

THERE'S A BRIEF WINDOW IN YOUR CHILD'S LIFE WHEN YOU ARE CONSIDERED A COOL PARENT. THIS MOM AND SON TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THAT TIME BY TAKING OFF ON WHAT BECAME A MONTH-LONG ADVENTURE, FIELD TRIP AND BONDING EXPERIENCE ALL WRAPPED UP IN ONE TRIP.



## a mother, son adventure

Before I was Mom, I was Stepmom. I married my husband when his girls were 5 and 9 so I had a chance to be a part of those happy golden years where kids love you, they want to hang out around you, will let you style their hair and even make clothing suggestions.

Then, suddenly, one day somewhere around sixth grade, the boom lowers and you are an overnight leper, possessing the totally wrong fashion sense, an out-of-touch point of view and all your jokes stink. I guess you could say I was acting on a sense of pending doom, when I proposed a summer road trip to my fifth-grade son.

First, I must admit I am not immune to the call of the open road. The urge to hop in the car and drive to Ames for Thai food or visit the shops in Osage is always there. "Hey, let's drive to Chicago!" also never is out of the question. So, buying a book called "Road Trip USA" was probably dangerous behavior on my part.

Once I took a road trip alone without a guide book or any particular destination in mind. That was a trip brought on by too

Text By MENDEE MORGAN  
Photographed by MENDEE MORGAN



Photo courtesy of TONY PACKIOS

Tony Packo's, Toledo, Ohio



Photo courtesy of Pere Marquette Lodge

Pere Marquette Lodge, Grafton, Ill.



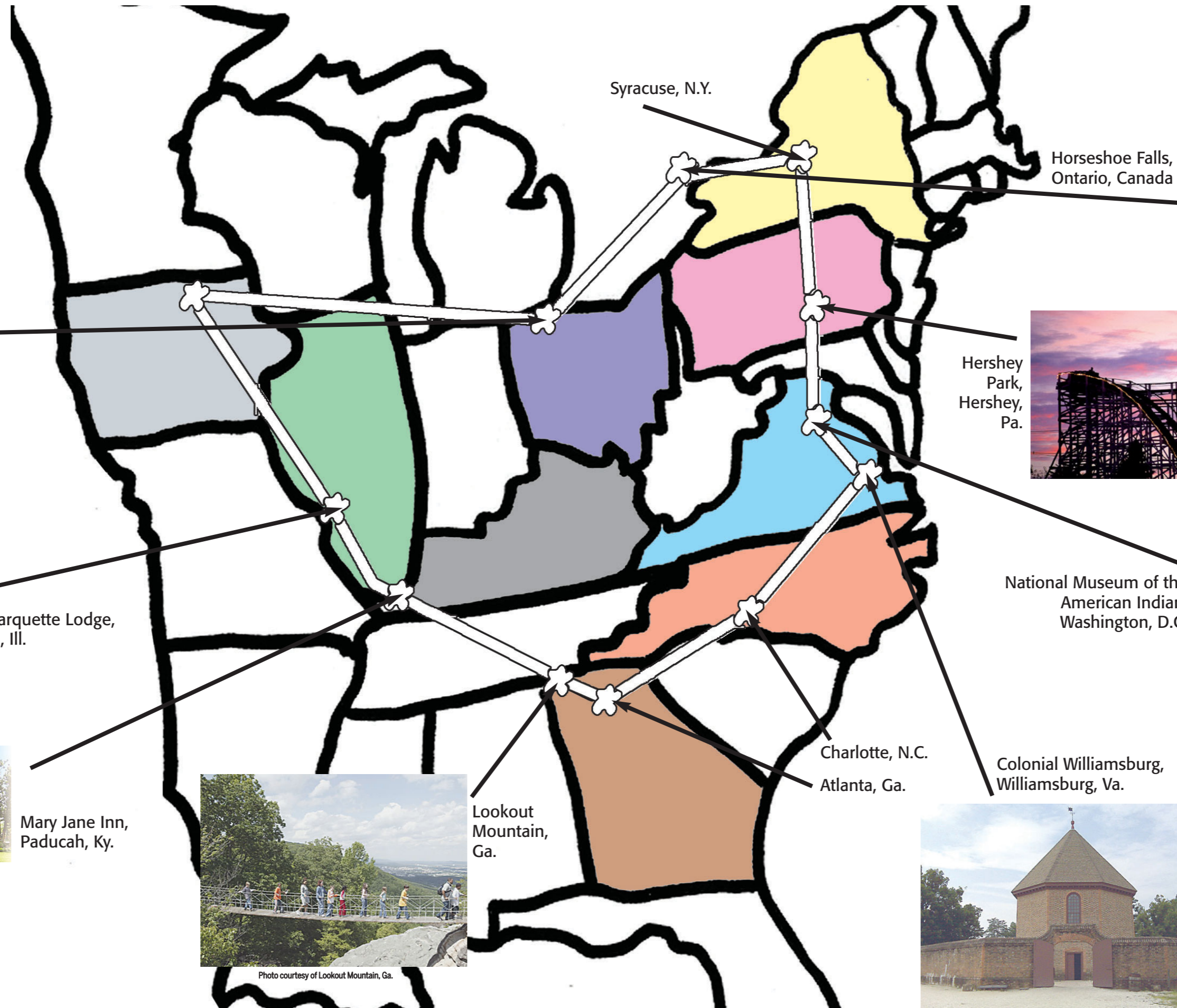
Photo courtesy of Mary Jane Inn

Mary Jane Inn, Paducah, Ky.



Photo courtesy of Lookout Mountain, Ga.

Lookout Mountain, Ga.



Syracuse, N.Y.

Horseshoe Falls, Ontario, Canada

Hershey Park, Hershey, Pa.

National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C.

Colonial Williamsburg, Williamsburg, Va.

Charlotte, N.C.  
Atlanta, Ga.



Photo by Mendee Morgan



Photo courtesy of Hershey Park



Photo by Mendee Morgan



Photo courtesy of The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

## Memorable destinations

- ✦ Future birthplace of Capt. James T. Kirk, Riverside, Iowa.
- ✦ Mark Twain's Boyhood Home, Hannibal, Mo.
- ✦ Pere Marquette State Park, Grafton, Ill.
- ✦ Lewis and Clark State Historic Site, Hartford, Ill.
- ✦ The Gateway Arch, St. Louis, Mo.
- ✦ The Mary Jane Inn, Paducah, Ky.
- ✦ Las Paletas, gourmet popsicles, Nashville, Tenn.
- ✦ Rock City and Lookout Mountain, Ga.
- ✦ Lake Lanier, Atlanta, Ga. If you don't have family there, camp at Bald Ridge Campgrounds right on Lake Lanier.
- ✦ Charlotte, N.C.
- ✦ Colonial Williamsburg, Va.
- ✦ Washington, D.C.
- ✦ Hershey, Pa.
- ✦ Lake Onandaga near Syracuse, N.Y.
- ✦ The Maid of The Mist boat ride and a side trip to Niagara On the Lake, Horseshoe Falls, Ontario, Canada
- ✦ Cincinnati
- ✦ Toledo, Ohio



Salt Museum, Liverpool, N.Y. was one stop on the trip.

Spencer checks out Williamsburg, Va. (below); The Pork, Peanut and Pine Festival at the Chippokes Plantation in Surry, Va. (bottom).



**I treasured every second of our trip knowing I'd snuck it in just before my coolness expired, and grabbed as many moments as I could.**

much time at home with a toddler. Mommy just needed to drive around alone for a week without Barney blasting in the background — so she did. I ended up going fly fishing, hanging out in Nashville, reading several books and driving around lost a lot.

With that in mind, acquiring a guide seemed like a pretty good idea. I spent a few evenings reading it, fantasizing about driving from Key West to Maine or doing something goofy like visiting The Giant Ball of Twine, and then it joined the stack of other ideas that only exist in the form of books on my nightstand, lacking the timing or gumption to be fully executed.

So I caught myself by surprise in suggesting the road trip to my son. He caught me by surprise in thinking it was a great idea. My husband would be traveling much of the summer on business anyway so there seemed to be little reason not to go for it.

It started out as a “down and back” plan: Seeing some sights on the way down to my parents’ house in Georgia and heading back after a week or so. Of course we’d stop at my sister’s B & B in Paducah, Ky., the halfway point.

But then other ideas started to crop up. Since you’re down there, might as well drive four more hours to Charlotte, N.C. where we have friends. And if you are going that far, why not an extra six up to D.C.? Heck, all those museums are just free entertainment. And if you are going to be over that way there’s Colonial Williamsburg. He’s a great age for that. This logic went

on and on until I had designed a circuitous route starting in Mason City and making a big loop that included Hershey, Pa. (only a few hours from D.C., you know.) Oh, and Canada.

In the planning phase, the trip just seemed to grow and grow. So did the excitement. And my husband’s apprehension that all these educational experiences were going to cost more than a few weeks away at camp. Four weeks on the road were planned.

And that is when I did what moms do best — find a way to



Keith Lanpher Photography, Virginia Tourism Corporation



Photo courtesy of The Lewis and Clark Historic Site

pay for it. We packed camping gear, called friends along the way to ask if we could stay the night on our way through town, downloaded coupons and hopped on Priceline.com. Like anything, if you are willing to do the legwork, you can make it happen.

Of course the best part was knowing I'd have my son as a virtual hostage for a month on the road. OK – I didn't call him a hostage directly because that sounds, er... rude? And I didn't call it bonding because we all know, "That's gross, Mom!" But I knew for one month I'd have some great experiences with a kid who wouldn't be a kid much longer.



Photo courtesy of The Lewis and Clark Historic Site

We cooked dinner over campfires, penned a road trip memoir, took photos, got bloated on greasy road food, visited relatives and friends, rode rollercoasters, fished (caught zip!), learned about American history, schlepped through museums, rode the Maid of the Mist and ate half the menu at Tony Packo's in Toledo, Ohio. Neither of us will ever forget swimming in the James River at sunset watching birds swooping down and fish jumping up – a magical moment when the sky turns lavender and God seems to say, "It's just us here. Watch this!"

True confessions: Not every second was magical. There was the day we spent at the Verizon store in Lightfoot, Va. because I dropped my Blackberry in the river. (We're living proof that a woman and child can safely camp in the woods without a cell phone to protect them. And that a swim in one of the nation's most polluted waterways can be survived. Gee, it sure looked pretty.)

There were the endless miles of road, more than 3,000 that sometimes made the tires chant, "You'll never get there." Plus, the car started to have a certain "air." Oh, and Capt. Kirk's Future Birthplace was a bit of a bust ... but most people would probably figure that before driving 100 miles out of the way.

Even still I treasured every second of our trip knowing I'd snuck in just before my coolness expired and grabbed as many moments as I could. I asked my son if he'd like to drive out to Seattle this year by way of Cody, Wyo., the Badlands and Portland, Ore. He didn't take more than a minute to consider the offer. "Nope, I think I'll go to camp."



Photo courtesy of Pere Marquette Lodge

## If you go ...

### Lewis and Clark State Historic Site:

One Lewis and Clark Trail  
Hartford, IL 62048  
618-251-5811  
www.campdubois.com

### Mary Jane Inn:

502 N. Sixth St.  
Paducah, KY 42001  
270-443-5316  
www.themaryjaneinn.com

### Tony Packo's:

1902 Front St.  
Toledo, OH 43605  
www.tonypacko.com

### Pere Marquette Lodge and Conference Center

Illinois Rout 100 – The Great River Road  
A National Scenic Byway  
13653 Lodge Blvd.  
Grafton, IL 62037  
618-786-2331

### Hershey Park

100 W. Hershey Park Drive  
Hershey, PA 17033  
1-800-HERSHEY  
www.HersheyPark.com

### Hershey Museum

63 W. Chocolate Ave.  
Hershey, PA 17033  
HersheyMuseum.org

### Lookout Mountain - Rock City

1400 Patten Road  
Lookout Mountain, GA 30750  
www.seerockcity.com

### Chippokes Plantation State Park

695 Chippokes Park Rd.  
Surry, VA 23883  
757-294-3728  
www.dcr.virginia.gov

### Niagara Falls - Horseshoe Falls

www.niagaraparks.com  
www.niagara-usa.com