

LAGUNA BEACH

Magazine

Travel to San Diego for Kid-Friendly Deals in October

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Photo courtesy of Hornblower cruises & events

October provides the chance to beat holiday crowds and experience San Diego at its best. Throughout the month, more than 100 organizations offering discounts on transportation, lodging, food and entertainment encourage families to come and explore the city. Deals are typically for children 12 and under, and while many are available with the purchase of an adult equivalent, there are also some complete freebies.

America's Finest City can't be beat for its jovial vibe and colorful culture, and October's promotions make it an ideal time to venture from Laguna Beach for a vacation where vendors

will welcome you and your kids with decadent desserts, historic highlights and amusing anecdotes.

GETTING THERE AND GETTING AROUND



Amtrak offers complimentary rides for children 2 to 12 in October.

As you make your way down Interstate 5, veer off in Oceanside via the historic Highway 101 and wind through Carlsbad and Del Mar before exploring the beaches of La Jolla. My family loves to grab wet suits and snorkels from the nearby shops and get up close to aquatic life at La Jolla Cove. Sea lions lounge on the shore and are very comfortable with human interaction, but take care to give them a wide berth; one actually batted my husband with a fin when he unknowingly swam into its space.

If going car-free is more your style, skip the freeway and take in some views from an Amtrak window. Kids ages 2 to 12 get a complimentary ride during October with the purchase of an

adult ticket on the Pacific Surfliner, which drops off in a couple of bustling areas like Old Town and San Diego downtown. The trains accept bikes and boards of all sorts, but outdoor adventurers may want to reserve space ahead of time on the equipment rack. Bites are available on-board along with Wi-Fi, so you can connect and wrap up loose ends or iron out plans for your relaxing weekend.

Once you're settled in town, see the sights aboard the Old Town Trolley or take to the water with San Diego SEAL Tours, Flagship Cruises & Events or Speed Boat Adventures; each of these tour operators is offering one free child per paid adult. Two kids can tag along at no cost with a paid adult on a picturesque bay tour from Hornblower Cruises & Events, and up to four can join in with mom or dad's purchase of a scenic ride from The Gondola Co. in Coronado. My family went on one of their gondola tours recently in celebration of an anniversary, and I consider it to be one of the county's most valuable excursions. Gliding along the island's sparkling edge is a memory that will stay with children for years to come.

STAY AND PLAY



Photo courtesy of Paradise Point Resort & Spa

Options abound for warm hospitality. Book the US Grant Junior Explorer Family Getaway at the historic US Grant downtown, and you'll receive free daily breakfasts for two kids along with a creative welcome amenity and mocktail. Ask about the rooftop, where world-renowned sommelier Jeff Josenhans has helped establish a sustainable garden to provide seasonal harvest for the venue's plates and pours.

Further north—toward the San Diego Zoo Safari Park—families will receive frighteningly good service at the expansive Rancho Bernardo Inn property, which is totally decked-out for Halloween. With the “kids rule, ghosts drool” package, children can enjoy unlimited food and drink from kids' menus along with festive activities like cookie decorating and haunted mini golf.

For more of a secluded country club feel, escape to a 44-acre private island destination: Paradise Point Resort & Spa is offering a \$50 “island allowance” for kids to use on bike rentals, ice cream, mini golf, pool toys and more. The property's spacious bungalow-style rooms and suites usher guests in with tropically elegant decor and stunning lagoon or bay views.

ANIMAL ENCOUNTERS



Photo courtesy of Birch Aquarium at scripps

Bring your wild ones to meet Southern California's most famous animals at the San Diego Zoo and San Diego Zoo Safari Park. Children 11 and younger are free at both locations—my boys love watching the lorikeets land in their open palms at the Safari Park. The Africa Tram there is the perfect spot for little ones to catch a late afternoon nap while mom and dad gaze at the giraffes, while the new Sumatran Tiger Trail exhibit provides a rare look at this endangered species.

Also up north by the Safari Park, Legoland is offering a free single-day Child Sea Life Hopper Ticket so kids can experience the main park—which features 128 acres of building brick fun for any age—and Sea Life aquarium with the purchase of a full-price Adult Sea Life Hopper Ticket. Our family has made a tradition of taking each child there and getting a caricature drawn of them when they're about 2 to 3 years old. The artists are surprisingly talented, and the trip

gives us adults a good excuse to ogle over Legoland's incredible Miniland USA cities, constructed to scale with 20 million Lego bricks.

Another aquatic adventure awaits at the Birch Aquarium at Scripps, where more than 60 habitats house fish and invertebrates from the chilly waters of the northwest Pacific to the tropical ocean off the coast of Mexico, and beyond. With a coupon from the San Diego Museum Council website, a paid adult ticket grants admission for up to two children under 12.

ADVENTURE TIME



The Gondola Co. | *Photo by Stacy Childers Photography*

Whether you're raising a feisty fisherman or an aspiring astronaut, San Diego has something to keep any kid—or kid at heart—busy from sunrise to sunset. The USS Midway Museum combines the excitement of the sea and sky: On board the massive retired aircraft carrier, “a city at sea,” visitors can explore more than 60 exhibits with a collection of 30 restored aircrafts, as well as two flight simulators. Kids 12 and under receive free general admission and a self-guided audio tour.

About a 10-minute drive away, a full day of thrills awaits at San Diego's Balboa Park. More than three dozen San Diego museums countywide are welcoming kids 12 and under to enter for free, and this is the place to hit a huge number of them. Car fans will revel in the San Diego Automotive Museum's classic display of old school vehicles and motorcycles, while train aficionados will find plenty of mini locomotives at the San Diego Model Railroad Museum. Visitors of all ages will be amazed by the detail of tiny scale models; the San Diego and Arizona

Eastern Railway, nicknamed “The Impossible Railroad” because of its rough terrain, is one of five operating train layouts on display.

For aviation and aerospace enthusiasts, the San Diego Air & Space Museum—a Smithsonian affiliate—is another must-see spot, as is the Reuben H. Fleet Science Center, where the “Journey To Space” film transports viewers to the stars and discusses NASA’s past, present and future space plans. But if you want to actually take flight, hire Corporate Helicopters to bring your family up and over the tops of La Jolla Cove, Petco Park and the Coronado Bridge. This bird’s-eye view won’t soon be forgotten, and a child can fly free with a paid adult.

Whether you’re exploring it by land, sea or sky, a family trip to San Diego is sure to create lasting memories for kids and adults alike. I’ll never forget the look on my mom’s face as she gazed at me, making those first memories here. It’s the same way I look at my own children today, laughing at their innocent antics and smiling as they interact with a world that still seems new and vibrant. Come share our warm October air and welcoming community with your children—I guarantee you’ll smile as well.