



SAN DIEGO
MUSEUM COUNCIL

Kids Free San Diego | Special Edition



Photo: The New Children's Museum

Get Ready, Set, GO!

Kids Free San Diego is back! From October 1-31, kids 12 and under receive FREE admission with a paid adult to many of San Diego County's favorite cultural institutions, including museums, historic sites, aquariums, gardens and more.

Not sure where to start? Check out our complete [Kids Free Family Guide](#) with highlights and planning tips from over two dozen participating museums. We have included a sneak peak below at some of the fun options you'll find in each corner of the County.

To participate in Kids Free, simply download a coupon for each participating museum at [SanDiego.org](#) and get ready to explore!

[Learn More About Kids Free](#)



Kids Free is the PERFECT time to experience the wide diversity of San Diego County's museum community. Plan your family's adventures one unique neighborhood at a time. Think you have seen it all? Think again! Here are some ideas to get your started, from new exhibitions to special events to hidden gems waiting to be discovered!

Photo: Maritime Museum of San Diego

Kids Free in Balboa Park

San Diego's crown jewel, Balboa Park, offers families the chance to explore one or more museums in a single day or plan multiple visits.

Mingei International Museum

Check out the newly renovated [The Mingei International Museum](#), featuring beautiful folk art, craft and design from around the world. The museum offers a variety of special events geared towards young kids, including Mini Mingei (ages 2-5) and Family Sundays (5+). On October 1 and 15, Mini Mingei will feature toddler-centered art-making and storytime. On Sunday, October 17, Mingei will host a free program for kids to create a sugar skull piñata in honor of Day of the Dead.

San Diego Air & Space Museum

The [San Diego Air & Space Museum](#) is always a family favorite, with a 3D/4D theater and interactive exhibits, including MaxFlight® simulators and an interactive kid zone. The Museum is located next to Palisades Plaza, a beautiful new public space with seating, making it the perfect spot for a picnic lunch or snack.

San Diego Automotive Museum

Car- and motorcycle-loving families will want to visit [San Diego Automotive Museum](#). Fans of *Back to the Future* can't miss this opportunity to see the DMC DeLorean currently on display. Kids can even climb inside for a great photo!



Photo: Birch Aquarium at Scripps

San Diego Model Railroad Museum

Kids love the [San Diego Model Railroad Museum](#), which is the world's largest accredited model railroad museum. Check out the five enormous scale model layouts depicting railroads of the Southwest, as well as a Toy Train Gallery with an interactive Lionel layout for children.

Have an aspiring young artist or photographer? You won't want to miss exploring [The San Diego Museum of Art](#) and the [Museum of Photographic Arts](#).

Museum of Photographic Arts

Younger guests love the annual youth exhibitions, now on view. The unique show combines imaginative artworks responding to two separate thematic calls for submissions: *Growing Up* and *Space*.

The San Diego Museum of Art

San Diego's world-class art museum is always free for guests under 17 and the grassy Sculpture Garden is a great place for kids to get their wiggles out. Panama 66 restaurant is a favorite spot for a casual lunch and live music on the patio. On October 31, the Museum will be hosting "Spooky ArtStops" with Halloween-inspired performances from the San Diego Shakespeare Society in the Garden.



Photo: Fleet Science Center

Kids Free is the perfect time for kiddos with a passion for science and nature to visit the popular [Fleet Science Center](#) and the [San Diego Natural History Museum \(The Nat\)](#).

Fleet Science Center

Don't miss [Mechanics Alive!](#), a brand-new exhibition opening October 9 that explores small, surreal worlds through fantastical and amusing mechanical sculptures known as automata

(they come to life at the push of a button or pull of a lever!). Digital Me is another brand-new exhibition, exploring today's digital world through larger-than-life exhibits in technology, art, play and media, presented from a powerful new perspective. Both experiences open October 9.

San Diego Natural History Museum

Animal lovers should check out the [Living Lab](#), a new exhibition featuring live animals from the Museum's Vivarium. You'll get up to close some of our region's not-so-cuddly residents, like an impressive red diamond rattlesnake, an observation bee hive, a Gila monster, several centipedes and arachnids and more. Films may be added for an extra \$5.

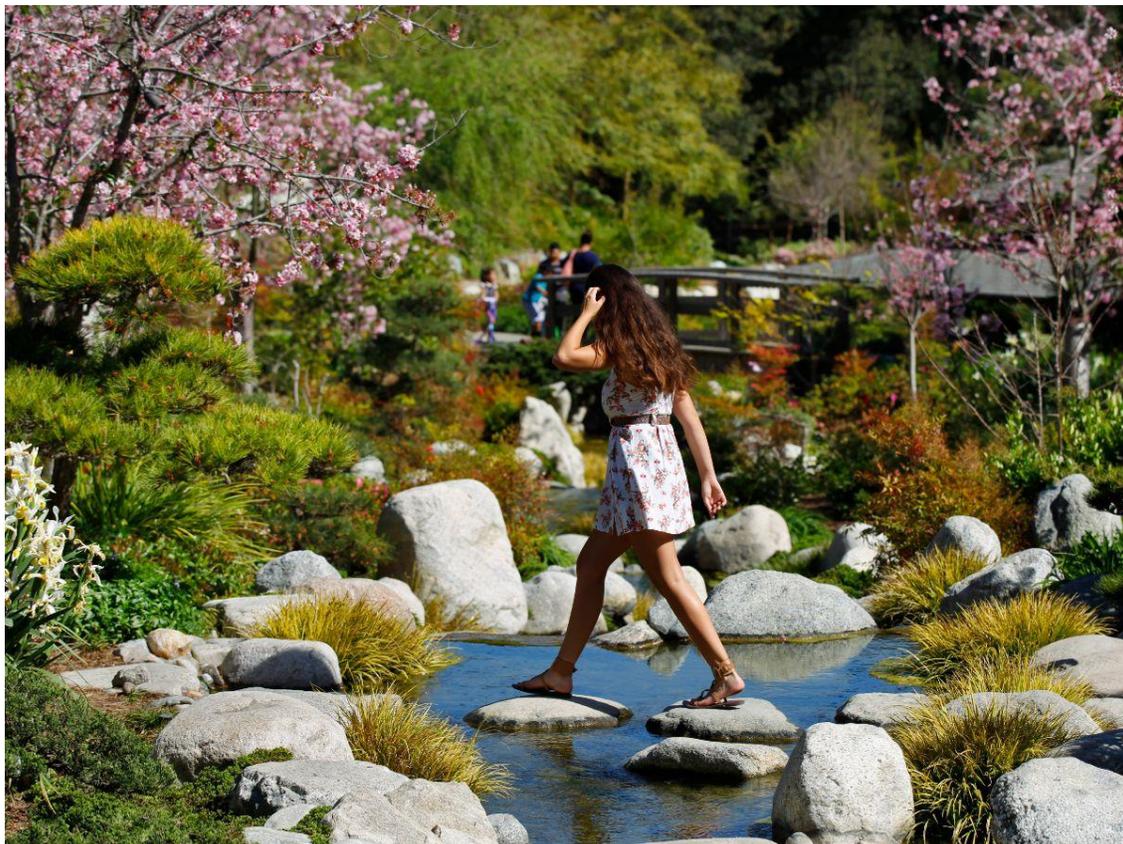


Photo: Japanese Friendship Garden

Japanese Friendship Garden

Finally, no day in the park is complete without a visit to the beautiful [Japanese Friendship Garden](#). Explore the upper gardens and tree-lined canyon, check out the Bonsai collection, stone garden, dragon bridge, and (everyone's favorite!), the majestic koi ponds. During October, you can also see the photography exhibit, "Hokusai Wave," inspired by the artwork of the acclaimed Japanese Ukiyo-e artist Katsushika Hokusai. The Garden also offers a free scavenger hunt activity that kids love!



Photo: San Diego Air & Space Museum

Explore Kids Free in Downtown San Diego

The New Children's Museum

In downtown San Diego, [The New Children's Museum](#) is the perfect destination for families with little ones to think, play and create. Right now, guests can experience the Museum's newest art installation, *El Más Allá* by international artist Panca, featuring vibrant murals, a 40-foot slide, giant foam blocks and geometric sculptures. Also, check out the new outdoor installation, *In the Balance*, a play structure in which visitors are invited to carefully walk

on different balancing beam paths.

Gaslamp Museum at the Davis-Horton House

Families can enjoy free admission and self-guided tours at the [Gaslamp Museum at the Davis-Horton House](#), the oldest building in downtown San Diego, which has been used as a county hospital, military barracks, private residence, and has ties to Prohibition and WWI espionage history. In the Museum's Pocket Park, check out the statues of "Bum," San Diego's first and only town dog, and "Bobby," another famous local canine.



Explore Kids Free Along the Coast

Birch Aquarium at Scripps

Located along the beautiful La Jolla coast, [Birch Aquarium at Scripps](#) is a kid-favorite with

its Tide Pool Plaza, the Giant Kelp Forest and Seahorse & Seadragons exhibits. Plus, kids will love *Oddities: Hidden Heroes of the Scripps Collections*, a comic book-inspired exhibit that highlights the "super powers" of ocean species. Haunted Aquarium returns Oct. 22-24 from 6 to 9 p.m. Guests will meet slimy sea creatures, learn about mysterious animals from the sea, and get up close with spooky science. Costumes, including ocean-themed, are encouraged!

Living Coast Discovery Center

At the southern end of San Diego Bay is the [Living Coast Discovery Center](#), a zoo/aquarium dedicated to connecting families with coastal wildlife. Get face-to-face with endangered sea turtles, explore Raptor Row and Eagle Mesa (featuring hawks, falcons, owls and even an American Bald Eagle!), touch friendly rays in the Shark & Ray Experience and see all types of fish, octopuses, jellies, reptiles and amphibians in the Aquarium Galleries. Don't miss the special weekend presentations and up-close animal encounters.

Maritime Museum of San Diego

Along the Embarcadero, the [Maritime Museum of San Diego](#) is offering a special Buy One Get One Free deal in October that includes admission to all of the Museum's historic vessels plus dozens of below-deck exhibits and galleries. Have some Halloween fun on Oct. 29-31 when kids can help solve the mystery of the ghost ship *Mary Celeste*. One lucky winner will sail away with a Tall Ship Adventure Sailing Four-Pack aboard the topsail Schooner and official tall ship of the state, *Californian*.

USS Midway Museum

Don't miss a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to explore a historic aircraft carrier. The [USS Midway Museum](#) has activities for all ages including self-guided audio tours, theater, flight simulators, climb-in aircraft, ejection seats and cockpits, guided tours of the bridge and more.



Photo: USS Midway Museum

Kids Free Experiences in North County

San Diego Botanic Garden

Head up the coast to Encinitas where you'll find [San Diego Botanic Garden](#) with three areas designed just for kids – the Hamilton Children's Garden (the largest on the West Coast, home to Toni's Tree House, mountain stream and bird and butterfly garden), Seeds of Wonder (for early learners, with model trains), and the Junior Quail Trail (an immersive area to play and explore). On Wednesdays through Fridays at 10 a.m. to noon, kids can participate in the SAPLinGs (Science, Art and Play in Garden Spaces) program. Ask for a copy of the Garden's fun scavenger hunt, always always available at admissions.

The Museum of Making Music

Following a complete renovation, [The Museum of Making Music](#) in Carlsbad has reopened to

the public and October is the perfect time to see what's new! Families will find hundreds of instruments on display from the last 150 years and experience an immersive panoramic multimedia display with multiple hands-on opportunities. Music-lovers young and old will enjoy hearing a vast sampling of musical styles from yesterday and today.

The New Children's Museum – Now in North County too!

As an exciting new addition to North County, [The New Children's Museum](#) recently launched its first stand-alone satellite location, a 2,000-square-foot Art + Play Space in the Del Mar Plaza shopping center. It is a smaller version of the Museum's downtown location, offering families the opportunity to play in a mini version of [Wobbleland](#) by artist Marisol Rendón, make hands-on art in the Makerspace, and sign up for fee-based art classes and workshops for kids.



Photo: San Diego Botanic Garden

California Surf Museum

San Diego kids love catching waves while lying on their bellies, and the [California Surf Museum](#) has a whole exhibit to show the history of the ever-popular Boogie Board. See *Let's Boogie! Tom Morey and the Evolution of the Boogie Board* during your visit to this Oceanside favorite.

Mission San Luis Rey

Also in Oceanside is the historic [Mission San Luis Rey](#), which tells the story of our nation's frontier past and the heritage that helped form California. Explore the grounds of this National Historic Landmark and check out the Museum's displays of original art and artifacts that bring the Mission Era to life.

San Diego Archaeological Center

Kids (ages 5-12) visiting the [San Diego Archaeological Center](#) in Escondido during October will receive a free *Kids Dig Archaeology* activity book and can complete activities to earn a Junior Archaeology Badge.

California Center for the Arts, Escondido

José Guadalupe Posada is a legendary printmaker of Mexico, and [California Center for the Arts Escondido](#) Museum is showing his work this fall season. Posada's satirical skeletons (calaveras) are instantly recognizable!



Photo: California Surf Museum

Kids Free in East County & South Bay

Lemon Grove Parsonage Museum

Join the [Lemon Grove Parsonage Museum](#) on Oct. 9 for family fun at the Treganza Heritage Park Dedication and Museum Open House. The free event celebrates the history of this whistlestop town (known for the iconic "Big Lemon") and will feature an antique auto show, a taco truck, lawn games and activities for kids.

Barona Cultural Center & Museum

The [Barona Cultural Center & Museum](#) in Lakeside is a great place to learn about local Kumeyaay-Diegueño culture. The Museum's collection represents thousands of years of

history (some objects dating as far back as 10,000 years!) and demonstrates the artistry and skill of the hemisphere's first inhabitants. Kids visiting in October will receive a free goody bag.

Bonita Museum & Cultural Center

October is also a great time to visit the [Bonita Museum & Cultural Center](#). From Oct. 9-23, the museum will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Chula Vista Art Guide in the main gallery. On Oct. 15-16, the museum will feature floral arrangements by the Bonita Gallery Garden Club, and on Oct. 29-30, visitors will find Día de los Muertos ofrendas by local artists.

Tijuana Estuary

While in South Bay, plan a visit to the [Tijuana Estuary](#) in Imperial Beach, the "most southwesterly city in the contiguous United States." It is always free to visit this National Estuarine Research Reserve and Visitor Center, which features hands-on, interactive activities for all ages to learn all about the biological diversity of our coastal wetlands. Go on a guided nature or bird walk or explore the kid-friendly hiking trails on your own. Afterwards, stroll over to the Imperial Beach Pier for some ice cream.



Photo: Tijuana Estuary

More Kids Free Fun

J.A. Cooley Museum

Take a step back in time at the [J.A. Cooley Museum](#). This gem in University Heights features two dozen historic automobiles from 1886 to 1933, including a 1910 Hunt Special, the only car made in San Diego/National City. There are more than 25 different collections to explore, including the Museum's telephone, camera and Edison collection.

Visions Art Museum

Did you know San Diego has a museum dedicated to contemporary quilts and textile arts? [Visions Art Museum](#) in Liberty Station is offering kids who visit during October a free mini-loom kit (including a cardboard loom, mini-balls of yarn, a feather, lace and/or ribbon). Check out the Museum's "[Stir Crazy](#)" page for fun crafting projects for all ages year-round.

Warner -Carrillo Ranch House

Take a family road trip to Warner Springs for a visit to the [Warner-Carrillo Ranch House](#). Built in 1857, the property served as the Butterfield Stage Stop and was California's first regular overland stage connection with St. Louis. With its multilayered history, the adobe ranch house tells the story of the emigrant trail, the overland stage, and the prominent ranching history of the area.



Photo: Visions Art Museum

TIP: You can find additional Kids Free discounts and perks at [SanDiego.org](#). To learn more about our participating member museums, visit the [San Diego Museum Council website](#) or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#).

Always Free Museums

Did you know that many San Diego museums offer free (or donation-based) admission all year long? Here are some enriching museums experiences families can enjoy at (little or) no cost.

- The [San Diego History Center](#), [Junipero Serra Museum](#), [Museum of Photographic Arts](#), [San Diego Archaeological Center](#), [Bonita Museum](#) and [Miniature Engineering Craftsmanship Museum](#) offer "pay-what-you-wish" (donation-based) admission.
- The [San Diego African American Museum of Fine Arts](#) is a free "without walls" online museum.
- The [Institute of Contemporary Art San Diego](#), [Barona Cultural Center & Museum](#), [Visions Art Museum](#), [Timken Museum](#), [Tijuana Estuary](#), [Coronado Historical Association](#) and the [La Jolla Historical Society](#) are free for everyone to visit (donations are welcome).
- The [California Surf Museum](#) and [Lemon Grove Parsonage Museum](#) are always free for kids 12 and under.
- The [San Diego Museum of Art](#) and [Oceanside Museum of Art](#) offer free admission for guests up to age 17. The SDMA's Sculpture Garden is always free for everyone.
- The Commons Level at [Mingei International Museum](#) is always free for all.
- **Tip:** Check out [Residents Free Days](#) (Tuesdays) in Balboa Park. The program offers free general admission at participating museums on a rotating basis for residents of the City and County of San Diego, as well as active military personnel and their dependents.



Photo: Junipero Serra Museum

Photo: Gabriel Rico, "Unity in Variety." Institute of Contemporary Art, San Diego (ICA Central)

Exhibitions

Open Now

[Disestablishment: John Raymond Mireles](#)

The San Diego Museum of Art
Through January 2022

[Pearls from the Ocean of Contentment](#)

The San Diego Museum of Art
Through February 2022

[Artist-in-Residence Christine Howard Sandoval](#)

ICA North (Formerly Lux Art Institute)

Events

[Sunset Scripps Pier Walks](#)

Birch Aquarium
Select Fridays, Saturdays & Sundays
(September 24 to November 19)

[Mehregan Fall Fête: Persian Mehregan Festival with Aida Shahghasemi](#)

The San Diego Museum of Art
May S. Marcy Sculpture Garden
October 2, 4 PM

Through October 31

[El Más Allá](#)

The New Children's Museum

[Darkest Nights, Brightest Stars: 15th Annual Juried Youth Exhibition](#)

Museum of Photographic Arts (MOPA)
Through February 2022

[A Moment to Reflect](#)

Museum of Making Music
Through December 31

Coming Soon

[José Guadalupe Posada: Legendary Printmaker of Mexico](#)

California Center for the Arts, Escondido
Opens September 18

[Gabriel Rico: Unity in Variety](#)

ICA Central (Formerly San Diego Art Institute)
Opens September 25

[Aaron Siskind: Mid Century Modern](#)

Museum of Photographic Arts (MOPA)
Opens October 2

[Mechanics Alive!](#) and Digital Me

Fleet Science Center
Opens October 9

[Chula Vista Art Guild 75th Anniversary](#)

Bonita Museum & Cultural Center
October 9 - 23

[Blooming Art](#)

Bonita Museum & Cultural Center
October 15-16

[Yolanda López : Portrait of the Artist](#)

Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego

[Treganza Heritage Park Dedication & Museum Open House](#)

Lemon Grove Parsonage Museum
October 9, 10 AM - 2 PM

[Suds & Science](#)

Fleet Science Center
October 11, 6:30 PM

[Family Sunday: Day of the Dead](#)

Mingei International Museum
October 17, 12 - 5 PM

[Wine & Lecture: John J. Montgomery and the Quest for Flight](#)

Coronado Historical Association
October 21, 5:30 PM

[Haunted Aquarium](#)

Birch Aquarium
October 22-24 (6 - 9 PM)

[Ghost Ship Experience](#)

Maritime Museum of San Diego
October 29 - 31

[SDMA + San Diego Shakespeare Society: Spooky ArtStops](#)

The San Diego Museum of Art
October 31

(Downtown)
Opens October 16

[Interpretations 2021](#)

Visions Art Museum
Opens October 16

[Día de Los Muertos Ofrendas](#)

Bonita Museum & Cultural Center
October 29 - 30



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