

The Best California Vacation Ideas

Traveling to California is popular for many reasons. It's accessible, it's diverse, and it's sure to be an adventure no matter where you choose to take your California vacation. There is a never-ending list of possibilities when looking for California vacation ideas, but read on for some of our top picks and some lesser-known gems you won't want to miss!



San Clemente Pier, San ClementeSan Clemente Pier, San Clemente

Where Should I Vacation In California?

The long story short is: basically anywhere. California has everything from mountainous solitude to quaint towns on the beach to larger-than-life cities roaring with energy. Whether you're looking for national parks in California or the best places to stay in California on a budget, we've got you covered.

"I have two favorite cities to visit. The SAN waterfront is an amazing place with great weather, food, and activities year-round. However my favorite and most common destination is San Francisco. The city is unique among US locations with its history as a melting pot with diverse neighborhoods and activities. Food is amazing from the Ferry Building, Chinatown, North Beach, the Wharf, Mission, everywhere is like visiting a new city by traveling a few blocks. Even within one block, there could be new high-rise developments next to mom and pop bodegas next to a gas station - totally eclectic mixture of life. Don't forget to tour it by taking the moving landmark, the cable cars!"

[@DancingDavidE](#) Southwest Rapid Rewards Member

Tips for Booking Your California Vacation

Want to get the best deals on your trip to California? Check out the [Southwest's Low Fare Calendar](#), which can help determine when you can get a great price on your airfare. You can also find hotel and airfare packages using the [Southwest Vacations](#) search engine.

Where Can I Go On A Relaxing Vacation In California?

California is chock full of relaxing vacation spots. From secluded hotels to hidden gems outside the big city, try unwinding at one of these locations on your next California vacation.

San Francisco

It's like the OG American destination for meditation and relaxation culture. With its overarching love for yoga (they even have a dedicated yoga studio in the airport, in case of flight delay or immediate necessity of doing the downward dog), you can even find hotels that supply personal mats in each room. The city is full of top-notch yoga studios and spas, and of course, the Golden Gate Bridge covered in fog is one of the most relaxing views there is.

Big Sur

The scenery may be dramatic, but this California vacation can be anything but. Check out the Post Ranch Inn for a luxurious and deeply relaxing stay. It's a perfect romantic getaway (no televisions

and no alarm clocks!) touting some of the most breathtaking views ranging from Pacific cliffside to mountainous hideaway. A southern California must!

Bodega Bay

This is a slow-your-pace-and-breathe-easy kind of California vacation. Just north of San Francisco, Bodega Bay (made famous by Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*) is a tiny town full of fresh seafood, horseback riding, and whale watching. It's easy to put your feet up here but if you get the urge, there's plenty of hiking trails to enjoy as well.

What Are Some Cheap California Vacation Ideas?

Believe it or not, California vacations can be done on a budget. If you're looking for a California vacation idea that won't make your wallet sweat, try one of these sweet spots.

[Joshua Tree National Park](#), fly into Ontario

With an inexpensive flight and a fun mini-road trip, you can hit up Joshua Tree National Park without breaking the bank. You can even camp in the park to save more on lodging and experience the unique landscape day and night.

[Ventura](#), fly into L.A.

Just a quick drive from Los Angeles, Ventura gives you a more laid-back beach feel, without the hefty price tag of the city. Plus, you can entertain yourself for days exploring the beautiful botanical gardens and rent a bike for a leisurely ride along their extensive biking trail.

[Eureka](#), fly into Sacramento

If your idea of the best California vacation means steering clear of the bigger crowds, head up to the northern coast where you'll find some of the best seafood on the West Coast. You'll get the small-town getaway feel on a budget, without having to feel like you're pinching pennies.

What Is The Most Visited City In California?

It's no surprise that the most popular California vacation idea is none other than Anaheim, home of the most magical place on earth. The city generally attracts around 48 million visitors annually, and for obvious reasons. But there are some funkier, lesser-known attractions near Anaheim if you're headed to the magical city on your California vacation. (Fly into L.A.)

The Blind Rabbit, the Anaheim packing district

A regular hidden-in-plain-sight speakeasy

The Crystal Cathedral, just 3 miles outside Anaheim

A mind-blowing church constructed with over 10,000 glass panes

The Hass Avocado Mother Tree, 8 miles outside Anaheim

The great ancestor of 80 percent of all that Hass guac you've been eating

Old Town Orange, just a half-hour outside the city

THE place for picking up your California vacation souvenirs

What Are The Best Vacation Spots In California?

When looking for California vacation ideas, it's easy to say anywhere is a good bet. But here are a few of the best vacation spots in California for the wine-lover, the beach bums, and the So-Cal newbies.

Napa Valley, fly into Sacramento

If you love wine, Michelin-star restaurants, and unbelievable beauty, Napa Valley may be your number one California vacation idea. Tour the vineyards, take a hot air balloon ride, or browse the many art galleries on your trip at this wildly popular California vacation destination.

San Clemente, fly into L.A.

One of the best places to vacation in California if you live for the surf. But after riding the waves, hop into town to enjoy the beautiful Spanish-style architecture and cultural center, shop the boutiques on Del Mar Street, or cozy up to a beach bonfire for some s'mores and more talk about surfing.

San Diego, fly into San Diego

One of the best places to vacation in southern California, San Diego has it all—ideal weather year-round, a trendy downtown district, the adventure of La Jolla Cove, and the laid-back vibes of the perfect California beach. You may never want to pack up and head home! (We won't blame you.)

What Are The Best Beaches In California?

For Families:

Santa Cruz, fly into San Jose

Oceanside campgrounds (S'mores!), family-friendly boardwalk, and the infamous Mystery Spot

For Surfing:

Windansea Beach, fly into San Diego

Bursting with critical surf history and rife with competitive spirit for the more experienced riders

For Oceanfront Accommodations:

Newport Beach, fly into Orange County

Essentially every vacation rental has beachfront access for the beach lover in, well, all of us

What Are The Best National Parks In California?

If you're looking for a unique California vacation idea, look no further than the Golden State's many national parks. The best part is that no two parks are alike and you have your pick of some of the best national parks in the nation, all within California state lines.



Sequoia National ParkSequoia National Park

Channel Islands State Park, fly into L.A. or Burbank

These five beautiful islands are also known as America's Galapagos, off the coast of Santa Barbara. This California vacation spot is perfect for wildlife lovers, with 150 different species completely unique to these islands alone! Plus, the turquoise waters will absolutely blow you away.

Lassen Volcanic National Park, fly into Sacramento

It's sometimes hard to believe the diversity of the California landscape until you see some of these national treasures for yourself. Lassen Volcanic National Park is great for hiking and enjoying a summer picnic near the unreal blue of the melted ice pools at the base of the actual volcano—which you can also hike!

Redwood National Park, fly into Sacramento

You will never believe the enormity of these ancient trees until you stand at the base of one yourself. Worth every minute of the drive to northern California, this vacation will be impossible to forget for all the best reasons.

Yosemite National Park, fly into Sacramento or San Francisco

Known worldwide for its dramatic scenery and incredible hiking, you can't go wrong with Yosemite. Perfect for the outdoor-loving family's California vacation, you'll find jaw-dropping waterfalls, unbelievable rock formations, and beautiful sequoias.

We weren't kidding when we said basically every inch of the state is ripe with California vacation ideas. No matter your lifestyle, budget, or interests, the Golden State has you covered for the best vacation in the west.

Tell us! Leave a comment below telling us about your favorite California vacation spot! (We're always looking for new ideas.)

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