

CALIFORNIA ^{22 DAYS} & The Southwest - day by day



California, Grand Canyon + Vegas in 22 days

This day by day itinerary is intended for international families with teenagers who in three weeks – with L.A. as the starting point – want to experience classic highlights such as Los Angeles and San Francisco as well as some of California's beautiful national parks, including Yosemite and Death Valley. California Highway 1 along the Pacific coast from San Francisco to Los Angeles is also included.

The itinerary also covers the majestic views of Grand Canyon. Staying overnight in Vegas for two days is also part of this day by day guide as well as some of the most fascinating and beautiful national parks in Southwestern U.S. including Zion National Park and Bryce Canyon in Utah. Finally, the itinerary embraces the possibility to relax and enjoy a few days along the California beaches.

Introduction to California and the American Southwest

California, Grand Canyon and Las Vegas are dream destinations for most travelers. With a huge range of adventures, you won't be able to do it all. However, with this day by day itinerary you'll be able to incorporate the majority of the classic sights plus a few handpicked attractions in California and across the Southwest.

The distances in the Western parts of the U.S. can be extreme. Bear in mind that there will be days, where you'll have to cover long distances. Therefore, this itinerary is intended for families with children age 8 and up who are old enough to accept the long car ride the days that you cover a great distance.

At the same time, the experiences in Western U.S. – including both major cities and national parks – are many and very intense. This can be overwhelming for smaller children and infants. I therefore recommend that children should be at least 8-10 years old before going on this road trip – unless they are experienced travelers and used to travelling long distances.

The suggested route in this itinerary is meant to be explored during the summer and the fall – or at least between May until late October early November. Tioga Road through Yosemite which is included in this itinerary is closed during the winter. If travelling from the early November until early May, you'll have to go south of the Sierra Nevada mountains via Bakersfield. Please take notice of that the dates for the opening and closure of Tioga Road through Yosemite National Park changes from year to year.

The best times of year to go on a self-drive holiday in California and Southwestern U.S. is during the springtime in April, May and June – or during the fall in September, October and November. Seen from an international perspective, late June, July and early August is the most expensive time of the year – looking at airfares as well as lodging. Besides, it can be extremely hot in some of the national parks in July and August. But large parts of Arizona, Utah and Nevada are also extremely hot during the summer time.

The suggested route in the itinerary is based on a road trip in a rental car. If you plan to go in a motorhome please take notice of that some of the distance traveled is based on the route being driven in a regular car or similar vehicle, in which you would typically cover longer daily distances. However, you can travel all the recommended roads in a motorhome.

Your day by day adventure trip starts in Los Angeles, and the route is done counterclockwise. The benefit of driving the route anticlockwise is that you will get to experience some of the national parks early in the tour. Besides, you will also drive down California Highway 1 along the Pacific Ocean in a north-south direction which gives you the best experience from a scenic point of view. Once you get back to Southern California the itinerary concludes with a few days of beach vacation before flying back home.

The total distance in this 22 day-by-day itinerary is about 2.200 miles or 3.540 kilometers. On top of that comes driving within Los Angeles and Las Vegas, plus distances on day trips within the national parks.

Los Angeles, Grand Canyon, Utah, Las Vegas, San Francisco, Highway 1 - day by day:

- Day 1: Arrival in Los Angeles (including pick-up rental car in Los Angeles)
- Day 2: Los Angeles
- Day 3: Joshua Tree National Park – drive to Lake Havasu City, Arizona
- Day 4: Route 66 to Grand Canyon
- Day 5: Grand Canyon National Park
- Day 6: Drive to Page – Antelope Canyon
- Day 7: Lake Powell/ Antelope Canyon – drive to Bryce Canyon, Utah
- Day 8: Bryce Canyon National Park
- Day 9: Zion National Park
- Day 10: Drive to Las Vegas, Nevada
- Day 11 + 12: Las Vegas
- Day 13: Drive to Mammoth Lakes via Death Valley, California
- Day 14: Yosemite National Park
- Day 15: Drive to San Francisco
- Day 16 + 17: San Francisco
- Day 18: San Francisco – drive to Monterey
- Day 19: Highway 1: Monterey – Solvang/ Santa Barbara
- Day 20 + 21: Beach vacation by the Pacific Ocean
- Day 22: Departure from Los Angeles (including drop-off the rental car)

Arrival in Los Angeles - Day 1

Almost all international airlines fly into Los Angeles International Airport – LAX. You are almost guaranteed to end up in LAX when you arrive in L.A. LAX is one of the largest airports in the world and you should be prepared for an immigration and customs procedure that might take an hour or more. It depends on which time of the day you'll arrive at LAX.

Next step is picking up your rental car. At LAX all car rental companies are spread throughout the area near the airport. There is no single building where all the major rental car companies are located. You board a free shuttle bus outside the airport terminal which takes you to your specific rental car company. After picking up your rental car you can head towards your hotel.

Regarding a place to stay in Los Angeles on the first night, I would recommend either Santa Monica by the Pacific Ocean which is not too far from LAX, or simply choose one of the many nearby airport hotels.

Links about Los Angeles:

Los Angeles International Airport – www.lawa.org

Hotels and lodging in Los Angeles – www.highways-usa.com/los-angeles-hotels

Try to avoid driving in L.A. during rush hours. Then you won't get stuck in traffic



Los Angeles – day 2

After a long flight, I recommend that you spend the first full day in Los Angeles without too much driving. So today you could get a closer look at Hollywood, take a walk up and down Hollywood Boulevard and maybe hop on a guided tour with Starline Tours. Their most popular tour is the Movie Stars' Homes Tour which takes you around Hollywood and Beverly Hills including Rodeo Drive. Here you can experience some of the million dollar homes of the stars – although most of the big mansions in Beverly Hills are not very easy to spot. However, driving around Hollywood in a Starline Tours cabriolet style bus is quite fun.

In the afternoon, I would consider visiting Warner Brothers and join their VIP Tour. This will take you backstage at Warner Brothers on a guided tour through their huge location including visits inside some of their soundstages and walks through their outdoor TV and film sets. The guided tours take about two hours and afterwards you can do a self-guided tour through Warner Brothers new Visitor Center.

Reserve at least three hours when visiting Warner Brothers. Children must be at least 8 years old to participate. Warner Brothers offers one of the best “behind the scenes studio tours” in Hollywood especially for grownups. The tour might not catch the same attention from kids.

Personally, I wouldn't plan any more activities on the first day in Los Angeles and just keep an easy schedule. Universal Studios is great fun too but you need a full day to enjoy all the entertainment. If Universal Studios is on your to-do list, consider spending a full day at Universal Studios when you're back in L.A. at the end of your road trip before flying back home.

If you want to end the day with a genuine California feeling, you might consider going to Santa Monica or Venice Beach right by the Pacific Ocean. Santa Monica and Venice Beach are two nice and very Californian parts of the L.A. Santa Monica is famous for the Santa Monica Pier and considered the ending point of Route 66 while Venice Beach is famous for the beach promenade along the coast.

Please note an important message: Try to avoid driving in L.A. between 7 am and 9 am in the morning and again between 3 pm and 6 pm. This way you can keep clear of the heavy traffic and long queues on L.A. freeways during the rush hours which may otherwise be time-wasting.

Links about Los Angeles:

Starline Tours – www.highways-usa.com/starline-tours-hollywood

Universal Studios Hollywood – www.universalstudioshollywood.com

Warner Brothers Studio Tour – www.wbstudiotour.com

Beverly Hills and Rodeo Drive – www.lovebeverlyhills.com

Santa Monica – www.santamonica.com

Venice Beach – www.venicebeach.com

Hollywood Boulevard with its many stars in the sidewalks is a must-see in L.A.



The Venice Beach promenade is lively during weekends and always nice and sunny



In the evening consider a walk on Santa Monica Pier with its amusement park



Joshua Tree and Lake Havasu City – Day 3

Driving distance: 305 miles/ 490 kilometers

Today marks the beginning of the grand tour through Southwestern U.S. To make the most of the day you should leave Los Angeles early. You might run into some rush hour traffic but just take it as an experience. Luckily, traffic is denser going Downtown. You are going the opposite direction.

I suggest you leave the hotel around 7.30 am as you're going to visit Joshua Tree National Park in the Mojave Desert. If you are visiting in July or August, it gets very hot in the park in the middle of the day. So, it's recommendable to visit the park early in the day to avoid the most extreme heat. Head for Interstate 10 which takes you eastbound out of Los Angeles towards Palm Springs. Leave Interstate 10 at Exit 117 and follow California Highway 62 to the village Joshua Tree. From Joshua Tree drive into Joshua Tree National Park – just look for the signs on the right. Follow the park road through Joshua Tree National Park from west to north.

At the entrance a park ranger is selling admission tickets to Joshua Tree National Park. I recommend that you buy the America the Beautiful Annual Pass which gives you unlimited access to all American national parks for the next 12 months. The cost for America the Beautiful Annual Pass is 80 dollars (2017). The annual pass is valid for all persons that travel together in a single vehicle. You will be visiting several national parks on your road trip and the annual pass will turn out to be inexpensive. A single-entry ticket for each national park is 25-30 dollars. Note: Please remember to bring water bottles! Joshua Tree is a desert park which can get blistering hot midday during the summertime.

Wonderful experiences in the park await you and it's worth getting out of the car. There are several short and easy nature trails to follow as well as some viewpoints. You'll receive an overview map of the park at the entrance station thus you'll easily find your way around the park which only has a few paved roads. Joshua Tree National Park has some very beautiful cliff formations as well as the small palm treelike Joshua Trees.

When you exit the park, you'll reach the town of Twentynine Palms. You'll get back on the California Highway 62 Eastbound through the Mojave Desert where you'll leave all civilization behind as you drive into the desert.

Please note the sign at the outskirts of Twentynine Palms: Next Services 100 Miles! So be sure to have a full tank of gas so you're all set to face the Mojave. The travel time from Twentynine Palms to Lake Havasu City is estimated to be 2-3 hours.

Along the way, you'll cross U.S. 95 in California. Stay on Highway 62 and continue east into Arizona across the Colorado River, until you reach Arizona Highway 95. Then follow Highway 95 Northbound to Lake Havasu.

In Lake Havasu City, you can take a walk across the real London Bridge. It was moved here stone by stone in the 1960s from London, England. A canal connected to the Colorado River ensures water beneath the bridge. A beach nearby is offering a "real" beach atmosphere in the middle of the desert.

Do you want more? Get the full version of the 22-day itinerary: California & The Southwest

www.highways-usa.com/southwest-22days

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