**Traveling with Kids**

**When Traveling With Kids, Get Out of the Car and Into Some Fun in Elizabeth City**

Road travel is never as challenging as it is with kids in tow. There are the inevitable soda spills, family feuds and wayward limbs (“Mom! She’s got her foot on my car seat!”). It’s a wise parent who sprinkles the family travel itinerary with liberal excuses to get out of the car—and into some fun. And to that, the Elizabeth City area delivers, with enough trails and tours, science experiments and stargazing to entertain even the most discriminating young travelers.

If you’re traveling toward Elizabeth City via Highway 17 from the north, make your first stop the Dismal Swamp State Park in Camden County. Just the name—Dismal Swamp—should get their attention. And when they learn that George Washington explored the forested wetlands in 1763 or that bobcats and bears prowl the inner depths of the forest, they’ll want to learn more.

Rangers at the park’s visitor center are happy to oblige. The center features interior exhibits that interpret the history and biological make-up of the swamp. Native stands of Atlantic white cedar thrive here, as well as deer, river otters and rare plants. Migratory, neo-tropical birds and a significant number of butterfly species also make the state park home.

Families can explore outdoors via a raised boardwalk or go for a longer excursion among the 16.7 miles of hiking and mountain-biking trails. Visitors can rent bikes for traversing the park’s interior trails and kayaks for a paddling excursion on the historic Dismal Swamp Canal.

There are more adventures down the road in Elizabeth City.

Have you ever walked inside a Colonial farmhouse, or tried your hand at churning butter? You can, when you visit the Museum of the Albemarle, located along the city’s downtown waterfront. The northeastern regional branch of the North Carolina Museum of History, the museum is chock full of artifacts that reveal the history of 13 counties in northeastern North Carolina, considered by many to be the birthplace of English America.

A thoughtful, permanent exhibition, *Our Story* showcases more than 750 artifacts and displays that tell the story of the region’s watermen, farm life, the Civil War, the Wright brothers, the Coast Guard, as well as the region’s rich African American and Native American history.

It won’t take long for kids to spy the cannon recovered from the ship purported to be Blackbeard’s *Queen Anne’s Revenge*, or the horse-drawn “steam pumper” fire engine used in Elizabeth City through the 1920s. The will also enjoy learning how early farm families lived by exploring the Jackson House, a 1755 farmhouse. This and a ca. 1840 smokehouse are original structures from the area.

Young children can try on Colonial clothes, pretend to churn butter and make an old-fashioned yarn doll when they visit the Museum’s Discovery Room. Designed especially for the young set, the room is outfitted with both Colonial and modern-day activities and games.

For even more experiential fun, young travelers can explore and interact with the science around them at Port Discover Hands-on Science Center. Offering free science and health programs for children to enjoy with their parents, the center is a science teacher’s dream come true. Kids can fly an airplane, observe sea life, examine rocks and minerals and take part in a host of special programs that bring science to life. Special attention is given to what’s unique about North Carolina’s Albemarle region with programs on environmental, marine and aviation sciences.

If your sights are set on an out-of-this-world experience, reserve seats for one of the star and laser presentations at the Elizabeth City State University (ECSU) Planetarium. Housed in a 30-foot hemispherical dome with comfortable seating, the ECSU Planetarium Star Theater features a Spitz 512 star projector that can depict the sky as seen from anywhere on earth. Depending on the season, visitors can choose from laser shows featuring Valentine’s, African American history, Halloween, Thanksgiving and holiday themes, as well as other presentations set to music by the Doors, Jimi Hendrix, Led Zeppelin and Pink Floyd. The free programs are by reservation only for groups of 20 or more.

For travel information and suggested itineraries, call the Elizabeth City Area Convention & Visitors Bureau at 1-866-ECity-4U (1-866-324-8948) or (252) 335-5330 or go to [www.DiscoverElizabethCity.com](http://www.DiscoverElizabethCity.com).

**Sidebar: Blimps Are a Sight to See in Elizabeth City**

Residents have long been accustomed to seeing airships in the skies over Elizabeth City. In 1942, from two enormous hangars in neighboring Weeksville, the U.S. Navy began launching airships, or blimps, that were instrumental in combating enemy submarines that lurked off the North Carolina Coast during World War II.

Known as the “Shepherds of the Fleets,” the Navy “K” airships were ideally suited for spotting the German U-boats that devastated the Outer Banks and gave it the moniker “Torpedo Junction.” The airships hunted for submarines and escorted groups of ships along the coast.

During wartime, the air station covered 822 acres and had 10 miles of railroad tracks. Today, TCOM, L.P., an international supplier of tethered aerostats and airship blimp envelopes, operates at the Weeksville site. If you drive by, you can see one of the historic hangars and the remnants of the second that burned in a fire.

If you’re lucky, you might just spy a blimp aloft.