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Now It's Our Turn

As summer crowds dwindle, the region's attractions become more, well, attractive. Take a vacation in your own backyard.

By BRENDA REES, Special To The Times

OK, everyone: Breathe a collective sigh of relief. The summer tourists are . . . gone.

Every year, nearly 24 million tourists from all over the world descend on Los Angeles County, and 38 million visit Orange County. Sure, we welcome our guests and want them to feel right at home, but--tell the truth--isn't it nice when they finally leave?

Now, when the summer crowds are gone and the busy holiday season is not yet in gear, is one of the best times for locals to take advantage of great fall weather by doing a little backyard sightseeing. It's our turn to be thrilled at local theme parks, to experience culture at our museums and to get in touch with nature at our beaches and forests. If you plan right, you can schedule visits when crowds may be at their lightest.

Though some local attractions--such as theme parks--reduce hours of operation after Labor Day, crowds can be heavy on weekends, especially if the weather is inviting.

Insiders from local attractions have some advice on how to get the most out of a visit.

"It's always best to come first thing in the morning," says Audry Eig of **Universal Studios Hollywood**. "I would suggest that people come on a Monday or Tuesday and avoid Thursdays and Fridays, since that's when other people take long weekends."

Eig recommends that people try a new approach when visiting a theme park. "Work backward. Everyone goes and does the first thing they see after they walk through the gate," she says. "I also recommend folks visiting Universal to wait to do the studio tour at the end, after they have been on their feet all day."

Mondays and Tuesdays also feature the smallest crowds at **Disneyland**, but if you're strapped for time on the weekends, the park's Marge Baker advises the FastPass. "I recommend the pass so guests don't have to wait in line for the big rides like Indiana Jones, Splash Mountain and Space Mountain," she says. The pass assigns guests specific times to board rides, thereby eliminating waiting.

"Our park attendance ebbs and flows with the school schedule," says Bob Ochser of **Knott's Berry Farm**, who adds that in the fall, students routinely visit Knott's for science field trips and recreational outings more toward the end of the week rather than the beginning. "Tuesdays and Wednesdays are better days for low crowds," he says.

Six Flags Magic Mountain representatives suggest that visitors come later in the



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AP

afternoons, especially on Tuesdays or Wednesdays. They also advise thrill seekers to start their day with a bang at the far side of the park. "Do the top coasters first, like Superman or Goliath," says Amy Means, pointing out that the lines get longer as the day progresses.

Hit the Waterparks Before It Gets Cold

Early fall is the time to hit the water parks, which close shop when the weather cools off. Magic Mountain's sister park, [Hurricane Harbor](#), like [Knott's Soak City U.S.A.](#), are open for water enthusiasts only on weekends in the fall and--depending on the weather--can be packed. Ken Kowalski, general manager at [Raging Waters](#), advises people to consider their group when going to a water park. "If you have little kids, arrive earlier and leave earlier. But if you have teens, start a little later and stay until dark, which is a thrilling way to ride some rides," he says.

Weekday evenings are also a perfect time for locals to visit area museums because of the relaxing atmosphere and smaller crowds. Take advantage of the [Getty Center's](#) policy of no longer requiring parking reservations on Thursdays and Fridays from 4 to 9 p.m. and peacefully watch fall sunsets above the din of 405 traffic. And just this month the Getty expanded its no-reservations policy to weekends. Be warned that Friday nights can be bustling because of the Friday Nights at the Getty performance series. The Getty this month also dropped its policy requiring weekend parking reservations.

Friday nights at the [Los Angeles County Museum of Art](#) are hopping with year-round jazz concerts in the courtyard, but weekday evenings are usually conducive to thoughtful introspection. And remember that there's no admission charge on the second Tuesday of every month, which is good for the wallet but not so good for anyone hoping to avoid crowds.

Weekdays are best, as well, at the [Museum of Contemporary Art](#). And if you want plenty of elbow room, avoid Thursdays from 5 to 8 p.m., when the weekly free admission night draws crowds at MOCA's two locations: at California Plaza and at the [Geffen Contemporary](#).

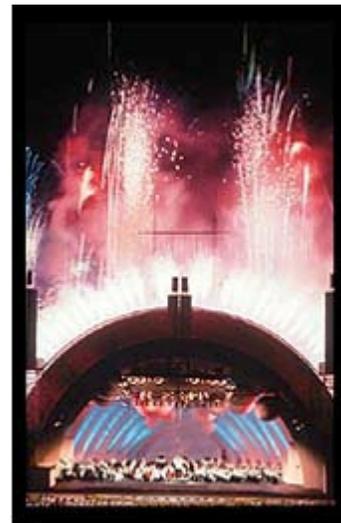
Traffic can be the big obstacle when going to a concert at the [Hollywood Bowl](#), which winds up its season next week with fireworks, movie music and an evening with Brian Wilson.

Bowl representatives advise people to use the three shuttle parking lots or the 15 park-and-ride sites that are situated from Sherman Oaks to Costa Mesa. In addition, they suggest concert-goers hop aboard the Metro Rail (assuming there's no strike against the Metropolitan Transportation Authority); a free shuttle runs between the Bowl and the Hollywood and Vine station during Bowl events.

For free entertainment, there's always a TV show taping. [Audiences Unlimited](#) arranges tickets to such shows as "3rd Rock From the Sun," "Friends," "Jeopardy!" and "Wheel of Fortune." Representatives say that Tuesdays and Fridays are the best days to get tickets because of the wide variety and volume of tapings available on those days.

In addition, tickets to "The Tonight Show With Jay Leno" are much easier for locals who can write in at least six weeks in advance, which eliminates waiting in line for tickets the day of the show, representatives say. Still, if that last-minute need arises, the [NBC](#) box office (818) 840-3537 opens at 8 a.m. for tickets the day of the show (which tapes at 5 p.m.). Depending on the guests, you could end up waiting nearly all day. Crowds seem to be prevalent on Fridays, holiday weekends and when popular guests are appearing. Remember that most TV tapings have age requirements, even for family programs.

For something definitely kid-friendly, get lost and found at the Lost Adventure Corn Mazes in [Van Nuys](#) and [Aliso Viejo](#), which expect to be operating their twisting corridors of corn until Halloween, weather permitting. Naturally, crowds are bigger on the weekends, but for a more exciting challenge, both mazes are open late Friday and Saturday nights--and you must bring a flashlight. In general, Mondays and Tuesdays are lighter days for maze walking.



The Hollywood Bowl winds up its season next week with an evening with Brian Wilson.
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How to Avoid School Group Tours

Weekday mornings are when most school groups tour zoos, aquariums and science museums, such as the [California Science Center](#), so plan visits after lunch, representatives say. Monday afternoons can be an especially quiet time at the [Los Angeles Zoo](#). Weekend attendance can be surprisingly small if the weather is great, says a spokesperson at the [Long Beach Aquarium](#) of the Pacific. Crowds will be out in full force, however, during the popular [Cabrillo Marine Aquarium's](#) annual Sea Fair, Oct. 15, which will feature carnival games, live music and a sand sculpture contest; other weekends may prove to be lighter.

[Santa Monica Pier](#) is a calming and picturesque locale any weekday evening, when you can watch the rides light up, eat at a nearby restaurant or join in a happy hour. However, Pier Days, Oct. 7 and 8, with musical performances, kite flying, art exhibits and family activities, will bring out the masses.

Down the coast, the [Queen Mary](#) showcases the big ship's treasures and memorabilia; spokeswoman Melinda Gann advises guests to come early weekday and weekend mornings to avoid big crowds.

Across the sea, Catalina Island welcomes guests who come to snorkel, kayak or relax on the beach. Gwen Bronson with the Catalina Island Visitors Bureau (310) 510-1520 says the island is still busy on weekends in the fall but is also full of activity on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. "That's when the cruise ships dock at Avalon and we can have an extra 1,500 people here," she says. Crowds will also be coming for the annual **JazzTrax Festival**, which will be held three consecutive weekends beginning Oct. 6. A true getaway place may be found at the island's other town, Two Harbors, which has a lodge, cabins and campsites.

At the southern end of Orange County, the [San Juan Capistrano Mission](#) welcomes guests to tour the historic church grounds, and representatives say the best times for quiet visits are on weekday afternoons. The usually serene mission courtyard will be the site for the last in a series of lively outdoor concerts on Saturday and Sept. 24 and 30. On the second Saturday of each month, the mission hosts an extremely popular living history event with costumed performers reenacting early California life and times.

Farther north in Orange County is a skateboarder's paradise, [Van's Skate Park](#) at the Block in Orange. Skateboarders can enjoy both the indoor and outdoor facilities with spectator seating in upstairs bleachers, where parents, friends and passersby can watch the action. Park workers say that, with school back in session, weekday mornings are the least crowded.

Finally, Southern California beaches are still popular for camping and hiking, surfing or snoozing. Ocean lifeguard specialist Danny Douglas says beach-goers seeking open spaces should check out [Manhattan](#), [Hermosa](#) and [Redondo](#) beaches. "Parking can be a problem there," he warns, "but that's why those beaches are less crowded." Douglas adds that the more popular a beach, the bigger the parking lot.

Get Reservations for Weekend Camping

Camping at the beach is now a little easier on the weekends, but California State Park representatives continue to recommend that people get reservations at the more popular locations, such as Orange County's [Bolsa Chica](#) and [San Clemente](#) beaches and Los Angeles' [Leo Carrillo](#) and [Sycamore Cove](#) sites. Weekday camping, however, is wide open at all sites, they say.

[Laguna Beach](#) isn't quite sure its tourist season is officially over. Representatives from the Visitors and Convention Bureau say that big crowds still flock on weekends to the picturesque ocean-side community to check out the art galleries, restaurants and beaches. In fact, they say their "quiet time" is really the first two weeks of December. Nevertheless, visitors seeking art and inspiration are encouraged to come weekdays when crowds are thinner. The well-attended [Art Walk](#) is held the first Thursday of every month and offers free admission to



Jellyfish will be showcased at the Long Beach Aquarium of the Pacific until the end of the year.
Long Beach Aquarium of the Pacific

the Laguna Art Museum as well as shuttle buses among 40 other art galleries.

Other beaches have special events this fall that will bring in the spectators. For example, **Doheny State Beach** in Dana Point will be rock 'n' rolling Saturday and Sunday, with its annual **Music Festival**, featuring the Steve Miller Band, Johnny Lee and Dave Mason.

The number of campers shrinks in half in the **Angeles National Forest** (626) 574-5200) in the fall, according to spokesman Bob Brady, though popular areas like Crystal and Pyramid lakes continue to draw weekend crowds. "We have this nice lull right now before the snows hit. Then we'll be inundated with snow campers and skiers. This is the most peaceful time of year--we have fall colors and everything smells crisp and wonderful. Who says we don't have seasons here?"

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