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Keep summer vibes alive with a family getaway to Vancouver, WA

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Kids play in the flowing water at the interactive Headwaters Wall feature, located at the Vancouver Waterfront's 7.3-acre Waterfront Park. (Visit Vancouver WA)

By [Visit Vancouver WA](#)

Produced by ST Content Studio

Summer is winding down and soon it will be time to trade sunglasses for raincoats and fun outings for homework. But not so fast! There's still time for at least one more family getaway — and nearby Vancouver, Washington, is the perfect spot to enjoy the last days of summer and ease

back into the rhythm of the school year while keeping the summer vibe alive for as long as possible.

About a three-hour drive from Seattle, Vancouver is the fourth-largest city in Washington, but it maintains a charming, small-town atmosphere that makes it the ideal destination for families.

Why Vancouver?

“I think Vancouver is special because it still operates very much like a small town and has that small-town feel,” says Katherine Cory, executive director at Columbia Springs, an environmental education nonprofit. “Even though it expands over a pretty good size area, you can go from a place like Columbia Springs to the Fort downtown easily.” Cory notes that an example of the “small town” feel is people striking up conversations with locals and visitors alike at everywhere from restaurants to the library. She describes the atmosphere as “refreshing” and one of the main reasons she believes it’s such an inviting destination for families and children. “They get to see really cool sites like Fort Vancouver and the city is also full of really friendly people,” says Cory.

Michael Lary, co-owner of Source Climbing Center, shares similar sentiments about Vancouver’s family appeal. Lary also describes the city as having a “small town” feel and being easy to get around. “Our family just loves the downtown area,” Lary says. “It has great restaurants and we feel comfortable taking our kids to the restaurants down here. There are a lot of fun little businesses popping up downtown that are supporting kids and families.”

From adventure to history, here’s what to do on a family getaway to Vancouver.

Vancouver Waterfront

Located on the Columbia River, Vancouver’s waterfront is one of the city’s prime attractions, and it’s easy to see why. The waterfront can easily be turned into a daylong outing. “[It’s] a wonderful place to be with the kids and family,” says Lary.

Stretching 90 feet over the Columbia River, the Grant Street Pier was designed by renowned public artist Larry Kirkland and is a peaceful spot to take in the scenery and watch the sailboats go by. In fact, Kirkland specifically designed the pier to resemble the billowing sails of a boat as it passes. It’s also worth a nighttime visit because the pier has amazing lighting designed with the help of Fisher Marantz Stone, who also had a hand in the lighting designs for the Washington Monument in Washington, D.C. and New York City’s “Tribute in Light,” which occurs each year on the anniversary of 9/11.

Kids will absolutely love the [Waterfront Park](#), an urban oasis that features easy walking trails, bike paths, interactive water activities, a picnic area, sculptures and one of the best views of Columbia River.

There's no shortage of options for eating and drinking on the waterfront. You'll find excellent fresh seafood at [WildFin American Grill](#) for a sit-down meal, or grab fish and chips and an ice cream cone to go at [What A Catch Fishbar](#). Try out local beers at [Ruse Brewing](#) and [The Waterfront Taphouse](#) or, if you prefer wine, [Maryhill Winery](#) has a variety of Washington wines (along with the six other tasting rooms within a few blocks of one another). For martinis and dinner, you can't beat [Twigs Bistro](#) — in addition to the great food and drinks, it offers beautiful sunset views.

Outdoor and indoor adventures

Vancouver has a wide variety of hiking and biking trails for all skill levels. Some of the easier, family-friendly options can be found at Burnt Bridge Creek Trail, The Waterfront Renaissance Trail, Frenchman's Bar Hiking Trail, Beaver Marsh and Discovery Historic Loop.

[Columbia Springs](#) is also a "must visit" on a family getaway to Vancouver. The environmental education nonprofit is located on a 100-acre urban natural site which serves as an outdoor education center. It has two miles of easy trails as well as two lakes and forested areas.

Columbia Springs is also home to the historic Vancouver Trout Hatchery, which Cory explains is "an opportunity to see fish as they're being reared in a public way, which is rare as far as hatcheries go." The rainbow trout are a year-round presence and Columbia Springs has a display pond that's particularly popular among children because they have the opportunity to feed the fish and see them up close.

"We bring a lot of families here and they have the opportunity to really explore and that's such a good bonding experience," says Cory. She adds that spending time outside as a family offers an excellent opportunity to be fully present in the moment, and it also opens up productive conversations about the wildlife that children observe when they spend time outdoors.

For a different but equally exciting bonding experience, visit [Source Climbing Center](#). Michael Lary, co-owner of the center, says that kids get excited by the inspiring challenge when they walk in and see the 40-foot climbing walls.

"Kids that come in and are initially drawn to the shorter walls and then reach the bigger walls realize what they're capable of and it gets them really excited," he says. Lary emphasizes that parents are involved every step of the way — in addition to the trained staffers, parents go through the process with their children and actively supervise as they climb. Because the climbing walls are initially daunting to many children, the experience also opens up family conversations about how to approach a seemingly risky activity in a safe manner and push yourself out of your comfort zone (within reason, of course).

History and learning experiences

Vancouver also embraces its rich history. [Fort Vancouver National Historic Site](#), one of the first permanent settlements west of the Rocky Mountains, stretches across 191 acres. In addition to the reconstructed fort itself, there are three separate areas on site, each with their own unique backstory: a frontier fur-trading post, the U.S. Army's Vancouver Barracks, and Pearson Field, the oldest continuously operating airfield in the Pacific Northwest. There's also the [Pearson Air Museum](#), where several historic planes and replicas are on display.

Another site that offers a fun learning experience is [Clark County Historical Museum](#); the museum also hosts guided walking tours. From July through Halloween there's a "haunted" walking tour on the grounds of the Vancouver Barracks, which mixes both the ordinary and the creepy aspects of the barracks' history.

Connecting with the outdoors, our local history, sharing meals and maybe even a fun scare or two is a great way to make the most out of summer and make some long-lasting family memories.

Visit Vancouver WA is the official destination marketing organization for Vancouver, Washington and greater Clark County. Learn more and start planning your trip at www.visitvancouverwa.com.

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