

Are We There YET?

Bringing History to Life

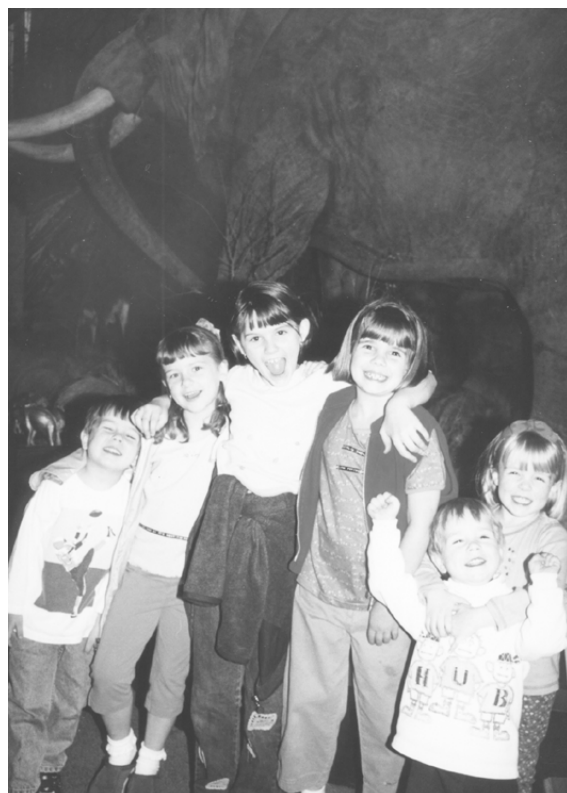
“Wow! This is so cool!”

This enthusiastic response is definitely music to the ears of any parent trying to combine fun and learning. Much to my delight, that is exactly what I heard from our eight-year-old daughter shortly after arriving at the Anniston Museum of Natural History. We decided to make the short trip to Anniston at the recommendation of our neighbor, Jeannie Chandler. Her three boys loved the museum, especially seeing the life-size re-creations of dinosaurs.

We were not disappointed! Within minutes of our arrival, our crew had touched a real meteorite, saw the tooth of a 75-foot long pre-historic shark and walked under a life-size version of a flying dinosaur. From there, we explored an Alabama cave, dug for fossils, and got a shake from an earthquake!

One exhibit hall features more than 400 birds. Extinct and endangered birds are mounted in natural habitat groupings with painted background dioramas. The collection dates back to the early 1900's, making it one of the oldest diorama collections in the

The Thomley crew and friends enjoying the African exhibit at the natural history museum.



United States. Another highlight is a re-creation of an African savanna featuring various animals, including an African elephant.

While the children enjoyed the Natural History Museum, we loved the Berman Museum located next door. It contains a diverse collection of art, rare weapons, and historical treasures, including objects once owned by Mussolini, Hitler, Napoleon, and Jefferson Davis. The collection is valued at more than \$100 million dollars and reminds me of what you would expect to see in a world-famous museum in a major European city.

The late Colonel Farley Berman, a native of Anniston, and his wife Germaine acquired the treasures from around the world. The two met in the 1940's while involved in counter-intelligence in North Africa. I would recommend the Berman Museum for older children, perhaps starting at age 8. They will especially enjoy the spy weapons disguised as other items such as a flute or cigarette lighter.

Your Anniston adventure can easily be completed in a day, but I recommend an overnight stay at another Anniston landmark, The Victoria. The country inn was built in 1887



One of the many exhibits at the Anniston Museum of Natural History.

and features three guest rooms in the main house decorated with antiques. Our room was behind the main house in the newer hotel section (well suited for children). Our mid-week AAA rate, including a very nice buffet breakfast, was \$65 plus tax. The main house guestrooms are \$129-\$169.

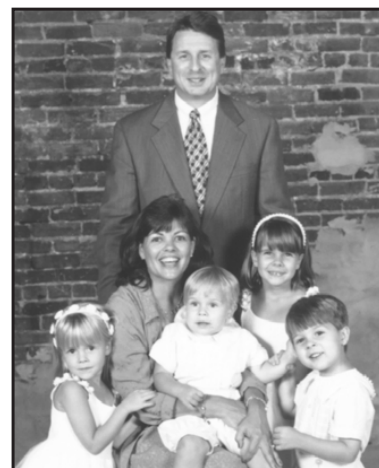
While in the area we also visited the Old Henry Farm, located just north of Anniston in Jacksonville. Originally built as a state-of-the-art dairy farm in 1910, it has been transformed into a restaurant and entertainment complex. Imagine eating your meal in an old barn stall. As you walk through, overhead you can see the iron rails once used for carrying the milk churns. I loved the old pictures of the barn and the farm family. The meal was excellent and reasonably priced. It would be a great place for small church group outings.

One of the best parts about this trip was the travel time. It was great to be out of town but still

close to home. Our return drive took about an hour. All the kids napped on the way home and that was definitely music to my ears!

— Kendra Veach Thomley

— See Resources



Kendra Thomley is a former news anchor and a reporter for WBRC-TV. Kendra and her husband Martin are the parents of two sons and two daughters ranging in age from 2 to 8.