

50 Activities

San Diego

A Family Activity Guide

Coastal mornings • Clever play • Animal days • Room to change plans

FREE SAMPLE · PAGE NUMBERS REFER TO THE FULL GUIDE

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Researched from current venue information, with Google Maps ratings checked September 25, 2026. Ages marked "best for" are editorial recommendations. Prices show the stated basis; parking and special programs may cost extra. Venue links open current details.

Before you buy child tickets

Budget examples use standard admission. Check these dated offers before paying for children.

October 1–31, 2026: ages 11 and under enter the Zoo and Safari Park free with an adult age 18 or older who has valid admission, up to six children per adult. No child ticket is needed. Our Zoo example becomes \$172 for two adults and children ages five and nine, including \$16 parking: \$136 below standard Any Day pricing. [Zoo offer and conditions](#)

Other museums use Kids Free coupons with different ages, dates and exclusions. The New Children's Museum offer is Wednesday and Thursday only in October 2026: one youth age 17 or younger per full-price adult, with the coupon presented. Check each offer before buying a city pass. [Museum offers and individual coupons](#)



START HERE · CHOOSE YOUR FIRST DAY

One good plan. Room to change.

Choose by time and budget, then adjust for your youngest child. Ages and pacing are recommendations. The plans start on pages 50–52; choose a plan first.

A lower-cost outdoor day → [Nature Day · p. 51](#)

Start with Cabrillo's lighthouse and views. \$60 example: one car's admission plus a picnic allowance; fuel and any Shelter Island metered parking are extra. Half a day or younger children? Omit the rocks and make the playground optional.

An indoor day → [Science & trains · p. 52](#)

Begin at Fleet; add Model Railroad after lunch only if energy holds. \$185.80 example for Fleet, stated parking and food; the second museum adds \$60. Kid City suits ages five and under. Transfers are outdoors.

A first-visit weekend → [Zoo & Balboa Park · p. 50](#)

Best for roughly ages 5–12 with two days available. \$398 example includes standard tickets, stated parking and food. Choose a shorter plan if that cost or walking does not fit.

Before you go: pick one main stop, open the arrival links on your plan, and save this PDF. Museum and weekend budgets use two adults and children ages five and nine; your total may differ. Check the dated child-ticket offers on page 2.

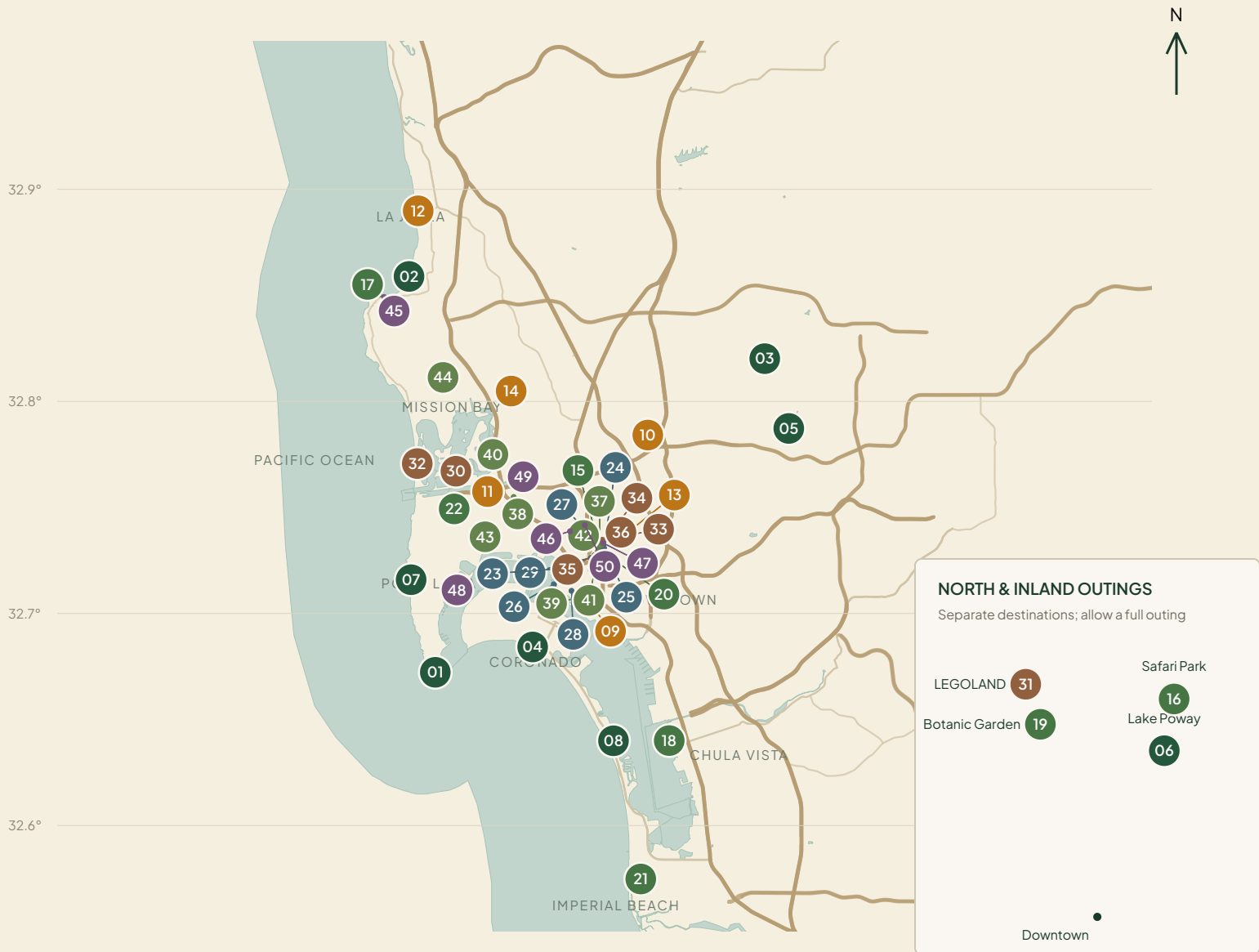


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EDITOR, KIDPATHS

Find Your Next Stop

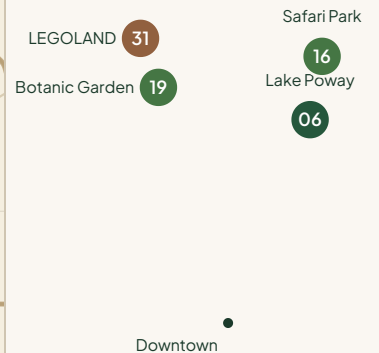
SAN DIEGO, ITS BAYS AND NEARBY COMMUNITIES



Roads & water: U.S. Census Bureau, TIGERweb • Dots mark locations; leaders separate labels

NORTH & INLAND OUTINGS

Separate destinations; allow a full outing



- | | | | |
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Numbers follow the guide. Check a live route before leaving; this index is not turn-by-turn navigation.



01 • FEATURED VENUE • SECTION 01

Cabrillo National Monument

Best for 4–12 Point Loma \$20 per private car

4.8 · 12,833 reviews

Check whether low tide falls inside Cabrillo’s park hours before leaving, and use it to set the order of your visit. Without a suitable tide, plan for the lighthouse, harbor views and a Junior Ranger booklet instead. The \$20 vehicle pass covers everyone in one private car and remains valid for seven days.

The upper monument and rocky shore are different outings. Save the coast for steady feet, shoes with grip and a child willing to watch where they step. The lighthouse living quarters are part of a normal visit; climbing the tower requires a special open day.

Insider Tips

- ▶ Family budget: \$20 admission for one private car; bring lunch and water.
- ▶ Tidepool target: about 0.7 feet or lower, before the coastal area closes at 4:30.
- ▶ No useful low tide? Keep the upper-park visit and save the rocks for another day.

ADDRESS 1800 Cabrillo Memorial Drive, San Diego, CA 92106 **HOURS** Daily 9–5; coast 4:30; holiday closures **PRICE** \$20 per private car

WEBSITE [Current venue details](#) ➤



02

La Jolla Shores

Best for 3–12

La Jolla

Free beach entry 4.7 · 4,452 reviews

Choose the Shores when your family wants to build, dig, and play before making any commitment to the ocean. This sandy beach has a playground, showers, and restrooms, making it a more practical sand-first day than a cliffside viewpoint; swimming still depends on conditions and each child's abilities.

Pro tip: The adjacent ecological reserve is a look-and-leave place: don't collect shells or other objects from it. Make a photograph or a drawing the take-home souvenir instead.

Allow 2–3 hours · Daylight visit; check ocean conditions
8200 Camino del Oro, La Jolla, CA 92037 ↗

[Current venue details ↗](#)



03

Mission Trails Regional Park

Best for 4–12

Mission Gorge

Free trails 4.8 · 819 reviews

Begin with the visitor center and a walk through Mission Trails' rugged landscape. Use the exhibits to introduce the plants and landforms you'll look for outside, then choose a short out-and-back that suits your family. You can explore from the visitor center without making a summit the goal.

Pro tip: The visitor-center theater is temporarily closed, so don't count on an indoor film break. Use the exhibits as the indoor part and keep the walk short in heat.

Start with 60–90 minutes · Visitor center daily 9–5; holiday closures
One Father Junipero Serra Trail, San Diego, CA 92119 ↗

[Current venue details ↗](#)

AN OUTDOOR DAY ON POINT LOMA

Your plan, at a glance

Start on Point Loma and stay there. Check Cabrillo's low tide, coastal access and holiday closures before leaving. These times assume the tidepool visit fits late morning; reverse the upper-park and shore stops if the actual tide calls for it.

ITINERARY 02

The Nature Day

A lighthouse morning, a tide-dependent shore, and an easy harbor finish.

Make it fit: Skip the shore if your children are not comfortable on uneven rocks. Short version: upper-park lighthouse and views, with the playground optional.

9:00

Cabrillo visitor center

Collect a Junior Ranger booklet and ask about coastal access. Begin with the harbor view if the tide is not ready yet.

9:45

Old Point Loma Lighthouse

Explore the lighthouse living quarters and surrounding views. Tower climbing is a special-event opportunity, so it is not part of this plan.

10:45

Tidepools, only when conditions fit

Aim for a tide around 0.7 feet or lower. Skip the rocks if access is closed, waves are rough or footing feels wrong.

12:00

Packed lunch and a break

Finish the Junior Ranger activity at your child's pace. Eat before leaving Point Loma's monument area. Pack out all your trash.

--- Drive to Shelter Island Park South: allow 25–30 minutes including arrival and parking; traffic can add time.

1:30

Shelter Island Park South

Use the south playground at 1732 Shelter Island Drive. Follow the waterfront for a short walk, then stop when the children are done.

Arrive: [Cabrillo parking](#). 1800 Cabrillo Memorial Drive. Start at the Visitor Center lot. Drive to coastal Lot 1 only if access and tide fit; parking is limited. Save the [tide details](#) before entering the coast's cell-service gap.

Food & toilets: Bring lunch and water; there are no restaurants or designated picnic areas. Use the Visitor Center restrooms before the coast; two accessible single-stall rooms have changing tables. [Shelter Island details](#).

One private car: \$20 Cabrillo admission. Add a \$40 picnic-and-snack allowance = \$60 planning budget before fuel and any Shelter Island metered parking. Admission remains \$20 even when the tidepool stop is skipped.

Change of plan: No suitable tide? Keep the lighthouse and views, then head to Shelter Island earlier. If rain or wind makes the coast unpleasant, use the Rainy-Day plan instead; do not treat high surf as a sightseeing bonus.

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Volume 3: San Diego, California
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Plan with current venue links before departure

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