

Sacramento Southern Railroad

Fast Facts

- 2016 marks the 33rd consecutive year of weekend excursion train rides on the Sacramento Southern Railroad in Old Sacramento offered by the California State Railroad Museum.
- The weekend excursion train ride season runs April through September each year which is in addition to scheduled educational excursion train rides for school groups.
- In the early 1900s and due in large part to competition spawned by the Delta's early development with its rich soil, plentiful water and agricultural bounty, Southern Pacific made the decision to build a new railroad – the Sacramento Southern – to transport both freight and passengers.
- With permission granted by the City of Sacramento, the standard-gauge line was built in a southeasterly direction from Sacramento toward Stockton. It reached Walnut Grove in the Delta, and later was extended to Isleton. The line was totally owned, funded, and operated by Southern Pacific.
- Early in its history, the Sacramento Southern Railroad was primarily used to transport pears, asparagus, celery, seeds and other products to markets from the Delta communities including Isleton, Walnut Grove, Hood and Freeport. In turn, the region's railroads transported these and many more fruits and vegetables to markets nationwide.
- When the Great Depression hit, it took a toll on many railroads -- including the Sacramento Southern -- and passenger service ceased in the early 1930s but freight business continued.
- In the 1950s and 1960s, fruit – especially Bartlett pears – was the main commodity hauled on the Sacramento Southern Railroad.
- In these early days of the Sacramento Southern Railroad, more than 100 cars were often dedicated each night just to carry beets during the height of sugar beet season.
- Train crews often would pick fresh asparagus for dinner -- which grew directly on the right-of-way in places -- and stop for coffee and donuts or meals at the Freeport Café.
- In 1971, Mother Nature intervened when a devastating flood destroyed much of the railroad. With the extensive flood damage, the line had become impassable and customers of necessity instead turned to trucking.
- As rail traffic continued to decline, service to Hood was reduced to a thrice-weekly local freight; eventually, Southern Pacific abandoned all but the last three miles on the Sacramento end.
- In 1978, Southern Pacific picked up the final train of empty freight cars and exited the picture.

- The California State Railroad Museum opened in 1981 and, to celebrate the new facility's anniversaries in 1982 and 1983, the first commemorative excursion trains operated on the Sacramento Southern Railroad to the delight of passengers.
- These early excursion trains were operated by the Pacific Locomotive Association, with the assistance of Southern Pacific Railroad (which still owned the rail line) and financially supported by the Friends of California State Railroad Museum (a predecessor to today's California State Railroad Museum Foundation).
- Conceived by a group of local railroad enthusiasts, the "Excursion Railroad Project" was created in 1983 and was led completely by an all-volunteer railroad operation crew.
- Initially, Southern Pacific leased a few miles on the northern end of the line to California State Parks for use by the Museum's newly formed "Excursion Railroad Project." Today, California State Parks owns large portions of the remaining rail line.
- The Museum's staff handled promotion, while the Friends' staff and Museum volunteers handled the money, cleaning and preparation of coaches for the public and provision of car attendants on the excursion trains.
- With a successful introductory track record fueled by passionate supporters and dedicated volunteers, the Railroad Museum's first official season of operation for excursion train rides on the Sacramento Southern Railroad kicked off on June 2, 1984 departing from Track #3 of the Central Pacific Passenger Station.
- Museum volunteers were solicited to determine how many would be interested in working on the railroad -- 140 responses were received and about 110 of the group made it through the entire training process and were on hand for the railroad's first season of operation.
- Since 1984, more than two million guests have taken a ride aboard the Sacramento Southern Railroad.
- In May 1997, Sacramento Southern Railroad first introduced Granite Rock steam locomotive No.10 to pull the excursion trains each season.
- Weekend excursion trains are now operated by all-volunteer crews fully trained and certified under Federal Railroad Administration regulations.
- The Sacramento Southern Railroad has matured into a true organization and is a vital revenue generator for the California State Railroad Museum and Foundation.
- Each year, the Sacramento Southern Railroad attracts nearly 80,000 riders -- and thousands of school children -- for an unforgettable, educational and interpretive experience, including school trains to the Crocker Art Museum.
- Excursion train ride guests delight in the sights, smells and sounds of an authentic, working locomotive as it rolls along the levees of the Sacramento River for a six-mile, 45-minute roundtrip excursion.

- Appealing to all ages, the weekend train ride experience offers guests the chance to experience train travel from an earlier era.
- After being taken out of service in 2011 for extensive boiler repairs, Granite Rock No. 10 steam locomotive returned to service on April 11, 2015 on the Sacramento Southern Railroad. Granite Rock No. 10 is an oil fired steam engine built by the H.K. Porter Co. for the U.S. Army in 1942.
- The excursion train features a combination of vintage closed coaches with comfortable seats, and open-air “gondolas” with bench style seating along with VIP accommodations for guests interested in a more luxury experience.
- Each September, the California State Railroad Museum proudly participates in Sacramento’s signature “Farm-to-Fork” initiative with a pear giveaway for train ride guests and introduced The Cocktail Train in 2015 to highlight the important role the region’s railroads have played in supporting agriculture.
- In addition to the weekend excursion train season, popular and family-friendly *Spookomotive* and *The Polar Express* train rides take place on the Sacramento Southern Railroad each fall and winter.
- The Old Sacramento State Historic Park’s approved General Plan makes way for the Museum’s Sacramento Southern Railroad in the future to offer exciting new adventures. A long term vision is to one day offer wildlife viewing trains to the Delta and Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge as well.

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