

Tots about town HOUSTON



New to Houston? NewMum/Mom? Looking for activities for toddlers?

It's all here. You just have to find it.

As a Brit living abroad, I am new to both Houston and motherhood. I am often asked to share my experiences and recommend things to do and places to go with infants and toddlers in and around Houston. The following is a collection of my suggestions. I do not intend to endorse any businesses listed and this publication is not subject to advertising. It is merely intended as a point of view and I hope that you find it useful.

I arrived in Houston in 2007. Finding new 'Mum friends' and things to do has been a challenge. I have stumbled across private children's classes, voluntary-led groups, city-wide festivals or just wonderful community

play parks. One thing is for certain, there is a lot out there. However, the variety can be overwhelming and knowing where to find it all, especially when you have just arrived in the city, can be challenging.

I aim to provide an overview here and to include website addresses and contact information where I can. I hope to cover all-inclusive centres where you pay for access to both children and parent support (see below); creative or sports-led groups (see page 2); general city organizations which have children's provisions (see page 3); a selection of good play parks that I have stumbled across throughout town; some of my favourite family festivals and events; and lastly, a few places to find out about voluntary or free playgroup-type activities (see page 4).

The list is not comprehensive and I hope to keep it as up-to-date as I can. Please get in touch with your own recommendations and experiences. Perhaps, together, we will be able to discover Houston.

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The Motherhood Center
Weslayan and Alabama, Houston 77027



"All the mother needs"

TMC pitches itself as "the only one-stop shop" for all pregnancy and family needs. Offering a wide, range of prenatal and postnatal support, educational and fitness classes in addition to a leading photographic studio and nanny placement agency, TMC is a great resource for new mothers and, in particular, new mothers to Houston looking to meet new friends. Classes on offer include: yoga (for all ages including Mom and Me and prenatal), art, baby sign, developmental education and not to forget the impressive Prelude Music series (see page 2). For classes schedules and more information visit www.motherhoodcenter.com



Rhythm helps my children move... and learn

There is a lot of research out there that indicates the benefits of music for children's development. I haven't had to look further than my own car radio or impromptu shower solo to see this. However, enrolling my children in the Prelude Music classes hosted by The Motherhood Center, has been a fascinating learning experience both for me and my children.

Ana Goffrey, professional soloist and instructor, motivates children and parents to be involved and exposes the class to a wealth of culture and sound. She follows the Music Together curriculum. Classes run for 45 minutes and include circle time, unaccompanied and accompanied singing and dancing and free play time with a variety of instruments in a warm and welcome learning environment. Classes are supported with parent education sessions and two concerts a term. For more information, visit or enroll online at: www.motherhoodcenter.com

While I have not attended them, there are also music classes available at the following locations:

Fundamentally Music is located in Upper Kirby and offers classes for 4 months to 4 years. www.themusicclass.com

Kindermusik (0-6 years). Various locations. www.kindermusik.com

Gymboree, not to be confused with the clothing store of the same name and brand (see below) also offer music classes for 6 months to 5 years in various locations. www.gymboreeclases.com

And, once they are moving...

Active child or want to develop gross motor and social skills? The following places have gymnastics or dance classes. They all offer free trial classes so, go along and see for yourself.

The Little Gym are specifically designed for 4 months to 12 year old children. They are a chain with many locations in Houston and Greater Houston. www.thelittlegym.com

Gymboree offer Play and Learn classes that include music, art and sports for children from 0-5 years. They also offer family classes for multi-age learning and siblings. www.gymboreeclases.com

Houston Gymnastics Academy is a professional gymnasium offering classes from 12 months. www.houstongymnastics.com

Biron Gymnastics offer preschool classes from 6 months. www.birongym.com

Champion Gymnastics is a gym, dance and cheer facility in the Katy area. Their Lil' Kids programme starts at 18 months to age 6. www.champgym.com

Westwood Gymnastics, also in Katy, offer classes for all ages from walking. www.westwoodgym.com

Yoga West started Nurturing Pathways last year. It is a music and dance/movement programme for ages 2 months to pre-walking. www.yogawest.net

Stephanie's Dance Studio One offer ballet classes for under 3s.

ART In addition to classes at TMC and Gymboree; ArtMix offer pop-in studios from 2 years old. www.artmixlearning.com

Shape up!

In addition to regular gyms that offer childcare, there are a few 'Mom and Me' fitness classes around.

The Motherhood Center

Mommy and Me yoga and fitness classes for mothers and infants through to walkers. Classes run Monday through Thursday in the mornings. www.motherhoodcenter.com

Discovery Green

Free yoga, pilates and zumba classes for all ages. They are not specifically designed for Mom and Me but, perhaps worth a try? www.discoverygreen.com

Baby Boot Camp

In May 2010, Strollerfit was acquired by Baby Boot Camp. Classes are offered in Houston, Katy, Woodlands and Cypress. They are held mainly outdoor and rely on your child being in a jogging or sturdy stroller while you exercise. The first class is free. www.babybootcamp.com

Stroller Strides

Appears to be a similar set-up to Baby Boot Camp above. Sessions are held in Bear Creek Park, Woodlands and Pearland. The first class is also free. www.classes.strollerstrides.net

It's raining, it's pouring...

Having trouble finding indoor play places for rainy or hot summer days? In addition to mall play places (Galleria, Memorial City) or museums, there are more indoor soft play centers opening in and around town.

Here are a few suggestions:

www.gowonderwild.com
www.monkeybizness.com
www.haveafunchatfun.com

Swim and sports	Swim	Splash	Sport
	<p>Houston Swim Club offer classes for children from 30 months. Various locations. www.houstonswimclub.com</p> <p>Saint Street Swim promotes itself as a patient and gentle approach to swimming and offers classes for children from 12 months. www.saintstreetswim.com</p> <p>YMCA offer classes for all ages from 36 months. You do not have to be a member. Various locations. www.ymcahouston.org</p>	<p>Nottingham Park 14205 Kimberley Lane One of the larger splash parks in Houston. See page 4 for similar splash pad locations.</p> <p>Noah's Ark pool at First Methodist Houston is open to the public from May-September. Admission for children over 12 months. www.fmhouston.com</p> <p>Both Splashtown (Woodlands) and Schlitterbarn (Galveston) have height requirements for rides. Katy Magazine offers a top 10 Water Parks in the area. www.katymagazine.com</p>	<p>SoccerTots and HoopsterTots are franchised physical development programmes for children from 18 months. Various locations. www.soccertots.net</p> <p>Diary Ashford Roller Rink host a toddler play and skate on Friday 10-noon for ages 7 and under. Strollers and scooters are welcome. www.skatedarr.com</p> <p>While I aim to keep the information here aimed at under 3s. I have been impressed with Soccer Shots, available in various locations. www.soccershots.org</p>

Museums and attractions

Houston Zoo, located in Hermann Park in the Museum District, has a wide range of animals, birds, reptiles and fish. Children can groom goats and feed the giraffes. Food is limited to fast food however there are tables and shade for picnics. There are a number of events throughout the year for all ages.

ZooBoo is a personal favourite for young children. Free admission on the first Tuesday of the month from 2pm www.houstonzoo.com

The Children's Museum offers colourful and imaginative exhibits with a whole kid city to get lost in and a fabulous soft play zone for younger children on their top floor. Parking is sometimes difficult. Free admission on the first Thursday of every month from noon until 6pm. www.cmhouston.org

The Miller Outdoor Theatre, also located in Hermann Park, are hosting children's concerts in July 2011 from 11am. A picnic on the hill is great fun but, arrive early to get parking and take an umbrella, it can get hot. www.milleroutdortheatre.com

Discovery Green have a number of events throughout the year, many free, in addition to their year-round playground, splash area, fitness offer and theatre. www.discoverygreen.com

The Weatherford Family Concerts Series at the Houston Symphony are ticketed and usually held on Saturdays at 10 and 11.30am. The Houston Symphony League engage

children in craft activities before the concert. www.houstonsymphonyleague.com The HS also host free evening concerts throughout the city. Venues and more information can be found at: www.houstonsymphony.org

The Houston Fire Museum host permanent exhibits of fire appliances and Fire Fest, a family and demonstration event, in October. www.houstonfiremuseum.org

The Museum of Natural Science is home to the Burkey Baker Planetarium, IMAX theatre and the Cockrell Butterfly Center. Food options aren't brilliant with only a McDonalds in the museum itself but Hermann Park is just across the road and a great place for picnics. Parking can sometimes be difficult but, less busy before 10am. Admission is free on Tuesdays after 2pm. www.hmns.org

The Museum of Fine Arts is free for under 5s. It has three locations with a junior art exhibit housed at the Audrey Jones Beck location in the Museum District. www.mfah.org

The Downtown Aquarium is a small but child-friendly attraction. The restaurant onsite has a huge aquarium to keep kids amused and there is a splash pad and various rides for summer fun.

Centrally located, the Houston Arboretum and Nature Center offer free walking trails and a Discovery Room with interactive exhibits and activities. Children's classes start at age 3. www.houstonarboretum.org



Not just for books

Most public libraries offer free story time or sing-along groups for toddlers and infants. Some even include craft classes.

www.hcpl.net
www.houstonlibraries.org
www.fortbend.lib.tx.us

Run wild, for free!

A sample of play parks in Houston and surrounding areas.

For more parks: www.houstontx.gov/parks

* Contain splash park/pad features

Central Houston:
Discovery Green*
1500 McKinney
www.discoverygreen.com

Hermann Park*
www.hermannpark.org

Memorial Park
Vale Asche Foundation
Playground

River Oaks Park
3600 Locke Lane

The Heights:
Donovan Park
www.houstonheights.org

Milroy Park
www.heightsparks.org

West Houston and Katy:
Bear Creek Pioneers Park
3535 War Memorial Dr

George Bush Park
16756 Westheimer
Parkway

Ray Miller Park
1800 Eldridge

Terry Hershey Park
I-10 and Eldridge

Crescent Green Park
South Greenhouse

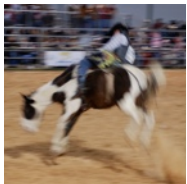
Cullen Park*
19008 Saums Road

Mary Jo Peckham Park*
5597 Gardenia Lane

What's on for Mums/Moms and tots?

Seasonal fun and events

MARCH Reliant Stadium hosts the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo. Starting at the end of February/beginning of March this huge event offers a whole area for children including education exhibits, petting areas, horse riding, pig races, carnival rides and more. www.hlsr.com If you want to get closer to the dirt and the action,



the Katy Rodeo, held on the last weekend of February, is a smaller, family-orientated event. www.katyrodeo.org At the end of March, Memorial Park hosts the Bayou City Art Festival. The Creative Zone is an "interactive family area" to "explore the fun of art" and will feature free children's art projects. www.bayoucityartfestival.com

APRIL Downtown plays host to the International Children's Festival www.houstonchildrensfestival.com iFest showcases music and culture from around the world with a Kids Zone in Little Tranquility Park. www.ifest.org Bluebonnets are usually blooming in early April, head to Brenham or keep track of sightings online at: www.lone-star.net/wildflowers/sightings.htm

MAY The Orange Show is a celebration of creativity including the Art Car parade. www.orangeshow.org The Houston Dragon Boat Festival will be held on May 7 2011. www.texasdragonboat.com

SEPTEMBER Dewberry Farm opens its doors from the end of September. Children under 2 go free with access to rides and activities areas. www.dewberryfarm.com

OCTOBER Ever wanted to be Robin Hood for the day? Texas Renaissance Festival. www.texrenfest.com The Katy Rice Harvest festival is aimed at families with two days of events and activities. www.riceharvestfestival.org

One of the largest air shows in the US, Wings over Houston is held at Ellington Airport on 15-16 October. www.wingsoverhouston.com

DECEMBER Lights in the Heights is a family-style block party in The Woodland Heights area. Held on the second Saturday of the month. www.woodland-heights.org

A little farther afield

George Ranch is an operational ranch about 45 minutes SW of Houston. They offer a number of family events including Easter Egg hunts and Texian Market Day in October. www.georgeranch.org

If you fancy a walk, seeing wild Alligators or some camping Brazos Bend may be for you. No catering at the park but picnic tables and BBQs are available. www.tpwd.state.tx.us/spdest/findadest/parks/brazos_bend/

Most people think of NASA when they think of Houston but, I have found it difficult with under 3s. However, the Balluner Festival, hosted there in October, is a site to behold. www.ballunarfestival.com

The Bluebell ice cream factory is in Brenham, the heart of Bluebell country. Free scoop with admission. www.bluebell.com

Schlitterbahn & Moody Gardens (Galveston) www.moodygardens.com www.schlitterbahn.com

Oil Ranch www.oilranch.com

Got feedback?

I welcome your feedback and recommendations. Please contact me at: totsabouttown@hotmail.com

Find this info sheet online at: www.internationalconnectionshouston.org

Playgroups

Playgroups tend to be hosted by members, in their homes, on a rotational basis. Some are more organized than others. I list a few here. Contact me for more information or to share your experiences. totsabouttown@hotmail.com

Tanzot have a playgroup that is open to all. www.tanzot.org



BHP Billiton wives and mothers established a play group that is open to all. It runs every Tuesday from 10am, mainly in the midtown area.

Cheeky Monkeys, a UK-style playgroup runs every Friday from 10-noon at Kendell Library, Eldridge. Organizers welcome a donation toward refreshments (\$5 a week).

Heights Kids is a network of more than 500 families in The Heights area,

Heights Kids hosts play groups, activities and parents events. Similarly, Montrose Moms operates in the Montrose area. Find both at: www.bigtent.com

Mums and Tots is a group in the West Houston, Lakes on Eldridge and Katy areas. Please get in touch if you are interested.

There are a number of online groups. A few are listed here: www.momsclub.org www.katymoms.org