



Sneak Some History Past Your Kids

Volunteers re-enact the Revolutionary War battle on Concord's North Bridge each spring. PHOTO COURTESY OF MINUTE MAN NATIONAL HISTORIC PARK

By Kathy Shiels Tully

On a recent family trip to Concord, my third-grader taught me something: Visiting a historic place, especially one that your kids have studied in school, is like dropping them into a real-life diorama. This summer, why not jump off the textbook page and into history itself? You don't have to mention *learning* to your kids. Instead, promise family adventures: sky-high views, boat rides, cannons – even a sleepover on a haunted ship!

Boston is crammed with American history, so here are five summer samplers, along with tips on their kid appeal. Four are part of the National Park Service, so be sure to look into Junior Ranger and passport programs.

1 The North Bridge, Concord

The gigantic trees and rolling fields surrounding the North Bridge in Minute Man National Historic Park in Concord provide a perfect picnic setting but make it hard to imagine this bucolic scene as the stage for the official start of the American Revolution on April 19, 1775.

After beginning their march in Lexington, the British, or “Regulars,” were met by minutemen in Concord, standing strong on one side of the bridge and preventing the British from proceeding up to the nearby farm of Col. James Barrett. The British suspected Barrett of harboring weapons, including two prized cannons.

Kids' Take-Away: It's shocking to discover the short length of the bridge and to realize just how close the British were to the Colonists. Challenge your family to recite Ralph Waldo Emerson's “The Concord Hymn,” which was sung at the completion of the Concord Monument, an obelisk at the foot of the bridge, on July 4, 1837. (Need help? The hymn ends with the famous words “*Here once the embattled farmers stood, And fired the shot heard round the world.*”)

Minute Man National Historic Park, North Bridge and North Bridge Visitor Center, 174 Liberty St., Concord, 978-318-7810; www.nps.gov/mima. Open daily, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. Admission is free.

2 Bunker Hill Monument, Charlestown

If you've only driven past this 221-foot granite obelisk, visible from I-93 or Route 1, make a point to stop and visit. The attraction for kids? Climbing the stairs to the top of the monument – all 294 of them. (Make the kids count!) There's also an interesting exhibit and a visitor's lodge at ground-level.

From this bird's-eye view of Boston and Charlestown, it's hard to picture the raging fire set by the British on nearby Breed's Hill on June 17, 1775 – one of the first major battles of the American Revolution. In 1843, the Bunker Hill Monument was dedicated to honor the men who fought and sacrificed their lives on Breed's Hill. Bunker Hill itself was only peripherally involved in the actual fighting.

Kids' Take-Away: Ask your children what famous line was uttered at Bunker Hill? (“Don't fire till you see the whites of their eyes!”) After your visit, head over to **Warren's Tavern** in Charlestown, where Paul Revere and George Washington both imbibed in the late 18th century. Today, it's a family-friendly restaurant, and kids will love to regale their friends and teachers with stories of having a beer – root beer, that is – and a bite to eat at Massachusetts' oldest tavern.

Bunker Hill Monument, Monument Square, Charlestown, 617-242-5641; www.nps.gov/bost/historyculture/bhm or www.thefreedom-trail.org/visitor/bunkerhill. Open daily: Monument, 9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.; visitor lodge and exhibits, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. Admission is free.

Warren's Tavern, 2 Pleasant St., Charlestown, 617-241-8142; www.warrentavern.com. Open weekdays, 11:30 a.m. – 1 a.m.; weekends, 10:30 a.m. – 1 a.m.

3 Boston Light, Boston

Aug. 7 is National Lighthouse Day. Why not visit Boston Light, America's first lighthouse, this month?

Coast Guard Civilian Keeper Sally Snowman is one of 52 trained volunteers who will greet you as you disembark from a 45-minute narrated boat tour from Boston Harbor out to Little Brewster Island, one of the Boston Harbor Islands.

Originally built in 1716, Boston Light helped ships navigate through rocky channels – the scene of many a shipwreck – to Boston's harbor entrance. In 1775,



The author climbs to the top of Boston Light.

PHOTO COURTESY OF KATHY TULLY

American Colonists burned its interior to prevent the invading British from using it. When the British retreated in 1776, they blew up the tower. Reconstructed in 1783, Boston Light's beam still shines – visible for 27 miles on a clear night. Though automated, it's the only human-operated lighthouse in the country.

Kids' Take-Away: Climb the 76 steep steps (and two narrow ladders) to see Boston Light's Fresnel lens.

(Note: Climbers must be 8 years old or 50 inches tall. For safety, no flip flops.) Snap some photos, through a port-hole, of Boston's skyline. After exploring the lighthouse, have a picnic on the grounds.

Boston Light, Boston Harbor Islands National Park Area, Boston, 617-223-8666; www.bostonharborislands.org. Depart from Boston's Moakley Courthouse Dock aboard a vessel operated by UMass Boston. The boats run until Sept. 4: Friday – Sunday, two trips daily at 10 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

4 Mill Girl and Immigrant Exhibit, Lowell

Whether or not you've toured some of the grander national parks in this country, don't forget the one in our own back yard – Lowell National Historic Park.

This 19th-century center of the Industrial Revolution is considered the birthplace of today's modern textile corporations and working classes. This year, Lowell celebrates its 175th anniversary.

Learn what life was like for the children who worked long hours in grueling conditions during the Industrial Revolution. See the Mill Girl and Immigrant Exhibit, with reproductions of an 1830s boardinghouse bedroom, kitchen and dining room.

Stroll (or take a boat tour) along a portion of Lowell's five and a half miles of canals that weave throughout the city and its historic neighborhoods. Lowell once had the reputation as the “Venice of the United States.”

Kids' Take-Away: My daughters (ages 9 and 13) were shocked to see what life during the Industrial Revolution meant for young girls like them. After seeing how the Lowell “mill girls” and immigrants lived, sharing a room with one (or two) siblings suddenly doesn't seem so bad.



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Re-enactors demonstrate the life of mill girls in Lowell during the Industrial Revolution.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NPS/HIGGINS & ROSS

Lowell National Historic Park, Mill Girl and Immigrant Exhibit, 40 French St., Lowell, 978-970-5000; www.nps.gov/lowell. Open daily through Aug. 21, 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.; Aug. 22 – Sept. 5, 1-5 p.m. Admission is free.

*Reservations required for seasonal boat tours of the canals, offered by the Lowell National Historic Park: **Working the Water Canal Boat Tour**, daily at 11 a.m. **Engineering Innovation Boat Tour**, daily at noon. Fees: Adults \$8; students/seniors \$7; ages 6-16, \$6; under age 5, free.*

5 The USS Salem, Quincy

Located in the former Fore River Shipyard in Quincy, the 700-foot long *USS Salem* CA-139 is the world's only preserved Heavy Cruiser. Built in Quincy and named after the city of Salem, she was launched in 1947.

Hands-on exploration is encouraged by the all-volunteer staff. Peer into a periscope and climb into the gun rooms. Everyone's invited to explore from the top of the bridge to the lower third deck.

On Aug. 20, the ship hosts a Family Overnight for up to 342 people. Enjoy meals, movies, a scavenger hunt, six different 30-minute "classes" in subjects like First Aid and Cold Water Survival, and, oh yes, ghosts. In 2009, stars of television's Discovery Sci-Fi show *Ghosthunters* declared that this ship is haunted!

Kids' Take-Away: Children and teens will be awed by how sailors once lived in this floatable city; there's an electronic shop, print shop (still used), communications and radar rooms, a barber shop and the Brig (jail).

The USS Salem, U. S. Naval Shipbuilding Museum, 739 Washington St., Quincy, 617-479-7900; www.uss-salem.org. Open daily 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. Admission: adults, \$8; kids ages 4-12, \$6; Senior citizens and kids under age 4, free; family overnight, \$45 per person. ♦

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