

Samples of Travel Writing by Alan McNairn

Excerpt from *Things to do in New York With Teenagers* for Home Away Website

A bite of the Big Apple is just as much a thrill for teenagers as it is for their parents. New York is brimming with action. It will keep the young set hopping and their parents panting to keep up with them. A good place to start as you hit the ground running is Times Square.



15 Seconds of Fame on Times Square

American Eagle Outfitters flagship store on the west side of Times Square is easy to find. Look for the 25-foot tall LED billboard. It's the largest animated picture in the world. After your teenagers have made their first New York purchases of some highly desirable item of clothing they can go to a photo booth in the basement. There they will be photographed and asked to write a short personal message. Now go outside. Watch the sign carefully. Get your camera ready and be prepared to scream when your child's picture appears. This is their 15 seconds of fame, right in the heart of a city where fame is fact of life.

Give Teenagers Their Fix of Technology

Take a very short walk from Times Square to Madison Avenue and 56th Street to see the Sony Wonder Technology Lab. It is immensely popular so you are advised to reserve in advance your free admission tickets. Sometimes same day tickets are available.

The state-of-the-art, interactive, entertainment center begins with a hands on experience of a wall of sensi-tile that creates intricate reflections in response to touch. Further on there is a fascinating word map showing global internet traffic. It's an eye-opener for perpetual texters and downloaders. Teenagers can learn how the electronic devices they use every day actually work by engaging in an interactive 3D unwrapping of a camera or a cell phone. Other enticing youth oriented displays focus on nanotechnology, virtual surgery, robots, animation and most popular of all dance motion capture that reveals how film and video games achieve such high levels of realism and personality. Visitors are videoed dancing and the images are manipulated and shown as animated shorts.

In New York You Can Shop 'Til the Teenagers Really Drop

Again the problem with the Big Apple is to know where to begin. For the budget conscious, starting with the high-end fashion shops on 5th Avenue is not advised. Most of them do not really cater to teenage fashionistas. A better bet is to go to the very popular Century 21 Department Store just beside Ground Zero in Lower Manhattan. Here shopping is a genuine hunt and gather procedure where your teenager will dash about squeezing through crowds in search of the finest fashions at cut-rate prices.

For a further adventure in budget shopping, take a stroll through the mobs along Canal Street. The stores here have just about anything your kids might want from sunglasses to souvenirs but be prepared, they are distinctly low end operations and the salespeople are sometimes quite aggressive. Nevertheless, the bargains are endless.

An Unusual Experience When In New York with Teenagers

The Tenement Museum on Orchard Street in the Lower East Side offers an experience that will stick in your teenager's mind. The museum consists of several buildings where 19th century immigrants to America first lived in cramped and primitive of conditions. A number of tours are offered that take you up to the dingy tiny apartments in this neighborhood that once was the most densely populated in the world. Here you will experience the stories, songs and traditions of the tenants from whom so many Americans are descended.

Clip from article *Merida Mexico: A Tour for the Whole Family*

In the Yucatan, an educational and entertaining tour of a sisal plantation is a treat for those on vacation with kids.

Why spend all your time on the beach when vacations in the Yucatan can include activities for children that will provide hours of educational and recreational entertainment.

You can get both at the Hacienda Sotuta de Peón, not far from Mérida. The best way to get there is through a tour that can be arranged at any hotel or travel agency.

Sisal Barons

When you arrive at the hacienda you might start with a visit to the main house. There you will quickly see that the plantation owner and his family lived an elegant life surrounded by expensive, imported furniture and decorative art.

The Sisal Boom

Hennequin or sisal plantations produced huge incomes for their owners in the 19th and early 20th centuries when there was wide-spread demand for sisal in the making of rope. Imagine how much sisal rope it took to rig the thousands of sailing ships that plied the oceans as world trade expanded at a great rate. The need for rope declined as more and more of the world's goods were transported by steam ships in the early 20th century and the sisal boom sputtered out. Before it did the hacienda owners built those palatial town villas that you can see today dotting the streets of Mérida especially on the Paseo Montejo

See the Agave Harvested

After you have seen how the landowners lived you can take a ride on a mule powered cart along a narrow gauge railway through the fields of sisal agave. You will learn about the planting and harvesting of hennequin and see trucks like the one you are on being loaded with agave leaves to be transported to the processing factory.

Swim in a Cenote

You will be taken to a cenote for a truly unforgettable swim in an underground cavern carved out slowly over the ages by water coursing through limestone.

For children and adults this will be the highlight of the visit to this hacienda. The water is warm, the air cool and the lighting in the cave spectacular. The experience is almost impossible to describe. It is much like a dream. The memory of this subterranean bathing experience will stay with you.



Processing the Agave Leaves

The mule truck will take you back through the fields to the sisal factory where the fascinating process of extracting the fiber from the agave leaves is clearly demonstrated by workers using original machines.

The leaves are moved on a conveyor to a machine where they are shredded so that the flesh of the leaf is separated from the fiber.