

# Los Angeles & SoCal for Children

In *Tyler on Prime Time* (2003) by Steve Atinsky, a 12-year-old gets caught up in the world of TV production after he is sent to LA to live with his uncle, who works on a sit-com. Written by an actual TV writer.

Throughout this book, we've denoted kid-friendly establishments (sights, activities, hotels and restaurants especially) with the symbol (👶), within the parentheses after each establishment's name.

(Tiny) hands down, Southern California has got to be one of the most child-friendly vacation spots on the planet. The kids will already be begging to go to Disneyland, Universal Studios, SeaWorld and Magic Mountain. Get those over with (you may well enjoy them too) and then introduce them to many other worlds.

SoCal's 'endless summer' of sunny skies and warm temperatures lends itself to outdoor activities too numerous to mention, but here's a start (big breath): swimming, bodysurfing, snorkeling, bicycling, kayaking, hiking (mountain or urban), horseback riding and walking. Many outfitters and tour operators have dedicated kids' tours.

Sometimes no organized activity is even needed. We've seen kids from Washington, DC, thrill at catching their first glimpse of a palm tree, and 11-year-olds with sophisticated palates in bliss over their first heirloom tomatoes at a farmers market or shrimp dumplings at a dim-sum palace.

The upshot: if the kids are having a good time, their parents are having a good time.

## ARE WE THERE YET? What to Bring

Sunscreen. Bring sunscreen.

And bringing sunscreen will remind you to bring hats, bathing suits, flip-flops and goggles. If you like beach umbrellas and sand chairs, pails and shovels, you'll probably want to bring or buy your own; all are readily available at local drugstores. At many beaches, you can rent bicycles of all stripes – check local listings for surf and other water gear.

For mountain outings, bring hiking shoes, plenty of food and water, and your own camping equipment. These can be purchased or rented from markets and outfitters near desert parks (see local listings), but remember that the best time to test out shoes, sleeping bags and such is before you take your trip. Murphy's Law dictates that wearing brand-new hiking shoes on a big hike results in blisters.

Whatever you bring, kids always seem to take more ownership of the process if they have their own minibackpacks to carry their own gear.

For short car trips, snacks, books and toys are always a good idea; for long trips, they're essential. From LA to all but the most remote destinations in our book, travel time should be within about two hours (plus traffic, of course). Drugstores everywhere sell inexpensive books and toys to constantly keep the kids amused. An MP3 player loaded with their favorite music will help control fidgeting. Some families travel with DVD players and many public libraries have extensive kids' collections; see regional chapters for library

### TIP!

Don't pack your schedule too tightly. Traveling with kids always takes longer than expected, and in LA you'll want to build in time for distance, traffic and getting lost.

Also, kids are more likely to be engaged if they can help choose the activities. Offer them choices of sights and activities you think would be suitable.

## JET LAG

Jet lag can be trying for adults, and that's multiplied with children. For example, if you're coming from the eastern US and your kids' bedtime is 8pm at home, that means 5pm in SoCal. To avoid meltdown, you'll probably dispense with dinner, baths, stories and 'Mooommyyyyyy...!' before most locals sit down for dinner. See p74 for info on babysitting services.

It may also mean waking up three hours earlier. If you're at a hotel, check the hours of nearby restaurants or prepare early-morning snacks – many hotels, particularly in outlying areas, have refrigerators just for this purpose.

listings and inquire directly as to lending requirements (some lend only to local residents).

Baby food, infant formulas, soy and cow's milk, disposable diapers (nappies) and other necessities are all widely available in drugstores and supermarkets. Breast-feeding in public is legal, although most women are discreet about it. Public toilets – in airports, stores, shopping malls, cinemas etc – usually have diaper-changing tables.

Important note: always check the weather before setting out. Winter (basically November to March) can be rainy and temperatures unpredictable. All but the heartiest, wet-suited surfers avoid the beach then. Desert winter nights can be near freezing, and even clear winter days won't necessarily be swimming weather.

Still bring the sunscreen though.

## Flying

Airlines usually allow infants (up to the age of two) to fly for free, while older children requiring a seat of their own may qualify for reduced fares. You may want to bring your child's passport or birth certificate copy as proof of age. Generally good weather means good on-time performance at SoCal airports, but the same cannot necessarily be said for other airports on your route, so bring plenty of amusements and snacks. If traveling from overseas, order special kids' meals in advance.

Most airlines 'preboard' passengers traveling with small children. On Southwest Airlines (which has no assigned seating) you can snag seats together and other passengers tend to avoid sitting near the little ones.

## Driving

California law requires all passengers in private cars to wear seat belts, and children under the age of six or weighing less than 60lbs must be restrained in a child-safety or booster seat. If you're not traveling with your own car seats, most car-rental firms rent them for about \$5 per day, but it is essential that you book them in advance.

See What to Bring (opposite) for tips on keeping the kids amused while on the road. Rest stops on SoCal freeways are few and far between, and we wouldn't recommend gas-station rest rooms for bathroom breaks as maintenance tends to be shoddy. However, you're never very far from a shopping mall, which generally have well-kept rest rooms.

## NIGHT-NIGHT

Hotels and motels commonly have rooms with two double beds or a double and a sofa bed. For families who prefer more space, many properties have 'adjoining' rooms (two rooms attached via an internal door). Alternatively, one- or two-bedroom suites may end up being more economical. Most places provide rollaway beds, usually for a small extra charge.

A good general resource is [www.travelwithyourkids.com](http://www.travelwithyourkids.com), which has advice on how to prepare for a trip and handle oneself on the road, although there's nothing specific to SoCal.

Having one parent travel in the back seat while the other drives can let you keep the kids amused with books and games and eliminate the 'He crossed the *lil-i-i-ine!*' dilemma.

The Traveling Baby Company (☎ 800-304-4866; [www.travelingbabyco.com](http://www.travelingbabyco.com)) rents equipment, with delivery to Los Angeles, Ventura, Santa Barbara, Orange and San Diego Counties. Figure on \$8/35 per day/week for a Pack 'n' Play or car seat; weekly multiequipment packages are available from \$109.