



CAPE COD CERTIFIED

CAPE COD DAY TRIPS WITH KIDS

# Free Cape Cod Family Day: Splash Pad to Tidal Creek Paddle

A free field guide from the people who actually live here.



This is a full-day itinerary for families with kids roughly ages 2–12: a genuine, locally-known combination of free and low-cost activities that doesn't require reservations, a car ferry, or a \$200 activity budget.

Total cost for a family of four, conservatively managed: \$0–60 depending on whether you bring your own kayaks or rent.

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## Why This Combo Works

The Sandy Pond Splash Pad in West Yarmouth and a tidal creek paddle (Scorton Creek in Sandwich/Barnstable is the primary recommendation, Bass River as a backup) hit two completely different sensory experiences in a single day. The splash pad is pure kid chaos — water jets, sunscreen, other kids, happy noise. The tidal creek is quiet, slow, and wild in a way that surprises families who expect Cape Cod to be crowded everywhere.

Between them: a casual lunch at a local spot on Route 6A or Route 28.

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## Stop 1: Sandy Pond Splash Pad — West Yarmouth

**What it is:** A free-admission ground-level splash pad adjacent to Sandy Pond, operated by Yarmouth Parks and Recreation. Water jets, spray features, and a zero-depth entry area designed for young children.

**Best for:** Ages 2–8 (the splash pad's primary sweet spot), though older kids enjoy it too.

**When to arrive:** 9:00–9:30 AM to get parking and a good setup spot before peak-morning crowds. The splash pad opens at 9:00 AM (verify current hours with Yarmouth Parks and Recreation before visiting).

**Parking:** Sandy Pond has a parking lot with a non-resident daily fee. Approximate cost: \$15–20. Arrive early; the lot fills on hot summer mornings.

**What to bring:** - Change of clothes for every kid (they will be soaked within five minutes) - Sunscreen applied before arrival — there's minimal shade - Snacks and water — no concession stand at the splash pad itself - A dry bag or plastic bin for wet clothes afterward - A small towel per child

**Plan for:** 1.5–2 hours at the splash pad. Most families find that by 10:30–11:00 AM, kids are ready for food and a change of scene.

**Note:** Splash pad admission itself is free. You pay for parking.

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## Transition: Quick Lunch on Route 6A or Route 28

After Sandy Pond, you're heading northwest toward Sandwich and Scorton Creek. The Route 6A corridor between Yarmouth and Sandwich has several family-friendly lunch options.

**Recommended approach:** - Grab sandwiches to-go and find a pull-off or picnic table on 6A - Alternatively, drive-through or counter service at a local deli in Sandwich

**Why not sit-down:** With damp, sand-covered kids in tow, a counter-service or take-away lunch is more practical and faster. Save the sit-down restaurant for evening.

**Budget:** \$15–25 for a family of four with a take-away lunch.

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## Stop 2: Scorton Creek — Sandwich/Barnstable

**What it is:** A tidal creek running through the Sandwich/Barnstable marsh system, draining into Barnstable Harbor and Cape Cod Bay. One of the most beautiful and accessible tidal paddle routes on the Upper Cape.

**Why it works for families:** - Flat water — no waves, no open ocean, very manageable for kids in a tandem **kayaking** or canoe - Wildlife is present and visible: great blue herons, snowy egrets, osprey, and (in the right season) harbor seals near the outlet - The creek winds through tall marsh grass — the “disappearing into nature” experience that kids remember - The tidal current aids paddling in both directions if you time it right (incoming tide going up, outgoing tide coming back)

**Access:** There is a public put-in near Scorton Creek. Confirm current access point and any parking requirements before visiting — access and signage at tidal creek launch points can change.

**If you have your own kayak or canoe:** This is the genuinely free option. Load up, launch from the public access point, paddle for 1–2 hours, return.

**If you need to rent:** Several outfitters on the Upper Cape offer kayak rentals. For a family of four over a 2-hour rental, budget approximately \$90–\$130 depending on the outfitter and equipment (tandem kayaks, possible trailer for young kids). Confirm which outfitters offer access near Scorton Creek or provide drop-and-go service.

**Tides matter:** Check the tide chart before going. An incoming tide in the afternoon creates a helpful current going up the creek — you paddle in on the tide and drift back on the ebb. Check a local tide chart for Sandwich Harbor before you go.

**What to bring:** - Life jackets (PFDs) for every child — required by law for kids under 13 in Massachusetts - Water shoes or sandals with a back strap (flip-flops come off in the water) - Sunscreen - A dry bag for phones and keys - Binoculars if you have them — herons and osprey are a reliable sight

**Plan for:** 1.5–2.5 hours on the water depending on ages and energy.

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## Tidal Creeks vs. Ocean Beaches: Why This Works for Young Kids

Ocean beaches are magnificent but demanding for young children — waves, rip currents, and the constant vigilance required. Tidal creeks offer a completely different experience:

- Kids can trail hands in the water safely
- The scale is manageable — you’re never far from shore
- Wildlife sightings are close and frequent
- The physical demand is low enough that a 4-year-old can genuinely participate
- Post-paddle, kids are calm and often exhausted in the best possible way

For families with a wide age range (say, a 3-year-old and an 8-year-old), a tidal creek paddle works when an ocean beach doesn’t.

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## The Full Day Timeline

| Time           | Activity                                     |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------|
| 9:00–10:30 AM  | Sandy Pond Splash Pad, West Yarmouth         |
| 10:30–11:00 AM | Pack up, change clothes, load car            |
| 11:00–11:45 AM | Drive toward Sandwich; grab lunch            |
| 12:00–1:00 PM  | Lunch and decompress                         |
| 1:00–1:30 PM   | Drive to Scorton Creek put-in; unload kayaks |
| 1:30–3:30 PM   | Paddle Scorton Creek                         |
| 3:30–4:00 PM   | Load up; rinse gear; head back               |
| Evening        | Dinner in Sandwich or Hyannis; early bedtime |

## Backup Option: Bass River, South Yarmouth

If Scorton Creek access is not available or outfitter logistics don't work out, Bass River in South Yarmouth is a comparable tidal creek experience closer to Yarmouth. Rental options exist in the Bass River area. Same family-friendly characteristics — flat water, wildlife, marsh habitat.

### ◆ THINGS TO DO

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