



Spotlight On: National Museum of American Jewish History



by Lauren McCutcheon
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Think of Independence National Historical Park, and you immediately think of colonial- and Revolutionary-era American history. Red bricks. Yellowed paper. White wigs. But the Mall's shining standout, the [National Museum of American Jewish History](#), a Mommy Nearest partner, tells

the rest of the story. This five-story, 100,000-square-foot building in the heart of Philadelphia offers enthralling glimpses into what a strong, proud, diverse religious group of people can achieve when it puts down roots in a nation founded on religious freedom. In other words, [NMAJH](#) is about more than Judaism in America (dating back 360 years), it's about the experience of all American immigrants—all of us. Not surprisingly then, it's an essential experience for you and your kids.

National Museum of American Jewish History

101 S Independence Mall E
Philadelphia, PA



Kids experience the five floors of NMAJH differently than adults might. Like adults, they're advised to start at the top, with stories of America's earliest Jewish settlers and George Washington, and work their way down, to current events. Kids will especially enjoy the fifth floor, which houses special exhibitions. There is an exhibition of guitars, Day-Glo concert posters, behind-the-scenes photos and concert sets in the *Bill Graham and the Rock & Roll Revolution* exhibit. Like adults, they'll become rapt by video presentations and antique artifacts (those tiny, delicate shoes! The Three Stooges!). But unlike grown-ups, they'll turn their educational exploration into interactive play. Also unlike grown-ups: Children **12 and under are free**.



It's easy to play, even amid serious history. NMAJH has made it purposely so. Katerina Romanenko, NMAJH's Associate Director of Education, points out the museum's covered wagon, try-on pioneer clothing, playful Purim masks, cranks and pedals in a textile factory, a Sabbath table kids can set in a tenement kitchen and children's books about life in America's big cities during the early 20th-century. "There are so many hands-on objects for children to pick-up, touch, and play with," says Romanenko.

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Though most exhibits are recommended for ages five and up, families with toddlers can still get in the action, pushing buttons, watching machines run and climbing on small wooden school desks. Another bonus: Enclosed decks that face the Mall offer benches and a spectacular view—a great respite for weary and/or rambunctious little ones. On the third floor, there's even a pair of sculptures emblazoned with language taken from Jewish immigrants' letters in Yiddish that purposely double as low slides.



Those who want to be sure to occupy their little ones can bring them on a thematic tour especially for preschoolers, or follow a printed family guide that points out aspects of exhibitions that are especially engaging to kids. "Our docent-led tours have also been successfully adjusted to multi-generational groups, making them suitable for children," says Romanenko. Best time to bring the fam: The second Sunday of the month or "Second Sunday Family Corner" when family-friendly activities—story time, arts and crafts—multiply throughout the galleries. (Next up is winter and holiday-themed activities during the [Sunday Family Corner on December 11!](#))



"NMAJH's family program provides nurturing environment for social interaction collaboration and sharing among family members," says Romanenko, "An open door for all NMAJH brings to life the stories of Jews in America and invites families to share their own."

The museum's busiest days are Free Family Days on major federal holidays: MLK Day, Presidents Day and the Fourth of July. Bubbles get in free on Grandparents Day. And everyone is invited to build with clay, listen to stories, get faces painted, make and take crafts and jam out to live music during the annual, all-day "[Being_at Christmas](#)" held on December 25. Don't miss any of the NMAJH's events, see the full calendar [here](#).

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