

## Fun, Touristy things to see and do around the Salton Sea and in Imperial County

(The ones in red are the ones I've been to and recommend.)

1. **Box Canyon** – folded rocks. The layers of rocks were once sedimentary rocks laid down horizontally on the sea bed many millennia ago. They were tilted and folded by the action of the Pacific and North American tectonic plates pushing against each other – the San Andreas fault! From 86 go east to Mecca, then continue east out of town. Easily accessible by road, but perhaps best to not park too far off the blacktop unless you have 4WD.
2. **Painted Canyon**. On the way to Box Canyon, there is a turn-off with a dirt road. About 4 miles down there is a hiking trail and ladders. Read the website before going. [www.hiking-in-ps.com/mecca-hills-painted-canyon-ladder-canyon-hike](http://www.hiking-in-ps.com/mecca-hills-painted-canyon-ladder-canyon-hike). The last time we went there some of the landscape had been rearranged by weather and the seven ladders hike may be only for adept mountain climbers. Nevertheless interesting canyon hikes for those preferring the horizontal.
3. **International Banana Museum**. From Mecca go back to 111 and drive south. It's on the right just before Bay Drive. Highly recommend you call ahead for times, usually 1-5 Fri-Mon during the winter <http://www.internationalbananamuseum.com>
4. **North Shore Yacht Club**. Continue south on 111. When you get to Marina Drive in North Shore, turn right to see the restored Albert Frey building. After the restoration this briefly housed the Salton Sea Museum, then was used as a gym/community center but I believe is now closed because of the conflict between the 1950s design of the historic building and ADA compliance. ☹️ [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North Shore Beach and Yacht Club](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Shore_Beach_and_Yacht_Club)
5. **North Shore State Park**. Continue south on 111 a few miles until you get to the State Park on the right. There is a visitor center there, rv camping, a beach which is increasing due to the retreat of the Sea. [www.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=639](http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=639)
6. **Corvina Beach**. South again on 111, there is dry camping here/day use. This is where I fell in love with the Salton Sea!
7. **Bombay Beach**. Continue south on 111 to this small-town-America community in the middle of nowhere. Everyone knows everyone and it's one of the last places where you can let your kids play soccer in the street after school. Also as the site of the Desert X biennial, it has become a venue for installation upcycled assemblage art. Don't miss the installations on the exposed playa.
8. **Salvation Mountain**. A huge folk art monument, the artistic gem of Imperial County. Created over 30 years by the late Leonard Knight. Aside from the Mountain, there are other grottoes to the right. Caretakers now attend and continue work on the project. If you have old latex house paint you'll never use, take it and donate it! From Bombay Beach, go south on 111 to Niland. In Niland, go east on 4<sup>th</sup> street, across the tracks, and keep going. [www.salvationmountain.us](http://www.salvationmountain.us)
9. **Slab City**. Featured in 'Into the Wild', this is described as 'the last free place'. People live off the grid. The 'slabs' are all that is left of a WWII era military installation. This is how the other 1% live. Keep driving past Salvation Mountain.
10. **East Jesus Sculpture Garden**. This is one of four registered museums in Imperial County. All sculptures are made from reclaimed materials. Once you have visited and seen what they do, next time, you may have materials donations! From Salvation Mountain, drive straight into Slab City until you get to the T. Go left, then left, then right at the Fork in the road. [eastjesus.org](http://eastjesus.org)
11. **Tallest flagpole**. Go back to 111 and proceed south to Calipatria. At the crossroads turn right, then right again a block or two down – you will be able to see the flagpole on your right from pretty much anywhere. This is the tallest flagpole in the world and the top of it is at sea level. Yes, that's how low we are. <http://www.calipatria.com/city/history>
12. **Keep on south on 111 again**. A few miles out of town turn west on Sinclair road. Go all the way to the end to visit the Sono Bony wildlife unit. From there you can park and go on a walk out to the point, with an awesome view of the Salton Sea. Much of the area you will walk past is dry, it was once all lake. [www.fws.gov/refuge/sonny\\_bono\\_salton\\_sea](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/sonny_bono_salton_sea)

13. Go back on Sinclair road to Garst Road (3 blocks, just past the first geothermal on the left) and turn north. This dirt/washboard road will take you 2 blocks north to a left turn for Red Hill Marina (if you cross the river, you went a little too far). Drive to the point and see how far the Sea has receded.
14. Back track to Garst and turn north again, across the bridge. At the dead end, on your left, is a wildlife lagoon, which is usually amazingly green. I mean literally the water is usually green.
15. Turn south again and just\*\* before the bridge turn east on the dirt road, this is Schrimpf Road. The next intersection is Davis – turn north and on your right are the mudpots. Note that I haven't been there recently and apparently they move and pop up elsewhere. Welcome to the San Andreas Fault. The power plants you see around you will likely be soon doubling as lithium extraction facilities. Yup, you're in Lithium Valley now.
16. Schrimpf Road will take you back to 111, then turn south again and in a mile, there is Finney Ramer Wildlife unit. You can pay a couple dollars for day use, and go enjoy a walk around the lakes and do birdwatching. If you have a California fishing license, you can fish here too.
17. A mile south of Finney Ramer, on the 111, turn east on Rutherford Road. After the tracks is scenic Wiest Lake, another fishing hole, which also has an rv camp area.
18. Continue east on Rutherford and turn south on either Wiest, Harston or Butters Road and then east on Route 78 – Ben Hulse Hwy. You will spend a few hours meandering through and enjoying the Glamis Dunes, and the wilderness of east Imperial County. [www.glamisdunes.com/invision](http://www.glamisdunes.com/invision)
19. When Rte 78 makes a T onto Rte 34, head south. About 15 miles down on the right hand side down a mile of washboard road is Gold Rock Trading Post and Museum. Hours 10-4, if no one is in the store, ask around. RV park and mobile home park. Small display of historical mining equipment.
20. South again on 34. Just before you get to the I8, turn left on Center of the World Drive and go to Felicity. Here is the Center of the World pyramid and the History of the World in Granite, in many different languages. [www.felicity.us/home.html](http://www.felicity.us/home.html) They also have an interesting maze.
21. From Felicity Head west on I8 and exit at Gray's Well Road. Turn west on the road the follows along the freeway, about a ¼ mile past 'Midway' RV area. On the left is Old Plank Road. [www.roadsideamerica.com/tip/21697](http://www.roadsideamerica.com/tip/21697)
22. Head west on I8 to 111 and head north. A mile or so take a left on Aten Road, on the left is the Pioneers' Museum – about the colonization of the Imperial Valley. You could take a full day in this museum. [pioneersmuseum.net](http://pioneersmuseum.net)
23. Directly south on 111 you can head to Calexico. Old town has a very Mexican flavor as it's a few feet from the border. Brush off your Spanish, not all stores have a English-speaking staff.
24. Next is the Imperial Valley Desert Museum. From Calexico take the 98 through the Yuha desert to Ocotillo. This boasts an incredible view of the Imperial Valley. On moonless nights you can enjoy the outdoor star observatory - stars without light pollution. [ivdesertmuseum.org](http://ivdesertmuseum.org)
25. New in 2024 is the Gateway Gallery, across the I8 in Ocotillo. Run by a former student of mine, this is the only commercial gallery in the county.
26. An even better view is from the top of the hill, but on the way up, at Mountain Springs off ramp, try the Gravity Ramp. [www.roadsideamerica.com/tip/21697](http://www.roadsideamerica.com/tip/21697)
27. At the top of the hill, visit Desert View Tower, [www.roadsideamerica.com/story/9178](http://www.roadsideamerica.com/story/9178), but on the way, try the Gravity Hill [www.roadsideamerica.com/tip/10884](http://www.roadsideamerica.com/tip/10884) and check out the flying saucer repair shop. [www.roadsideamerica.com/story/46466](http://www.roadsideamerica.com/story/46466)
28. To return to the Coachella Valley, head east on I8 until Forrester Road, then head north to Westmorland. Turn left on 86 which then curves north to Salton City.
29. Side trip from here might be to Borrego Springs (west on S22) through the Badlands (stop for the view). Highlights in Borrego are a touristy downtown, Borrego Art Institute, State Park, and Galleta Meadows sculptures. [www.desertusa.com/borrego/bs-art.html](http://www.desertusa.com/borrego/bs-art.html)
30. Back east on S22 to Hwy 86 and head north back to Coachella Valley. Stop in Desert Shores – off at the first exit, turn right, head all the way to the end, then turn left. Follow the road around and park on the street above the shore, to see a view of the Salton Sea that goes to the horizon.