



# World of Wonder

**"Come with me...  
and you'll be in a world  
of pure imagination."  
-W. Wonka**

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**PICTURE THIS:** You're a brave adventurer, exploring a world of magic, ready to face any obstacle that stands in your way. Your mission: to travel over, under, around and through those obstacles to reach the fairytale castle, where kings and queens will be swinging from the rafters and waiting for you to join them. Along the way, you meet archaeologists digging for dinosaur bones, and young seafarers navigating their way through an ocean wonderland. You stop to load up on supplies at a fully stocked supermarket, where you are met by friendly cashiers who double as ballerinas. And at the end of your journey, Mommy is waiting for you at a peaceful oasis with a healthy snack and juice box.

Believe it or not, this magical world exists right here in the Lowcountry. And kids of all ages are heading to the Island Playground in Bluffton to experience the magic.

Walking into Island Playground is like stepping into the world's most amazing playroom, but magnified exponentially (and

cleaned and sanitized constantly). There are no walls dividing the space, save for a low one separating the entrance and picnic areas. Rather, the giant room is divided by activity: the "playground area" and the "imagination station".

You should note that "playground" here means something entirely different than the usual swing set and monkey bars. All of the playground equipment is inflated à

la Moonbounce, so not only is it wildly fun, it's safe too. There

is a two-story double slide for some seriously slippery fun. There's also a giant bouncy basketball court, fully equipped with balls of every size, color and texture. And across from that, there's an obstacle course, with two small (but still slippery and fun) slides for escaping. The three and under crowd have "VIP" access to their own inflatable exploration area, an ocean wonderland complete with a friendly sea monster. During busy times, this allows the little ones a quieter spot to bounce and

climb. Designated as a "toddler exploration area," this corner is also scattered with all kinds of soft gymnastics equipment, hula hoops, tunnels, ride-on toys and climbers.

That's only one side of Island Playground. The space also features a cluster of "Imagination Stations." There is a two-story fairytale castle, and right next door is a costume corner featuring an abundance of dress-up options. At any given time, you can see a king or queen, princesses, a wizard, and even a pair of dragons peeking out the windows or sliding down

one of two slides built into the castle. Around the corner is a fully stocked food market with a cash register and grocery carts. The kids can carry their groceries over to the

kitchen area and put them away, then "wash" the dishes in the sink and set the table for a lovely dinner.





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the Bar / Lounge Area ONLY.

Parents will be happy to relax with a magazine on one of several couches and comfy chairs scattered around the play floor. For high-tech folks, the building is Wi-Fi enabled, so moms and dads can bring their laptops and check e-mail or browse the Internet while their kids play in plain view. Parents will also like the healthy choices at the snack bar, which include juice boxes, string cheese, and cereal bars. Owner, Jennifer Edwards says she wanted to create a "clean, safe, healthy place where parents want to come." Speaking of clean and safe, Island Playground has a strict no shoe rule, and socks are mandatory for parents and kids alike. (Cubbies are provided for stowing shoes and other personal items.) There are also several hand sanitizer stations to help keep germs to a minimum.

So how exactly did this brilliant idea come to pass? Well, once upon a time, Edwards created the popular mother and child fitness program called Once Upon a Workout. Knowing there was a "tremendous need" for a place where parents and kids could interact together in an imaginative environment, she decided to sell her business and move on to bigger ventures, or perhaps rather, adventures. Using her master's degree in child and family counseling combined with a background in fitness instruction, Edwards came up with the idea for Island Playground. "Our



philosophy is to provide exercise for young bodies and minds," she said.

Edwards says things are only getting started at Island Playground, which officially opened at the Bridge Center in Bluffton in April 2008. Besides being available for open play from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. every weekday, the facility also offers private party slots on Saturdays. Open play is also offered from noon until 5 p.m. on Sundays. On Friday nights, Island Playground has joined up with its neighbor, Jalapenos Mexican Restaurant, to offer Family Fun Night, with open play hours extended to 9 p.m., and free kids' meals at Jalapenos. Other programs include Mommy and Me classes, and beginning June 2,



CardioKids Summer Camp, a weekday drop-off program that will run through August 22. The camp will combine open play with structured fitness and arts & crafts. Future endeavors will include Parents' Night Out, offered on occasional Friday nights, where parents can drop their kids off for a few hours of supervised free play, pizza, and a movie. Also coming soon, "Bootcamp 4 Kids," a kid-friendly version of the latest workout trend.



So on that muggy Lowcountry summer day when the kids are antsy and you just can't bear the outdoors, grab your craziest pair of socks and head over the bridge to the Island Playground. A couple of hours being lost in this local world of wonder will surely cure the wiggles, and take them places far greater than you or I could ever imagine. 2

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