walking, so plan appropriately.





Snoqualmie Falls. Photo courtesy Shutter Tours

Shutter Tours

Here's a perfect gift for your budding shutterbug: an outing with [Shutter Tours](#), which takes groups around downtown Seattle and up to Snoqualmie Falls in a four-hour combined local tour and photography class. Teens love that the tour guide instructors are just as happy to give iPhone photo tips as to fiddle with DSLR settings. Adults \$69, ages 5–12 \$49.

Pro tip: Due to the combination of long drives and constant narration, these tours are not recommended for children younger than 5.

Ninja Escape

Winter, when you're feeling trapped inside anyway, is the perfect time to check out the puzzle game and escape room trend that is taking over the birthday-party scene. [Ninja Escape](#) has two locations: Fremont, where the mission themes relate to defeating a secret organization, and Belltown, where you are locked in a room with a zombie. Each location has multiple "missions," or scenarios (\$28/person), consisting of a sequence of puzzles that must be solved. You can ask for a limited number of hints, and sometimes kids come up with the most creative solutions.

Pro tip: Children younger than age 18 must be accompanied by an adult in the room at the Belltown location, and 11 and younger at Fremont. Groups with very young children or babies are encouraged to book a private game at Fremont.

Winter museum-hopping

Few family traditions are as cozy as rainy Saturday afternoons wandering the halls of a museum, and this winter brings a crop of promising exhibits to explore.

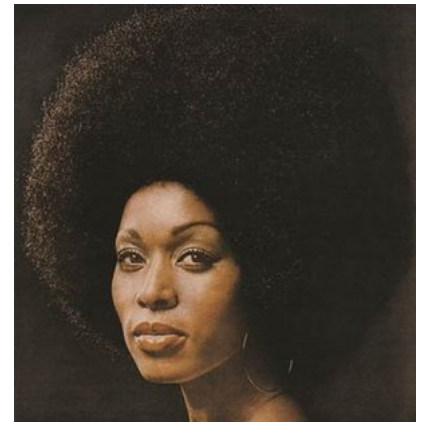
30 Americans: Through Jan. 17, the Tacoma Art Museum is hosting the West Coast debut of this critically acclaimed exhibition showcasing an influential group of prominent African-American artists who have emerged as leading contributors to the contemporary art scene. \$13–\$15, kids younger than 6 free.

Edible City: Explore Seattle's food culture, from Native American food traditions to celebrity chefs, at this new Museum of History & Industry exhibit that features crafts, activities, music, film screenings, chef-led tours and nibbles. Opens Nov. 19; \$13.95–\$19.95, ages 14 and younger free.

International Exhibition of Sherlock Holmes: Bring your mystery-loving kids to this immersive, historically accurate exhibit at Pacific Science Center, where kids and grown-ups work together to solve a Holmesian mystery using forensic scientific tools and learning about Victorian England. \$7–\$9, in addition to admission.

Chihuly Garden and Glass hot shop: Winter is ideal for visiting the bright, fanciful glass sculptures at this Seattle Center museum, but another seasonal draw is the new onsite hot shop, which glass blowing every 30 minutes, but only through April.

Mammoths – Giants of the Ice Age: If you make your way to Victoria before the end of the year, don't miss this exhibit at the Royal BC Museum where you can learn about the giant early mammals who once roamed the same land where we now live. (\$17–\$24, ages 3–5 free).



From '30 Americans'

Free and easy self-guided tours

Download one of these free DIY tours and spend some time exploring the city with fresh eyes.

Pike Place Market: Discover new corners of the market by downloading one of four pocket guides (the "[Kids and Families Guide](#)" is the obvious choice).

STORY: [This app](#) helps people find and understand art, and offers local guides to museums and historic sites, as well as neighborhood art guides.

Neighborhood walks: Get to know your neighborhood nature with a City of Seattle free [Tree Walks](#) maps.

Museum of Flight virtual reality tour: Step inside the cockpits and interiors of some of the [Museum of Flight's](#) most carefully preserved aircraft. You can do it onsite or remotely.

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