



Make the December holidays FUN!

The long December holidays are looming ahead, and as a mother of a very busy 4-year old, I know how daunting it can be when you're trying to think of affordable options to entertain your little ones, and maintain your sanity. In Pinelands, we are lucky enough to have kids play places, and restaurants with play areas, but this does not suit everyone's budget, particularly long term... and let's be real, we all feel the Mom-guilt if there's a ridiculous abundance of screen time (although trust me – no judgment here.) So here are just a few budget-friendly ideas to not only keep them busy, but hopefully create some lasting memories, and some fun learning opportunities as well.

1. PLAYDATES

I'm sure most of you do this already. Playdates keep the kids busy and happy, and allow them to practice some essential social and friendship building skills. If you have a tight-knit group of friends, you could even organize within your group to take turns hosting the playdate, giving you an opportunity to enjoy some rest yourself.

2. NATURE EXPLORATION

This is one of my favourite activities to do with my family. We are so spoiled for choice in Cape Town and it's completely free. We make each outing an adventure by trying to find new places we haven't visited before, even if it means a bit of a drive. Tokai Forest, Upper Liesbeek River Garden, Newlands Forest, Liesbeek Road Tractor Park, Alphen Trail – the list is endless! Exploring and being outdoors is such a great chance for children to naturally discover the world around them. Collect leaves, twigs and rocks (if you're allowed) and take them home to count, sort and graph to make it into even more of a learning activity. Observing insects or going on a scavenger hunt along the way will keep your child interested and entertained. Pack a picnic, or check ahead of time which of these places allow bikes or pets to add to the fun!

3. ARTS AND CRAFTS

This does not need to be an expensive activity with a myriad of pricey paints and paper. Recycling in this case is your friend and you'll more than likely be able to use what you have at home anyway. For example use diluted food colouring as a dye alternative, break open those large boxed deliveries or even a cereal box for large card to work on, keep empty toilet rolls, bring scrap paper from work, and gather all the glue, crayons and crafty items you have around the house. Anything can be your child's canvas – and hopefully keep them away from the walls!

Google crafty ideas online or brainstorm ideas with your child to foster creativity even more.

4. LIBRARY VISITS

I may be biased but I really think we have one of the most wonderful libraries in Pinelands. The staff are so friendly and helpful and the library itself often offers story-times, and sometimes even holiday activities. Keep an eye on the Pinelands Library doors and notice boards to see what they may have planned. If you don't have a library card for yourself or your child – now is the time to get one!

5. INDOOR OBSTACLE COURSES

We know in Cape Town that no matter the season, rainy days can creep up on you at any moment. This is a tricky time for those of us who have very busy ones like mine. As mentioned, we have a few lovely indoor play areas nearby, but if the budget is tight, why not create your own play place at home? Move the furniture around and bring in items from other rooms to create a fun indoor obstacle course. Use couches to make tunnels, masking tape for balance beams and pillows for a soft surface to roll or crawl over. We all know the benefits of moving our bodies, so your child will be working on a variety of skills while having a blast – and who says you can't take the fun outside if the weather is good.



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6. SCIENCE EXPERIMENTS

One of my favourite times of the year is when I do science experiments with my class. There are so many simple and easy experiments to find online that use everyday household items. These activities engage your child's natural curiosity so well, and I have found that they also seem to awaken a new found love for learning in each child as they watch these experiments unfold and try to understand them. Take the time to explain the processes to your child in a fun and simple way – they pick up and understand more than you think.

7. BAKING

Get those pre-Maths skills working with fun baking activities at home. Let your child measure, weigh and mix ingredients, and let them get crafty with the decorating. Budget Tip: Why not use some of these home-baked items as Christmas gifts for friends and family. Your child could craft and create their own labels. Don't forget to keep a few items aside for you and your child to test. Quality assurance is important.

8. MOVIE NIGHTS

An oldie but a goodie. I'm all for screen time that includes the whole family, turning it into quality time. Make it even more exciting by blocking out windows, designing your own movie tickets, and making popcorn together beforehand. Add to the luxury by dragging mattresses into the TV room or even making bed-sheet forts if that is an option. I recommend that you do some thorough research before choosing a new film to ensure it is age-appropriate for the whole family.

Some parents may find the longer holiday's overwhelming, but with a little bit of planning, and a good dose of flexibility and spontaneity, I truly believe the holidays can be a relaxing and fun bonding time for the whole family, without breaking the bank. It's the simple things in life that bring the most pleasure, and create the most long-lasting memories. ■