



Lake of the Ozarks Convention and Visitor Bureau • c/o TBMG • 330-B East High Street • Jefferson City, MO 65101  
Phone 800-544-8474 or 573-636-8282 • Fax 573-635-8494 • Website [www.funlake.com](http://www.funlake.com) • E-mail [tbmg00sk@aol.com](mailto:tbm00sk@aol.com)

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## Variety of Attractions Focus on Family Fun at Central Missouri's Lake of the Ozarks

**LAKE OF THE OZARKS, MO.** – If you're looking for a vacation destination with a variety of great family attractions, take a look at Central Missouri's Lake of the Ozarks. For fun on or off the water, the Lake area offers non-stop activities for kids from 3 to 93, including mini-golf, go-carts, show caves, arcades, water parks, scenic cruises, music and more.

### **Wild Waterparks, Exciting Arcades**

Opened in 1988, **Big Surf Waterpark**, between Osage Beach and Camdenton, attracts about 100,000 visitors a year, says Darin Keim, general manager. The lushly landscaped 27-acre park includes water rides, slides and play areas. The 375,000-gallon Wave Pool with four-and-a-half-foot waves probably is our most popular attraction," Keim says. "The Space Bowl, according to our surveys." Big Surf's Space Bowl slide was the first slide of its kind in the United States, Keim says. "It's a big, enclosed red and blue tube in which you spin around at a pretty fast speed then drop two feet into eight feet of water."

Another favorite is Big Surf's newest addition, Zambezi Falls, truly designed for the thrill-seeker. The attraction is four stories tall and riders experience speeds of up to 28 miles per hour. "It's definitely extreme," Keim says. In 11 seconds riders experience free-fall, negative Gs and a feeling of weightlessness as they slide over a thin sheet of a single or double tube down one side and up the other. Other attractions include Raging Rapids and Flumes, the Nile Lazy River and Tropical Splash Island for kids age 6 and under.

The park recently added new "dry" activities areas for sand volleyball, outdoor billiards, horseshoes and shuffleboard, kids' crafts, and more. Other new features include strolling entertainers like magicians and balloon sculptors, plus shows and a resident DJ.

Next door, **Big Shot Family Action Park** is a nine-acre playground featuring mini-golf, turbo go-karts, batting cages, kiddie rides and bumper boats. Families can purchase passes to visit one or both parks. Area lodging facilities offer a variety of value-priced packages that include accommodations and park passes.

**Timber Falls Waterpark** at Tan-Tar-A Resort opened in 2003. Its main attraction is the three-story "Ozark wilder tree house complete with suspension bridges, web crawls and water blasters – topped with a six-foot-wide wooden platform that tips over about every two minutes and spills out 700 gallons of water. Visitors also scream with delight over Timber Falls' 600-plus feet of water slides, including two that actually wind outside the building then back in before dropping sliders into the pool.

Other highlights include an activity pool with water basketball and other games, a 21-seat whirlpool and a Lazy R relaxing tube floating. Locker rooms, seating and a full range of concessions also are available.

Also at Tan-Tar-A Resort is the **Bears Den Arcade**, featuring state-of-the-art video games, classic favorites and

in electronic simulators. Nearby are a bowling alley and billiards.

More indoor fun can be found at **Miner Mike's Family Fun Center and Buster's**. This 12,000 sq. ft., atmospheric mining town contains games geared toward older children and adults, such as bumper cars, the Miner's Maze, Ferris wheel, runaway mine train and more. Kids of all ages will spend happy hours at Buster's, featuring more than \$1 in the latest high-tech games and simulators that let you race a stock car, fight a Galaxian battle, ride a Harley-Davidson wave-runner and more. In-between the action, families can relax at the Longbranch Saloon.

The Lake's oldest arcade, the **Rebel Arcade**, opened in 1972. "We have the cheapest skee ball in the United States," says owner Keith Blankenship. That helps kids rack up prize tickets faster to win treasures from plastic smiley-face pinball and video games. None of them is state-of-the-art but Blankenship doesn't worry about keeping up with technology. "A lot of them are classic games I actually played when I was younger, like Pac-Man and Mario Brothers," he says: "today aren't familiar with these games but when they play them they love them." And since older games cost less to purchase, Blankenship says families can get a lot more plays for their dollars.

The Rebel Arcade is located at the famed **Bagnell Dam Strip**, about a mile of flea markets, motels, motorcycle shops, restaurants, candle shops, tattoo parlors, snack bars, T-shirt and swimwear shops, Indian jewelry stores, arcades, psychics, batting cages, a merry-go-round and Miss Angie's 1891 Haunted Hotel, complete with scary sounds and bushes. In-between are an increasing number of upscale gift shops and boutiques, including a store just for pampered pooches.

But to generations of visitors, no trip to the Lake of the Ozarks is complete without a stop at that "Strip" institution **Dogpatch**. Opened by Walter Tietmeyer in 1947 and based on Al Capp's comic strip, Dogpatch featured a combination station/souvenir shop, a live snake pit, a lion, piano- and tic-tac-toe-playing chickens and an outhouse featuring a screaming, "Shut that door!" on the plaza area next to store.

Today those "talented" chickens are long gone, but inside the big, bright, well-stocked Dogpatch store are general merchandise families searching for the perfect Lake of the Ozarks gifts and souvenirs. The store is known for its friendly atmosphere and quirky features including the fortune telling machine, elephant skull and "Old Grandpa" the talking hillbilly man.

"We try to keep the old-fashioned atmosphere and nostalgia," says owner Mike Page. "Adults who come to the Strip used to come here as children. Now they're bringing their children and grandchildren to experience what they experienced before."

In addition to the Strip stores, the Lake of the Ozarks offers a wide variety of shopping destinations. One that's popular with families is Missouri's largest brand-name factory outlet center, the 110-store **Osage Beach Premium Outlets** on Highway 54, covering 400,000 square feet on 60 acres. The center features stores like Liz Claiborne, Polo Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, Bombay Outlet, Eddie Bauer, Wilsons Leather Outlet, Gap Outlet, Tommy Hilfiger Company Store, A Borders and 100 more offering 25-65 percent savings every day. There also are several restaurants and a five-screen cinema on-site.

### Show Caves and a Show

The Lake area also is home to three of the state's popular "show caves," where visitors can view Nature's breath-taking underground beauty up close. Just north of Camden, **Bridal Cave** has provided the backdrop for more than 2,000 weddings since the first was held in 1949. Hour-long guided cave tours over well-lit concrete pathways reveal rooms of giant columns, delicate soda straws and massive draperies plus the smooth-as-glass Mystery Lake and rare formations per square foot than any other show cave in the United States. Next to Bridal Cave is Thunder Mountain featuring a visitors center, the area's largest lakeside gift shop, nature trails, an observation tower and picnic grounds. Thunder Mountain Mining Company rock shop offers rocks, minerals and gemstones from around the world.

**Jacob's Cave**, located south of Versailles, is famous for its depth illusions, reflective pools, ceiling sponge-work, prehistoric mastodon and bear bones and the world's largest geode. The mile-long tour also takes visitors past evidence of formation unimaginable, from millions of soda straws, massive stalactites and columns to delicate helictites. There is evidence of six Ice Ages and three earthquakes. On-site is the Novelty & Rock Shop, the largest in the Lake area featuring native Missouri minerals like Mozarkite (the state rock), Northern Missouri geodes, quartz, crystals and a plus jewelry and souvenirs.

The third show cave, **Ozark Caverns**, located inside **Lake of the Ozarks State Park** on Highway 54, is a short but spacious cave that has been open to the public since 1952. "There are two unique features here you won't find in

Lake-area caves or even in this part of Missouri," says Cindy Hall, park naturalist. "First, we do the tours with hand lanterns. People like that because they feel they're doing more wild-type caving. Also the deep showerhead batht deposit is one of just 14 known showerhead formations in the world."

Ozark Caverns tours take visitors past mysterious claw marks left in sediment fills by animals that found shelter thousands of years ago. It's also possible to see four species of salamanders, four species of bats and 16 species of invertebrates that call the cave home. A visitors center offers interpretive exhibits and information about caves and more. The park also has two public beaches, boat launches, hiking trails, horseback riding, naturalist programs and fishing from a dock with crappie beds.

The Lake area's other state park, **Ha Ha Tonka State Park**, is known for the blufftop ruins of an early 20th-century castle built by a prominent Kansas City businessman. In 1942, sparks from one of the castle's fireplaces ignited the structure and within hours the building was destroyed. Only the stark ruins remained, mysterious and brooding atop the bluff.

The park offers other attractions, such as Missouri's premier showcase of karst topography, a honeycomb of tunnel caverns, springs and sinkholes. Visitors also will see one of Missouri's best examples of a savanna, an area where tall grasses and wildflowers flourish in open forests of oak and hickory. Twelve hiking trails offer 16 miles of opportunity to explore this popular park which also has several picnic areas, fishing, boat docks and interpretive programs throughout the summer.

For a different kind of show, the **Main Street Music Hall** at The Landing on Main Street offers a contemporary take on the traditional live opra show. Now in its 14th season, the two-hour show offers current and classic country, gospel and patriotic songs plus a nostalgic look back at songs from the 1940s through today. Families also are sure to enjoy the hilarious comedy of Gabby Gumm.

### **Boats, Cars and (Golf) Clubs**

What's a visit to a lake without a boat ride? If you don't have your own, you can rent a motorboat, pontoon and power watercraft from a variety of marinas and lodging facilities throughout the Lake area. Or, you can enjoy a relaxing cruise on one of the Lake's excursion boats. Located at the Kirkwood Lodge, the 150-passenger **Celebration** is the Lake's largest and most luxurious climate-controlled motor yacht, offering two-hour, narrated lunch and dinner cruises. And the **T Island**, a 75-foot yacht docked at The Lodge of Four Seasons, also offers leisurely narrated tours around the Lake.

For those who like a faster pace, the **Lake Ozark Speedway** in Eldon is the place for late-model, street stock, mini and sprint-car races every Saturday night.

The Lake also is home to several unique miniature golf courses. **Sugar Creek** is known for its two challenging, colorful and shady 18-hole courses. At **Putt 'n Stuff** you'll also find two 18-hole courses plus bumper cars and go-karts. And at **Pirate's Cove** families will enter a world of 18th century buccaneers complete with mountain caves, footbridges and cascading waterfalls on two fun courses.

And there's more! Explore the Lake area's fascinating historical museums, the inspiring Mary, Mother of the Church Shrine in Laurie, the fun and educational Orion Science Center in Camdenton and other great family attractions.

For more information on family-friendly Lake attractions, and to get the facts on Lake-area lodging, dining, activities and events, contact the Lake of the Ozarks Convention and Visitor Bureau at **800-FUN-LAKE** (386-5253), or visit [www.funlake.com](http://www.funlake.com).