

# California Museum Guide: Top 10

California may be known for its incredible beaches and magical theme parks, but rest assured there is an amazing museum scene as well! Your California vacation can be packed with cultural learning and fun for everyone on the trip. Check out our Top 10 California Museum Guide (plus a few bonuses) to find the best museums the Golden State has to offer!

## How Many Museums Are There In California?

You may think you'd need to travel to Chicago, New York, or D.C. to find the best of the country's art and culture scene, but California would beg to differ. Los Angeles county alone boasts over 840 museums and art galleries! So suffice it to say there are a LOT of museums in California. So many, in fact, you might want to see them ALL—so take a peek at [Southwest Vacations](#) to get a great deal on your flight and hotel package and start building your museum-centric itinerary today!

## What Are The Top 10 Museums In California?

Listen, the state is huge and diverse, which means it's tough to pick a mere 10 out of the California museum lineup. But keeping in mind a variety of interests, locations, and sheer awesomeness, we think we've narrowed it down to the TOP 10 MUSEUMS IN CALIFORNIA.

### 1. [The Getty](#), fly into L.A.

Just the building itself is enough to visit and marvel at, but make sure to head inside where you'll get mind-blowing panoramic ocean and valley views. Oh, and get to see an original Van Gogh...no big deal.



Central Garden at the Getty Center, Los Angeles

2. [The Museum of Contemporary Art](#), fly into L.A.

May not be for the truly classic art lover, but it's hip, modern (post-1940s art only), and a great way to hone your skills of interpretation.

3. [The Broad](#), fly into L.A.

Everything from Andy Warhol to a very contemporary installation of infinity mirrors and an olive tree grove. This one is not to be missed. (Bonus: admission is free to one of the best museums in California!)

4. [The Natural History Museum](#), fly into L.A.

Here's where you can study everything from a 63-foot-long fin whale skeleton to native gemstones to the history of southern California's people. There's something for every guest, no matter age or interests.

5. [Petersen Automotive Museum](#), fly into L.A.

An ode to the beauty of the automobile old and new, this car culture hub is high-tech and absolutely beautiful, with over 150 cars on display. Even if you're not an engine enthusiast, this museum is sure to win over any patron wanting to visit a unique museum in California.

6. [Legion of Honor](#), fly into San Francisco

This picturesque museum houses works by European artists from Rodin to Monet. This beautiful museum will transport you to another country, until you catch the lovely view of the Golden Gate Bridge and you're happily reminded you've been in northern California all along.

7. [Exploratorium](#), fly into San Francisco

The perfect combination of learning and entertainment, this San Francisco museum houses over 650 interactive exhibits—including the tactile dome where, in total darkness, you must rely on every sense but sight to guide you through. Definitely a must visit!

8. [California State Railroad Museum](#), fly into Sacramento

You don't have to be a train buff to catch the excitement of this historical treasure. This California railroad museum illustrates the development of travel in the West with beautifully restored rail cars and even real train rides!

9. [Birch Aquarium at Scripps](#), fly into San Diego

After so much playing by the ocean, the kids will love learning about what's going on beneath the waves. There are 60 different habitats to explore, plus hands-on experiments and outdoor tide pools overlooking La Jolla Shores beach.

10. [USS Midway Museum](#), fly into San Diego

Climb aboard a historic aircraft carrier—built just after WWII—and experience the floating city that over 225,000 men lived on over decades of US military service. Plus, enjoy a chat with veterans on board to truly immortalize the once-in-a-lifetime experience.



USS Midway Museum, San Diego

### What Is The Best Museum For Families In California?

Honestly, we can't (and shouldn't!) narrow it down to one best family museum in California. But here are the top few!

[The New Children's Museum](#), fly into San Diego

What better place to let go of some energy (and learn!) while on vacation in California? This museum encourages creative play as a way to learn and grow into the future's leaders. Plus, they encourage jumping on the bed—who's going to turn that down??

[Monterey Bay Aquarium](#), fly into San Jose

Captivating, multi-level exhibits that will mesmerize every member of the family. Make sure to check out the jellies, octopuses, and the magnificent views of the bay. You may even spy some otters or whales in the wild!



Kelp Forest Tank at the Monterey Bay Aquarium, Monterey

[Los Angeles County Museum of Art](#), fly into L.A.

At over 20 acres, this is the biggest museum in the western United States and one of the best museums in California, hands down. You'd need at least a day to cover everything it has to offer, but don't be afraid to pop in for one of the renowned rotating exhibits either. This is your multicultural hotspot in southern California and rivals some of the best museums in the rest of the world.

What Are Some Fun and Unusual Museums In California?

Let's face it, we're not all art history buffs! And some of the best museums in California cater to those looking for things outside the realm of—shall we say—“normal” gallery content. If so, then these are for you.

The Bunny Museum, fly into Burbank or L.A.

Packed with around 30,000 (you read that right) items related to...you guessed it...bunnies. Yeah, and did we mention this is a personal collection? Got to see it to believe it, friends.

The Museum of Jurassic Technology, fly into L.A.

This is not your typical museum! Eclectic, bizarre, fascinating, creepy, beautiful—this museum is all of the above and more. And it's up to you to decide what's real among the mysterious contents!

Museum of Death, fly into L.A.

Hello, serial killer art! Yes, morbid, but also incredibly fascinating and totally on-trend with today's obsession over true crime dramas. Not for the light-hearted!

Pez Memorabilia Museum, fly into San Francisco

Hands down, the best museum in northern California, with over 1,000 Pez dispensers (every model ever sold) on display for the collectible candy lover! Excellent California vacation souvenirs!

What Museums In California Are Free?

Who doesn't love a free museum? Here are a few top California museums to hit, especially if you're traveling on a budget!

[The California Science Center](#), fly into L.A.

400,000 square feet of awe-inspiring, hands-on, interactive science experiences, plus an IMAX theater. Perfect for kids and adults, and totally free.

[Griffith Observatory](#), fly into L.A.

Known as Southern California's gateway to the cosmos, this Los Angeles space museum offers free telescopes and incredible views of the Hollywood sign, valley, and the Pacific Ocean. For a small added fee, you can purchase tickets to see a show in the planetarium!

Musée Mécanique, fly into San Francisco

For the historic gamer in us all! It's easily located on Fisherman's Wharf and is full of hundreds of old pinball machines, a 1950s jukebox, and other classic games. Just bring quarters if you want to get in on the fun! Easily one of the best museums in San Francisco!

Do you have a favorite California museum to share? Tell us in the comments!

Looking for more travel ideas? Visit our Discussion Forum for a little [inspiration!](#)

