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By Mary Gazze, The Canadian Press, thecanadianpress.com, Updated: March 3, 2011 10:24 AM

## How to do March Break on the cheap (or free)



or free

A boy smiles after finishing his hand puppet during a puppet making workshop at the Byram Archibald Neighborhood Center, in Greenwich, Conn., Tuesday, May 15, 2007. Families foregoing the big splurge on a Caribbean holiday can still have fun this close to home this March Break. And parents on a budget don't have to spend all their milk money on typical staycation activities like hockey camp or a trip to a city museum - that can cost as much as \$100 for two parents and two kids for just admission. THE CANADIAN PRESS/The Time, Bob Luckey

TORONTO - Families foregoing the big splurge on a beach holiday can still have fun this close to home this March Break.

And parents on a budget don't have to spend all their kids' milk money on typical March Break activities like hockey camp or a trip to a city museum that can cost as much as \$100 for two parents and two kids — just for admission.

Head to the library or toboggan hill, pick up your camera or raid your cupboards for staycation inspiration.

Libraries are in kid-destination mode, with the [Toronto Public Library](#) holding free magician, puppet and juggling shows, movie screenings, and craft or dance workshops throughout spring break.

The public library in Winnipeg is offering free video game tournaments and jewellery and craft sessions for teens. Other libraries across Canada are hosting events like children's book readings, or science experiments for free or only a few dollars per session.

Jennifer Reynolds, editor-in-chief of Canadian Family magazine says some libraries also lend passes to local museums. But be aware that there's mega competition for these coveted money-savers during the holidays, so keep your eyes open for alternatives.

"Even if you're doing something like geocaching, if you're in Bruce County, Ont., or if you're in Calgary, a lot of those local libraries will be able to lend you a geocaching kit and that's a fun way to get outside with the whole family," she said of the treasure hunting game with a GPS device.

Reynolds says parents can occupy their kids at home for a whole week by letting them piece together plans for a party. On day one off school, kids come up with a theme, on day two they make invitations, on day three they create decorations, and so forth, until the activities culminate with a full out bash. Supplies don't need to be elaborate and can come from the dollar store or use recycled bits from around the house.

"At Canadian Family we love to scour our cupboards and make things out of cardboard...there's lots of potential craft supplies in your own home if you just use a little imagination," she says.

A day as simple as playing board games, trading movies with friends, sledding, skating or playing dress up for a silly photoshoot with a digital camera are ways for parents and kids to have fun together, using equipment they already own, without spending an extra dime.

And if you do plan on heading to a museum or zoo, you don't have to break the bank, says Stacie Pearson, associate vice-president of credit cards at TD Canada Trust. She says more and more of her customers are redeeming their travel rewards points for activities at home like admission to the science centre.

You can also cash in airline miles, department store or movie theatre points for ski passes, movie or hotel vouchers, and even tours of [Old Quebec City](#).

If you have membership in any kind of club, or alumni association, you may also be eligible for discounts. Union members, auto club members, transit pass users or holders of certain credit cards may also find they are eligible for discounts.

A survey released this week by TD Canada Trust found that 75 per cent of respondents plan on staying close to home this spring break.

"We usually see a 50-50 split at March Break," said Pearson, adding that many respondents reported they just want to relax with family.

"I'm hoping this may just be a hangover from the excitement of Christmas, with people just wanting to stay home, relax, and save a little money," she says.

But if you do take a trip, stick to your budget and have a bargain-hunting game plan, like adjusting the days of your getaway if feasible.

"If you're visiting a big city like New York, Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal or even Calgary, what generally is truth is that those hotels in big cities drop their rates on weekends. It's a great way to save money," says Pearson.

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