

By Jennifer G. Williams

WEST COAST

ADVENTURES

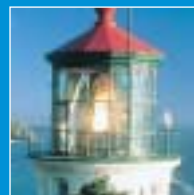
One of the best things about moving with the military is the opportunity to experience a whole new culture and climate – even when moving within the United States. And a move to the West Coast provides an endless number of possibilities for day trips and other ways to occupy your free time. From hiking on glaciers in the Pacific Northwest to soaking up some rays in sunny Southern California, there's truly something for everyone.

WASHINGTON STATE

Washington state offers a wide range of things to see and do, including llama trekking and Microsoft headquarters in Redmond.

Seattle

Seattle is home to the world-famous Space Needle, the original Starbucks and about more than three feet of rain a year. But contrary to popular belief, it does not rain all the time in Seattle. While several East Coast cities report more annual rainfall than Seattle, those cities' skies tend to clear up after their rainfall. In Seattle, the skies tend to remain overcast much of the time. The driest months are July and August, and the temperature stays pretty mild year round. The average January high/low temperatures are 46.1/35.8, while the averages in July are 75.2/55.2.



Seattle's Space Needle has been one of the West Coast's most recognizable structures since it was built for the 1962 World's Fair. At 605 feet tall, this symbol of Seattle boasts an impressive 360-degree view from its observation deck. Just below the observation deck, at about 500 feet, visitors can dine at the SkyCity Restaurant, which reportedly has a wonderful Sunday brunch. Hours for the Space Needle are 8 a.m.-midnight daily and there is an admission charge.

For fresh fish and produce to handmade jewelry and artwork, Pike Place Market has something for everyone. Open daily from 10 a.m.-6 p.m., the three story farmer's market has been a Seattle landmark for many years. And perhaps you've heard of a little coffee shop that first opened its doors there in 1971, and now has more than 4,700 locations worldwide — Starbucks.

Visitors to Seattle's Museum of Flight can see how past U.S. Presidents Kennedy and Nixon traveled in style. The former Air Force One, used during their administrations, is just one of many displays at this impressive museum. There is an admission charge, but parking is free.

No visit to Seattle is complete without going to the Seattle Aquarium and Woodland Park Zoo. The aquarium's newest exhibit, "Life on the Edge," allows guests to experience the tidepool life of Washington's outer coast and Seattle's inland sea. The aquarium features "touch zones" throughout their exhibits, to allow young and old to get up close and personal with aquatic life. Woodland Park is considered to be one of the top zoos in the country, with more than 300 animal and 1,000 plant species. The Northern Trail exhibit, which spotlights animals, birds and plants from the Pacific Northwest, is a must-see, along with the world-famous Woodland Park Rose Garden. There is an admission charge to the aquarium and the zoo, but annual passes and Aqua-Zoo passes are available.

Just a few hours away from Seattle, near Ashford, Wash., is Mount Rainier, an episodically active volcano in the midst of a 378-sq.-mi. national park which draws more than 2 million visitors annually. The elevation in the park ranges from 1,880 feet to 14,411 feet at Mount Rainier's summit. The park boasts miles of trails and climbing opportunities, and includes several glaciers. Emmons Glacier, at 4.3 square miles, is the largest glacier in the contiguous U.S. For more camping, hiking and climbing information, visit www.mount.rainier.national-park.com.



CALIFORNIA

Disneyland, Hollywood and sunny beaches may immediately come to mind when you think of California, but this enormous state has much more to offer. The best place to get started is www.gocalif.ca.gov, the state's official tourism site. This expansive, easy-to-navigate site features all kinds of activities in every corner of the state.

Los Angeles

There's more to Los Angeles than just Hollywood. While you can still catch a movie premiere and check your hand-prints against the stars found at Mann's Chinese Theater, you can also take a gondola ride in the Naples Canals in Long Beach, or visit the Farmer's Market in Chinatown every Thursday from 4-8 p.m. And Universal Studios' Hollywood Theme Park gives something other parks don't — a wet weather guarantee.

Cruise down the Sunset Strip and on down Sunset Boulevard, from downtown Hollywood to posh, residential Beverly Hills. Or check out shipwrecks and kelp forests off the coast in Catalina Island's Underwater Park (<http://www.catalina.com>, 310-510-1520).

Another attraction gaining popularity is the Getty Center, world renowned for its grand art museum, which includes new acquisitions from Monet, van Gogh and Degas.



San Diego

When a mission and fort were constructed in San Diego in 1769, it became California's first settlement. But the city is better known these days for its animal attractions. The San Diego Zoo is world famous, and has the only panda cub in the United States. Other zoo attractions include the Polar Bear Plunge, Tiger River and the new central-African rain forest exhibit, Ituri Forest. Just a short drive away is the huge Wild Animal Park, which features a 32-acre "Heart of Africa" walking safari and lush botanical gardens.

A taste of the old world can still be found in Old Town San Diego State Historic Park where life in the Mexican and early American periods of 1821-1872 are restored and recreated. The Mission San Luis Rey in Oceanside is the largest and most populous Indian mission in the state.

Sealovers will enjoy the Chula Vista Nature Center where visitors can see and touch stingrays and leopard sharks in the new Shark and Ray exhibit.



Orange County

One word: Disneyland. It seems everything else in the county has sprung up in the wake of the granddaddy of all theme parks. The original Disneyland includes old favorites such as Tomorrowland and Fantasyland, but also features new rides and attractions based on Disney's newer features such as Toy Story and the Lion King. Disneyland also operates a California Adventure Park which in the combined spirit of Disney and its home state, features attractions with names including Grizzly Peak Recreation Area, Pacific Wharf and Golden Vine Winery.

But Disney isn't the only game in town. Knott's Berry Farm has its own Theme Park and Soak City Water Park. The theme park offers exciting rides including the new XceleratorSM roller coaster. Soak City offers more than 20 California-themed water adventures.

San Francisco Bay Area

When you arrive in San Francisco, you'll probably want to check out the Golden Gate Bridge, the city's famously orange, single-span suspension bridge; or ride in a national historic landmark, in one of the city's 40 cable cars currently in service. Check out the roller-coaster feel on the ride over Nob Hill and along Hyde Street.

But you can also enter another world through Dragon's Gate at Chinatown, and sample ancient potions, exotic shops and renowned restaurants. Be sure to check out the week-long Chinese New Year festival in Chinatown each February.

If seafood is your thing, Fisherman's Wharf is a must-see. In addition to Fish Alley, which offers any type of seafood you can think of, the wharf is also home to the National Maritime Museum and numerous delicious eateries. The USS Pampanito, a WWII fleet submarine, is located off Pier 45.

Alcatraz Island is located in the Bay, and offers tours to the public every day except Christmas and New Year's Day. It's a good idea to get advance tickets in the busy summer months to visit this former maximum security prison.

And Hollywood isn't the only place to see stars in California — look through the country's largest public telescope at the Chabot Science and Space Center.



Other attractions in California

- ✦ The lowest spot in the Western Hemisphere, at 282 feet below sea level, is located in the 3.3 million-acre Death Valley National Park.
- ✦ Lake Tahoe is world-renowned for its boating and skiing. At 72 miles around, it is the largest alpine lake in North America.
- ✦ Literary buffs can check out the contest Mark Twain made famous each May at the Calaveras County Fair and Jumping Frog Jubilee; 800-225-3764).
- ✦ More than 700 wineries statewide, most of which are concentrated in the Sonoma and Napa Valleys.
- ✦ Yosemite Falls, in Yosemite National Park is the longest drop in the United States.
- ✦ Three drive-through redwood trees along Highway 101 between Klamath and Laytonville.
- ✦ Shasta-Trinity National Forest in northern California features Mt. Shasta, the second largest summit in North America.
- ✦ Whale watchers won't want to miss prime viewing areas on the Channel Islands, near Ventura and Oxnard.
- ✦ The famed stretch of Route 66 through California extends from near Needles to the Pacific Ocean Santa Monica.

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