

San Jose: Family Fun Central

SAN JOSE, CA — Chosen as one of the top-three “funnest” cities in America by Seattle-based game-maker Cranium Inc., San Jose has, indeed, plenty to keep a family busy and entertained—often for free. From child-oriented and inner-child-inspired museums to zoos, parks, hiking trails, picnicking havens, sports, festivals, and parades, life in San Jose means never having to hear, “Mom, I’m bored!”

Seasonal Jollies with Kid Appeal

San Jose’s exciting array of events and festivals take full advantage of our abundant sunny days, like summertime’s free, live music in downtown **Plaza de Cesar Chavez** and **St. James** parks. Families turn out on Thursday evenings to enjoy the balmy weather and **Metro Music in the Park** (www.sjdowntown.com), or **Metro Music in the Other Park**. On Wednesday evenings, catch free movies (www.sjdowntown.com) starting at dusk in **San Pedro Square**, and Fridays in **St. James Park**.

Families with children ages 2 to 8 delight in free face painting, puppet shows, and arts and crafts classes every month from May to December at **Santana Row’s Mommy and Me & Daddies Too Kid’s Club** (www.santanarow.com/events/mommyandme.php).

In July, the two-day **Obon Festival** (www.japantownsanjose.org/events.html) in Japantown honors ancestors and features game booths, food, taiko drumming, cultural exhibits, and demonstrations. Then August comes alive on the grounds of the **Santa Clara County Fair** (www.thefair.org) through old-fashioned carnival rides and livestock exhibits.

Summer signs off with a flourish in September with two big Latin festivals. One highlight of **Fiestas Patrias** (www.sjdowntown.com) downtown is its parade. Shortly after, the **San Jose International Mariachi Festival** (www.mhcviva.org) of music, food, workshops, and shopping takes place in a variety of venues, and outdoors at Arena Green, by HP Pavilion.

But fun doesn’t hibernate over winter; though you probably won’t see a white Christmas in San Jose, you can still ice skate outdoors in the **Circle of Palms** rink (www.sjdowntown.com/eve_eve_ice.html) near the Fairmont Hotel, starting mid-November. The **Winter Wonderland** carnival’s rides and amusements light up late November through early January. Atop its giant Ferris wheel, you might catch a glimpse of animated displays and decorated trees at the **Christmas in the Park** (www.christmasinthepark.com) celebration in Plaza de Cesar Chavez. And, of course, San Joseans turn out in droves in early December for the **Holiday Parade** (www.sanjoseholidayparade.com), one of the top in the U.S. and internationally lauded. The parade showcases thousands of participants, floats, top marching bands, giant balloons, horses, and guest celebrities.

Family-friendly Arts and Culture

L.A. may have its big museums, but San Jose has its own fascinating collections. In the Rose Garden district, the **Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum and Planetarium** (www.egyptianmuseum.org) has the largest collection of Egyptian artifacts (including mummies) on the West Coast, Nile-invoking gardens, and a funky, Moorish-style, 70-year-old planetarium, with shows most every afternoon.

The mango-colored **Tech Museum of Innovation** (www.thetech.org) now opens its themed galleries on innovation, the Internet, the human body, and exploration seven days a week. Interactive displays here create a hands-on approach to technology and science education. The Tech also has an educational center for workshops, a café with kids’ menu, a retail store, and the only IMAX dome theater in Northern California.

Children are naturally attracted to the other candy-colored museum downtown—the purple **Children’s Discovery Museum of San Jose** (www.cdm.org) that entertains, invites, and fosters children’s curiosity and development (ages 0 and up!). For six months starting June 2008, CDM welcomes home its award-winning exhibition, “Alice’s Wonderland—A Most Curious Adventure,” from a five-year, nationwide tour. Explore interactive displays based on Lewis Carroll’s beloved classic.

Across the street from the fun splash fountains of Plaza de Cesar Chavez Park, the **San Jose Museum of Art** (www.sjmusart.org) is Silicon Valley’s place to see and learn about visual culture. Featuring special and continuing exhibits on modern masterworks and the newest frontiers of art, it’s budget-friendly, especially for families with young children (under 6 years enter free).

What is this place called San Jose? **The History Park** (www.historysanjose.org) helps answer that question through self-guided tours of restored buildings collected onto one corner of the enormous Kelley Park. Docents at this free museum-park offer a historical perspective on San Jose.

Ballet San Jose (www.balletsanjose.org), in the Center for the Performing Arts, entices families toward the cultured life by offering shortened versions (three in 2008) of main stage productions. Little nippers as young as three who won't sit through a full ballet can still enjoy a Nutcracker, for a little-nipper price.

The Really Great Outdoors

In 2000, local voters approved a \$228 million bond measure for construction and renovation of parks, community centers, and trails. Some terrific, creative playgrounds for kids are springing up, like **Parma Park** by the new Almaden Community Center. San Jose has great parks for big kids to burn off energy, too. **Alum Rock Park** is San Jose's oldest and largest park, previously a hot springs resort. It still bears some of the remnants of that grandeur, including pretty stone bridges. Within its 720 acres, visitors can hike, bike, picnic, watch wildlife, or ride horses, but oddly, nobody's ever found alum.

Kelley Park provides a little of everything in the middle of San Jose: picnic areas and green spaces, plus the restful, free **Japanese Friendship Garden**. Based on a park in sister-city Okayama, Japan, the Garden has several linked koi ponds where kids love to feed the fish. At Kelley Park's north end sits **Happy Hollow Park and Zoo** (www.happyhollowparkandzoo.org), a toddler Shangri-La with pint-sized rides, attractions, and petting zoo. It closes July 2008 to undergo eight months of refurbishing and updating, but unveils new rides, infrastructure, zoo exhibits, a restaurant, and more in March 2009.

Two of San Jose's most unusual parks warrant visiting for novelty's sake: downtown's **Discovery Meadow** (www.grpg.org/DiscoveryMeadow.html) has the world's largest Monopoly game board, at 930 square feet. Groups may rent tokens to play, with funds going to further beautify San Jose. When you need a good dose of grit in your teeth, **Calabazas BMX Park** (www.calabazasbmxpark.org) near Cupertino lets you work on your two-wheel stunts in the Bay Area's largest, city-funded park of its kind.

Although kiddie books frequently star farm animals, not every kid sees them in action. The free **Emma Prusch Farm Park** (www.pruschfarmpark.org) on 47 acres of original dairy farm land contains a mid-1800s farmhouse, the largest freestanding wood barn in California, a rare fruit orchard, and Old MacDonald's friends: pigs, cows, ducks, chickens, rabbits, and more. There's also a new playground in the park.

Mysteries, Thrills, and Splashes

Anything billing itself a "mystery" is an automatic lure for kids, and **Winchester Mystery House** (www.winchester-mysteryhouse.com) lives up to the biggest expectations: Winchester Rifle heiress Sarah Winchester spared no expense transforming a farmhouse into the 160-room Victorian behemoth near Santana Row. See exquisite Tiffany windows and panels, including a spider web window Winchester designed herself. Spooky nighttime Flashlight Tours are held on Friday the thirteenth, and around Halloween.

Families demanding thrills with their leisure love **Great America** (www.cagreatamerica.com/) in neighboring Santa Clara, just a few miles from downtown. The 100-acre theme park packs heart-pounding rides, speeding roller coasters, stage shows, and Boomerang Bay, an Australian-themed water park exploring the many ways to get wet: a heated lagoon, water slides, wave-pool, tubing, and "spray-ground" of fountains for tots.

Back in San Jose, Northern California's largest water world, **Raging Waters** (www.rwsplash.com), corrals pools, slides, wave pools, a lazy river, kiddie splash zones, and speed slides for brave hearts inside **Lake Cunningham Regional Park** off Tully Road. Want more water with your water? Lake Cunningham itself is a popular fishing and boating (though not swimming) destination. Sailboats, sailboards, rowboats, and canoes are just some of the watercraft you can rent or launch.

Play Ball! (Or Hockey, or Lacrosse, or Tennis...)

Live sporting events are easy to catch: the **NHL Sharks** (sharks.nhl.com) play in the "Shark Tank," downtown's HP Pavilion, as does the NLL professional lacrosse team, **San Jose Stealth** (www.sjstealth.com), and Arena Bowl XXI Arena Football Champions, the **SaberCats** (www.sanjosesabercats.com). The Pavilion also hosts the first West Coast stop on the worldwide ATP circuit, the **SAP Open** (www.sapopentennis.com). See team web sites for special family pricing, like the Sharks' Family Packs on select nights.

If it's an old-fashioned, outdoor stadium experience you crave, take 'em out to the ball game at Municipal Stadium near Kelley Park, where 2007 California League Champions **San Jose Giants** (www.sjgiants.com)—the San Francisco Giants' farm team—play. Or join them on the field: in 2007, the Giants launched five-day summer camps for girls and boys, ages 9 to 14. And to everyone's delight, Major League Soccer is back in San Jose as the **San Jose Earthquakes** (ww2.mlsnet.com/t110) return, further raising the city's profile as a pro sports town.

More Fun Nearby

San Jose's central location makes it a short drive east to the mountains for skiing the Sierras, or west to the Santa Cruz coast for beach combing or surfing. A must-see is **Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk** (www.beachboardwalk.com) amusement park which just celebrated its 100th year anniversary; visitors can arrive by car or take the Santa Cruz, Big Trees & Pacific Railway Company train, traveling from **Roaring Camp** (www.roaringcamp.com) in the mountains at Felton down through the redwoods to the beach. Two well-known aquariums—**Aquarium of the Bay** (www.aquariumofthebay.com) in San Francisco and **Monterey Bay Aquarium** (www.mbayaq.org) are only an hour's drive away. And a short drive northwest to **Big Basin Park** (www.bigbasin.org) takes you into Northern California's famed redwood territory, where easy and strenuous hikes await (to the coast, even!).

San Jose is so much more than a business trip these days—giving travelers and their families a chance to escape their routines and get out and play. With great weather and a wide variety of activities from amusement parks to petting zoos and interactive museums, San Jose is truly Family Fun Central.

About The San Jose Convention & Visitors Bureau (SJCVB)

The San Jose Convention & Visitors Bureau (SJCVB) mission is to enhance the image and economic well being of San Jose by marketing San Jose as a globally recognized destination. The SJCVB offers visitors, meeting planners, and tour operators, a range of services to ensure a successful event and fun visit to San Jose. For a copy of the Official Visitors Guide, please contact the SJCVB at 1.800.SAN.JOSE (1.800.726.5673) or visit <http://www.sanjose.org>.



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