YOUR FIRST DAY AT SANTA ANITA

A Practical Guide to the Races

Your first trip to Santa Anita does not need to start with a betting strategy. Start with a day you want to enjoy: a few races, time to watch the horses, and a comfortable place to settle in with friends.

A little preparation makes the afternoon easier. This guide covers the decisions worth making before you leave, along with a simple way to find your rhythm once you arrive.

1. Make sure your date has live racing

Check Santa Anita's official events and racing calendar for your date. The park also hosts simulcast viewing and other events. A listing for watching races from other tracks does not mean horses will be racing at Santa Anita that day.

Look for both gate opening and **first post**, the scheduled start of the first race. Our suggestion is to allow roughly an hour inside before first post, when the gates permit. Add driving, parking, and entry time separately.

Save the date-specific event page along with your tickets. Check it again before leaving, particularly for major racing days or special events.

2. Choose how you want to spend the afternoon

Decide whether you want to wander and explore or have a reserved place to return to between races. Compare admission, seating, and dining options for your date through the official calendar.

- **A casual first visit:** Review general admission and the areas included with your ticket.
- **A home base for your group:** Consider reserved seating, especially if being together matters more than moving around.
- **A meal with the races:** Compare dining packages and read what is included before booking.

Santa Anita's Opening Day listing, for example, distinguishes entry-only admission from reserved seats and dining packages. Treat major-event pricing and inclusions as specific to that event.

Before paying, check the full cost: admission, seating, parking, fees, and any food or beverage requirements. Do not assume a seat reservation includes a meal.

3. Match your arrival gate to your plans

The park's published address is **285 W. Huntington Drive, Arcadia, CA 91007**. Its visitor directions identify Gate 8 off Baldwin Avenue for the South Admission area and Gate 5 off Huntington Drive for the East and Clubhouse entrances.

Use your event's arrival instructions and current signs to choose an open gate. Confirm parking arrangements for your particular ticket instead of relying on a saved price or an old visit.

Open mobile tickets before joining the entry line. If meeting friends, agree on a specific meeting point after entry and send it to everyone. "See you at the track" leaves too much room for confusion.

4. Pack for comfort and check entry rules

Our suggested basics are comfortable walking shoes, sun protection, a light layer, a charged phone, and your tickets. Check the forecast before deciding what else to bring. Allow yourself an easy way to carry the essentials while walking around.

Santa Anita's visitor information includes area-specific bag and cooler guidance alongside a broader prohibited-items list. Confirm what is allowed in your reserved area before bringing a cooler, backpack, folding chair, or outside refreshments. Check your event's dress requirements too.

The calendar's general ticket information currently distinguishes cashless admission and parking from cash-only program sales. Confirm current payment arrangements for your date; a small amount of cash can be useful if you want a printed program.

5. Plan food around the kind of visit you want

Santa Anita's dining page describes FrontRunner as a restaurant above the track and Silks as open-air dining at reserved tables. Check availability, the menu, and package terms for your date before choosing.

For a relaxed first visit, decide whether lunch is the centerpiece of your day or simply a break between races. If you prefer to explore, ask which casual food outlets are open when you arrive. If you book a table, check when you need to be seated and whether your group can come and go.

Interested in a separate morning visit? The park also lists Clockers' Corner for breakfast and viewing morning workouts. Confirm hours and access before making an early trip; do not assume a morning visit includes afternoon admission.

6. Watch the horses, then follow one race

Once inside, find your seating area, restrooms, and a convenient place to get something to eat. Ask staff where visitors can watch horses before a race. Stay in public viewing areas and give horses and handlers plenty of space.

For your first race, identify the race number, the horses' program numbers, and their names. Check for **scratches**-horses withdrawn from the race-before following a particular runner.

Pick a horse to watch without feeling you need to bet. Follow it through the race and compare what you expected with what happened. After a few races, the sequence of preparation, start, finish, and results will feel more familiar.

For help with the numbers and terminology, keep our guide to reading odds and guide to bet types handy.

7. Keep betting optional

You can enjoy the afternoon without placing a wager. If you do choose to bet, decide your entertainment budget before you arrive, separate from tickets, transportation, and food. Do not increase it to recover losses.

You do not need to bet every race or try complicated combinations on your first visit. Watching a race is a useful choice whenever the information feels unfamiliar. Our beginner betting-plan guide can help you organize your limits in advance.

Visiting with children or arranging accessible seating

The calendar's general admission information lists free admission for children 17 and under. Confirm any separate seat, dining, or special-event requirements for your family.

Santa Anita lists accessible parking and wheelchair viewing areas in its visitor information. Before booking, contact the park about the route from parking to your chosen seating, accessible tables, and companion arrangements. Its general information number is **(626) 574-7223**.

Build your day around the people coming with you. Plan breaks, choose a meeting point, and leave room to head home before the final race if that makes the visit more comfortable.

Your before-you-leave checklist

- Confirm live racing, gate opening, and first post for your date.
- Check what your tickets include and which entrance to use.
- Review parking, payment methods, and mobile ticket access.
- Confirm bags, refreshments, and dress requirements for your area.
- Check dining reservations and any accessibility arrangements.
- Agree on a meeting point and an entertainment budget.

Make the first visit about enjoying the day

You do not have to understand every line of the program to have a good afternoon. Give yourself time to look around, ask questions, and enjoy watching the horses. The rest can come one race at a time.

Want an introduction before you go? Download The Paddock's free beginner booklet or browse our horse racing guides. Planning another Southern California track visit? Read our Del Mar visitor guide.

The Paddock is an independent educational resource and is not affiliated with Santa Anita Park. Venue information was checked November 12, 2026; confirm current details directly with Santa Anita before visiting.