

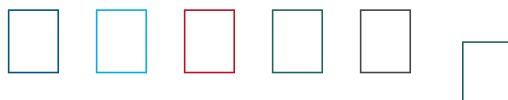
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7 Great **Geek** Conventions for Northwest Families

Cosplay, comics, science fiction and fantasy — **geek** out with your kids at these awesome cons

BY GEMMA ALEXANDER

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There was a time when “geek” and “nerd” were pejorative labels, but it’s not even news anymore that **nerd is the new cool**. Nowadays parents don’t wonder who goes to the cosplay-filled conventions that have sprung up everywhere — we wonder which one will be most fun to attend with our kids. When it comes to cons, Seattle has an embarrassment of riches. We’ve compiled this list of the area’s best cons to help you plan a full year of geeking out.

1. [Emerald City Comic Con](#)

When: March 1–4

Where: Washington State Convention Center, downtown Seattle

Cost: Adults \$40 per day; youth 6–12 \$20 (sold out); ages 5 and under free; 4-day passes \$120

(sold out)

In contrast to smaller cons “for and by” the fans, Emerald City Comic Con (ECCC) prides itself on bringing fans and creators together. If your kid has a favorite comic book, cartoon or TV show, they can probably meet its creators at Comic Con. Yes, it’s that big. The earliest major convention on the calendar, Comic Con was attended by more than 90,000 people last year. As its name suggests, ECCC focuses on comics and media. Kids’ tickets are already sold out for 2018, so if you want to bring kids ages 6–12, you’ll have to pay the adult rate or plan ahead for 2019 and buy tickets months in advance.

2. Norwescon 41

When: March 29–April 1

Where: DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Seattle
Airport, Seatac

Cost: 4-day passes are \$70 for adults; \$50 for

ages 13–17; ages 12 and under free. Single day tickets are available at the door.

Now in its 41st year, Norwescon is for the bookish family, with a primary focus on narrative. Books and gaming rule this con, which bills itself as the Northwest's premier science fiction and fantasy convention. A [specialized youth track](#) in the program keeps planning simple for families (kids must be accompanied by an adult). This year's theme is "Uncovering Mysteries," with Guest of Honor [Ken Liu](#), an author and translator whose work has helped bring Chinese authors and Asian representation to the forefront of contemporary speculative fiction. Even if you don't attend this con, consider joining the [Norwescon Book Club](#) as a family. The club meets five times per year at [Third Place Books in Lake Forest Park](#) (check online to make sure the selections are age appropriate for your next generation.)

3. [Sakura-Con](#)

When: March 30–April 1

Where: Washington State Convention Center, downtown Seattle

Cost: 3-days pass for adults \$70; youth 6–12 \$35; ages 5 and under free

Weebs and otaku rejoice; this convention brings nearly 25,000 attendees to the Washington State Convention Center each year to celebrate all things anime and Japanese pop culture. It's only a fraction of the the size of Emerald City Comic Con, but with anime theaters, a manga library, gaming, cosplay, cultural panels, dances, concerts, art contests, industry guests and a huge exhibits hall, Sakura Con can still become overwhelming. Families should stick together and pace themselves. Attendees under age 18 are required to have an adult with them at all times.

4. Seattle Retro Gaming Expo

When: June 16–17

Where: Seattle Center

Cost: This year's admission prices have not yet been posted to the website but last year a family pass (good for 2 adults and 2 kids) cost \$60

Ready player one? While parents marvel at the technology that goes into modern gaming, many of our kids are geeking out on the video games we played when we were their age. The Seattle Retro Gaming expo is an opportunity to enjoy those old games together. They focus on giving attendees hands-on experience with classic games and a chance to unearth that long-lost favorite or discover a new gem that only feels old. There's also lots of fun game-themed merch and information on the history and industry of video games.

5. [PAX West](#)

When: Early September dates TBA

Where: Washington State Convention Center.

downtown Seattle

Cost: This year's admission prices have not yet been posted to the website. Last year a 4-day pass cost \$110; per day \$50

PAX West is the home-town stop of the massive, touring Penny Arcade Expo, nicknamed "Woodstock for gamers." Video games are the heart of the con, but PAX is as big as Emerald City Comic Con in scale, so there's plenty of room for both major game publishers and independent developers on the expo floor, panels on all things game-related, gaming-inspired concerts, LAN parties, tabletop gaming, competitions and anything else that you can connect to gaming. Last year passes sold out quickly; this year's dates and prices have not been announced yet, but plan to purchase passes as soon as they go on sale (usually early June) to get the best price.

6. [Aki Con](#)

When: October dates TBA

Where: DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Seattle
Airport, Seatac

Cost: This year's admission prices have not yet been posted to the website.

If anime is your jam, but Sakura Con is too much (or not enough), try this smaller anime fest. In addition to the traditional panels, exhibits and cosplay contests, some of the programming in past years has been pretty quirky — including a spicy ramen-eating contest and an in-character cosplay pageant featuring randomly assigned “talents.” In the past, special programming for kids has included kids-only costume contests, a Pokémon scavenger hunt, arts and crafts and kid-friendly arcade games. Looks like this con is working on updating its website and Facebook page, so check back for updated 2018 information.



GeekGirlCon's DIY Science Zone. Credit: Kevin Li

7. GeekGirlCon

When: Oct. 27–28

Where: Washington State Convention Center,
downtown Seattle

Cost: \$20–\$40 per day for adults (price depends on how early you purchase); \$10 per day for kids ages 6–12; ages 5 and under free. Weekend passes available (\$35–\$55) and earlier purchase gets the best price.

Inclusivity is trending in the convention world, but cons aren't always the most welcoming places for women and people of color.

GeekGirlCon was founded to empower women and girls to pursue their geeky passions from STEM to comics and gaming; their goal of promoting underrepresented groups in geek culture is in evidence in every aspect of the event, from panel topics to logistic arrangements. GeekGirl's emphasis on safety and inclusion makes it the only one where I feel comfortable letting my tween out of my sight. A quiet "introverts' room" is perfect for taking a break with napping toddlers or tapped out kids, and the kids' science zone filled with hands-on experiments kept my kids busy for nearly an hour first thing in the morning.

Convention tips for families

For every convention, preregistration is cheaper than buying tickets at the door — and for some may be the only way to

and for some, may be the only way to get a ticket.

Familiarize yourself with the photography policy at the convention; in general, always ask before taking pictures, and be respectful if someone says no.

If you cosplay, be sure to look up the weapons policy of the convention you will attend. Rules range from “nothing weaponlike ever” to “real weapons okay if disabled.”

Remember that inclusiveness means families are welcome, but doesn't mean that all attendees must conform to your idea of family values. Be prepared for cosplayers with frightening masks, realistic weapons and/or very skimpy costumes. Consider it an opportunity to teach your kids that treating others with respect is unrelated to their choice of attire.

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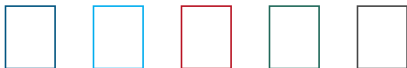
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