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A few weeks ago we decided to do something unusual. We went on our weekly road trip with a unique destination in mind, maybe even a bit wacky. It may have been different, but it was so much fun. We began our Sunday road trip driving towards the California desert. We love the beauty of Palm Springs. The variety of restaurants. The ritzy vibe. The snow-capped mountains beyond the barren desert floor. But today, instead of stopping, we drove on. We continued along the road until there were no signs of green vegetation, the towns felt like ghost towns, with old abandoned buildings probably now occupied by street dwellers. No rest stops, no bathrooms, no cell phone service. The temperature slowly rose from 89 degrees to 93, then to 98. We were in the middle of the desert!

GOING BANANAS AT THE INTERNATIONAL BANANA MUSEUM



International Banana Museum

Until we noticed a little old building with a big stuffed yellow banana sitting outside. Since we desperately needed a bathroom break, we decided to stop. What we found next was pretty appealing to us. The International Banana Museum. This museum has everything banana!

The owner opened the doors about 3 1/2 years ago and has collected over 20,000 banana related items. A few favorites were the banana telephone, the Chiquita banana football, and the banana gun. They have a table dedicated to dressing like a banana with a full banana costume, a banana hat, and some yellow straw hats. Of course, we couldn't resist the touristy temptation to try on the costumes for the perfect photo shoot opportunity.



Being touristy at the International Banana Museum

Our favorite part was the homemade banana ice-cream which they churn right there in the

store. We got ice-cream cones with banana-mango and banana-strawberry. The banana-mango was so creamy with small chunks of banana still in the ice-cream. It was definitely a favorite!



Clara indulging in a banana-strawberry ice-cream cone



Maddox happy to have some ice-cream on such a hot day

You can avoid the \$1 entrance fee by making a small purchase per person which includes ice-

cream. Who would have thought that a banana museum could grow so popular over such a short time. It even made it in the Guinness Book of World Records. Are you tired of the word banana yet?



Eating ice-cream while surrounded by over 20,000 banana related items

CLIMBING SALVATION MOUNTAIN



Welcome to Salvation Mountain

After setting our eyes upon more bananas than we've ever seen in our entire lives, we set off for our next destination. We continued driving southeast for an additional 40 minutes until we saw a colorful hill that stood out against the barren desert floor.



The vibrant colors stand out against the barren desert floor

Salvation Mountain is a hill in the Colorado Desert of Imperial County, California. Artist,

Leonard Knight, made the piece entirely from adobe, straw and lead-free paint. Aside from the materials, he built this piece based on love. And love is the first sight you'll see displayed when you pull into the parking lot and there is an enormous red heart painted on the mountain and above it reads the words "God is Love."



Salvation Mountain was made by artist Leonard Knight

Knight dedicated himself to this art form and spent countless hours using it to help spread the word about his love and devotion to God. There is scripture quoted throughout. It's flowing down the waterfall and growing from the flowers. But no matter your religious beliefs, it's worth a visit. You can feel the love radiating from the mountain. It brings feelings of joy and peace. It feels as though you've fallen into a fairy tale, perhaps the Land of Oz. It's colorful and vibrant and incredibly magical. Follow the yellow brick road to the top of the 50-foot mountain for a bird's eye view of the entire structure.



Follow the Yellow Brick Road to the top for a bird's eye view



The kids following the Yellow Brick Road



The view from the top

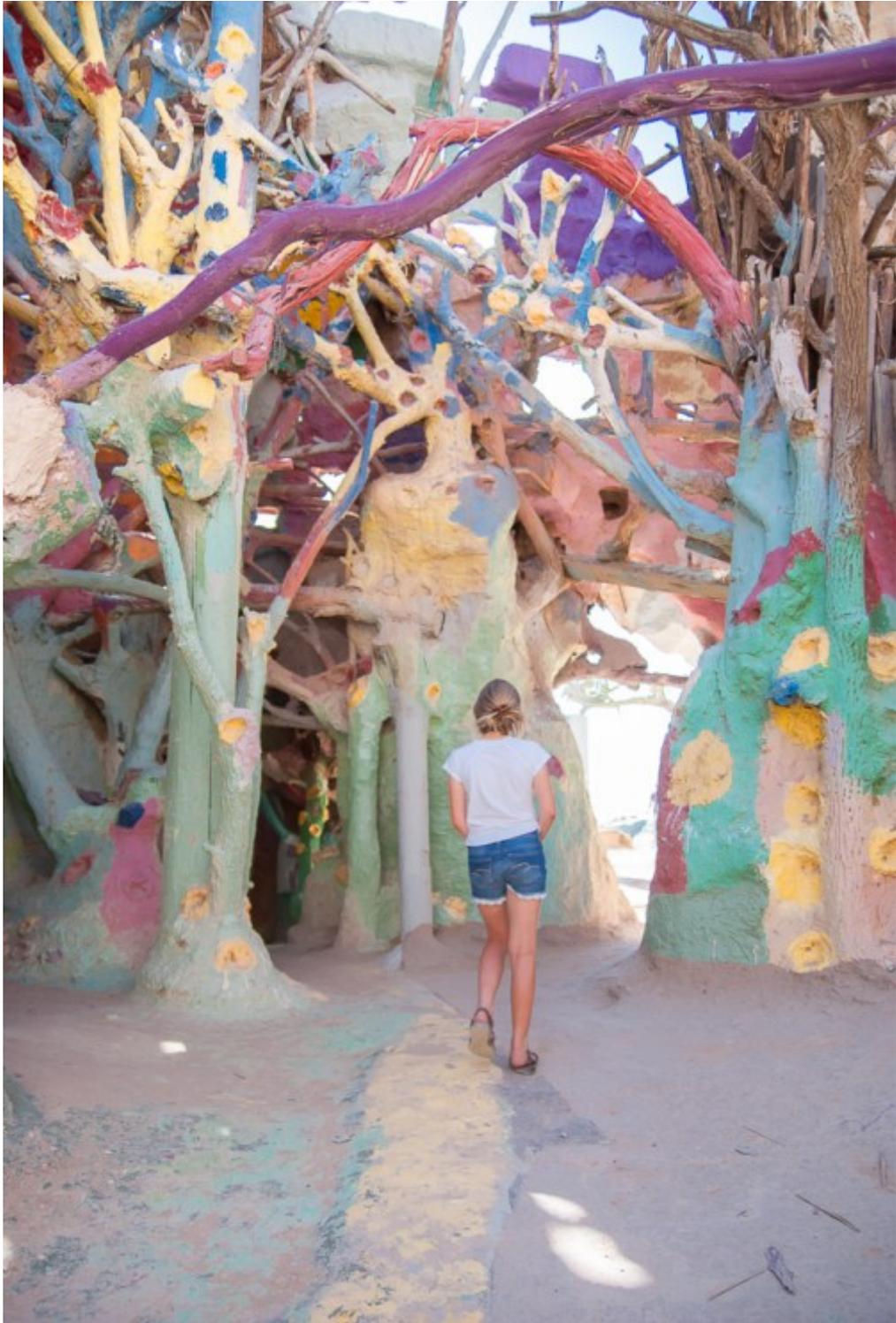
Not only can you climb to the top of Salvation Mountain, but you can venture through it. There are a few tunnels that weave in and out and through the back.



Exploring the tunnels



Looking up from inside



Enter at your own risk



Fun inside the mountain



Finding treasures in the caves



God is Love

There's no denying that Salvation Mountain definitely makes you feel happy with the vibrant

colors. Today, the mountain is maintained entirely by donations and volunteers. Salvation Mountain is truly a unique work of art.



Salvation Mountain

EXPLORING SLAB CITY



Entering Slab City

On the acres surrounding Salvation Mountain lies the “last free place in America,” known as

Slab City. The residents of Slab City live rent free on 640 acres of state-owned land. Those who want to escape the everyday grind of the American lifestyle come here. Slab City is completely off the grid. There is no electricity, no sewer, and no water. Homes come in all varieties including trailers, motorhomes, and tents. There are homes made of metal scraps and others made from trees and palm leaves. Some have solar panels and generators to produce electricity.

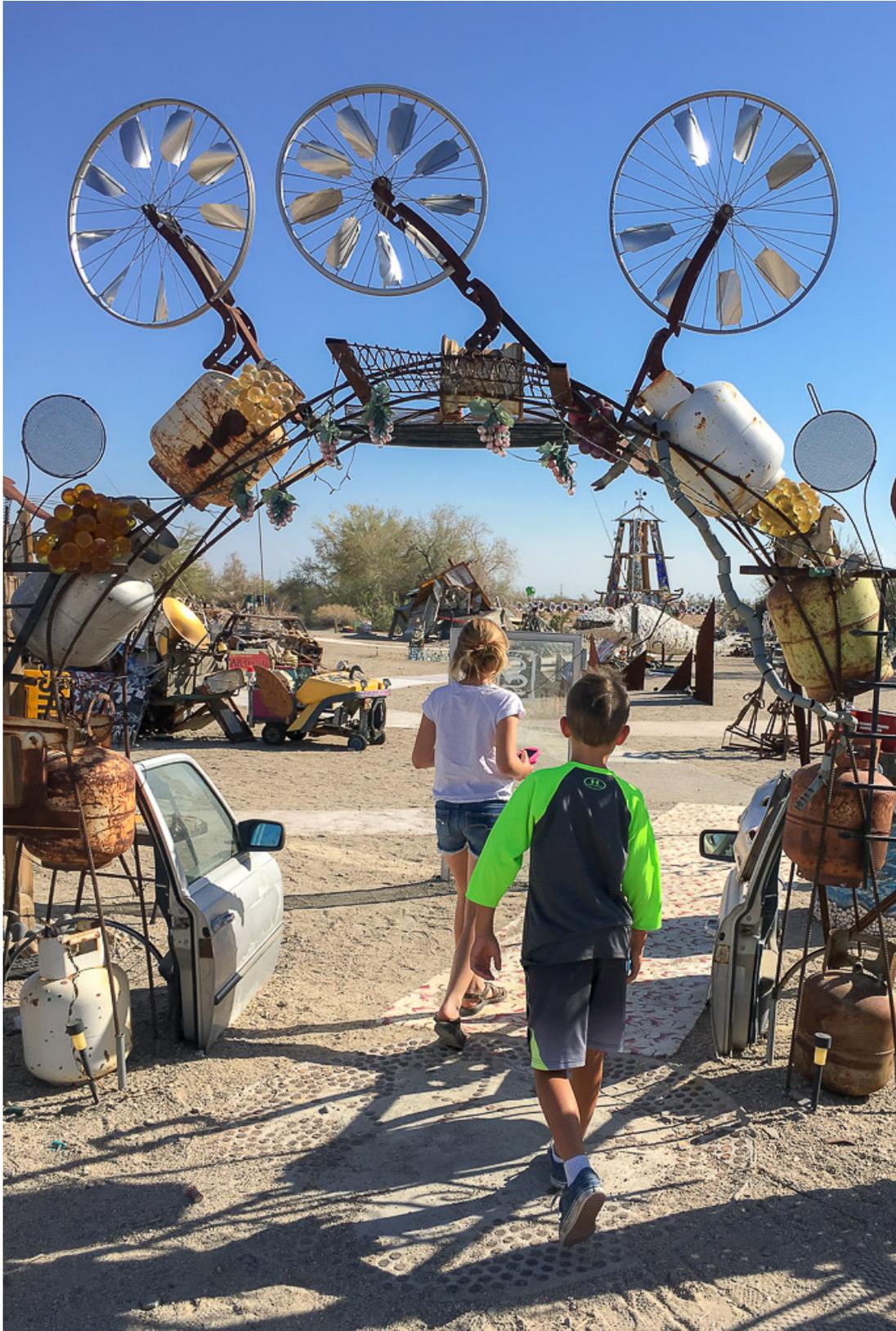


One of the many homes of Slab City

The residents have designed the city with a pet cemetery, a sculpture garden, a tavern and a place of worship. It is up to the residents to maintain this land.



The Pet Cemetery of Slab City



Entering the Sculpture Garden



The Bottle Wall located in the Sculpture Garden



More sculptures at the Slab City Sculpture Garden



An Elephant at the Slab City Sculpture Garden

Although I had read many frightening stories warning about the residents of Slab City, we had no problems and even got out of our vehicle to view the sculpture garden. Many residents even waved as we drove by. Slab City is a place in America that you won't believe exists until you see it with your own eyes.



The Shoe Tree that stands near the entrance to Slab City

THE EERINESS OF THE SALTON SEA

A large body of water that feels so desolate.



The surrounding beaches are made up of fish bones, crushed shells, and deposited salt

Hundreds of dead dried up fish line the shore.



Dead Fish line the shore of the Salton Sea

The smell, almost too unbearable. The only sign of life are the flies buzzing around and the occasional bird that swoops down to pluck a fish from the water.



A bird flies overhead in search of dinner

The Salton Sea is one of the largest inland seas and the largest body of water in the state of California. It is 227 feet below sea level making it one of the lowest spots on earth. Because the Salton Sea is landlocked, there is no outflow of water. Agricultural fields surround the area, therefore the runoff of toxins through the years is threatening the lively hood of the Salton Sea. The salinity in the water is on the rise, and it contains more salt than the Pacific Ocean. This is a real threat to more than 400 migratory birds that depend on the Salton Sea as a food source. The Salton Sea is in dire need of help.



The shoreline of the Salton Sea

The Salton Sea is also a large recreational area that attracts more than 100,000 visitors each

year. People come to camp, boat, birdwatch and even fish when the temperatures are mild during the spring and fall. The recently built visitor center is a beautiful addition where you can come to learn everything about this rare and interesting body of water.



Palms of the Salton Sea

This was a day filled with unique and interesting stops. The next time you're in Southern California, I would definitely recommend this day trip to add something slightly different in place of the usual.

Where's the strangest place you've ever been?



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