BABYCCINO KIDS blog
daily inspiration for the modern family

WEEKEND GET-AWAY: DALLAS

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The moment I hear Dallas, I automatically think of JR, Bobby and good old Sue Ellen hanging out in Southfork with their cowboy hats. I am sure this is a gross generalisation, and there must be so much more that Dallas has to offer than the Ewings and their crazy antics. Which is why I was very grateful that Sara, formally from the lovely children's clothing label Chakra Design Studio, offered to give us a bit more insight to what goes on in Dallas. Turns out that it is a wonderful place to visit with a family with a ton of things on offer.

Sara Hignite, our guest blogger, has put her master's degree in art history to good use as a museum professional, first in St. Louis and now in Dallas. She has also published Comic Art Magazine and in her most recent side project, she helped launch Chakra Design Studio, a boho children's clothing line. She lives in Dallas with her husband and their 4-year-old daughter, Ava, and is currently looking for her next project. Here are Sara's insider tips on a weekend away in Dallas:

The cosmopolitan, sprawling city of Dallas boasts great restaurants, family-friendly activities, world-class shopping, and a rapidly expanding cultural scene. As an added bonus, Fort Worth, Big D's totally charming and lovely neighbor to the west, is little more than an hour away by car. (And, believe it or not my European friends, there's also convenient rail service between the two cities via the Trinity Railway Express.) Realistically, even though the Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART) system can get you around town, with kids I would

probably suggest renting a car. Dallas is rather spread out, and you will be able to see more of the city with the freedom an automobile provides!

While there are a number of obvious family attractions in the Dallas area, such as Six Flags Over Texas, below I offer more of an insider's perspective, from someone who's transitioned over the last few years from curious tourist to in-the-know resident. Enjoy!

SEE & PLAY:

THE DALLAS ARTS DISTRICT, the largest urban arts district in the U.S., has developed into the city's downtown cultural epicenter, and is home to the Dallas Museum of Art, the Nasher Sculpture Center, the Crow Collection of Asian Art, the Winspear Opera House, and more. Each of the museums in the area offers numerous kid-friendly exhibits and activities, so check their websites for details. A brand-new offshoot of the current Museum of Nature and Science will be opening in the neighborhood in 2013. Also in the works is an incredible green space, a much-needed addition to our cityscape!

WHITE ROCK LAKE, an urban oasis on the east side of town, offers sailing and fishing as well as wonderful trails for biking, jogging, hiking, etc. The Dallas Arboretum is set on the banks of the lake, and is truly a lovely place for a leisurely stroll amidst gardens and fountains. (Tips for the Arb: You may want to consider renting one of their cute wagons to cart all of your stuff - especially if your kids aren't into strollers! Also note that last time I took my daughter to the Arboretum's sit-down eatery, Restaurant Degolyer, they did not offer high chairs; however, there are several other food service options on site and you may also bring in your own picnic food. Lastly, if the weather is hot, which is likely, take the kids to the frog fountains to cool off!)

FAIR PARK - If you're lucky enough to be in Dallas between late September and late October, you MUST schedule a day to experience the Texas State Fair, which completely takes over Fair Park, a Dallas landmark that boasts several great museums housed in a wonderful array of Art Deco buildings from the 1930s. Word to the wise: go on a weekday or Sunday morning to avoid the crowds and be sure to bring your strollers or baby slings.
Aside from the typical carnival games, rides, and exhibits, the Fair is all about food. While there is a wide array of culinary options, fried food is king at the Fair - specifically corny dogs. I've been told that if you're a vegetarian (like we are) you can bring in a veggie dog and the Fletcher's vendors will corny it for you - you can bet I'll be trying that this year! NB: The Fair is VERY pricey, so be prepared to spend some dough. My daughter and I went last year without my husband (am I crazy?) and we spent around $150 between admission, parking, food, rides, games, etc.

DALLAS ZOO - The Dallas Zoo recently opened a huge new exhibit, Giants of the Savanna, which gives the Fort Worth Zoo (world-famous and definitely also worth a visit if you are in FW) a run for its money. If you are staying near a DART train stop, you may want to consider riding the red line to the Zoo. The train spits you out right at the front entrance! Be sure to check out the wonderful Lacerte Family Children's Zoo, which has a manmade stream running through it - perfect for some summer splashing.

SIXTH FLOOR MUSEUM - No visit to Dallas would be complete

without a tour of the Sixth Floor Museum, housed in the infamous Texas School Book Depository from which Lee Harvey Oswald fatally shot President John F. Kennedy in 1963. Located in the city's West End, this museum really is fascinating (although perhaps not appropriate for very young children).

BISHOP ARTS DISTRICT - This hip, eclectic area is home to art galleries, shops, and some fantastic restaurants (see EAT). While here, take your kids to the super-cool arts and crafts studio Oil and Cotton for some DIY magic.

EAT:

I'm of the mind that nearly any restaurant can be family friendly if you get there by 5:30pm! Here are some options that we've tried and can vouch for:

TILLMAN'S ROAD HOUSE - Located in the Bishop Arts District, you cannot eat at this restaurant unless you indulge in the tableside gourmet s'mores. This is definitely a place to indulge, so be prepared to start with truffle popcorn and warm peanuts, move on to the trio of fries, and proceed from there. Tillman's offers an adorable coloring book for the kiddos as well.

RESTAURANTS IN NORTHPARK CENTER - If you're indulging in some retail therapy at this Dallas shopping dreamland (see SHOP), take a break and enjoy a leisurely lunch on the patio overlooking a lovely green space (the kids run around, you have another cocktail) at either Cibus for Italian or La Duni for Latin American fare. If you're on-the-go, grab a quick bite at the healthy and delicious Snappy Salads or grab some Tex Mex at Tin Star, both in the upstairs food court.

TACO DINER - There are several locations of this popular taco restaurant around town. We like the West Village location, as it's set in an outdoor shopping district with cute boutiques and an indy movie theater. The kids will love the Agua Fresca soft drinks (although, beware - they are sweet and enormous!).

ATOMIC PIE - For delicious thin-crust pizza, head up to our neighborhood, Lake Highlands (north of White Rock Lake). Their sauce has just a little kick, which we can't get enough of!

SHOP:

LITTLE BEAN - This hip children's shop south of Lakewood is wonderfully curated by Christine Visneau and showcases a lovely selection of small, chic children's labels as well as gifts and, most recently, a few gorgeous pieces for mom.

THE TOY MAVEN -My favorite toy store in North Dallas offers a wide selection of interesting and educational children's toys, books, games, and a smidgen of apparel, with a sweet, knowledgeable staff ready to assist. Next door you'll find Kid's Cooking Company, an adorable culinary school for kiddos. (If you're in the area, also hit The Purple Cow diner for burgers, fries, and delicious shakes or warm apple pie à la mode.)

ORIGINAL NEIMAN MARCUS - If you love shopping, you can't miss the original Neiman Marcus store downtown. During the holiday season, their store-front windows are beyond magical (recently they've offered interactive displays for your children to climb through

like guinea pigs!).

NORTHPARK CENTER - I truly believe this is one of the best shopping centers anywhere. Incredible department stores (Neiman's, Nordstrom, Barney's, Saks, oh my!) are punctuated by a slew of designer boutiques as well as more reasonable staples such as Anthropologie, American Apparel, and, coming very soon, H & M! Northpark also offers a lovely center courtyard where children romp when the weather cooperates. You can also take the kids to a movie or to Bookmarks, an adorable children's branch of the Dallas Public Library - right there in the mall. Pure genius.

STAY:

Beyond the usual suspects and a remarkable number of über-fancy luxury hotels, Dallas also has a few little gems, which are well-appointed, family friendly, and fun…while also keeping your vacation budget in check.

MAGNOLIA HOTEL - This affordable boutique hotel is located downtown and is near the Dallas World Aquarium, Dallas, Zoo, and Neiman Marcus. The kids will love their complimentary bedtime buffet featuring cookies and milk. Breakfast is also complimentary.

THE BELMONT - Reasonably priced as well, this cool historic hotel is located in the hip Bishop Arts District just south of downtown. In the summer, you can enjoy sunrise yoga, pool parties, and concerts, or kick back on a float for the Dive in Movies they offer pool-side.

GREAT WOLF LODGE - if you can muster up the courage, your children will love you for booking a night at this water park/lodge, where every detail has been designed with families in mind. Located in Grapevine, TX, close to DFW airport.

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