

10 Top Piers and Boardwalks

There are many piers and boardwalks that seem custom-made for student groups. From the West Coast to the East Coast, each pier has a personality of its own with boat tours, amusement rides and regional eats to enjoy.

Pier 39

San Francisco, California



Sea lions at K-Dock. Image from Pier 39.

A waterfront complex that looks over San Francisco Bay's Golden Gate Bridge, Bay Bridge and Alcatraz, Pier 39 is a 45-acre playground with plenty of leisure activities. Pier 39 has 14 restaurants and more than 90 shops and attractions including a five-acre waterfront park and 300-berth marina. One of Pier 39's most popular attractions is the sea lions at the K-Dock. During the winter, the population can be almost 900. Some migrate to the Channel Islands for breeding during the summer. Another place to view marine life is the Aquarium of the Bay, home to 20,000 sea creatures, offering the chance to pet them or view them through glass tunnels, the aquarium is an up-close, hands-on experience. Take a walk on the pier and peek in the variety of gift shops, candy stores, memorabilia markets and even the Alcatraz shop. Climb aboard the Rocket Boat for a thrilling, high-speed ride on the San Francisco Bay or have an indoor thrill-fix on the 7D Experience rollercoaster and laser-blasting game. Bike rentals and city trolley tours are available.

Navy Pier

Chicago, Illinois



Aerial view of Navy Pier. Image from ©Choose Chicago

Since 1995, Navy Pier has been a tourist staple on Lake Michigan, attracting more than 8.6 million people a year. With 50 acres of places to eat, walk, look and enjoy, there is bound to be something to cater to each student. Ride the 15-story Ferris wheel, watch a surround-sound movie at the IMAX® Theatre, have hands-

on fun at the Chicago Children's Museum or go on a high-speed boat ride. Other attractions include the Chicago Shakespeare Theater, Amazing Chicago Funhouse Maze and the 18-hole miniature golf course. There is a food court plus a variety of sit-down restaurants, food carts and candy shops.

South Street Seaport

Lower Manhattan, New York City

A mix of historic architecture and shopping at South Street Seaport awaits students in New York City. The 12-block harbor district flourished in the 17th and 18th centuries and is now the 26th most visited tourist attraction, according to Travel + Leisure, tied with the Great Wall in China. Comprised of ships and cobblestone streets with gas lamps, the seaport is known for its museum and pavilion shopping mall. The museum is a collection of buildings and refurbished warehouses with galleries and ships pertaining to the port's heyday. This includes a print shop with antique presses, a lighthouse memorial to the victims of Titanic in 1912 and a street of restored ships on Pier 16 that honor the maritime history. Climb on the 1908 Ambrose Lightship, with a brand new hull as of 2012, to see collections about navigation and lightships. Below deck of Peking, the four-masted barque, visitors can view the original living quarters of the 1911 ship that carried goods from Germany to South America.

Santa Monica Pier

Santa Monica, California

This 100-year-old landmark is a great place for students to unwind. One aspect not to miss is the Santa Monica Pier Aquarium. A marine-education center, the aquarium is at beach-level below the carousel on the pier. With more than 100 species of animals found in Santa Monica Bay, it features hands-on field trip programs that help students learn about pollution prevention, marine conservation and environmental education. The pier's amusement park, Pacific Park, has 12 rides including the Pacific Wheel, the first and only solar-powered Ferris wheel; West Roller Coaster; Pacific Plunge; and 17 carnival games. Other entertainment includes the Historic Carousel, Playland Arcade and Trapeze School.

Ocean City Music Pier

Ocean City, New Jersey



Ocean City Music Pier. Image from Ocean City Regional Chamber of Commerce.

Located on the Ocean City Boardwalk, the Ocean City Music Pier is the place to stop on the Southern Shore in New Jersey. Dating back to 1928, the pier is an entertainment venue for a variety of shows including famous artists and the Miss New Jersey Pageant. The Ocean City Pops is a summer concert series that showcases orchestral music as well as famous musical guests. The nearby Boardwalk has two amusement parks with Ferris wheels, roller coasters, go-carts, a water park, bumper cars, water rides and movie theaters. While there, shop for homemade fudge and salt water taffy. The Boardwalk has many events throughout the week. Monday nights feature Stockton Goes to the Beach Summer Concert Series,

Tuesday nights feature Radio Disney on the Boardwalk, and every Thursday in July and August is Family Night, with live entertainment, a barbershop quartet, face painting, karaoke, magicians and a strolling string band.

Long Wharf

Boston, Massachusetts



Long Wharf view of harbor. Image from Boston Harbor Association.

Dating before America's independence, Long Wharf is one of the most popular places to visit in Boston. Clipper ships from its past have been replaced by ferries and sightseeing boats. There are boat tours that go to Provincetown and the Harbor Islands Recreation Area as well as smaller tours along the wharf explaining the history of the harbor. Nearby historic buildings include the Custom House Block from the mid-1800s and 1760 Gardiner Building. The Norman B. Leventhal Walk to the Sea is a mile-long tour that starts at the State House on Beacon Hill and passes four centuries of history, ending at the wharf. Other sites to visit near Long Wharf include the New England Aquarium, Rowes Wharf, Quincy Market and the Paul Revere House.

Cocoa Beach Pier

Cocoa Beach, Florida

With a million guests each year, the Cocoa Beach Pier is made of more than 2.5 miles of boardwalk planks and 40-foot pilings and has been a place for fun since 1962. With five bars, four restaurants, ice cream parlor, arcade, beach rentals and volleyball courts, the pier has many options for leisure. It hosts special events throughout the year including the Annual Easter Surfing Festival, Beach Fest and Concert on the Beach. Just a mile away from the pier on Atlantic Avenue is the largest Ron Jon Surf Shop at 52,000 square feet. This flagship store is open 24 hours a day and is next door to Ron Jon's Watersports store for all beach rental needs.

Myrtle Beach Oceanfront Boardwalk

Myrtle Beach, South Carolina



Broadway at Myrtle Beach. Image from VisitMyrtleBeach.com

Constructed in 2010, Myrtle Beach Oceanfront Boardwalk and Promenade includes many options for shopping, fun and events. The boardwalk is divided into three different sections. The northernmost portion is from 14th Avenue North Pier to Plyler Park, the mid-section from Plyler Park to 8th Avenue North and the southernmost end of the boardwalk features an oceanfront park. One popular event is Ocean Boulevard's Hot Summer Nights, hosted at Plyler Park. It includes a kid's carnival with bounce houses and balloon artists on Mondays, live concerts on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, fireworks off 2nd Avenue Pier on Wednesdays, Dixieland band on Fridays, and jugglers, acrobats and a fire show on Sundays. Other places to go nearby include Family Kingdom amusement park, three water parks including Wild Water and Wheels, and miniature golf.

Virginia Beach Boardwalk

Virginia Beach, Virginia

Three miles long and 28 feet wide, the Virginia Beach Boardwalk features food, shopping, outdoor activities and entertainment.

The boardwalk includes a separate path for biking, rollerblading and surrey rentals. There is also a fishing pier and the Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center with an IMAX theater.

Walking along the pier, visitors can view King Neptune Statue, visit Atlantic Wildfowl Heritage Museum, see the Old Coast Guard Station and have fun at JT Grommet's Island Playground. The Atlantic Fun Park is right by the boardwalk and hard to miss with a giant Ferris wheel. With 12 midway games, 16 family fun rides as well as thrill rides and food, the amusement park makes for a fun day at the boardwalk.

For night-time entertainment, there is live music every summer at the four oceanfront stages at 7th, 17th, 24th and 31st streets as well as Cirquesta Dream Quest, a two-hour circus show filled with acrobatics and amazing feats.

Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk

Santa Cruz, California



Image from Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk.

Combining tradition and fun, the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk is filled with a variety of ways to spend the day, from roller coasters and arcade games to a haunted house and miniature golf. The boardwalk has had visits from Miss California Pageants, big bands and daring performers who sometimes incorporated fire to give the audience a thrill. Known for its 1924 Giant Dipper roller coaster, the boardwalk has thrill rides, midway games and two year-round indoor arcades. Neptune's Kingdom is an indoor entertainment center including Buccaneer Bay's 18-hole miniature golf course, Smuggler's Arcade and Captain's Game Deck, featuring eight pool tables, air hockey, ping pong and foosball. The boardwalk also offers other places for recreation including Casino Arcade, laser tag, Boardwalk Bowl and Fright Walk, a walk-through haunted house.

–By Becky Neems