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## Fun Freebies with Kids in Albuquerque

What do you do when you've got kids who have lots of energy and you don't have a lot of cash? There are a number of options around Albuquerque that cost little to nothing and will keep the kids energized. Some are completely free, and some entail a minimal fee for parking or entry.

All are guaranteed fun, however, and in tough economic times, nice and light on the budget.

### 1. Drive to Sandia Peak

No matter the season, driving out of town into the mountains to follow the Crest Road is always a wonderful way to take in the natural beauty of the Albuquerque area. Along the drive there are scenic mountain views. And once atop the crest, the views of the city below create the perfect chance to play scavenger hunt to identify the part of town where you live. There are hiking trails along the ridge, and interpretive literature can be found in the Sandia Crest Visitor Center in all seasons except for winter., so identifying flowers and birds can be part of a scavenger hunt. The restaurant at the crest is a perfect place for lunch or just a hot chocolate.

### 2. Sled the Capulin I

t's winter, and the weather is gray and cold, but as usual, the precipitation came and went. What to do? Head to the Capulin Play Area on the east side of the Albuquerque Sandias. Part of the Sandia Ranger District in the Cibola National Forest, the area provides the perfect slopes for kids to head down on an inner tube or a sled. The natural beauty of the surrounding forest and snow are its own reward. Be sure to dress warmly and take plenty of snacks, hot thermos drinks, and extra pairs of shoes. Follow the Crest road and look for the signs. The Capulin snow play area is located about eight miles up the Sandia Crest National Scenic Byway (Highway 536), just past the ski area. There's a great hill for sledding and plenty of open space to build a snowman or make snow angels. Be sure to bring your own sleds, there's no rentals and the area is not supervised, so play at your own risk. Be sure to call the ranger station (505-281-3304) before heading out to make sure the area is open (and that the road up the mountain is open). Getting up the mountain can be difficult, and if your car doesn't have four wheel drive or chains, you may not make it up. If you want to play in the snow elsewhere, don't park along the side of the road, as it just makes it more difficult for other cars to drive. Sledding is not allowed outside of the designated snow play area, but snowmen are allowed just about anywhere.

### 3. Hike the Travertine Falls

Head into the Albuquerque Sandias and enjoy the beauty of the Travertine Falls trail. It's easy to navigate, even for a young child. The hike has plenty of forest scenery and a stream bed that occasionally carries water. This trail provides a great launching point for discussions on local geology, and there is a small cave for the little ones once you've reached the falls. For older kids, the trail continues further up the mountain. Have them fossil hunt the rock walls found along the upper trail. To

get there, take I-40 east from Albuquerque and take the South Tijeras exit. Turn left, go under the highway and take a right into Canyon Estates. Follow the road to the trailhead and the parking lot, which has a minimal parking fee. Photo of the Mariposa Flower courtesy Trimbles Hiking

#### 4. Fish Tingley Beach

There is always something new to do on a visit to the long famous Tingley Beach. Kids can fish in a well stocked pond, watch the model boats on the boating pond, visit the nearby wetlands, or hike the bosque trails. There are bike rentals and paddleboats available for rent in the summer. The BioPark train can be accessed from Tingley if the kids just want to ride the train; it travels to the Aquarium/Garden and to the Zoo. Tingley Café provides something to eat and drink, or just an ice cream cone, or bring a picnic lunch and eat at the beach or at the park across Tingley Drive

#### 5. Drive to Nine Mile Hill After Dark

Some of the most magical moments in Albuquerque happen after dark. Head west on I-40 until you reach the western edge of town. Find a safe place to turn around and park the car. The turnoff for the City's western landfill is a possibility if you don't find another. There below in the valley, the many glittering lights of the city help remind residents of the special geography of Albuquerque, how it lies between an uphill plane and the mountains, directly in the valley. Look for the river and make a game of finding the major streets of town.

#### 6. Bike the Bosque

There are plenty of places to park the car and bicycle along the bosque trails. Start at the Rio Grande State Park off Candelaria, just west of Rio Grande Boulevard. Parking is available at the park for a nominal fee, and some parking is available along Candelaria at no cost. Just be sure to adhere to posted parking or no parking signs. Head north or south with a destination in mind. Head south to Tingley Beach and look for landmarks, such as the Botanic Gardens. Or head north to Alameda, and look for landmarks such as Anderson Fields. Pay attention to biking rules since it's a busy area. The City of Albuquerque lists biking rules, and provides a downloadable bike trails map to help you find the perfect trail.

#### 7. Hunt for Treasure

Try heading out with your family armed with a GPS and a sense of adventure and you'll find that you're treasure hunting like a geocacher. The New Mexico Geocaching Society holds events statewide, which provide a great way to see the diverse geography of New Mexico. Or walk along the bosque trail, where there are plenty of caches. The City's Open Space Division hosts a geocache event every September. The National GeoCaching website shows how to get started. The site lists hidden caches to look for in Albuquerque.

#### 8. Gaze at the Stars

Both the Albuquerque Astronomical Society (TAAS) and the Rio Rancho Astronomical Society (RRAS) have stargazings that the entire family can enjoy. TAAS has a special stargaze at Oak Flats in the east mountains every September that's a must attend event. The Rio Rancho club often holds their stargazes at Coronado Monument (pictured here). If it's too hard to keep the kids up late, try the UNM Campus Observatory's Friday night stargazes. They're in town, so not only are they convenient, but there are plenty of places nearby to take the kids before or after.

## 9. Rate the City's Parks

The City of Albuquerque has over 300 parks, from the Elena Gallegos (wildlife pond pictured) in the Sandia foothills to the Petroglyphs in the west. Create a log book that lists what play equipment each park has, what you liked about it, and take pictures. This is a great ongoing activity to do with the kids, and armed with a camera and some pencils and crayons, a scrapbook of Albuquerque memories can be had for pennies. Make each month a special park theme. Look for all parks starting in "G" one month and all parks along the river another. If possible, pack a picnic to take along, and rate the park for the amenities it provides. In summer, visit all the city's pools and rate them as well. Click highlighted title for listing and map.

## 10. Shop the Flea

Saturday just wouldn't be Saturday in Albuquerque without the Flea Market. Head out the door with a wagon and a few dollars for parking and just browse. Or give each kid five dollars and let them choose how to spend their bankroll. Armed with a disposable camera, every child becomes a photographic artist. The flea market provides something for everyone, to include the adults. Whether looking for sunglasses, YugiOh cards, or a special door handle for the cabinet in the garage, it's the treasure hunt that always changes, but where the fun never ends. Enter at Gate 9, at Louisiana and Central.