

A Night at the Museum

Checking into the American Museum of Natural History

BY JENNIFER VISHNEVSKY

Imagine roaming the halls of the American Museum of Natural History at night. Then imagine curling up in bed next to an exhibit. Well, you can stop imagining. While the animals don't come to life after dark, families can now have their own "Night at the Museum."

It may be an unlikely place for lodging, but select museums and zoos are now offering overnight accommodations for visitors with children. New this year, a sleepover program at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in New York City allows families with children ages 8 to 12 to explore the museum when the lights go out.

"The museum's new sleepover program allows families to experience together an intimate adventure of discovery, unlike anything else," said Ellen V. Futter, president of AMNH, in a press release.

The sleepover program begins at 5:45 p.m. and ends at 9:00 a.m. the next morning. Visitors must bring a sleeping bag and pillow, and the program provides cots for all participants. Guests are also encouraged to bring a toothbrush, toothpaste, washcloth and comfortable sleeping clothes. Restroom facilities are available throughout the museum for guests to change into their sleeping clothes.

The overnight experience starts when the doors close and the lights dim, as each family or group heads out with flashlights in search of adventure. After check-in and orientation in the Kaufmann Theater, guides are on hand to answer questions as



each family openly explores the lower level of the museum.

Participants can roam on self-guided flashlight adventures through the museum. Some of the notable exhibits are the herd of wild bison in the dark, and the looming skeleton of a 65 million-year-old *Tyrannosaurus rex*. Guests can stare down a herd of wild buffalo in the Hall of North American Mammals or venture into the Age of Dinosaurs. In the Hayden Planetarium, guests can watch entire galaxies collide.

As it gets later and darker, guests can explore fossils by flashlight in the dinosaur halls. After a solar system map activity,

guests head to the Cosmic Collisions space show, narrated by Robert Redford.

In addition to seeing the exhibits after the museum's closing, visitors are also treated to an evening snack and breakfast. No outside food is permitted, but vending machines are available.

Lights are out at midnight, when visitors unroll their sleeping bags next to the dolphins or under the belly of the beloved 94-foot-long blue whale in the Milstein Hall of Ocean Life.

At \$79 per person, this may be the most inexpensive way to spend the night in Manhattan.