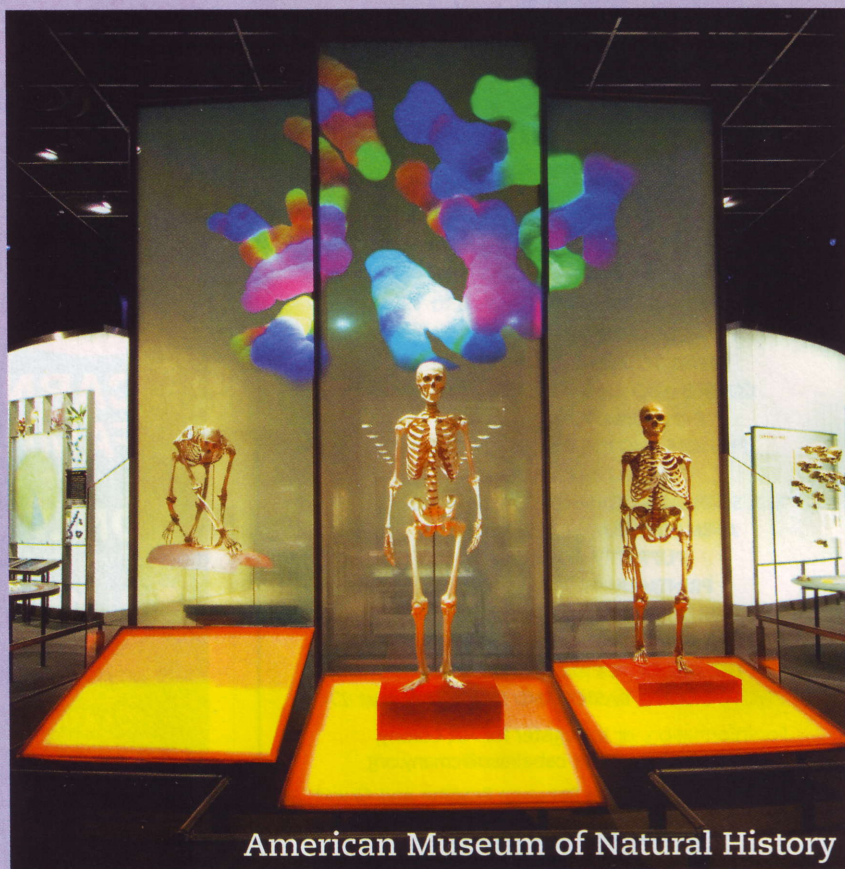


Evolution Makeover

For kids curious about who we are and where we came from, there's no better place to learn than the American Museum of Natural History—especially now that it boasts the Anne and Bernard Spitzer Hall of Human Origins. The new, permanent exhibition, which opened February 10 and is ideal for kids ages 6 and up, is the only museum space in the world that combines the latest fossil and genetic evidence to explore human evolution. It replaces the Hall of Human Biology and Evolution, which the Museum closed over 18 months ago for a complete overhaul to include the rapid scientific advances in genetics and paleontology.

One of the most exciting features of the Hall of Human Origins, says paleoanthropologist Ian Tattersall, one of the two curators behind it, is the placement of fossils in beautiful, newly designed backgrounds that represent scenes from human history over time and help give the fossils meaning. "Fossils are not static objects, but witnesses to a dynamic and eventful evolutionary history over the last seven million years," he explains.

While there are many new additions to the Hall, various objects from the museum's prior exhibit have stayed on, taking on different life in their new home. Parents and grandparents probably remember the infamous Australopithecus couple, trudging their way through a diorama of a plain in Tanzania, leaving a trail of footprints behind.



American Museum of Natural History

Their old setting presented them at a level above the floor, making it slightly difficult for kids to take in. But today the diminutive pair is situated right in the middle of the Hall, allowing people to walk around them and appreciate their true size. "Everyone is blown away by how tiny they are!" says Tattersall. Kids can also stand over the footprints and see how they measure up. Another revamped favorite is Lucy, a three-million-year-old skeleton with a newly reconstructed face.

Even parents will jump at the chance to take part in the new series of children's events tied to the new Hall. In an especially cool program called "Discover DNA," kids ages 8-12 and a parent have the rare chance to isolate their own DNA in the Hall's fully operational sequencing lab. (March 24 and April 21 at various times; \$35 per adult/child pair.) Then, in "Secrets of Skulls," kids ages 8-12 can compare skull casts of early humans (March 17 and April 14, 11am-12:30pm; \$25 per adult/child pair). A souvenir for kids who want to continue the fun is the companion book to the Hall, available at the museum. *American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, 212-769-5100, www.amnh.org.*

—Suzanne Reisman

Brooklyn Children's Museum

This month the museum highlights the power and magic of patterns with its spring exhibit, "Pattern Wizardry" (opening March 24). Kids explore a giant walk-in spiral and take part in hands-on activities with music stations and interactive computer games. **145 Brooklyn Avenue at St. Mark's Avenue, 718-735-4400, www.brooklynkids.org.**

Children's Museum of Manhattan

"Brain Games" encourages kids to test their creative problem-solving skills in a hands-on exhibition with more than 40 challenges, including escaping from locked handcuffs (through mid-April). On March 16 check out "Keep Rising to the Top," a performance for ages 5 and up featuring young dancers from the group KR3TS blending hip hop, reggae,

jazz and other musical styles. *The Tisch Building, 212 West 83rd Street, 212-721-1234, www.cmom.org.*

Jewish Children's Museum

Instead of eating matza out of a box this Passover, kids can make their own in the museum's interactive matza factory, iMatza (a play on iPod). Participants "harvest" wheat, grind it, and make their