



& Out About

20 free (or very nearly) things to do with your toddler in South Africa, compiled by Camilla Rankin

THERE ARE SO many things to do with toddlers these days, but most cost an arm and a leg, so we asked you to send us the things you like to do with your toddler that are free – for your toddler at least! Here are the top 20 things you like to do with your children in South Africa

Sand between your toes Mix a beach with a bucket, spade and toddler – and you usually have a winning combination. Topping the list are Nature's Valley and The Island at Groot Brak, both on the Garden Route, KZN's Bay of Plenty & Zinkwazi Beach and Port Alfred's Kiddies Beach, as they all boast golden sands and calm, wave-free lagoons. You can also get eco-friendly and take your tot to a beach clean-up in CT (first Saturday of the month – find more info on cleanc.co.za).

Buckets and fishing nets Great tidal pools for splashing toddlers are Granny's and Thompson's in Salt Rock, St James and Glencairn in CT, Davies in Onrus, Jan Rabie in Vermont, and Mermaid's at Kenton-on-Sea – don't forget your fishing net for those rock pools.

Bikes, trikes and push-trucks Green Point Urban Park in CT, James Pearce Park in East London, JHB's Delta Park and PTA's Hazeldean Valley Kiddies Bike Park (with a special toddler track) are all great places to test out your toddler's biking skills (and have a picnic). And when in Durbs, check out the options at xpressiononthebeach.com.

Under the boardwalk Walk, push or bike along CT's Boulders walkway and Sea Point boulevard, East London's Nahoon Corner boardwalk, Hermanus' cliff path and KZN's Ballito or Umhlanga boardwalks for great sea vistas. You might even glimpse the odd whale or dolphin along the way.

Take a stroll around Silvermine Dam, explore some of the walking trails in Tokai Forest, Hout Bay and the Constantia greenbelt – all in CT. Search for mudskippers in the mangroves (only open on third Saturday of the month) in Umgeni, Durban North, or search for crabs at Umhlanga Nature Reserve.

Ships and sails Go and check out the ships and boats (and feed the seals and sea gulls) at Hout Bay – with a real pirate ship – or Kalk Bay harbours in CT; or for R3 a toddler, you can climb aboard the ships and exhibits at the Port Natal Maritime Museum in Durban.

'Park' off Your top favourites are Delta Park, Mushroom Park and Zoo Lake in JHB, which have modern, safe jungle gyms, as do Green Point Urban Park, Deer Park and Paradise Park in CT. Other favourites are JHB's George Hay and James and Ethel Gray and James Pearce in East London.

Pages of fun Many local libraries offer toddler book readings and holiday craft activities, so check yours out. Also top of the list is The Book Lounge in CT's CBD, with readings and crafts most Saturday mornings at 11am.

Choo-choo! Ride a mini train at Cedar Junction in Pretoria (under-2's go free), or at the Rand Society of Model Engineers (Florida Park) on their twice-monthly open days (entrance free, rides R10).

Pet & pat Feed the ducks at Emmarentia (JHB) or Wynberg Park in CT, pet a cow or sheep at Irene Dairy Farm in Pretoria, watch the birds and squirrels in The Gardens in downtown CT or, for a small fee, splash in the river at Karkloof Nature Reserve, KZN – all good spots to picnic.

Smell the roses Nurseries, garden centres and botanical gardens are great places to while away the time with a toddler – and many have play areas. You could also visit JHB's Multiflora Flower Market with its explosion of colour and floral smells from over a million stems a day, walk past waterfalls and spectacular city views at the newly tamed gardens at The Wilds, or try spotting eagles at The Walter Sisulu Botanical gardens (entry is free for children under 6).

Coffee & climb Many coffee shops have enclosed play areas: topping this list are Imhoff Farm Village in Noordhoek; Pallet Jacks, Bona Terra and Lucky Bean in KZN and Bambanani in JHB.

Markets & more For food, fun, jumping castles and some interesting toys, take your tot to CT's The Old Biscuit Mill, Kuns

& Ko Mark in Bloemfontein, Shongweni Market and Kloof SPCA's market in KZN, or try JHB's Neighbourgoods market – all open on Saturday mornings.

Come play a while The incredible Play Africa museum at Constitution Hill, JHB has recently opened its doors and offers amazing interactive play and learning stations perfect for toddlers – they do ask for a discretionary donation at the door.

Hug a tree in the Tokai Forest, CT, the arboretum on Kirstenbosch road (behind the stone church) or in Paarl – or do the forest walk at Ballito's new and revamped Waterberry Coffee Shoppe.

Budding Picassos Send your older toddler in search of knights and horses in the Johannesburg Art Gallery; for flowers and trees at The Cape Gallery; for their favourite painting, pot or sculpture at Artists Under the Sun (held once a month at Zoo Lake in JHB), or see what they make of contemporary African art at the Zietz Museum in CT (always free for those under 18 and free for everyone on Wednesdays between 10am and 1pm).

Tea gardens For the cost of a cup of tea or coffee, your toddler can explore the fairy garden at Makaranga Garden Lodge, Kloof; climb the lion statues at the tea garden at Rhodes Memorial in CT, or play in the child-friendly gardens at The Big Dog Café in Franschhoek.

Pack a picnic Your top picnic spots are CT's Silvermine Dam and Green Point Urban Park; the Free State National Botanical Gardens in Bloemfontein; and Delta Park (with its bird hides, jungle gyms and big hill perfect for sliding down on cardboard boxes) in JHB.

For rainy days With its collection of 4 000 model cars and olden-day toys, the Warrior Toy Museum in Simonstown is perfect, as is a visit to the fossils, insects and dinosaurs at the Iziko South African Museum in CT.

Up close with sharks Although not for the squeamish, The Natal Sharks Board offers a 26-minute audio-visual display, followed by a shark dissection every Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday (free for those 3 and under; R30 for those aged 4 to 12). **YB**