

Tallahassee

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# Viva la Historia!

## Watch History Come to Life



BY TRICIA DELANEY

“Slow and easy,” the Spanish soldier instructs. The hand-fletched arrow zips straight up, the dart from the atl-atl buries itself in the ground yards away, the blacksmith’s hammer rings on glowing iron, and the mule plods a slow circle around children patiently waiting for a sample of sugarcane juice. Welcome to history lived in the first person, replacing the dry-as-dust history class from your youth. Time travel is easy in Tallahassee where our local museums and historical sites open doors into the past, inviting kids to step right through.



Begin the journey at Mission San Luis, a unique Living History site offering a glimpse into life in a 17th-century Spanish mission and Apalachee Indian village. The fort, Spanish Deputy Governor’s house, enormous palmetto-thatched Apalachee council house, and other structures were excavated and reconstructed on site. You won’t find a “look-but-don’t-touch museum” but costumed interpreters who invite kids to stroke animal pelts in the council house, sit down at the soldier’s mess and investigate the beans and hardtack

they ate, even to handle the weaponry (parental



permission required, of course). Shooting a bow or using the native atl-atl appeals even to adults, and the ability to clean a cannon or load a flintlock could come in handy someday. Homeschoolers should look into the online lesson plans.

The first Saturday of every month offers the Colonial Crafts program from noon to 2, where children can make and take traditional crafts such as animal masks (August 6), corn husk dolls, or painted Majolica tiles. Other special events with definite kid-appeal are the Blessing of the Animals in October, Giving Thanks in November with

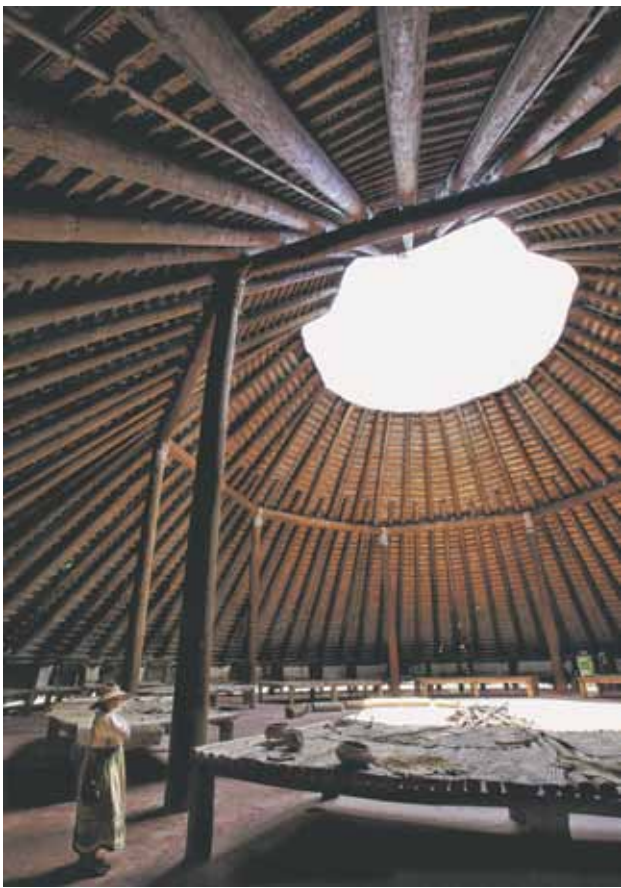
17th century food demonstrations (eat your heart out, Food Network!), and the December Commemorative Mass, where kids in period costume participate in Los Posadas, the journey of the Holy Family to Bethlehem. That

event concludes

with the breaking of a piñata.







Take history home with a trip to the gift shop. Your kids won't find mass-produced trinkets here, but instead reproduction pewter jacks, Spanish doubloons, treasure maps, drop spindles for spinning fleece, rope sandals, Indian flutes, and other reasonably priced souvenirs. Look for the made-on-site ironware and the handmade paper greeting cards with native flower seeds embedded in the paper. Just plant the card – how cool is that?

The Tallahassee Museum welcomes children into the past with the 1880's Big Bend Farm, complete with authentic buildings transported from around the




area – and plenty of animals. Skills such as candle-dipping and crochet are taught at the farm workshops, or try the preschool and Critter classes (includes a VPK program). Fall Farm Day, November 5, offers a typical harvest day, complete with costumed farm residents and sugarcane crushed by mule and boiled down to syrup onsite.

Ask about A Day on the Big Bend Farm, where children can dress in period clothing and participate in the everyday chores, food, and activities of an 19th century farm. Or take just a taste at the annual Pioneer Breakfast. Don't forget to stop by the Discovery Center for hands-on fun, and a walk through

the vintage caboose is a rail journey to another century.

You can visit the Tallahassee Museum for free on September 24, Smithsonian Museum Day.

The Museum of Florida History takes visitors way back to prehistoric times, beginning with impressive fossil mastodons and winds its way through Florida culture, including Florida's role in the Second World War. The Florida History Shop in the bottom level of the R. A. Gray Building offers gifts that serve as reminders of items displayed in the museum collections and other Florida-themed merchandise.

Happy time traveling! 

## History Comes Alive

Looking for more ways to bring history to life for your kids?

### Interact at a reenactment:

Costumed military reenactments such as Mission San Luis' Military Muster, demonstrations at the Tallahassee Museum, or the Confederate victory at the Battle of Natural Bridge give kids a clearer view of the scope of history despite the gunpowder haze – and the costumes are vivid replications of the real things.

**Scavenge a site:** A scavenger hunt is a terrific incentive to pay attention to exhibits – particularly if it includes a few bucks to blow at the gift shop as a prize. Do a little homework online beforehand and print a list of items to locate, such as Lawton Chiles' boots, a Seminole doll, and the Pork Chop Gang at the Florida Historic Capitol Museum.

### Put a little "story" back in "history":

Create a period character and take turns relating what happens to him as you investigate exhibits. An 8-year-old Native American meets the Spanish Deputy Governor's child. How do they live? What games do they play together?

**Play pretend:** Encourage this natural tendency with a little coaching – "Pretend you live in this house. Where do you sleep? What chores do you do? Show me!"