

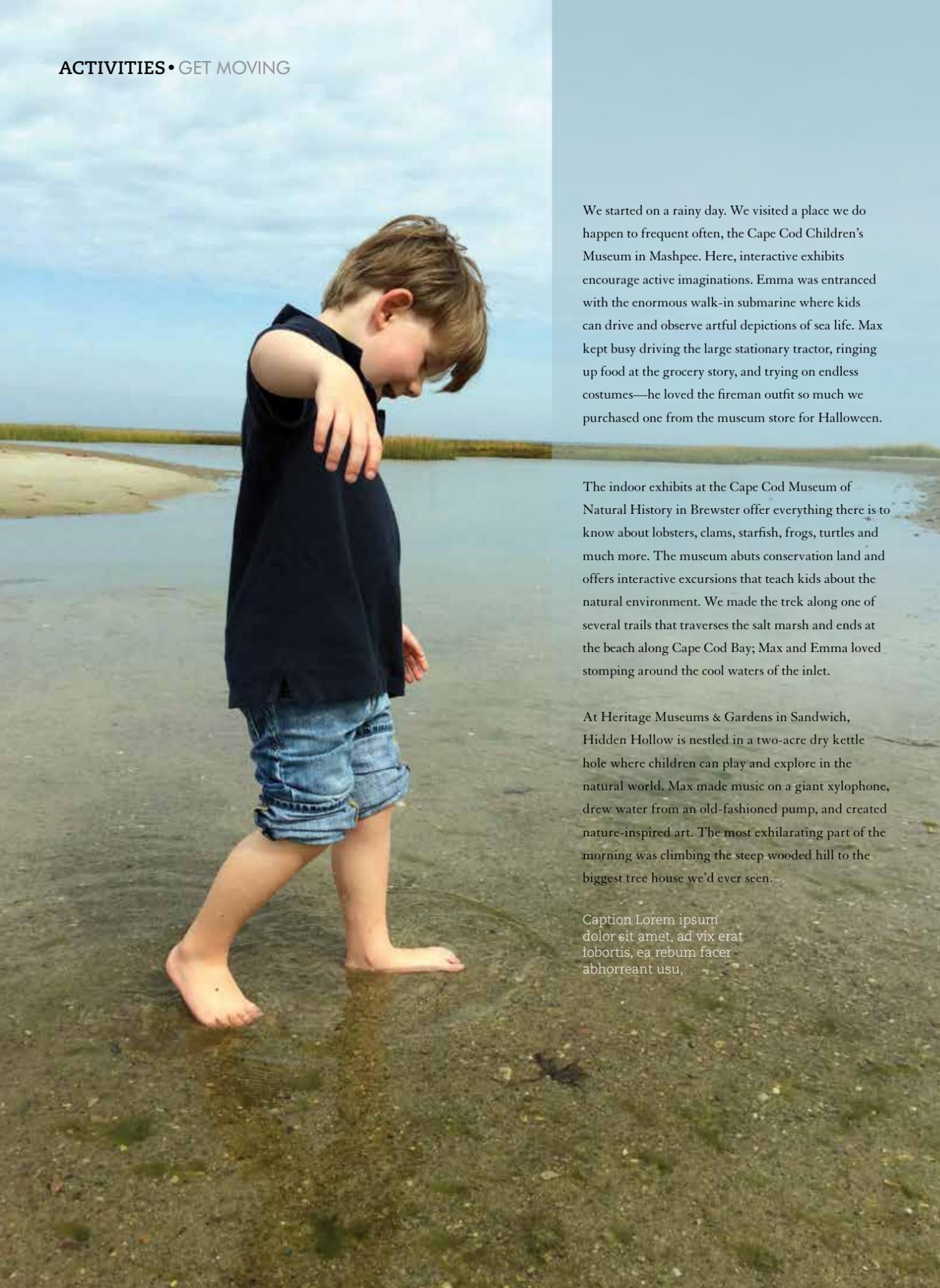
# through the eyes of a child

**T**HERE'S SOMETHING SO WONDERFULLY timeless about Cape Cod. The easier pace, the bucolic village greens and the tidy harbors, the scent of the salty air—and oh, those alluring broad white sand beaches! While we adults find this sandy peninsula intoxicating, it is also a true children's paradise. For evidence, just listen for the ding of the ice cream truck bell the next time you're at the beach. You'll hear the joyous cries of kids, their pleas for a couple bucks from their parents, and the scampering of little feet across the sand to the parking lot.

But we can't spend every day at the beach. When it's time for a different activity, pleasures and attractions for the young abound. My family and I are year-round Cape Codders and we don't often get the chance to appreciate all of the family-focused activities the Cape has to offer. Last summer, however, I made sure we indulged. Throughout July and August, I took my four-year-old son Max and occasionally, my two-year-old daughter Emma, around the region to experience the ample adventures for children. And what a journey it was.

BY JACI CONRY





We started on a rainy day. We visited a place we do happen to frequent often, the Cape Cod Children's Museum in Mashpee. Here, interactive exhibits encourage active imaginations. Emma was entranced with the enormous walk-in submarine where kids can drive and observe artful depictions of sea life. Max kept busy driving the large stationary tractor, ringing up food at the grocery store, and trying on endless costumes—he loved the fireman outfit so much we purchased one from the museum store for Halloween.

The indoor exhibits at the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History in Brewster offer everything there is to know about lobsters, clams, starfish, frogs, turtles and much more. The museum abuts conservation land and offers interactive excursions that teach kids about the natural environment. We made the trek along one of several trails that traverses the salt marsh and ends at the beach along Cape Cod Bay; Max and Emma loved stomping around the cool waters of the inlet.

At Heritage Museums & Gardens in Sandwich, Hidden Hollow is nestled in a two-acre dry kettle hole where children can play and explore in the natural world. Max made music on a giant xylophone, drew water from an old-fashioned pump, and created nature-inspired art. The most exhilarating part of the morning was climbing the steep wooded hill to the biggest tree house we'd ever seen.

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On some of the hottest days of the summer we focused on getting wet wherever we could. At the Cape Cod Inflatable Water Park in West Yarmouth, the main attraction is the big, fast and imaginative water slides—one depicting Jaws, another an enormous octopus, and another a giant fire truck. A toddler zone provides attractions with a slower, but equally exciting pace. Just over the Bourne Bridge, Water Wizz in Wareham is a whirlwind of water slides, wave pools and rivers. There's enough to keep the whole family occupied for several hours. You may recognize the park as the backdrop of two recent films, the Adam Sandler-produced "Grown Ups" and "The Way, Way Back," starring Steve Carrell. Captain's Island is where we spent most of our time amid the interactive water sprays, waterfalls and tunnels.

While Max took an interest in fishing early this summer, he doesn't have the stamina to embark on a typical four-hour charter boat trip on the Cape, so I was excited to discover that Harwich's Cap'n Kids Fishing Adventures offers two-hour fishing trips geared to young anglers. Aboard the 50-foot U.S. Coast Guard certified vessel, kids have the chance to pull a lobster trap, fish by rod and reel, and bait a crap trap. Refreshments are available on board; visitors are also welcome to bring their own. Other options for young fishermen include Cape Cod Family Fishing Charters in Barnstable Harbor and Kid's Fishing in Hyannis.

Out of Hyannis Harbor, Pirate Adventures is another on-the-water excursion geared for kids age three to 10. Upon setting foot on the Sea Gypsy—adorned with skull and crossbones—kids become members of the crew of a working pirate ship and embark on an hour-long adventure in search of a valuable treasure. As soon as the boat sets sail in Lewis Bay, activity is non-stop. There are flags to hoist, faces to be painted, water cannons to blast, and treasure maps to read.



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On an overcast day, we took a trip over the bridge to Edaville Railroad in Carver. While Edaville has long been known for its dazzling holiday light display that visitors observe from a train, it's an equally enticing place to visit in the summer. Max and I went for Edaville's "Day out with Thomas," a family event centered around the Thomas the Tank Engine storybook, and my little locomotive lover had a great time. There's also an antique carousel and an illuminated Ferris wheel, along with several other amusement park rides for kids. A traditional playground has slides, swings and sandboxes and there's an additional play area indoors.



A more refined experience is to be expected on the Cape Cod Central Railroad's Family Supper Train, where children have the opportunity to enjoy a traditional railcar dining experience. The train departs from Hyannis and Buzzards Bay. There's fun food for the kids and delicious fare for the adults, all to be enjoyed against a backdrop of joyous entertainment.

After making his way through almost the entire course—a long trek for a four-year-old!—Max was tired. However, he perked up when I suggested a quick stop at Katie's Ice Cream in downtown Hyannis. Here, the homemade flavors are delectably imaginative and varied: Banana Crunch, Cape Cod Mud and Lavender Honeycomb are just a few. Max went for his usual: vanilla with chocolate sprinkles, which he proclaimed to be the "best ice cream ever." My cup of Brownie Batter—a rich chocolatey base with actual brownie chunks, may have been the best ice cream I've ever had too. I think both of us smiled the whole way home.

Our last excursion took us to Pirate's Cove in West Yarmouth, a miniature golf course that offers insight about the adventures and legends of the most infamous pirates. The adventurous course has patrons putting their way through caves, over footbridges and under cascading waterfalls.