

Come and play with your kids in any season.

With kid-friendly restaurants, hiking trails for all skill levels, sand dunes and museums to excite and engage your whole crew, Santa Maria Valley is a great destination for families. The valley's mild winters and moderate summers makes weather one less thing to worry about. And although this itinerary is for a family trip, we should mention Santa Maria Valley is known for its complex, balanced and flavorful wine. So if you're a wine lover, you can easily pick up a bottle of local wine for the hotel room later. When you're headed to Santa Maria Valley, plan on an easy, fun (and affordable!) weekend getaway.



Your Trip at a Glance

Day 1

- U-Pick Blueberries
- Los Flores Ranch Park
- Cottonwood Canyon Winery
- Santa Maria Valley Discovery Museum
- The Swiss Steakhouse

Day 2

- Monarch Dunes Butterfly Grove
- Oso Flaco Lake / Oceano Dunes
- Burgerim Gourmet Burgers
- Doc Burnstein's Ice Cream Lab
- Waller Park

Day One

If you're visiting Santa Maria Valley March through June, start your day at **U-Pick Blueberries** where you can grab a bucket and get your fill of blueberries, strawberries and other seasonal fruit. Santa Maria Valley is known for its strawberries and produces 20 million trays annually that are shipped to grocery stores across the U.S. Every April, local produce is celebrated at the Santa Maria Valley Strawberry Festival.

With your berry haul in tow, head to **Los Flores Ranch Park** for a family walk and picnic. Los Flores Ranch is a 1,778-acre open space area in Santa Maria Valley with 15 miles of hiking trails, guided tours, nature walks and kid-friendly animals like donkeys and goats to feed. Look for the Dinosaur Loop for an easy hike the whole family can enjoy.

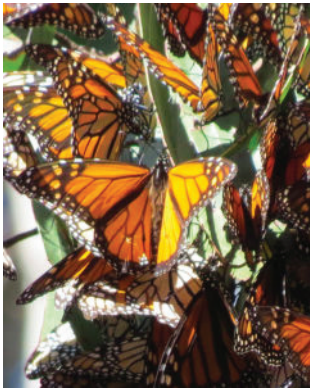
On the way back into town, make a quick parental-pitstop at **Cottonwood Canyon Winery**. Cottonwood Canyon has a great outdoor space with a large lawn that kids can play on while you taste handcrafted wines. Like many Santa Maria Valley wineries, Cottonwood Canyon specialized in Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Syrah.

Next, head to the **Santa Maria Valley Discovery Museum**, where kids and parents alike can play and learn together. The museum has more than 20 exhibits, including Vandenberg Launch Experience that gives families a chance to launch rockets and experience aerospace in an entirely new way. The Vandenberg Launch Experience features a Discovery Space Shuttle with a full simulation dashboard. One of the newest exhibits, the Central Coast Makerspace, allows children to build and play while focusing on STEM learning.



Finish your night around the corner at **The Swiss**. Get your fill of some traditional **Santa Maria Style barbecue**, which consists of tri-tip seasoned with salt, pepper and garlic and served with a green salad, grilled garlic bread and pinquito beans. Children can select from the kid's menu, which has something for even the pickiest eaters.

Day Two



If you're visiting the Santa Maria Valley October through February, don't miss the monarch butterflies at the **Monarch Dunes Butterfly Grove** in Nipomo. Thousands of monarch butterflies spend the colder months among the eucalyptus trees in groves along the Central Coast. This grove is a scenic half hour drive from Santa Maria and a beautiful place to see native plants and wildlife.

Then, head over to **Oso Flaco Lake** for a hike out to the ocean. A short, 1.7 miles, the trail is mostly on a boardwalk, making it a smooth and enjoyable walk for people of all ages. This California State Park gives hikers the opportunity to view and learn about native plant life, birds and other animals along the path. If you're lucky, you may spot a rare Western Snowy Plover. Plovers often make their nests along the beach. The trail eventually leads right to the **Guadalupe Nipomo Dunes**. You and the kids can walk along the beach, hunt for shells and dip your feet in the water, chasing the tide along the shore.

Oso Flaco Lake is part of the Oceano Dunes SVRA. If your kids are older, you can rent dune buggies to ride on miles of sandy coastline. The Oceano Dunes are the only place in California where you can ride dune buggies right on the beach.

For lunch, check out **Burgerim** which serves gourmet burgers, chicken wings, salads, fries and more. The entire menu is customizable, so even picky eaters can get exactly what they want.

Then, treat yourselves to dessert at **Doc Burnstein's Ice Cream Lab**. This locally made, fresh, premium ice cream comes in three-dozen flavors. They also have unique creations such as the Elvis Special, Rootbeer Marble, Merlot Raspberry Truffle and many gluten free options.

After dessert, let the kids burn off their ice cream energy at Santa Maria's **Waller Park**, which boasts two lakes with fountains and more than 150 acres of grass, picnic areas, playgrounds, basketball and volleyball courts, and a frisbee golf course. There's even pony rides on the weekends.

If your family wants to spend extra time exploring all there is to explore along the central California coast, it's easy to extend your stay. In Santa Maria Valley, there's so much to see and do from here.

NOTES:

Pro Tips

- » Kids stay and eat for free at the Holiday Inn and all guest rooms come with a kitchenette, microwave and mini-refrigerator.
- » Check the events schedule to see what's going on when you're in town.
- » Pack some kites to fly at the park or the beach!