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## CHEAP FUN CHASES AWAY THE SUMMERTIME BLUES

By Sarah Gish

It's hot, the kids are at home, and you have 2,016 hours to fill. It's easy to see you've got the kids-are-almost-out-of-school summertime blues! How the heck will you survive summer? Before you go running for the shelter of mother's little helper, read on! I have made it through many a summer with 2 ankle biters and have learned how to not only survive, but THRIVE in the summer. It's a time for kids to explore their interests and passions so I suggest you go along for the ride and look at summer as an adventure. Below are some of my ideas to make summer a blast (most without breaking the bank), so grab your walking sticks and let's go!

**Field Trips.** Take weekly field trips to many of the attractions Houston has to offer. You can start by checking out my website, [www.gishcreative.com](http://www.gishcreative.com), which lists over 200 attractions. [147 Fun Things to Do in Houston](#), [Best Easy Day Hikes Houston](#), and [Day Trips from Houston](#) are also great resources. You can also be a tourist in your hometown and purchase a City Pass ([www.citypass.com/houston](http://www.citypass.com/houston)) which gives you entry to 6 Houston sites for 9 days for one low price. When planning field trips, get your kids involved and have them research and pick the sites to visit.

**Scavenger Hunts.** When I was younger, I babysat this super-hyper kid and the only way I could calm him down was by sending him on scavenger hunts. They're a great way to entertain and are so easy to create. Kids can do these individually or in teams and your hunts can focus just on your house or your neighborhood or you can get high tech and try geocaching. Geocaching ([www.geocaching.com](http://www.geocaching.com)) is the latest way to scavenge using a cell phone app. Your kids won't get bored and the sky's the limit – it's estimated there are over 900,000 geocaches worldwide!

**Farmers' Markets.** There are so many to choose from in Houston, including Airline Drive, Houston's Farmers Market, Discovery Green Farmers Market, Midtown Farmers Market, Bayou City Farmers Market, Central City Co-Op, Katy Farmers Market at La Centerrra, Bay-Fest Farmers Market, and Fresh Foods Market at Armand Bayou Nature Center. For getting fresh food yourselves, check [www.pickyourown.org](http://www.pickyourown.org) for family farms that will let you pick your own fruits and veggies.

**Cheapie Arts.** Enjoy the arts by grabbing discounts from [www.stubdog.com](http://www.stubdog.com) and arts organizations. The Houston Symphony ([www.houstonsymphony.org](http://www.houstonsymphony.org)) offers "Houston Chronicle Dollar Concerts" and their annual "Sounds Like Fun!" free family series throughout June. City museums have free times each week (<http://www.houstonmuseumdistrict.org/default.asp?id=146>) and Miller Outdoor Theatre ([www.milleroutdoortheater.com](http://www.milleroutdoortheater.com)) and Discovery Green ([www.discoverygreen.com](http://www.discoverygreen.com)) regularly offer free family fun.

**Nature.** Get back to nature with shady spots such as the Houston Arboretum, Nature Discovery Center, and Hedwig Park (my absolute fave park with shade located off Campbell Road and I-10). Also check out large green spaces such as Terry Hershey Park, Memorial Park and water parks at Hermann Park, Discovery Green, Kemah Boardwalk, Downtown Aquarium, and Market Street (The Woodlands)

**Indoor Fun:** Malls such as the Galleria, Katy Mills Malls, Woodlands, the Shops at Houston Center, and Memorial City are great places early in the morning and later at night – and the weather is always good! Indoor fun can also be found in the downtown tunnel system – for a complete map, check <http://www.downtownhouston.org/district/downtown-tunnels/>).

**Water Parks:** Have the kids throw on swimsuits and sunscreen and grab towels to head to these fun sites that feature full on water fun: Six Flags SplashTown, Kemah Boardwalk, Discovery Green, Hermann Park, Noah’s Ark Pool (great for toddlers!), Burnett Bayland Park, James Wiley Park, Hidalgo Park, Aron Ledet Park, Schlitterbahn (Galveston or New Braunfels), and the Houston Zoo water play area.

**Movies.** Several movie theatres offer summer film festivals that are held on weekdays and offer cheap, kid-friendly movies. Check out AMC Theatres, Studio Movie Grill, Cinemark, Rave Motion Pictures, Silverado 19 IMAX in Tomball, and the Edwards Marq\*E. The Museum of Fine Arts screens monthly “Family Flicks” on the first Sunday of the month; admission is the cost of getting into the Museum.

**Camps.** Fun for your children without the family begins at day or residential (overnight ) summer camps. Take into account your child’s interests, camp length, location, cost, registration deadlines & discounts, family’s schedule, safety, and buddy sign-ups. Camps are a great way for kids to make new friends, learn specialized skills, and to increase independence from the family. Research over 200 Houston day camps and classes in The Summer Book: A Guide to Houston Day Camps and Classes for Kids and Teens ([www.thesummerbook.com](http://www.thesummerbook.com)) – my book that sorts camps a number of ways, including by interests (arts, sports, educational, religious), by age and area of town, by dates offered, by length during the day, and much more. If you’re on a tight budget, my book also lists which camps offer scholarships. You can order it online or get it at retailers listed on my site.

So there you have it: all you need to know to make summer more fun than a barrel of monkeys! Have a great one and don’t be afraid to let the sun shine in!

**Hire me! I can talk to your group about summertime fun with a talk I present called “Sounds Like a Summer Plan.” I bring fliers and brochures and event calendars from local organizations, resource books on Houston entertainment and site-seeing, lists of ways to enjoy summer with kids, and much more. Contact me for more information and fees: [sarah@gishcreative.com](mailto:sarah@gishcreative.com) or 713.532.1173.**