

The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum—Simi Valley, California

The Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum is located about 45 miles northwest of downtown Los Angeles on 100 acres of beautiful brush covered hills. On a clear day, you can see the Pacific Ocean from the library's terrace. Welcoming you to the museum is a bronze statue of President Reagan with his familiar cowboy hat.

Inside the museum are various galleries highlighting the different periods of Mr. Reagan's life including his childhood, his acting career, his time as governor of California, and his two terms as President of the United States. Items on display include a 1965 Mustang that Mr. Reagan used during his campaign for governor, his inauguration suit, clips from his films, his personal journals, and many gifts he received while serving as President. A life-size model of the White House Situation Room, a copy of a letter from George Washington, many photos of President and Mrs. Reagan, and numerous White House artifacts are also included. A large collection of belt buckles, numerous western art pieces, and several saddles are also on display. Jelly Bellies appear throughout the museum, including a beautiful depiction of President Reagan created from jelly beans!

A highlight for children and adults alike is Air Force One, the Boeing 707 that flew President Reagan and 6 other presidents around the world. Visitors walk through the entire plane and see the presidential state room, the first lady's state room and the rooms for the flight crew, staff, press, and security. Does the president wear a seat belt while sitting in his state room? Yes! Air Force One is housed in a huge multi-level pavilion with windows looking out to the foothills. Just outside is a replica of the White House Rose Garden.



A full size recreation of the oval office is included at the museum. Some of the items, such as the desk, have been a part of the oval office for decades and some are President Reagan's special touches. A docent fills you in on some interesting information about the oval office furniture and decorations.

There are also exhibits devoted to Nancy Reagan, Camp David, Rancho del Cielo, and the Cold War. In addition, several artifacts related to the U.S.S. Ronald Reagan are on display.

The rear terrace of the museum leads to a recreation of the South Lawn of the White House, a piece of the Berlin Wall, and President Reagan's Memorial Site.

The museum is family friendly but very young children who are not familiar with President Reagan may not appreciate the displays as much as youth who are interested in American history or politics. A self-guided tour only takes a few hours to complete and gives many opportunities to discuss history, politics and of course, President Reagan. The library is easy to find and there are picnic tables near the free parking lot. There is also a café featuring some of President Reagan's favorite dishes and two gift shops, one devoted mainly to Air Force One.

For more information, visit <http://www.reaganlibrary.com/> .

San Diego Zoo—San Diego

The San Diego Zoo deserves its reputation it has as one of the premiere zoos in the nation. One of the first zoos to incorporate no-bars exhibits, the San Diego zoo still offers excellent views and updated facilities for the animals. You could visit the zoo a dozen times and still not see everything.



If you have a Giant Panda lover in your family, the San Diego Zoo is a must-see. Since only about 20 giant pandas live in captivity outside of China, it's one of the few places you can get an up close look at several of them. The Giant Panda exhibit has recently been remodeled and now provides easy access to visitors as well as a serene habitat for the pandas. Visitors now wind slowly along a path that gives you several close-up views of the pandas and enough time to take photos.

Other zoo highlights include the koala enclosure, the polar bear habitat, and the gigantic aviaries. Children will also enjoy the glass viewing areas for the gorillas and apes.

The San Diego Zoo is built on steep slopes and hills in Balboa Park. The views are magnificent, but be forewarned that it takes muscles to get up some of the hills. Plan your visit so that you are taking the escalators up and walking down as much as possible, especially if you are pushing a stroller or have young children.

Unless you are seriously afraid of heights, don't miss the skyfari ride across the park. It will give you a beautiful view of Balboa Park and Mission Bay. If you start at the Skyfari West tower and go down near the end of the day, it will save you a lot of walking when you are headed back to the entrance.

Visit <http://www.sandiegozoo.org/>

The Scorpion Submarine—Long Beach

Boys and girls that like enclosed places like hiding in the clothes racks while shopping or building forts under the kitchen table will love this field trip! Those that enjoy obstacle courses will also be highly entertained! Don't attempt this field trip if you are claustrophobic or have difficulty getting around. Children must be at least 48" tall to enter.

The Scorpion is an actual Russian foxtrot submarine that was used in the Soviet Navy for about 20 years in Top Secret assignments. Over 75 crewmen somehow lived in these cramped quarters for up to 3 months at a time but you will be glad to leave in less than 30 minutes. You will come away with a new appreciation for high ceilings, flat floors, and beds you can turn around in. Your children will come away with new material for imaginative play for weeks to come! This will be an experience none of you will ever forget.



In addition to walking through the entire submarine, you will also have the unique experience of walking along the top of the submarine as it sits in the Long Beach harbor partially submerged in water. You know your children will love that!

The Scorpion submarine is part of the Queen Mary complex and tickets can be purchased either separately or as a package with the Queen Mary. Combination tickets including the Aquarium of the Pacific located nearby are also available.

<http://www.russiansublongbeach.com/>

Aquarium of the Pacific—Long Beach

If you (or your children) have always wanted to pet a shark, this is the place for you! The Aquarium of the Pacific in Long Beach, California, has several child-friendly tanks that allow visitors to touch harmless sharks, bat rays and other sea creatures with two fingers. They specify two-finger touching because "One finger is like poking and more than two fingers are like grabbing."

Upon entering the museum, visitors are welcomed by a model of a mother whale and her gigantic baby suspended from the ceiling. It's fun for children to compare their size with that of the whale mommy and baby. There are also interactive displays that allow children to mimic the sounds of various whales and hear their calls replayed back to them. The displays also include a variety of videos giving additional information about the different whales.



The aquarium is divided into exhibit halls that feature animals from various regions such as "Tropical Pacific" and "Northern Pacific." Each hall gives visitors a chance to see a variety of creatures from that particular region. Some of the animals are very familiar and some are extremely unique. My personal favorites are the leafy seadragons with the sea otters making a close second.

There are several large exhibits that are very popular. The seal and sea lion aquarium can be seen from both above and below the water. The sea lions are very friendly and can often be enticed to interact with visitors. They are interested in you – especially if you have a new toy they can "play" with through the glass.

If you are visiting the Long Beach area, the museum is easily accessed from the 710 freeway and is located near the Queen Mary ship, shopping, restaurants, hotels and beaches.

For more information, visit <http://www.aquariumofpacific.org/>