

Palo Alto and Stanford

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Stanford University
- Downtown Palo Alto
- Stanford Shopping Center
- Stanford Dish Walk

ABOUT PALO ALTO

Just a quick train ride from San Jose is the cool Silicon Valley college town of Palo Alto. The main attraction of this charming upscale city is Stanford University, about 20 minutes north of San Jose. Named after a tree, this Ivy League town revolves around this famous private research institution, which was founded in 1891 by United States Senator and former California governor Leland Stanford and his wife, Jane Lathrop Stanford, as a memorial to their son Leland Stanford Jr., who died of typhoid in Italy a few weeks before his 16th birthday. The university is a major attraction, and is divided into a number of schools such as the Stanford Business School, Stanford Law School, Stanford School of Medicine, and Stanford School of Engineering. The school's Cantor Arts Center galleries are devoted to a wide range of art spanning 4,000 years, from ancient Chinese ceramics to 19th century American drawings to contemporary sculptures. The university has served as an incubator for the most brilliant high tech minds in Silicon Valley, its alumni have founded companies including Nike, Hewlett-Packard, Electronic Arts, Sun Microsystems, Yahoo!, Cisco Systems and Google. Today Palo Alto is headquarters to a number of Silicon Valley high-technology companies, including Hewlett-Packard, VMware and Facebook.

Don't worry, you don't have to be a geek or relative of a student to enjoy Palo Alto. Downtown is adorable, its pedestrian friendly streets attractive for strolling and people watching. With its 800 retail and professional businesses and plenty of parking, the town is a regional draw offering unique shopping, top-rated restaurants and nightlife. The recently restored Stanford Theater offers classic films throughout the week and weekend.

Palo Alto is home to the popular Stanford Dish Walk, named after the large old radiotelescope used for research in the Stanford foothills. The paved trail climbs the hills and offers spectacular views of the Peninsula, the campus and the coastal mountains. On a clear day visitors can see San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose and the East Bay. The main loop trail is 3.5 miles and takes about an hour and fifteen minutes to walk. The Palo Alto Baylands Nature Preserve protects some of the last remaining salt-marsh and mud-flat habitats on the West Coast and offers excellent birding and hiking year round. Another great place for walking is the Stanford Shopping Center, with 140-plus stores, dozens of restaurants and coffee shops, and public art by nationally acclaimed artists. This open-air Stanford Shopping Center is considered one of the top shopping centers in the country, featuring award-winning gardens and a European-style street market.