

Suggested Itinerary:

Los Angeles & Southern California

Perpetually sunny Los Angeles is a prime spot for beginning a tour of scenic Southern California. Start in L.A.'s trendy neighbourhoods before taking in the natural wonders of Joshua Tree National Park, and enjoying vibrant San Diego and the relaxing vibe of Long Beach.

Los Angeles

Suggested: 3 days

Start just west of downtown Los Angeles on the upscale Third Street Promenade shopping-and-entertainment district in Santa Monica. Then, head toward the ocean to visit the beautiful Santa Monica Pier, which boasts the Pacific Park amusement park, a historic carousel and the Santa Monica Pier Aquarium. Drive about nine miles (14.5 km) northeast to upscale Beverly Hills to stroll high-end shops on Rodeo Drive and dine at the poolside café at the iconic Beverly Hills Hotel. Theme parks abound in the LA area: there's the classic Disneyland in Anaheim, Universal Studios Hollywood in Universal City and thrill-filled Magic Mountain in Santa Clarita. Complete your stay with an exploration of Hollywood, the centre of the U.S. film industry, and save time to hike to the often-photographed Hollywood sign for stunning views.

Joshua Tree National Park

Suggested: 2 days

From Los Angeles, head two-and-a-half hours east through the desert to otherworldly Joshua Tree National Park. The park, named after the weathered, twisted trees found there, is an ideal spot for nature enthusiasts, whether you prefer a short walk or a more challenging and lengthy hike. While exploring the park, take in the panoramic view of the Coachella Valley from Keys View. Witness the eroded granite of Skull Rock. Stay past sunset for awe-inspiring sky gazing. Or, with the help of a local outfitter, rent gear and ascend some of the park's 8,000 rock-climbing routes. There are no hotels, restaurants or grocery stores inside Joshua Tree National Park, but visitors will find plenty of hotels and amenities in the surrounding towns.

San Diego

Suggested: 3 days

San Diego, a beautiful, sunny city with diverse neighbourhoods, is about three hours south of Joshua Tree National Park. Start your exploration of the city in San Diego's quaint Little Italy, packed with restaurants and Italian markets. Stroll through scenic La Mesa, with its walking trail traversing public art installations and three sets of steep 'secret stairs' in the Windsor Hills area. Stop for dinner in Mission Hills, known for its many inventive restaurants. Spend several days exploring Balboa Park, the cultural hub of the city, and home of the impressive San Diego Zoo, with thousands of animals representing more than 650 species. Balboa Park is also the perfect place for people-watching, strolling through gardens such as the Inez Grant Parker Memorial Rose Garden, or enjoying local culture at Casa de Balboa with its three art museums. Finish your visit by spending a day at one of the many picturesque beaches along San Diego's 70 miles (112 km) of coastline.

Long Beach

Suggested: 2 days

From San Diego, head two hours north up the Pacific coast to the pedestrian-friendly waterfront playground of Long Beach. Begin your visit with a trip to the mammoth interactive Aquarium of the Pacific where you can touch sharks and sea jellies. Continue your ocean adventure by stepping aboard the historic *Queen Mary* ocean liner which acted as a troopship in World War II. The ship now has a restaurant, shopping and even lodging. Take an hour-long cruise from the Port of Long Beach to charming Catalina Island to enjoy outdoor adventures such as fishing, snorkeling, sail boating and hiking as well as excellent dining and shopping.

For more trip inspiration and travel ideas throughout the U.S., go to VisitTheUSA.com and thebrandusa.com/USAtripkit.