

Life in the FINGER LAKES



The Magazine for People Who Love New York State's Wine Region

[\(http://www.lifeinthefingerlakes.com/\)](http://www.lifeinthefingerlakes.com/)

LEARNING THROUGH PLAY AT ITHACA'S SCIENCENTER



One of my absolute favorite museums to take my children to in the Finger Lakes Region is the Sciencenter in Ithaca. Just arriving at the parking lot promises an excellent experience with a moving sign that teeter-totters back and forth and an alluring out-door play space you have to pass to reach the entrance. Once inside, it is a world of sciencey play that makes it feel like its not learning at all.

After paying for admission, we always begin with my favorite exhibit: the sand topography table, which simulates water moving on the landscape

over time as the sand is shifted. We then head to the area dedicated to physics, which, among other things, has a large tank of water that drains through canals you can add or remove gates from, turning my kids into mini engineers. Upstairs is a large room filled with foam building pieces of interesting shapes and sizes where they work on their architectural skills. Off of this room rests a smaller room filled with lab tables and stools from which you can check out boxes filled with a themed activity. In our last visit, the kids fingerprinted themselves like forensic scientists and then sorted and identified shells, which supports counting and observation skills in a fun, hands-on way.

Passing through the Mars and Stars exhibit, the kids become astronauts and explore the moon on the big screen before heading down the musical stairs into a space filled with weights to explore force and pulleys. Last time we visited, we were lucky enough to catch the tide pool presentation, which is in this same area, and the kids got to be marine biologists by touching a sea star and learning about the nine eyes of horseshoe crabs. Around the corner from the tide pool exhibit is the Saltonstall Animal Room, filled with terrariums of fish, arachnids, reptiles, and amphibians. My six-year-old daughter most impressed me in this room: as we were looking into a seemingly empty tank, she said, "It's not empty, there are eggs on those leaves." And lo and behold, the adult frogs had been removed to allow their eggs to hatch safely. Future scientist? Maybe.

Once we are satisfied that we have seen everything that we wish to see on our visit, we always make our way to the gift shop to get a little something before heading home.

The Sciencenter offers different levels of memberships, as well as day camps and weekly hands-on programs during the summer. For more information on these programs, admission prices, and more, visit [sciencenter.org](http://www.sciencenter.org/)(<http://www.sciencenter.org/>) or call 607-272-0600. The Sciencenter is located at 601 1st Street, Ithaca, NY 14850.



(http://www.lifeinthefingerlakes.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/gabriellewheeler_profile.jpg)By Gabrielle L. Wheeler