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HI THERE!

Hello! I'm so excited that you're considering having a birthday party, baby shower or some other party at a park! A park might just be the perfect venue for your event, and I look forward to helping you plan it. There are definitely a few things you'll want to consider as you plan, and there are several ways I can help you save time and money in this process.

I've planned (and attended) multiple events at parks, and I've picked up a few tricks along the way. This book is packed with lots of useful information, helpful tips and comprehensive checklists (I love checklists, and I share them at the end!).

In 2019, I started a blog all about [Parks in San Diego](#). As a part of it, I researched every park (over 500!) and created a [searchable database](#) you can use to find your perfect park! I think that it's helpful for just a regular day at the park, but when planning an event it's essential. If you want a park with [barbecues](#) or [basketball courts](#), I got ya. I even provided the contact information for park permits and reservations, if it was available.

Let's start with step number one... figuring out if having your event at a park is what you want to do!



IS A PARK PARTY RIGHT FOR YOU?

For my daughter's first birthday party, I knew I wanted to have a party at a park because I wanted to invite all of our friends and family. I've always loved planning parties and for my first big event as a new mom, I also wanted to go "all out" for this event. I went on Pinterest and found beautifully decorated park gazebos and lots of special touches. However, much of what I planned didn't happen because life got in the way. At the party, I watched as the few decorations I did make blew around the park until I ultimately stuffed them back in boxes. I learned that when it comes to a park party, **simpler is better**.

Everybody is different and the parties they host are just as varied. Even if you're typically a Pinterest Mom, you might be in a season of life when you need to simplify - and that's okay! As you read through these points, ask yourself if they apply to you. By the end, you should have an idea if hosting a party at a park is for you.

Here are some things to consider:

Clean-up

- You don't have to worry about red frosting getting on your carpet or cushions.

Cost

- You can have an event for less than 50 people at any park in San Diego for free, but you might consider reserving space (I discuss this later in the book) and that could be between \$25 and \$100 or more.
- Generally, I'd say a party at a park is an inexpensive option. But, as with anything, the total cost for your party depends on a lot of things: the type of food you serve, anything extra you do (I've been to some kids parties that were fancier than my wedding!), if you end up renting anything... if you go a little nuts with your event, it might be more expensive than hosting it at your house.

Space

- If your house isn't big enough to host your entire family, parks offer lots of space (and parking!) for everyone.

Guest List

- There's likely plenty of space at the park for your child(ren)'s friends to bring their siblings - the more the merrier! The only limits are:
 - What you're paying for food/beverages and favors per guest
 - Any rules the park or your permit might have for capacity (typically, 50 people)

Entertainment

- Entertainment is built-in when you have a party at the park... even if you've been to the park a million times before, your kids likely haven't been there with all their friends at once!

Weather

- We have nice weather most of the time in San Diego, but if it does rain the day of your party you may need to cancel or reschedule. Consider having a back-up plan.

Schlepping

- You will have to bring everything you need to the park and take back (along with all the gifts). I recommend using large storage containers (if you have them) or laundry baskets. A cart is helpful too.
- Depending on the park, this might include bringing tables, chairs and shade structures - which certainly makes a party at the park less easy-peasy.

Sharing

- You're in a public space so there may be some things that come up that are out of your control – maybe you get to the park to find other people have already grabbed all the tables. We reserved the gazebo at our local (small) park and arrived to find somebody setting up for their own party. Since we had reserved the space, we asked them nicely to clear out (which they did), but I'm sure they were disappointed to have to move to a smaller shade structure with only one table. Also, our party started 30 minutes before theirs and our guests filled the parking lot, which meant their guests had to park up the street. I talk about the importance of picking the best park in the next section.

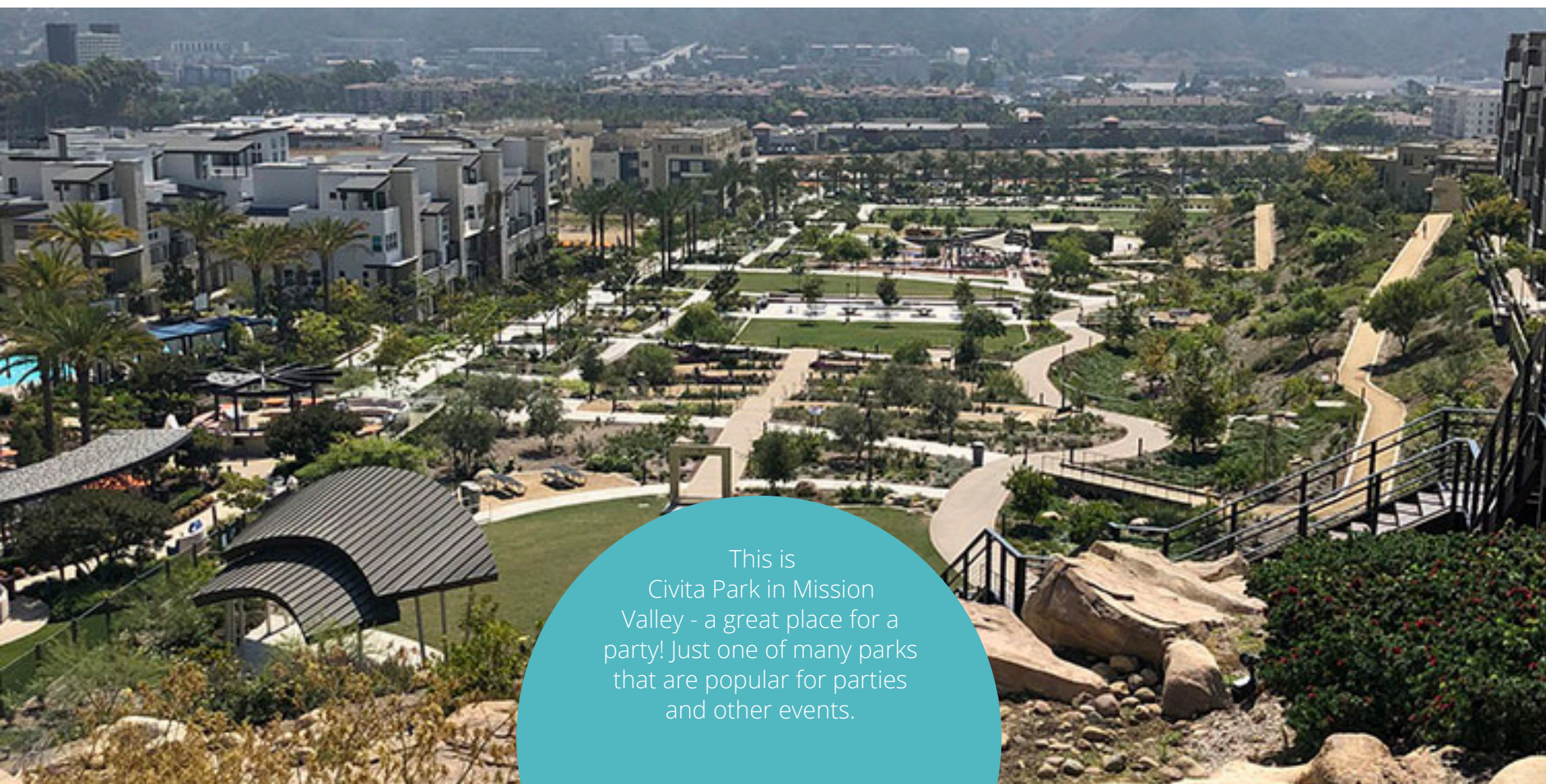
Logistics

- As previously mentioned, everything you need for your party at a park will need to be brought there. If you prefer to set-up the night before (or slowly in days leading up to the event), then hosting at your home might work better for you.

Decorations

- The biggest takeaway that I want to share with this guide is that you really don't need to decorate much for a party at a park. I talk about this more later in the book, but if you're wanting a Pinterest perfect party then you might not want to go with a park party. Everybody is different and however you wanna party is great! Some years, I've wanted to stay up late making decorations and special birthday touches. Other years, I've opted to do a simple park party with pizza delivery. Evaluate what you are wanting for this party and be honest with yourself.

If you're now sold on a park party, that's great! I hope that this guide and my park directory are helpful. I would love to hear from you if you have additional questions or want to share anything: parksinsandiego@gmail.com



This is
Civita Park in Mission
Valley - a great place for a
party! Just one of many parks
that are popular for parties
and other events.



2

PICK YOUR PARK



PICK YOUR PARK

You might already have a park in mind for your party, but I'd encourage you to read this section anyway because there might be something you haven't considered - for example, the park you want might have an amazing playground, but doesn't have restrooms (a party "must have"). If you don't have a park in mind, then this section will help you narrow down the more than 500 parks in San Diego to find the perfect one for your party. You might also find some cool parks to check out along the way!

If you aren't already familiar with my parks database on ParksInSanDiego.com, then I encourage you to check it out! You can search by feature, location and category to find the best park for your party. Based on the vision of your party, there are several features that you might want to have (or not have) - and the free database on my webpage is the best resource for combing through them all!

At a minimum, the two things a park needs to have to be a good option for your party are:

- [Restrooms](#)
- Parking

There are several beautiful parks with amazing playgrounds where you might want to host a party, but that don't have bathroom facilities or a parking lot (or it has only a tiny parking lot). Two parks that come to mind are Ranch Mission Canyon and Hoyt Park. You don't want guests to need to leave to go the restroom because they had a few cups of your special party punch. You also don't want guests to miss most of the party because there was nowhere to park.

Some other park features you might want to consider for your party are:

Playground: If you're hosting a wedding or 40th birthday party at a park, you might not consider a playground to be a necessity. I would say it's not even a requirement for a kids party, but it definitely makes a park more appealing. You can find parks [without playgrounds here](#) and parks [with playgrounds here](#).

Barbecues: If you plan on cooking up some hamburgers and hot dogs, then you might be looking for [parks with barbecues](#) or even [deluxe barbecues](#).

Sports Facilities: There are so many fun features in parks that you might want, like [horseshoes](#), [bocce ball](#), [basketball](#), a [skate park](#) or even [parkour](#)!

Alcohol ban: We're not big drinkers, but when we were planning our daughter's first birthday party we knew we wanted beer and wine so we could toast with our friends for having made it a year! Not every park allows alcohol ([these parks allow alcohol](#)) and some parks have very strict rules about it. If you have a specific park in mind, you can see the exact policy for alcohol at that park in the database. Keep in mind, glass containers are never allowed.

Additional Features: For any other features you might like for your party park, [check out this page](#). Once you do a search, you can refine it by selecting other features or location.

TO RESERVE OR NOT TO RESERVE

Several parks in San Diego can be reserved through the City of San Diego, the County of San Diego or through the local Parks and Rec department (depending on the park). Getting a permit means that you have the legal right to use the space and fees range from \$25 to more than \$100.

You can find [all the parks that can be reserved here](#), and the contact information for reserving each park is on each park's page.



If you're planning on serving barbecue, you might want to find a park with built-in barbecues - or even deluxe barbecues (like the one pictured above). You can find parks with barbecues or deluxe barbecues on parksinsandiego.com

Benefits of Reserving:

- The space is yours, either for the whole day or the allotted time.
- You don't have to get to the park early to claim your desired spot.

Cons to Reserving:

- There is an added expense.
- If you have to cancel for a reason other than weather, you likely cannot get a full refund (some parks offer partial refunds, depending on how close to the party you cancel).

Some tips if you reserve:

- **Know who to call:** To find out how to reserve a specific park, go to my [parks database](#). If reservation information is available, I've put it on the park page.
- **Ask how many permits they grant each day:** In Scripps Ranch, they only do one permit per park per day, so you can rent for the minimum amount of time (2 hours – starting 30 minutes before guests arrive) and have the facilities for as long as you want (this saved me \$30 on my permit!). Some parks permit multiple events per day, which is good to know because if your permit is until 2:00, that might mean that another party is starting at 2:30 and you need to clear out!

Some tips if you do not reserve:

- **Call ahead:** If you're having your party at a park that can be reserved, call the reservation number a day or so before so you can see if anybody has it reserved (at that time). You can find the number to call by looking up the park in [my database](#).
- **Get to the park early:** if you choose a popular park, you might want to get there *very* early. This might be a good task for a grandparent or someone who is an early riser.
- **Have a back-up:** it would be good to have access to some tables and chairs, and maybe also a pop-up canopy, in case you get to the park and all gazebos/tables have people at them. Unless it's a very popular park, you'll likely only need a general idea of what you would do if there isn't an open picnic table.



3

DECORATIONS

DECORATIONS

You might not realize just how windy it can get outside (even on calm days) until you have banners, streamers and balloons (that you lovingly put up) being thrown around the park from the wind. I hope that you get many time-saving and money-saving takeaways from this book, but the biggest one is this: you do not need to do much for decoration when you have a party at a park! Please make this your mantra as you plan this event: “I do not need to do much for decorations for this party.” Parks are naturally beautiful! It’s hard to compete with that anyway :)

With a few exceptions, any decorations you put up should also serve a function. I’ll provide some examples:

Table Coverings: I’m a fan of using actual tablecloths, but I’ve come to collect various tablecloths over the years so this is easy for me. Do what is easy for you! Whether you use plastic, vinyl or linen tablecloths, they will be both decorative and functional. If you’re using something lightweight, be sure to get tablecloth clips or tape them down with heavy duty tape.

Plates and Napkins: you can get plates and napkins in any theme or color (don’t forget cake plates, if you plan to do dessert!).

Piñata: so fun and makes for festive décor! You can get them in any theme and they’re one of those elements that make it a party (not just another day at the park)!

Streamers: about the most you can do to decorate for a party at a park is put up some streamers – anything more (balloons, pictures, banners, those pinwheel things that hang from the ceiling) is going to blow away. Use painters tape and wrap the streamers around the gazebo legs or trees. And, honestly, you can even skip the streamers if you want.

Games and Favors: a simple, fun display for the favors can double as decor, and so can some hula hoops, a bubble machine, or sidewalk chalk (if you have a few minutes, you can even write “Happy Birthday” on the ground near the party site to welcome the guests).

Balloons: balloons are **not allowed** at any park in San Diego, and they get tangled and blow away anyway. Balloons themselves take many years to decompose

(if they decompose at all) and the popped balloons and strings are very dangerous to wildlife. Also, getting balloons for your party is an added hassle – you can’t get them ahead of time (helium balloons deflate in nine hours or less) and they really are more trouble than they’re worth. The only balloons that I suggest using are two or three balloons tied to a fence or tree to help with wayfinding – and I’m not even talking about helium balloons! Just blow up a few balloons and tie them together.

Food Signage and Décor: the cake itself (if you’re doing a cake) can be decoration, and you can dress up a regular cupcake to make it a theme cupcake with a small toy or food pick. You can also have food labels and signs that are on brand – and these all serve a function as well as décor. Food picks are also fun! Just remember that windy can blow these around too, so plan accordingly.

Highchair Decorations: if you are celebrating a first or second birthday party, decorating the highchair is super fun. You can use a small banner for this, streamers, or one of those cute tutus. This, of course, is purely decorative and serves no function - it’s just cute!





4

FOOD, CAKE & DRINKS

4

FOOD, CAKE & DRINKS

The start time you plan for your party will determine how much food you should plan to serve. A party over the lunch (or dinner) hour would mean that a full meal (with cake!) is in order. If you're doing a party between meals (2-4pm, for example) then you can have appetizers and cake. It would also be appropriate to tell guests you're just serving cake to celebrate (but also have something for guests to drink).

I suggest that you go with food that's easy to serve and easy to eat. You can do it yourself or have it catered, or a mix of both! Here are some menu ideas that fall under a few different themes. You can find checklists to each of these menus at the end of the book!

BBQ

I love the smell of barbecue at a park – nothing says “summertime” more than that! If you're going to be barbecuing on-site, [here are all the parks in San Diego that have barbecues](#) (and here are the [deluxe barbecues](#)), and here are the parks that have [hot coal bins](#) if you're going to bring your own grill.

- Hot Dogs/hamburgers
- Beans
- Mac & cheese
- Veggies
- Watermelon

Time-saving tips: cut the watermelon and veggies ahead of time (or just get a tray from Costco). You can order trays of beans and Mac & Cheese so that you don't have to prep.

Sandwiches

Sandwiches are easy (I also include some PB&J for kids who might not like turkey subs). If you have a number of gluten-free guests, it's easy to have a “build your own” set-up so they have an option.

- Sub sandwiches
- Veggies & dip
- Chips

Time-saving tips: sandwich trays are available from sub shops, grocery stores or local delis. There are some DIY options here too, but (unless you already have large party trays), the cost of the ingredients and supplies would come close to just buying a pre-made tray. Cut veggies ahead of time (or get a prepared tray from the store). Individual bags of chips are the way to go for variety and to make them easy to grab.

Pizza

About the easiest option you can have for a party at a park is having pizza delivered to the park. Order the day before (and confirm the morning of) the party.

- Pizza
- Pasta
- Fruit & Veggie trays

Time-saving tips: Stick with 2-3 types of pizza. It's helpful to have signs that indicate pizza selections that you can tape right to the box. You might consider asking the pizza place to cut the pizzas into squares (instead of slices) if you think guests would prefer that. Squares are easier to eat, almost like an appetizer.





It's good to have some kid-friendly snacks on hand, regardless of what you serve. These can be oranges, pouches, yogurts, or any individually packaged thing your kid is into at the moment.

Tacos

Tacos are such a fun option, and probably the most cost-effective if you want to be completely hands-off for the food. You'll likely need to get a permit to have a taco company come to your park party, but they bring EVERYTHING and your guests will be happy. You can also order trays of food from a Taco Shop or Mexican fast food (think Rubios or El Pollo Loco) for a taco party.

- Tacos with all the fixings
- Quesadillas for the kids
- Fruit or Veggies
- Beans and/or Rice

Time-saving tips: Have the tacos set-up in a different location than the fixings (on a nearby table) so that people can move through quickly. Chips and salsa might be a fun option for each of the tables where people are eating. Another fun, similar option is a build-your-own nacho plate bar.

Kid-Friendly Add-ons

For kid parties, I think it's good to have some fruit and veggie pouches, clementine oranges, or yogurts (in tubes). It's something easy that parents can grab quickly in case kids get hangry.

Cake

There are so many options for the main event of any party (cake!) and I think they all have pros and cons... it just depends on what you want! I've included helpful reminders for each of these options in the checklists in the back of this book.

- Sheet cake
- Cupcakes
- Cookies
- Cakepops

Personally, I'm a fan of cupcakes for a park party (just be sure to order enough for everybody). If you have a sheet cake, you'll also need to bring a knife and cake-server, small plates and extra forks... cupcakes are self-contained! But, it's also super fun to have a beautiful cake as the centerpiece to your party so it's up to you.

Ice Cream

Enjoying some ice cream at the park on a nice day sounds so dreamy, doesn't it? And, it's totally possible to serve ice cream at your party without it turning into a big melted mess! [Check out my blog post on how to bring ice cream and ice pops to the park here!](#)

Drinks

I would definitely recommend having water available to guests for your party. You can also have juice boxes, cans of soda, sparkling water, pitchers of lemonade or ice tea... even beer and wine! You'll likely need at least one cooler for drinks, and you'll need to get ice the night before or the morning of the party (or use ice packs, since that might be more convenient). A very simple drink menu would be:

Bottled waters

Juice boxes

Soda: Diet, regular and lemon/lime

Optional: cans of beer / wine

Time-saving tips: load up your coolers with drinks the night before - it's okay if things get shuffled around in transit. Add ice the night before too (if you have a very insulated ice chest) or first thing the morning of the party. You can also use ice packs, which might save you a trip to the store the day of the party.

A Note on Food Safety

Hosting a party at a park means it's a little more challenging to keep cold stuff cold and hot stuff hot. Please keep a few basic food safety guidelines in mind:

- Keep cold food cold: Cold food should go in a cooler with ice at 40 °F or below to prevent bacterial growth. Pack your raw meat while frozen so it stays cold until it's time to barbecue.
- Use coolers wisely: put drinks in one cooler and perishable foods in another. Keep the lids to your coolers closed as much as you can. Having signs taped to your coolers is helpful too (so people don't keep opening the meat cooler looking for beer!).
- Don't cross-contaminate: Be sure to keep raw meat securely wrapped and totally separate from anything that might be eaten (cooked food, produce, etc.).
- Clean fruits and vegetables: Wash your produce the night before and allow to dry on a clean towel.
- Cooking your food: Cook your food thoroughly and keep it hot until it's ready to serve.
- Separate raw / cooked food: Don't reuse platters or utensils that you used for raw meat.
- Don't keep food out: Once you've served it, food should not sit out for longer than two hours (or just one hour if the outdoor temperature is above 90 °F). If it does — toss it.



If you want to serve alcohol at your party, check that it is allowed at your park (see page 7). Keep in mind that glass containers (beer bottles, wine bottles) are never allowed at parks.

A group of diverse children are playing tug-of-war on a grassy field. In the center, a young girl with brown hair in pigtails, wearing a white tank top and denim shorts, is smiling and pulling on the rope. To her left, a boy in a blue and white striped shirt is also pulling. To her right, another boy in a blue striped shirt is visible. In the background, another child is partially visible. The background is filled with green trees and a bright sky.

5

GAMES & ACTIVITIES

GAMES & ACTIVITIES

During my twenties, I had a side gig as a birthday party character or attendant - I dressed as a princess or assisted "head characters" (cartoon characters) and did face painting and balloon animals. So, I've attended hundreds of kids birthday parties! The best advice I have here is not to have anything too structured... kids don't really want to stop playing with their friends to focus on doing anything (except cake)! I recommend having **one** structured activity and **one or two** open activities. Ideas for each are below:

STRUCTURED ACTIVITIES

Piñata (don't forget the rope, bags, and stick!)

Scavenger hunt

Game (Pin the Tail, Red light/Green light, Simon Says)

Parachute Games

Craft or painting project ("instructor" led)

Obstacle course

Puppet show / Magic show / Princess / Character

OPEN ACTIVITIES

Yard games (bocce ball, ladder toss, corn hole)

Bounce house / air jump

Sidewalk chalk

Bubbles / bubble machine

Balls or frisbees

Craft project (independent)

Face painting

Balloon twisting

Kite Flying

Time-saving tips: something that you might think is a quick game or activity can take 30 minutes (or more!) once you're trying to herd everybody, give the instructions, do the game/activity and clean-up. Plan accordingly and ask for help if you can!

AIR JUMPS

Some tips on air jumps/bounce houses for your party:

Not all parks allow them, and some require a permit (usually around \$25).

[Here are some of the parks](#) that allow bounce houses.

Before you book with a bounce house vendor, make sure they have the proper insurance for parks.



Pick a Spot

Have a designated spot for each of your activities, and try to think through special considerations. If you're going to have a piñata, from where will you hang it? Does any part of your activity require an electrical outlet? Does the area need to be flat?

Have a Helper

As a friend or family member to monitor or lead an activity, which will free you up to tend to party matters. If it makes more sense for you to lead the activity, ask somebody to take pictures of the children or take over clearing tables and refilling food stations.

Keep it Simple

To make it easy to set up, explain, participate and take down, I suggest keeping activities SUPER simple. Having a corn hole tournament might sound fun, but the amount of attention requires could end up taking you away from the whole party! Opt instead to have it set up and people can play informal games.

Think Through Supplies

Because you're going to be at a park, you won't just be able to go to your kitchen drawer for a pair of scissors. You'll need to bring everything to the park, so try to think of each step of your activity and what you might need. Here are some suggestions (be sure to add these to your final checklist!):

- ❑ Tape (heavy duty, painters, and regular tape)
- ❑ Scissors
- ❑ Marker / Sharpies
- ❑ Baby wipes
- ❑ Sunscreen
- ❑ Trash bags
- ❑ Chairs
- ❑ Tables
- ❑ Tools (hammer, screw driver, pliers)
- ❑ Cleaning supplies
- ❑ Batteries



My daughter loved having a parachute at her third birthday party! It was a fun activity and made for some cute photos too!

A young child with blonde hair is sliding down a blue slide at a playground. The child is wearing a dark grey sweatshirt with a cartoon graphic, camouflage shorts, and dark sneakers with yellow socks. The slide is blue and curved, with green metal support poles. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a paved area.

6

HELPFUL LISTS

THINGS TO BRING

to the park

How to use this checklist: review the checklist and ~~cross-off~~ anything you know you won't need to bring. Only put a check mark next to the items you have packed and ready to go to the park for the party. See supplemental lists for food on the following pages.

ALL EVENTS

- ☐ Tape (heavy duty, painters, and regular tape)
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ Marker / Sharpies
- ☐ First aid kit
- ☐ Paper towels
- ☐ Baby wipes
- ☐ Hand sanitizer
- ☐ Sunscreen
- ☐ **Trash bags**
- ☐ Toilet paper
- ☐ Chairs
- ☐ Tables
- ☐ Canopies
- ☐ Tools (hammer, screw driver, pliers)
- ☐ Broom / Cleaning supplies
- ☐ Bungie cords / zip ties
- ☐ Insect repellent
- ☐ Wagon or cart

CAKE

- ☐ Cake
- ☐ Knife and server
- ☐ Small plates
- ☐ Extra forks

ICE CREAM

- ☐ Dry ice
- ☐ Ice cream (gallons or individual servings)
- ☐ Ice cream scoop
- ☐ Bowls or cones
- ☐ Spoons

ANY BIRTHDAY PARTY

- ☐ Candle
- ☐ Lighter
- ☐ Decorations
- ☐ Favors / goodies bags
- ☐ Tablecloths

FIRST BIRTHDAY PARTY

- ☐ Highchair
- ☐ Highchair decorations
- ☐ Diaper bag
- ☐ Change of clothes

GAMES & ACTIVITIES

- ☐ Sidewalk chalk
- ☐ Bubbles
- ☐ Games
- ☐ Piñata (with stick, rope, blindfold and bags)

DRINKS

- ☐ Coolers
- ☐ Signs for coolers (Water / Juice / Beer / Soda)
- ☐ Ice or ice packs
- ☐ Pitchers
- ☐ Dispensers
- ☐ Cups

FOOD

- ☐ Forks
- ☐ Knives
- ☐ Spoons
- ☐ Plates
- ☐ Napkins
- ☐ Utensil caddy (to hold forks/knives/spoons)
- ☐ Storage containers / sandwich bags for leftovers
- ☐ Signage
- ☐ Serving utensils
- ☐ Pouches / Clementine oranges / Snacks
- ☐ Food tents (to cover food)
- ☐ (see specific menu checklist in following pages)

OTHER

- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐



THINGS TO BUY

for a party at the park

How to use this checklist: review the checklist and ~~cross-off~~ anything you know you won't need to buy. Only put a check mark next to the items you have purchased.

DRINKS

- ☐ Ice or ice packs
- ☐ Bottled water
- ☐ Beer (no glass bottles)
- ☐ Wine (no glass bottles)
- ☐ Juice boxes
- ☐ Soda
- ☐ Lemonade / Tea

SUPPLIES

- ☐ Tape (heavy duty and regular tape)
- ☐ Scissors
- ☐ First aid kit
- ☐ Paper towels
- ☐ Baby wipes
- ☐ Hand sanitizer
- ☐ Sunscreen
- ☐ Trash bags
- ☐ Basic tool kit
- ☐ Pop up food tents
- ☐ Tablecloth clips
- ☐ Wagon

FUN STUFF

- ☐ Candles (or number candle)
- ☐ Lighter
- ☐ Decorations (reminder: don't go crazy here!)
- ☐ Favors / goodies bags
- ☐ Tablecloths
- ☐ Piñata
- ☐ Highchair decorations
- ☐ Birthday outfits
- ☐ Sidewalk chalk
- ☐ Bubbles
- ☐ Games
- ☐ Prizes for games (not required)

PARTY

- ☐ Forks
- ☐ Knives
- ☐ Spoons
- ☐ Plates
- ☐ Napkins
- ☐ Small plates
- ☐ Extra forks (if serving cake)
- ☐ Utensil caddy (to hold forks/knives/spoons)
- ☐ Storage containers / sandwich bags for leftovers
- ☐ Signage for food
- ☐ Serving utensils
- ☐ Pouches / Clementine oranges / Snacks
- ☐ Cake / cupcakes (incl gluten free option*)

*Trader Joe's has good GF cupcake options

OTHER

- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

Check out my post of birthday party supplies (with links!), so you don't forget anything!

THINGS TO DO

general party timeline

How to use this checklist: review the checklist and ~~cross-off~~ anything you know you won't need to do. Only put a check mark next to the items you have done. See supplemental lists for food on the following pages.

3+ MONTHS BEFORE

- ☐ Decide on park
- ☐ Choose time, date, and location (and back-up)
- ☐ Make reservation / get permit (optional, see page 8)
- ☐ Order invitations
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

4+ WEEKS BEFORE

- ☐ Decide on theme or colors
- ☐ Make a guest list
- ☐ Send invitations
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

3-4 WEEKS BEFORE

- ☐ Decide on food, place order (see supplemental)
- ☐ Order cake, cake pops or cupcakes
- ☐ Make online purchases (decorations, candle, outfits)
- ☐ Make a list of DIY projects
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

2 WEEKS BEFORE

- ☐ Buy decorations / party supplies (in store)
- ☐ Make decorations / DIY stuff
- ☐
- ☐

1 WEEK BEFORE

- ☐ Make / print food and beverage signage
- ☐ Confirm RSVPs
- ☐ Assemble favors
- ☐
- ☐

3 DAYS BEFORE

- ☐ Finalize your checklists
- ☐
- ☐

1-2 DAYS BEFORE

- ☐ Final shopping for food items
- ☐ Make cake (if that's your thing)
- ☐ Freeze ice packs
- ☐ Ask somebody to take a family photo at the party
- ☐
- ☐

DAY OF PARTY

- ☐ Get to park early to reserve spot
- ☐ Pick-up ice (and last minute food items!)
- ☐ Put drinks in cooler
- ☐ Set up food
- ☐ Set up activities
- ☐ Take a family photo
(ask a friend to help you MAKE SURE YOU DO THIS!)
- ☐ Enjoy yourself!
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐



BBQ MENU

to do, to buy & to bring

How to use this checklist: review the checklist and ~~cross-off~~ anything you know you won't need to do, buy or bring. Only put a check mark next to the items you have done / purchased / have packed and ready to go to the park for the party.

TO DO

- ☐ Order main course / sides
- ☐ Cut veggies
- ☐ Cut watermelon
- ☐ Make beans
- ☐ Make mac & cheese
- ☐ Make hamburger patties
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

TO BUY

- ☐ Hot dogs
- ☐ Turkey dogs
- ☐ Hamburger patties / meat
- ☐ Hot dog buns
- ☐ Hamburger buns
- ☐ Beans
- ☐ Mac & cheese
- ☐ Veggies
- ☐ Watermelon
- ☐ Ketchup
- ☐ Mustard
- ☐ Relish
- ☐ Other condiments
- ☐ Trays for raw meat
- ☐ Serving trays and sterno
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

BBQ MENU

Hot Dogs / Hamburgers

BBQ Baked Beans

Mac & Cheese

Veggies

Watermelon

TO BRING

- ☐ (everything under "to buy")
- ☐ Can opener
- ☐ BBQ tools (spatula, tongs, brush, etc.)
- ☐ Apron
- ☐ Food trays
- ☐ Coals
- ☐ BBQ (if the park doesn't have one)
- ☐ Cooler / ice chest
- ☐
- ☐

Tip: Some parks do not allow barbecues. Be sure to check out signage at the parks.



SANDWICH MENU

to do, to buy & to bring

How to use this checklist: review the checklist and ~~cross off~~ anything you know you won't need to do, buy or bring. Only put a check mark next to the items you have done / purchased / have packed and ready to go to the park for the party.

TO DO

- ☐ Order sandwiches (I recommend no onions)
- ☐ Order veggie tray
- ☐ Make sandwiches
- ☐ Cut veggies
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

TO BUY

- ☐ Breads
- ☐ Meats
- ☐ Cheeses
- ☐ Lettuce
- ☐ Tomatoes
- ☐ Avocados
- ☐ Mayo
- ☐ Mustard
- ☐ Other condiments
- ☐ Carrots
- ☐ Peppers
- ☐ Broccoli
- ☐ Veggie Dip
- ☐ Chips (individual bags)
- ☐ Wax paper or sandwich bags
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

SANDWICH MENU

Sandwiches

Veggies & Dip

Chips

TO BRING

- ☐ (everything under "to buy")
- ☐ Serving utensils
- ☐ Knives for condiments
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐



PIZZA MENU

to do, to buy & to bring

How to use this checklist: review the checklist and ~~cross-off~~ anything you know you won't need to do, buy or bring. Only put a check mark next to the items you have done / purchased / have packed and ready to go to the park for the party.

TO DO

- ☐ Order pizza (consider requesting squares instead of slices)
- ☐ Pick-up Pizza
- ☐ Order pasta
- ☐ Make pasta
- ☐ Order veggie and/or fruit trays
- ☐ Cut veggies and/or fruit
- ☐ Make signs for pizzas ("Cheese," "Pepperoni")
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

TO BUY

- ☐ Trays
- ☐ Grapes
- ☐ Melons
- ☐ Berries
- ☐ Carrots
- ☐ Broccoli
- ☐ Peppers
- ☐ Veggie Dip
- ☐ Pasta
- ☐ Pasta sauce
- ☐ Serving trays and sterno
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

PIZZA MENU

Pizza

Pasta

Fruit and Veggie Trays

TO BRING

- ☐ (everything under "to buy")
- ☐ Pizza cutter
- ☐ Veggie trays / tongs
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐



TACO MENU

to do, to buy & to bring

How to use this checklist: review the checklist and ~~cross off~~ anything you know you won't need to do, buy or bring. Only put a check mark next to the items you have done / purchased / have packed and ready to go to the park for the party.

TO DO

- ☐ Determine if permit is required for taco truck / catering
- ☐ Coordinate catering
- ☐ Order tacos and/or sides
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

TO BUY

- ☐ Chips
- ☐ Salsas
- ☐ Meat
- ☐ Tortillas (corn and flour)
- ☐ Beans
- ☐ Rice
- ☐ Cheese
- ☐ Sour Cream
- ☐ Lettuce
- ☐ Tomatoes
- ☐ Limes
- ☐ Onions
- ☐ Fruit (melons, grapes) or veggie tray
- ☐ Serving trays and sterno
- ☐
- ☐

TO BRING

- ☐ (everything under "to buy")
- ☐ Serving utensils
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

TACO MENU

Tacos with all the fixings

Quesadillas for the kids

Fruit or Veggies

Beans and/or Rice



CAKE & DESSERTS

to do, to buy & to bring

How to use this checklist: review the checklist and ~~cross-off~~ anything you know you won't need to do, buy or bring. Only put a check mark next to the items you have done / purchased / have packed and ready to go to the park for the party.

TO DO

- ☐ Decide on cake, cupcakes, cake pops, cookies or other
- ☐ Place order with bakery
- ☐ Bake cake
- ☐ Frost / decorate cake
- ☐ Determine GF alternative
- ☐

TO BUY

- ☐ Flour
- ☐ Sugar
- ☐ Butter
- ☐ Eggs
- ☐ Pan
- ☐ Confectioners sugar
- ☐ Gluten free dessert alternative
- ☐ Food coloring
- ☐ Fondant
- ☐ Cake stand / cupcake stand
- ☐ Cupcake liners
- ☐ Decorations
- ☐ Candles
- ☐ Ice cream
- ☐ Toppings
- ☐ Dry ice
- ☐

TO BRING

- ☐ (everything under "to buy")
- ☐ Knife
- ☐ Server
- ☐ Vented plastic cooler or foam cooler

CAKE TIME

Cake

Cake Pops

Cupcakes

Ice Cream

Tip: Small plastic cups make excellent "to go" containers for cake and cupcakes!



RESOURCES

for your park party!

I hope this book has been a helpful resource for you as you plan your park party! I wanted to also share some “evergreen” links that might help you as you plan as well. Please click on any of the boxes below for additional resources to help you! If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at parksinsandiego@gmail.com

What to Buy for a
PARTY at a **PARK**

Game Ideas on
Pinterest

good parks for
EVENTS

Accessible
Play

parks with
BBQs

how to reserve
a park in San Diego

parks that allow
ALCOHOL

weddings
venues

how to pack
ice cream
for the park



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