

Airshows In California

If you like to watch cool airplanes fly around, there is hardly a better state to live in than beautiful California. The great weather has made our state home to many air bases and to many passionate private owners of interesting aircraft. All the crop-dusting that goes on in the Central Valley produces many a fine aerobat. Nasa's Ames Research Center, right in Silicon Valley, has been at the leading edge of fluid dynamics studies for a while (they have the largest wind tunnel in the world). Also, much of the USAF's recon units are not too far from there, in the Sacramento area. Heading south, Lemoore is one of the US Navy's biggest fighter-jet bases. Further south; the LA area headquarters Northrop Grumman and AeronVironment and is home to some Boeing and Lockheed facilities, not to mention Vandenberg's rocket launchpads. And finally, the importance of Southern California's Antelope Valley to the development and testing of modern aviation technologies cannot be overstated, from Edwards Air Force Base and the Nasa Dryden Flight Research Center (where the sound barrier was first broken and where proof-of-concept X-planes still fly) to all the prototyping/testing facilities at Palmdale and the home of Scaled Composites in Mojave. So if you like aviation, there are few places you'd rather be at than California. And where there are a lot of people making aviation happen... there are airshows.

If you live in California and think you might enjoy going to an airshow, here are some you can pick from. The map below has them geographically, and the long list after that has them chronologically.



MCAS Yuma

Just across the border into Arizona on I-8 (where CA, AZ, and Mexico meet)

Mid-February

Yuma's mid-winter airshow is much beloved by airshow fans who, by this point, will have gone over 3 months without seeing an airshow, and will be experiencing withdrawal symptoms... Yuma always features the USMC Harrier jump-jet, a truly awesome demo only performed at about 5 airshows all year (and Yuma is the only place you're guaranteed to catch it). A local helicopter unit always performs a simulated rescue with a Huey. The airshow will feature at least one fighter jet demo,

sometimes two (not counting the Harrier). Groups of private pilots who fly formations in Yak warbirds and L-29 jets are based nearby, so they also usually make it to the airshow. Besides that, the show will typically feature a handful of "so-so" aerobatic acts and one very good one. The show is two hours east of San Diego, so if you're from there, then I strongly recommend it. If you're a bit further away, it might still be worth going to see the Harrier, but only if you're really into this kinda stuff (like I am). The show is typically held on Saturday only, and is free since it is hosted by a military base.

[NAF El Centro](#)

[On the CA side of the border with Arizona on I-8 \(where CA, AZ, and Mexico meet\)](#)

Mid March

This is always the Blue Angel's first airshow of the year. That by itself is a shame to miss. On top of that, the airshow typically features one or two fighter jet demos, about two aerobats, a couple of warbirds, some skydiving, maybe a helicopter flight, and the occasional surprise like a cargo airplane or a fire-fighting airplane. It's not a huge show, but the Blue Angels are a blast to watch. The recommendations are the same as for Yuma (since it is a comparable airshow, and about 50 miles from Yuma): If you live in San Diego, or Palm Springs, or somewhere else within a couple hours' driving, then do check it out. Angelinos who are into aviation probably should consider it. The show is typically held on Saturday only, and is free since it is hosted by a military base.

[NAS Lemoore](#)

[Lemoore \(Halfway between San Francisco and L.A.\)](#)

Late March (not every year)

Lemoore is the Navy's main SuperHornet base, where pilots go to learn to fly the F/A-18F, and where a lot of new tactics are figured out for this new jet. So the airshow will definitely have many SuperHornets (and regular Hornets) fly, a local S&R unit will probably simulate a rescue in a Huey, an Air Force fighter jet demo or two should happen as well, there will probably be about three aerobatic acts, and usually the show ends with the Blue Angels. Not a lot of warbirds, maybe one or two in a Legacy Flight, maybe some aerobatics in a Yak or T-6. It's a shame this show only happens every other year, because it's a good one. Unfortunately, it's kinda in the middle of nowhere, so unless you're a fairly hardcore aviation fan, you're probably not going to drive the three hours it takes to get there from any of the three closest cities. The show is held on both Saturday and Sunday and is free.

[Riverside Airshow](#)

[About an hour east of LA, between the 60 and the 91](#)

Late March

At Riverside, you're closer to the runway than at any other airshow. That by itself makes it TONS of

fun. One or two outstanding aerobats will usually perform, a few military jets often do fly-bys, turns, and climbs, and one or two might do a full demo (with rolls, Cuban 8s, tight turns, etc). Many warbirds will fly, often in formation. It's not a huge show, and the military presence may not be as extensive as on the shows that take place on military bases, but it's still a lot of fun. The proximity to the aircraft makes for great photography. (And remember that this is not a military airshow, so you'll have to pay to get in). Still, if you live in LA, Palm Springs, or even San Diego, I would highly recommend this airshow. Pictures, reports, and the announced line-up may make this look like a wimpy small-town airshow, but when I first went it immediately became one of my favorites. Unfortunately, it's Saturday-only.

[NAS Point Mugu](#)

[Ventura County \(an hour or so north of LA on the 101\)](#)

Late March / early April (has previously been in October)

This show has been cancelled on some recent years, which is a real shame since it's a really great military airshow, up there with Edwards, just one small notch below Nellis or Miramar. The Blue Angels usually perform (the Thunderbirds have filled in for them once or twice in recent years), as well as a several fighter jet demos, a couple warbirds, aerobats, the usual mix. The base is home to E-2s (those AWACS airplanes with a big radar disc on top) and C-130s, and it's fun to see how much those big airplanes can be thrown around the sky. The air is very humid, which means you can almost always see the air condensing inside wingtip vortices and over wings, which is very cool. And you get plenty of chances to do that, with fighters as numerous as the F-15, F-16, Superhornet, F-22, and A-10 flying in a single day! So, if you like military jets and live in LA or Santa Barbara, this is a great show that should not be missed... if they don't cancel it, and if the fog doesn't roll it in the early afternoon as it sometimes does over there. When this airshow does happen, it's free, and goes on both days of the weekend.

[Wings Over Gillespie](#)

[El Cajon \(very close to San Diego\)](#)

Late April

This is a small airshow. There are houses around the airport, so aerobatics are extremely limited, and not much jet noise can be produced. This means there might be one or two fairly boring jet passes, but most of the airshow is just warbird fly-bys. They do have some rare warbirds, but I have to admit that, if you're not a fairly hard-core aviation enthusiast, and if you don't live in the San Diego area, this one might be worth skipping. Ah, yes, and it's not free. It's typically held on Saturday and Sunday, and sometimes Friday too.

[March ARB, Thunder Over The Empire](#)

[Moreno Valley, near Riverside, about 1h east of LA, right on the 215](#)

Late April (not every year)

It's hard to describe this airshow. The line-up is huge huge huge: Tons and tons of fighter jets, stealths, cargo planes, bombers, some warbirds, some great aerobatics, some formation-flying groups, and last year they had the Thunderbirds. So it has everything to be one of the biggest military airshows in the country. Except the visibility SUCKS. The air over there is so hazy, airplanes disappear into it after each pass. The sun lights up the haze so you have to squint the whole time, and you might get a head-ache. I had never seen air this hazy (and I live in LA!), and it makes the airshow literally painful to watch. Which is a shame, because the line-up of aircraft they manage to pull together is really exceptional, with really cool flying going on from 9AM to 5PM. So do try and go if you live in the area, but check the weather forecasts, and don't travel very far to see this airshow since the haze could ruin your trip... The show is typically held on Saturday and Sunday, and is free since it is hosted by a military base.

["All Red Star" Airshow](#)

[Somewhere in the Central Valley](#)

Early or mid May

This small airshow is the biggest gathering of Yaks and L39s in the US. Not much variety, and no really loud or really fast jets, but if you want to see just how many people in the US fly Russian ex-military hardware, then do check it out. L39s and Yaks are very cool and all, but I would not bother driving too far just to see that. The gathering is typically five days long, and in recent years has been held in Atwater (ex-Castle AFB), Porterville, and other places in that general area.

[Planes of Fame](#)

[Chino, about 1h east of LA, near the 60](#)

Mid-may

This is one of my top-three airshows of the year. I love, love, LOVE this airshow. Chino is home to the largest collection of airworthy World War Two aircraft in the world, many of which are the last of their kind. They fly each plane a few times a year, and in this airshow they fly ALL of them!!! This, in turn, attracts most owners of airworthy warbirds in the western US to fly them at Chino, so the events snowballs into one of the two or three biggest gathering of WW2 aircraft anywhere in the world. It's like a trip back in time to an active military air base in 1944. All day, they put several aircraft up in the air at a time, flying a circuit around the airport, so you get a pass every few seconds (this is very different from all other airshows, which fly one airplane at a time, or a few airplanes in one formation). And at the end they put almost 30 of the airplanes in the air at once, a huge formation of the kind not seen since the 40s. Oh, yeah, and they had some jet fighter demos as well. If you're into aviation history, there is nothing like this show. People who like seeing old airplanes in the air come from all over the world to catch this airshow. (The only other comparable airshows anywhere in the world are Willow Run in Michigan in August, Flying Legends in Duxford (UK) in July, and the Midland airshow in

Texas in October). Since it is not held on a military base, this airshow is not free, but it is worth every penny - and those pennies go towards keeping this outstanding collection of historical aircraft airworthy! And the airshow is held on Saturday and Sunday.

[Watsonville Fly-In and Air Show](#)
[Just east of Santa Cruz, near Gilroy](#)
Late May

This is a fairly small airshow. It features lots of warbirds, and some acts involving light airplanes, biplanes, and RC planes. A modern military aircraft, like a C-130 or a transport helicopter or two, might do brief fly-bys. Pretty fun if you're in the area and enjoy hearing the purr of powerful piston engines. To be perfectly honest, I have never been to this small airshow, but I have seen pictures and it looks like it's fun.

[Van Nuys AirFest](#)
[Just north of LA, where the 405 meets the 101](#)
May or June (not every year)

This airshow used to be pretty big, now it's getting smaller and smaller. It might disappear soon. lately, the static displays have still been great, but the flying might consist of only two or three fly-bys. Granted, this can include an F-22 fly-by, but if that's all you want to see, then this airshow is still hardly worth the trip. So I would not recommend this "airshow" (i.e. couple of fly-bys) unless you live within less than an hour's driving distance.

[EAA Golden West Regional Fly-In](#)
[Marysville, 30 miles north of Sacramento](#)
Early June

This is a pretty good little airshow. Since it is run by the EAA, it focuses on kitplanes, antiques, ultralights, gyrocopters, aerobatic airplanes, raceplanes, and other kinds of general aviation aircraft. A large number of warbirds usually gathers, and like Oshkosh, there are many seminars and forums and exhibitors. Last year they also had a SuperHornet tactical demo, and a Legacy Flight with a Sea Fury. The full aerobatic airshow is on Saturday, and many fly-bys are done on Sunday, some of them in formation, and some of them featuring military aircraft such as the U-2 and C-130.

[Merced West Coast Antique Fly-In](#)
[Merced \(Halfway between Fresno and Sacramento\)](#)

Early June

This is not a big airshow, mostly a gathering of aviation enthusiasts and pilots of antique aircraft. Some ex-military jets may fly in, but mostly it's aircraft from the 20s, 30s, and 40s, as well as some aerobatics. I must admit I've never been, but if you like antique aircraft, then you may wish to check this out. It has been going on for almost 50 years!

[California Capital Airshow, Sacramento](#)

[Mather Field, Rancho Cordova](#)

Early-to-Mid June (has been in March)

So I guess in 2006 some folks at Mather Field decided to put on an airshow, and invested a lot into making it the first of a yearly major airshow. They did a good job! The Blue Angels came, the USAF did the A-10 demo (with pyrotechnics!), tons and tons of military jets on static (including a U-2!!!), the Coast Guard did a C-130 + Dauphin demo, several warbirds flew, and there were top-notch aerobatics flown by a recent world champion. Not too shabby! I do hope this airshow keeps going, and so far it looks like it will since the Thunderbirds have this airshow in their 2007 schedule! (The reason I'm not super optimistic about this show's future is because of the awesome airshow they had for 3 years at Moffett field (2002-04), which even had the Thunderbirds and the Patriots and lots of fighter jet demos, but then they abruptly stopped having it. I wish better luck (and more persistence) to the Mather Field airshow organizers.)

[Vertical Challenge - Hiller Museum](#)

[San Carlos - by the 101 about half an hour south of San Francisco](#)

Mid-June

This is a helicopter-only airshow, which is quite rare. You're about as close to the runway as at Riverside, except helicopters take off and land between the crowd and the runway, which is 100-200 feet away from you. So hold on to your hats! If you want to see just how diverse the world of helicopters is (from roomy VIP transports to small general-aviation vehicles, from huge cargo/troop-carrying helicopters to agile and deadly gunships, from police helicopters to firefighting helicopters to search-and-rescue helicopters to some very old and very historical designs), then there's no other airshow like it. Sure, it's not as loud as an airshow full of fighter jets, but many performers do amazing things with their helicopters. For example; tight formation flying, doing backwards opposing passes, and doing careful manouvering like knocking down a traffic cone, and then setting it upright again, with the skid of a hovering helicopter! Now THAT's skill! Or even spinning a cable around a giant yo-yo by flying and spinning the helicopter around the yo-yo. You can also expect some random stuff, like kite-flying, hovercraft, RC helicopters, some fixed-winged fly-bys (from DC-3s to C-5s), battle simulations... Last year a helicopter lifted an old car 200 feet in the air and dropped it on a target! Not only that, but the Classic Rotors foundation, which is based in Ramona and restores old helicopters back to flying condition, flies their most rare helicopters at this airshow, from the last flying Piasecki H-21 "Flying Banana" to the last flying Hiller H-32 "Hornet" which is powered by a ramjet at the tip of

each rotor blade! And when you visit this airshow, you are also allowed to check out the Hiller Museum, which has some really neat stuff, like the Boeing Condor (the largest UAV ever and the highest-flying piston-powered airplane), the mock-up of the Boeing SuperSonic Transport (which would have been the American answer to the concorde), the AD-1 (a Nasa experimental airplane with oblique wings!), many historical helicopters and autogyros, and many flying models used to test unusual aircraft concepts at Stanford and/or at Nasa Ames. So while this is a fairly small airshow with no fighter jets in sight, it's a lot of fun and very educational. If you like helicopters (or just want to see all that they can do), then don't miss it. It's not free, but it helps to keep a great museum going. The show is Saturday-only, but if you choose to visit the museum (or just the airport) on the Sunday after the show, you can watch all the helicopters depart in the late morning and early afternoon.

Father's Day Fly-In

[Columbia, CA \(about halfway to Yosemite, coming from San Francisco or Sacramento\)](#)

Mid June (duh!)

Like Watsonville, this is a small airshow, which usually features just a few warbirds, and some slurry drops done by the California Department of Forestry from S-2s and helicopters led by an OV-10. The airshow starts with an early morning pancake breakfast, which is kinda neat and adds to the small, informal atmosphere - the furthest thing from a big military airshow. In fact, you can get as close to the runway as at any airshow, so if you're in the area and decide to go, you'll certainly take some great pictures. The show is held on both days of the weekend, but if you're a really dedicated airshow fan, you can catch Hiller's Vertical Challenge on Saturday and this airshow on Sunday!

Beale AFB

[Just north of Sacramento](#)

Late June (not every year)

This is a solid military airshow. There typically are a couple warbird flights and some aerobatics, but the airshow will then have a few fighter jet demos, and several fly-bys of local jets (like T-38 formations, and the super-rare U-2, the last of which are flying at Beale). The Thunderbirds have closed the show in the recent past. So if you like the roar of military jet engines, then this is a pretty dang good airshow. It's free and is typically held on Saturday and Sunday.

Ramona Air Fair

[Ramona \(just northeast of San Diego\)](#)

Late June

Ramona is a fairly small airshow. They usually feature several aerobats, a few warbirds, some helicopters, and a fire-fighting slurry-drop by a CDF aircraft. If you're lucky, you might get a military jet

fly-by, but the emphasis of the show is definitely on light aircraft, and I don't think I've been to another airshow where ultralights were featured. So if you're in the San Diego area and don't want to drive to any of the other airshows that will probably be going on at the same weekend, then this is a nice way to spend one or two days of that weekend, I guess. I would not recommend it strongly, though.

[American Heroes AirShow](#)

[Hansen Dam \(northern L.A.\)](#)

Late June (not every year)

The "American Heroes" series of airshows gathers local helicopters flown by police, border patrol, forest-fire-fighters, the military, the Coast Guard, as well as private operators, news services, etc. There are American Heroes airshows in Seattle, Florida, Georgia, Texas, and this one in Lake View Terrace, Los Angeles, CA. The airshow features lots of helicopters, flying around, doing fire-fighting water-drops, etc. Not a huge airshow, and no fighter jets or aerobats in sight, but they do usually find some rare helicopters, from old Sikorsky S-55s to Border Patrol NOTARs to Apaches, as well as Chinooks and Blackhawks and Sea Knights and Cobras. (At how many airshows can you see Apaches fly? Not many at all!) The airshow is free and on Saturday only.

[Colusa Old-Time Fly-in](#)

[Colusa, CA \(Northwest of Sacramento, not too far off the 5\)](#)

Mid or late July

This is a small fly-in where some biplane and warbird pilots (and some who fly general-aviation light-airplanes and ultralights) bring their airplanes, usually around 100 in total. They have breakfast, there is some flying, and then they leave. Not a huge event by any means, but given that there are pretty much no other airshows in California that month, you might want to go to relieve your airshow withdrawal symptoms by watching some warbirds fly.

[Camarillo](#)

[Ventura County \(just north of LA\)](#)

Mid August

The military is definitely under-represented in this airshow, which is surprising since it's extremely close to NAS Point Mugu. Anyways, the show features a few aerobats, lots and lots of warbirds (Camarillo has a major Commemorative Air Force facility, an organization that restores and maintains old airplanes), some helicopters (doing water drops and occasionally aerobatics), some unusual stuff like gyrocopters and kitplanes, and the occasional privately-owned ex-military jet. So if you're in the LA area, it's a nice way to spend a Saturday and/or Sunday. Admission is free if you're under 12. However, if you're willing to drive a bit for an airshow, or if you're in northern California at the time, I'd

recommend you catch Wings Over Wine Country instead, which is usually the same weekend as the Camarillo show.

[Wings Over Wine Country - Pacific Coast Air Museum](#)

[Sonoma County Airport, about 1h north of San Francisco](#)

Third Weekend of August

This is one of my favorite airshows, and no, not just because they give me lots of killer photo ops (and some plane rides). The show will feature a few excellent aerobats, two or three military jet fighter demos, a couple military fly-bys (which have included the U-2 and F-117 and T-38s), a police helicopter rescue demo, other jet demos (from the C-17 demo to aerobatics flown in privately owned ex-military jets like L-39s, Strikemasters, and Fouga Magisters), slurry drops by local firefighting airplanes, skydiving, RC aircraft, acts involving ground vehicles, and lots and lots of warbirds. Not as many as in Chino, but more than at pretty much any other California airshow. Even the Patriots jet team have flown there. So really, this is about as diverse an airshow as they come. Not only that, but the museum has a large collection of cool military jets, including an F-14, an F-16, a Harrier, and several Vietnam-era fighter jets. These all get brought out and put among the airshow static displays. The museum's aircraft will have their cockpits open so that visitors can sit inside and be shown around the cockpit by an experienced pilot (the F-16 even has an audio tour!). So if you live in northern California, do try and catch this show. Unfortunately it is not free, but museum members get in for free, so if you think you might want to go on both Saturday and Sunday, it's worth it to just sign up for a museum membership instead of paying for tickets.

[National Championship Air Races](#)

[Reno, NV](#)

Mid-September

Sure, this airshow is not exactly in California, but it's not too far away either, and it's a really really great show and totally worth the trip (especially since there is more to do at Reno than just watch the airshow). The Reno Air Races keep alive a great tradition of racing airplanes around a closed course, something that most airshows featured during the first few decades in the history of aviation. Air races are held throughout the week, with the finals (and the rest of the airshow) on the weekend. There are several "classes": Texan (where pilots have to fly stock T-6s), Sport (where minimally-modified homebuilts are flown), Formula 1 (small airplanes designed for racing, from scratch, built around strictly identical 200hp engines), jet (where pilots must fly stock L39s), and the most exciting, Unlimited (anything powered by pistons). Unlimited racers are the fastest piston-powered airplanes on earth (naturally), and tend to be World War 2 fighters modified almost beyond recognition, and with engines that use modern technology to deliver around 4000-5000hp, about three times what the original engines could produce in the 40s. Nowhere else will you see so many planes flying 100 feet over the desert, a few feet apart, desperately trying to get past each other. It's exciting stuff. The airshow is also usually one of the best, with a couple fighter jet demos, aerobatics, Heritage Flights, and the occasional very random attraction (like Kent Pietsch (who can land his single-engine Cadet

onto a moving truck), or John Travolta doing passes in his very own 707, or the Collings Foundation or the USAF flying one of their super-rare and extremely historical F-4 Phantoms). The Thunderbirds usually fly there. So it's not free, but it's very unique, very exciting, and goes on all week long.

[Clear Lake Splash-In](#)

[Skylark Shores Hotel, Lakeport, CA](#)

Late September

This is not so much an airshow as a gathering of seaplane pilots and seaplane lovers. There are seminars and presentations at the local high school, as well as a huge picnic by the water, plus some flying of non-amphibious aircraft from nearby Lampson Field. There are Spot Landing and Water Bombing competitions, seaplane rides, and instruction. So if you like seaplanes - or old airplanes or cool general-aviation airplanes - then this is the place to be.

[California International Airshow](#)

[Salinas \(near Monterey, right off the 101\)](#)

Late September or early October

Salinas is a very very very good airshow. The weather sometimes is less-than-cooperative, but even when the sky is cloudy, they put a LOT of cool, diverse, loud, and interesting planes in the air. They always have three or four jet demos, plus one or two jet teams. Very few, if any, non-military airshows reliably attract so many military fighters. The show will also usually feature a few excellent aerobats, since Sean Tucker is local and his aerobatics school is always producing graduates of unparalleled skill. The Showcopters are based there, and will do scary and apparently impossible things with their helicopters (such as tight formation manouvers, flying backwards at each other, or smoothly landing on a designated spot with perfect controllability but with the engine off). Some warbirds are usually flown as well. The show will usually also feature skydivers, glider acts, jet-powered cars and trucks (one of which usually races a warbird or an aerobat), and other attractions. Like the Wine Country airshow, Salinas is an exceptionally diverse airshow (but unlike the Wine Country airshow, Salinas usually has more jets than most airshows, rather than more warbirds). The airshow is not free, but all profits go towards local charities - about \$300,000 per year, or over 7 million dollars in total - and I highly recommend you splurge and get some bleacher seats, the view is awesome. The airshow is held on Saturday and Sunday, and on most years will also feature a Twilight Show, usually on Friday evening. During the Twilight show, most of the performers fly (but not all), albeit each does only about 75% of their full routine. The Friday Evening show starts at 5, when there is still plenty of light, and goes till 8 or 9, when it's completely dark. Airplanes that fly after it starts to get dark are the ones that feature special lights, pyrotechnics, or bright afterburners. If you live in the San Francisco Bay Area or within an hour or two to the south of it, then this show is only an hour or two from you, and totally worth checking out.

Redding

Near Shasta, a few hours north on the 5 (from almost anywhere)

Early October (not every year)

This is a relatively unknown, relatively isolated, and relatively good airshow. It usually features a jet team, sometimes the awesome (and rarely-seen in the US) Canadian Snowbirds, who fly 9 jets in huge formations and dangerous opposing manouvers even the Blues or Thunderbirds won't attempt. There are usually a couple fighter jet demos, an aerobat or two, maybe some helicopter flying, and a couple warbirds (mostly in the Heritage / Legacy flights). So, all right, it's not a huge airshow, and it's usually the same weekend as Salinas or Fleet week or something, but if you're in the area, you should probably check it out. It's usually held on both days of the weekend, and not free.

San Francisco Fleet Week

Best viewed from the Hyde Street pier, Aquatic Park, Crissy Field, or Fort Mason.

Early or mid October

This is kind of an odd airshow, in that in some ways it's like a small airshow and in some ways it's like a big airshow. It's like a small airshow in that it usually only features a handful of acts, but it is like a big airshow in that LOTS of people watch it, and the featured acts are some of the best in the airshow world. The Blue Angels can be counted on to close the show, Sean Tucker usually flies his exceptionally precise and dizzying aerobatics, and the Coast Guard usually simulates a rescue from the Bay with a Dauphin helicopter (and occasionally a C-130). The USAF usually does one fighter demo and one Heritage Flight and one fly-by, the Navy sometimes does one or more of these things as well. The Red Bull Air Races have been featured the past couple of years, and those are very neat as well. Put that all together, and you have about three hours' worth of airshow (Red Bull Air Races, USAF fly-by, Coast Guard rescue, USAF demo, Heritage Flight, Sean Tucker, and the Blues). Because there are so few acts, I hesitate to say this airshow is worth driving a long way to see. But a trip to San Francisco is always nice, and the backdrop of this airshow (the Bay, the Golden Gate Bridge, Sausalito, Angel Island, Alcatraz) is uniquely beautiful. And it's free and goes on from Friday to Sunday with a practice on Thursday. So in the end, I guess it's a really really good but really really short airshow.

Travis AFB

Fairfield, CA (less than an hour NorthEast of SanFran on I-80)

October or June (not every year)

Travis had a great great military airshow in October of 2005 - their first in many years - and then cancelled their October 2006 airshow saying they would have one sometime in the summer of 2007. So I don't know what's up with that. All I can say the 2005 airshow was very good, including Stealth fly-bys (F-117, F-22, **and** B-2!!!), a B-1 fly-by, tons of flying done in a few different kinds of huge (and local) cargo planes and tankers, a Draken demo (how often do you see such cool Swedish fighter jets?), an F-15 demo, two warbird aerobatics acts, and the Thunderbirds. A solid, solid military

airshow. If you're in Sacramento or the Bay Area in the summer of 2007 and if they do actually put on an airshow at Travis, do check it out. (I sure hope this airshow does not simply stop happening, the way Moffett's airshows did after 2004. I still can't get over how awesome the airshows at Moffett were in 2002-2004 and how they then abruptly stopped having them...)

[MCAS Miramar](#)

Just north of San Diego ([Main Gate](#), [North Gate](#), [West Gate](#))

Mid-October

Miramar is one of the top military airshows in the US. It will always feature the Blue Angels as well as several fighter jet demos and military fly-bys and a simulated battle with tanks, Harriers, Hornets, C-130s, Howitzers, dozens of Marines, and several helicopters (Cobras, Hueys, Sea Knights, and H-53s, some of which refuel from the C-130). The Marines really like to show off all their hardware at this airshow, from the Harrier jump-jet, to the new and revolutionary V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor, to their large collection of military helicopters. On top of that, expect your usual dose of high-energy aerobatics, warbirds, some privately-owned ex-military jets, and some unusual acts like jet-powered cars/trucks, air comedy routines, etc. If you're anywhere in Southern California when this show goes on, don't miss it. It really is one of the top three or four military airshows in the US, the kind that draws aviation fanatics from all over the world. The weather has not been fully cooperative in the past few years, but good enough for the show to go on. The airshow is free, but a seat on the bleachers (for an extra 8 dollars) is totally worth it. The full airshow goes on all day on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and there is a special Twilight show (featuring airplanes with extra lights, pyrotechnics, and/or bright afterburners) on Saturday night as well.

[Edwards AFB Airshow and Open House](#)

Near Lancaster, Rosamond, and Mojave, CA ([North Gate](#), [West Gate](#))

Mid or late October (not every year)

This is my favorite airshow. Period. It's unlike any other. Edwards is home to Nasa's Dryden Flight Research Center and to the USAF Flight Test Center and Test Pilot School. It's where unique experimental proof-of-concept aircraft are flown, where new ideas in aeronautics are first explored, where almost all aviation records have been broken for the past 60 years or so. You'll see stuff there you simply won't see anywhere else, like autonomous unmanned stealth bombers (flown by artificial intelligences that can work as a team), or airplanes whose control systems can adapt to damage or failures (they can be controlled by engine thrust alone, for example), or jets with warping wings, or hypersonic scramjets that can fly at MACH 10, or spaceplanes that can fly over 60 miles high, or tilt-rotors that can take off and land like helicopters and then tilt their props forward to fly like an airplane... Edwards is a little bubble of spacetime where aviation is always 20-40 years in the future, compared to the rest of the world. And if that weren't enough, they have at least one of almost every airplane type in the USAF there for testing, so it's the only airshow where you will see long demos flown in a B-2, a B-1, a B-52, a C-17, a C-130, as well as F-117s and F-22s, and local Test Pilot School F-15s and F-16s and T-38s and L-39s. NASA usually flies their U-2, their T-34, and one of

their F-18s, as well as one of their experimental proof-of-concept futuristic jets. But wait, there's more! This airshow also features warbirds (the legendary Chuck Yeager flies his P-51 and the museum at Chino usually brings some of their warbirds like their unique N-9M Flying Wing), fighter jet demos (where else in the US can you see the Dutch Air Force F-16 demo?), MiGs, aerobatics, a cool glider act (that ends up landing right in front of the crowd line), cargo pellets being dropped from a C-17 or C-130, skydiving... There is lots and lots of amazingly interesting flying going on all day. Ah, and two completely unique things: The show starts with a sonic boom (again, something not allowed anywhere else) which used to be done by an F-15 with Chuck Yeager in the back seat (the boom happens at 10AM, the same time when the sound barrier was broken there by Yeager in 1947) but is now done in an F-22. The other unique thing is that the show closes with a huge formation of every local jet that flew that day, usually about 15 jets with the fighters in the front, the bombers in the middle, and the cargo planes and tankers in the back. It's an amazing sight. I might also mention the Thunderbirds also fly at this show sometimes, but who cares. (When a meal is delicious and substantial enough, sometimes dessert doesn't even matter). Anyways, it used to be that the show was Saturday-only on even years and both-days on odd years, but they seem to want to do only two-day shows now, which is just fine by me! The show is free, of course. If you live anywhere in southern California, I cannot see why you could have ANYTHING better to do that weekend than drive to Edwards and see the world's most advanced aircraft tear through some uniquely historic airspace. In fact, I know several people who travel from Europe just to see the amazing and uniquely advanced aircraft shown off at Edwards. And I literally dream about this airshow a few times a year. OK, enough about that.

[Jacqueline Cochran Memorial Air Show](#)

[Thermal, CA \(near Palm Springs\)](#)

Early November

This used to be a fairly small airshow but it's growing fast. A couple of years ago, it was warbirds, helicopters, and some CDF firefighting airplanes. This year they have two fighter jet demos, several excellent aerobats, quite a few warbirds, skydiving, a MiG demo, and even the Patriots jet team! I have not been to this airshow but I want to check it out. Saturday only. Free admission.

[Nellis AFB Aviation Nation](#)

[Las Vegas, Nevada](#) (park at the [Motor Speedway](#))

Early or mid November

Remember how I said that Edwards was my favorite airshow? Nellis is a very close second. It is the main airshow put on by the US Air Force, and they really make an effort to collect some of the best acts in the airshow world, and to display just about all the frontline aircraft in the US military. All that's missing are the unique prototypes they have at Edwards. Nellis, like Miramar, is one of the top 3 or 4 military airshows in the US, one of the few airshows where you can reliably see F-22s, F-117s, the Thunderbirds, at least two other fighter demos (usually more like 3-4 more), two or three of the country's best aerobats, two or three of the country's best warbird aerobatics acts, some privately-

owned ex-military jets, some World War 2 bombers, lots of World War 2 fighters, and even UAVs!!! (Nellis is, in fact, the only place they'll fly a Predator UAV in front of the public). B-2s sometimes make an appearance, and a simulated Reno Air Race is held on most years. The USAF may fly one of their three remaining F-4 Phantoms, and the Heritage Flights are the biggest and most interesting of any airshow. Foreign air forces are invited to bring some of their hardware: Israeli fighters and Russian helicopters have been shown on static display, and Bill Reeseman flies his MiG-17 on most years. In 2006, the Belgian Air Force will do their F-16 airshow routine, and the Brits will be bringing an Eurofighter Typhoon. A TYPHOON! This is arguably the most modern military airplane in Europe, and few Europeans have seen one! If you like military airplanes, then Nellis definitely needs to go on your airshow list (next to Miramar and Edwards). It's another really exceptional event with all kinds of really cool flying going on from 9AM to 5PM non-stop. Every year, airshow enthusiasts come from all over the world to watch this airshow. And hey, it's in Vegas, so it's not like the airshow is the only fun thing you get out of the trip! (Which is why I include it on this page even though it's not in California. Totally, TOTALLY worth the trip).

Well, I hope you enjoyed this little guide to airshows in and around California.

Sorry I can't offer nearly as much information about the many excellent airshows that go on in the East Coast, the South, the Midwest, Canada, Europe, or the rest of the world. I have been to some of them, but I felt I could only reliably give you an impression of airshows I've been to regularly for a few years (or at least airshows where I know some people who went for the past few years, or at the very least local airshows with tons of pictures online) so that I can really say pretty much for sure what they tend to be like. There are many websites out there with reviews and pictures from airshows all over the world, so you can visit those sites to find out about airshows near you. If you're considering attending this or that airshow for the first time, a Google search for the airshow name will usually turn up many websites like mine with pictures from that airshow from the last few years.

Thanks for visiting. Any questions, comments, suggestions, corrections, or other feedback, please don't hesitate to [email me](#). - Bernardo