

California Family Vacation Ideas

It's safe to say that California is on every family's vacation bucket list. And for good reason! The Golden State is bursting with vacation spots for families of every stripe—from idyllic California beaches to all-inclusive vacation destinations, California is the perfect place for your family to plan your best vacation yet. Read on for some of our best California family vacations, including destinations, attractions, and budget-friendly tips!



What Are The Best Weekend Getaways In Southern California?

Los Angeles

Obviously, right? It's the quintessential southern California vacation spot. You may think of it as a hotspot for a younger crowd but there is a lot that will make this a great California family vacation, too. You'll have to hit up iconic highlights like the Santa Monica Pier and the Hollywood Walk of Fame while you're there, but don't forget about lesser-known gems like the Shakespeare Bridge or old Griffith Park Zoo.

San Diego

Here's where you'll get the most bang for your weekend getaway: the legendary San Diego Zoo, SeaWorld, the beach—San Diego gives you everything your California family vacation is looking for and more. But look out...you may never want to leave this incredible weather oasis.

“Legoland in Carlsbad is really great for Lego loving kids. Skip the usual crowded and expensive theme parks and check out Legoland. Spend one or two days there with one whole day at the theme park and the second split between the aquarium and the water park. I highly recommend renting a cabana at the water park so you have a home base with shade and drinks to hang out in when you need a break. You can get to Carlsbad on Southwest from either SAN or SNA.”

[@TheMiddleSeat](#) Southwest Rapid Rewards Member

Solvang

This little European-esque getaway is just a couple hours from the Burbank airport, and well worth the beautiful drive! It’s modeled after a quaint Danish town, complete with windmills, wineries, and aebleskivers (a heavenly donut hole/pancake hybrid) practically on every corner! Solvang has all the charm of a trans-Atlantic adventure with all the convenience of its perfect California locale.

Where Can Families Go For Spring Break In California?

Lake Arrowhead, Big Bear

Just a quick drive east from Ontario International you’ll find the alps of southern California. While it’s a hot spot for the winter sports enthusiasts, this one is perfect for your California family vacation during spring break. The weather is unbelievable and you won’t have the winter crowds as you enjoy the lakeside activities like hiking and horseback riding.

Carlsbad

Just north of San Diego, Carlsbad is the less expensive version of some of the bigger hot spots. You can still get your amusement park fix at Legoland, plus enjoy the beauty of the Flower Fields in bloom and hop over to the beach for some surfing or fishing! All the attractions a California family vacation needs.

Oxnard

Flying into L.A. or Burbank, hop on the beautiful coastal highway until you hit Oxnard—the perfect hub for whale watchers, museum lovers, and outdoor enthusiasts (read: beaches with volleyball courts and plenty of running and biking trails). The perfect place to enjoy southern California travel without all the major bustle of L.A.

What Are The Best Family Beaches In California?

[Santa Cruz](#), fly into San Jose

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

[Crissy Field](#), fly into San Francisco

- Kite-flying, dog-friendly, iconic Golden Gate Bridge views

[La Jolla](#), fly into San Diego

- Basically the all-inclusive family beach of California complete with playgrounds, kayaking, snorkeling with leopard sharks, the Children's Pool beach, seals, an aquarium...the list could go on.

What Is The Safest Beach In California?

Manhattan Beach, fly into L.A.

- Notoriously clean, low crime in the city, relaxing

Crystal Cove State Park, fly into Orange County/Santa Ana

- Less crowded, geared toward outdoor enthusiasts, great hiking and views

Seal Beach, fly into Orange County/Santa Ana

- Small town feel, less crowded, right by a police station

Coronado Beach, fly into San Diego

- Quiet, kid-friendly, lifeguards

What Are Some Cheap Vacation Ideas?

Despite California being rumored as an expensive travel destination, there are plenty of places and attractions fit for a California family vacation on a budget! Check out some of these less expensive California vacation spots and activities.

When you've decided where you want to go, check out [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.

Fly into San Jose to enjoy inexpensive camping at Big Sur. Take in breathtaking McWay Falls and Bixby Bridge inside the State Park.

Fly into San Diego and hit Torrey Pines State Nature Reserve and explore Balboa Park. A California family vacation that breathes easy!

Fly into L.A. to participate in live TV show tapings, hike Runyon Canyon and hope for a celeb-sighting, enjoy ocean-front biking trails, and the Hollywood Walk of Fame—all for free!

Fly into San Francisco to cross the Golden Gate Bridge, climb Lombard Street, peer at Alcatraz from the Pier, or catch a baseball game often as low as \$15!

If your California family vacation takes you north, head to Eureka, Klamath, and the Redwood National Forest for HUGE sites you won't want to miss!

Tips for Booking Your California Family Vacation

When you're considering what airport to fly in and out of for your Disneyland vacation, Orange County is a great option. This will allow you to shorten your commute between the airport and the resort so you can get to The Happiest Place on Earth that much faster!

Want to get the best deals on your trip? 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.

“When our kids were young we would buy them multiple inexpensive toys and their snacks for the plane. Then we'd wrap everything individually in wrapping paper. Multiple layers of wrapping paper. Maybe a layer of foil for good measure. And tape, lots of tape. Each child would carry their own backpack through the airport with their wrapped surprises and they couldn't touch a thing until we were in the air. Every hour they could open a new surprise.

The most important thing to do with this is to bring a trash bag to collect all of the debris.

Our grown son, now married and living overseas, says he still gets excited to fly because he feels like he's going to get special treats." [@SWDigits](#), Southwest Rapid Rewards Member

Do you have a favorite family vacation spot in California? Share it in the comments! (We're always looking for great ideas!)

You can also swing over to the Discussion Forums for more advice and answers from other travelers like you—there's a section devoted to [Family Travel](#) that is packed with information!

