

exploreLI

VENUES WHERE KIDS
CAN LEARN BY EXPLORING
IN THE FRESH AIR **B4**

GO **OUT**
to a **MUSEUM**

Vilmarie Goud and
her son, Liam
Morales, 8, at the
mud table at the LI
Children's Museum.

U-PICK FUN Our roundup of farms for raspberries, tomatoes and more newsday.com/family



ALEXANDRA MOREO

Matei Cernasov, 3, plays mini golf at Bridgehampton's Children's Museum of the East End, which just opened a new play space to mark the museum's 20th anniversary.

Beyond **museum** walls

These learning and exploration centers are not just for rainy days anymore

BY ELLEN YAN

Special to Newsday

Don't think of museums only when it rains.

Long Island's great outdoors are being incorporated as valuable kiddie and learning spaces at exhibition and preservation venues.

At the Long Island Museum in Stony Brook, the halls showcase old-time horse carriages, but among the outside features is a carved 1880 fountain, once stationed at Madison Square Park for horses and people to drink from. The fountain attracts kids' curiosity as water pours from the heads of ser-

pent-like creatures.

"People think when they're going to museums they might be just kind of like 'OK, we'll go on a day when it's rainy and go indoors,'" notes Joshua Ruff, the museum's co-executive director. "Nine acres, it's a lot to walk around and sit outside and enjoy a really nice day in the sun."

The pandemic emphasized to museum officials the importance of outdoors, but even before then, they were studying the outside as a different kind of exhibition space that they cannot waste.

In 2006, museum heads around the country gathered for journalist and author Richard Louv's discussion at the Association of Children's Museum

Conference on what he called "nature-deficit disorder." His book, "Last Child in the Woods," focused on research that showed exposure to nature was key to children's healthy development and for humans' physical and emotional well-being.

"A lot of children's museums took that to heart," recalls Maureen Mangan, director of communications at the Long Island Children's Museum in Uniondale.

Long Island museums have been mixing rest and play with learning and nature on their grounds. Walk around a giant head with a long neck. Meander among the butterflies' milkweed garden. Or make mud pies.

CHILDREN'S MUSEUM OF THE EAST END

376 Bridgehampton-Sag Harbor Tpke., Bridgehampton

A 9,000-square-foot fantasy-

land with slides and blue and yellow paths opened this week to mark the museum's 20th anniversary.

Visitors might feel they're in a movie set. There are giant play stations, like a slide that looks like it's emerging from a 15-foot-high hut. The area is nestled among tall trees. The colorful paths wind among a ground of wood chips. For climbing, there are giant rocks, a rope area and other spots. Canopies of huge leaves dot the area.

"It's really so magical," says museum co-president Liz Bard. "When you're on the playground, you feel like you're in a theme park. It feels like 'Honey, I Shrunk the Kids.'"

COST Free with library pass and EBT card; \$19

MORE INFO 631-537-8250, cmee.org

LONG ISLAND CHILDREN'S MUSEUM

11 Davis Ave., Uniondale

On Museum Row, "Our Backyard" is an interactive, unplugged space where kids play with water, draw "evaporating art," learn about sustainable gardens through permaculture and practice hand-eye coordination at the mud table.

From 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Thursdays during the summer, visitors can join the STEM Explorers program on alternative energy, habitats and more, while at 2 p.m. Wednesdays, starting in July, youngsters can gather monarch butterfly data for scientists by measuring their eggs, the plants they eat and the rainfall.

The museum aims to teach visitors about nature. It has a beehive so children can learn not to fear honeybees, crucial

for a lot of what we eat, Mangan says. A gated waterfall area with seating lets families feel safe outside instead of thinking about “stranger danger,” a lesson taught to kids, she says.

When Mangan mentions the vegetable garden, she laughs.

“The parents, every time they see their kids there, they’re like ‘Oh, they’ll never eat that. They don’t eat vegetables,’ and the kids will eat them immediately because they’ve watched them grow,” Mangan recounts. “It’s a great way to get kids engaged with food choices.”

COST Starting at \$16
MORE INFO 516-224-5800, licm.org

SOUTHAMPTON HISTORY MUSEUM

17 Meeting House Lane, Southampton

It’s an outdoor walk through history.

Buildings from various centuries and from several locations were transplanted by the museum to Southampton to preserve their history — because many of them were under threat — and to create a representation of a village.

At 17 Meeting House Lane, go window shopping at an 1893 house made into a general store. Peek inside a 1790 horse stable that’s now a blacksmith shop. See what doesn’t quack in a duck decoy maker’s workshop.

The museum is also home to Conscience Point, dubbed the “Plymouth Rock of Southampton” because that’s where British settlers first came ashore in Southampton on June 12, 1640, according to the museum.

“It’s a little glimpse of the past,” says executive director Sarah Kautz.

COST Free
MORE INFO 631-283-2494, southamptonhistory.org

THE LONG ISLAND MUSEUM

1200 NY-25A, Stony Brook

Kids can run around Eileen’s head all day and lean against Victoria’s neck, and the ladies don’t mind because they are big head sculptures.

“Any time you play with scale . . . it kind of triggers the imagination,” Ruff says. “It’s really something kids



KRISTINA ROBLES

The Long Island Museum in Stony Brook provides 9 acres of space for children and families to explore.

and adults alike are drawn to.”

Whimsy dots the 9-acre grounds.

As the last survivor of a community art project, a massive red maple tree still showcases the cloth and crochet garb made for its trunk and all the way up and out to its high and tiny branch ends. About 100 residents, from ages 4 to 85, had gathered in 2019 to crochet medallions of fabric in place at several trees, under the direction of an artist. The maple is the only one with its

cloth wrapping due to its shady branches; four other trees’ wrappings faded and were picked apart by squirrels.

COST \$5 ages 6 and older
MORE INFO 631-751-0066, longislandmuseum.org

More to explore beyond LI

NEW YORK HALL OF SCIENCE

47-01 111th St., Corona

Humankind’s urge to explore far-off space is just a few feet away with real



JAMES ESCHER

The Rogers Mansion is the headquarters for the Southampton History Museum, where history comes alive inside and out.

NASA rockets.

Towering outside the museum walls, the Gemini-Titan II and Mercury-Atlas D rockets were the right stuff that launched missions into space about 60 years ago, when space exploration was pretty new.

Its enclosed, massive outdoor space is one of the most colorful and unique kid playgrounds, worth a trip across the boundary to Queens. At the Rocket Park mini golf, players can learn about how the laws of motion control a rocket and a

golf ball. The science playground shows how wind, sun, sound and other principles work in our lives. A rope bridge for climbing, one of the most popular spots, help kids learn about balance.

Nicole Casamento, digital marketing manager, says the playground has a nature-like oasis hidden to one side at the back of the playground: “You almost feel like you’re out of the city completely.”

COST Starting at \$19
MORE INFO 718-699-0005, nysci.org



BOWERY IMAGE GROUP / ANDREW KELLY

Sonny Macmanus blows a bubble at the New York Hall of Science in Corona, Queens. The museum has an outdoor playground.



MORGAN CAMPBELL

Isis Morales, 11, plays in the sandbox outside in “Our Backyard” at the Long Island Children’s Museum. ■ Video: newsday.tv