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Calgary's Kids Museum delivers the right 'stuff'

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for mytelus.com

CALGARY (mytelus.com) - Like any five-year-old, my daughter Madeleine prefers to do rather than watch. Museums, art galleries and the like tend to be lost on her because, after all, what's the big deal about standing around and looking at stuff? Wouldn't you rather run around and do stuff?



A young boy tries out a slide in the Mindscape exhibit at Calgary's Creative Kids Museum.
(Photo courtesy www.creativekidsmuseum.com)

That's the idea behind Calgary's Creative Kids Museum, the first arts-based museum for kids in Canada and the only children's museum west of Winnipeg. (Keep in mind that "museum" is used loosely here, since it's not the kind of museum you may be thinking of. Everything is designed for kids to learn

by doing.) Attached to and partnered with the TELUS World Of Science - Calgary, it takes the hands-on, interactive aspects of many science centres and applies them to the arts.

That means that instead of looking at fragile old drums no one dares to touch, listening to a dry lecture about the significance of rhythm to many cultures, kids can experience it for themselves by pounding on a variety of noise-makers and rhythmic instruments. One exhibit, called "Stomp," is reminiscent of the dance troupe in that it illustrates how found objects can be used to make music. Kids whack exuberantly on overturned metal drums, hubcaps and plastic water containers.

Madeleine was fascinated by the Sound Wave and Sound Pool, where stepping on various floor tiles produces different notes, sounds and beats. Stepping on different tiles together can produce chords and by co-operating, kids can even make compositions. Next to this, there's an area to explore broadcasting effects, showing kids how different sounds are picked up by microphones and manipulated with effects such as a flange pedal.

For the aspiring rock star, there's a lip-sync stage where kids can put on costumes and wigs, pick up fake instruments and rock out to hits such as "We Will Rock You" and Blondie's "Call Me."

The Scribble Dee Dee exhibit features areas where kids can explore the visual arts, using chalk, paint and even body heat to create their works. With space to draw on the floors, walls, a wash-away glass screen and a variety of mediums, kids can learn about the creative processes that go into producing art.

Another big hit with Madeleine was the Mindscapes exhibit, where she could take a flashlight into a simulated cave and look for cave

paintings. Having no knowledge of what she would find inside the cave, I imagine she felt much like an archaeologist discovering works left by ancient peoples: "Look, Daddy, it's a deer! There's the sun! Is that man a hunter?"

There's also the Perception exhibit, where kids explore how they see the world around them with a Perspective Room, a Leaning Tower of Perception and the Surrealism Wall. Madeleine thought the Perspective Room was great fun, with its shrinking or growing dimensions, depending on which side you look at.

We didn't have time to explore the theatre area which, according to the museum's press release, allows children to "experience everything from performance preparation to bringing a story to life on stage. Featuring a large stage, puppet theatre, control station, ballet bar, and preparation table, children call the shots as the lead actor, lighting designer, costumer or director."

Though it's only been open for a few months, the Creative Kids Museum appears to have a hit on its hands. I've been there twice and it was packed both times with gleeful kids running around getting their hands into the exhibits, trailed by their parents who look just as fascinated. As for Madeleine, ten minutes after we arrived she asked, "can we stay here all day, Daddy?" No problem, kiddo.

The Creative Kids Museum is located at the TELUS World of Science - Calgary, 701 11th Street SW. Regular fall hours are from 9:45 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays to Thursdays; 9:45 a.m. to 5 p.m. Fridays; and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays. Admission, which includes admission to the TELUS World Of Science, is \$12 for children (3-17) and seniors (64 and up); \$15 for adults (18-64); and \$49 for a family (up to two adults and four children from the same household).