

## TOURISTS' TOUR OF FOLSOM

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For a great sightseeing tour of Folsom, take a trip through time. Past, present and future all fuse perfectly in this historic, high-tech town, from the marker that commemorates the second gold mining camp in California, to the scenic lake that draws more visitors every year than any other recreation area in the state, to the impressive bridge now being built to span not only a river but the millennium.

Here in more or less chronological sequence are the most notable sites to visit in Folsom, starting with the ghost of a lively mining camp that drew the first gold-seekers to this promising outpost on the American River.

**1. Mormon Island:** Just six weeks after gold was discovered in Coloma, a group of Mormons set up the second mining camp in California at a site that later became part of the city of Folsom. Mormon Island for a time was one of the state's busiest towns, with a bridge, two stage lines and the Gold Country's first school. But by 1880, the gold was gone and so was the town. Its land now lies under Folsom Lake. Its historic graves were moved to El Dorado County.

***Mormon Island commemorative marker** is at Folsom Lake Observation Point on Folsom Dam Road. Mormon Island is under the water, but you get beautiful vistas and lake access from here. You can fish here, too.*

***Mormon Island Cemetery** is on East Natoma Street just across the El Dorado County line.*

**2. Negro Bar:** This is the mining camp, probably the state's third, that became the city of Folsom. It was named for the African-American miners who founded it. Nothing is known of these men, but Negro Bar State Park, across Lake Natoma, honors them.

**Negro Bar State Park**, part of Folsom Lake State Recreation Area, has campsites, the American River Bike Trail, a boat launch, swimming and picnic facilities. \$6 day use. Entrance is from Greenback Lane.

**3. Sutter Street:** As the gold camps flourished, shopkeepers set up businesses to serve the miners. For more than a century, Sutter Street was Folsom's main shopping area. Today, a stroll along this street's wooden sidewalks is like a trip back to the Old West. Sutter Street's authentic facades house antique shops, speciality stores, a variety of restaurants, a soda fountain and even a pottery factory. The History Museum is here, too (see below).

**Sutter Street**, in the heart of historic Folsom and a block from Lake Natoma, is interesting any time, but especially on one of the weekends throughout the year that it holds crafts and antiques fairs. The Chamber of Commerce on Wool Street (see below) has a schedule of events.

**4. The railroad:** Founder Joseph Folsom ensured his city would endure by establishing it as a railroad town. In 1856, the first railroad in the West linked Folsom and Sacramento. Stage coaches met the early trains and rushed their passengers to the gold fields. Johnny Cash made Folsom's train whistle famous in 1970 with his hit "Folsom Prison Blues," but the whistle is no longer heard here. The last train ran through in 1987.

**Folsom's old railroad depot** now houses the Chamber of Commerce and the Visitors Center. The original depot burned down; this one dates from 1928. Here you can get tourist information and maps. The chamber is in historic Folsom on Wool Street between Sutter and Leidesdorff.

**The Ashland Depot:** Built in the 1860s, this depot is the oldest original depot in the West. It served freight trains and the deciduous fruit trade at what is now Folsom-Auburn Road. When that part of Folsom was developed in the 1970s, the depot was

*moved to its present site next to the Chamber of Commerce on Wool Street. The Ashland Depot is a feature of the new living history center.*

***Living History Center:*** *A new area now being developed next to the Chamber of Commerce, this center features the Ashland Depot, a carriage house and a miner's cabin. Its historic presentations will focus on Folsom's ranching, dairy farming, railroading and gold-mining past. At Wool and Leidesdorff streets.*

**5. "Nob Hill":** The part of town around Scott and Figueroa streets, with its fine Victorian-style homes, has become known as Folsom's Nob Hill. The homes aren't open to the public, but they are interesting to see.

***The Bates House:*** *714 Figueroa St.. Built in the late 1850s, it is possibly Folsom's oldest existing house. Originally owned by Folsom dentist, Lerman Bates.*

***The Bradley House:*** *606 Figueroa St. Built in 1859 by Cyrus Bradley and John Seymour, owners of a general merchandise and provisions store. It's now Folsom's only bed and breakfast inn.*

***The Cohn House:*** *305 Scott St. Built about 1870 by state Senator Phillip C. Cohn, now a national registered landmark. The mixture of architectural styles gives it an eclectic look.*

***The Burnham Mansion:*** *602 Figueroa St. Built about 1884 by James Burnham, druggist, banker and Wells Fargo agent.*

***The Hyman House:*** *603 Figueroa St. Built in the 1880s by Jacob Hyman, a dry goods merchant. Hyman also built the Hyman building at Sutter and Wool streets.*

**6. St. John the Baptist Catholic Church:** This white clapboard church is the oldest church in Folsom and the oldest surviving building. It still belongs to the Catholic Church but is now used only for special occasions. Its adjacent cemetery contains many old, interesting grave markers. Both the church and the cemetery are at the corner of Sibley and Natoma streets.

**7. Wells Fargo Building and Pony Express stop:** While the gold mines prospered, the Wells Fargo Co. operated an assay office on Sutter Street. The building also was a Pony Express stop during the 18 months the innovative mail service ran from St. Louis to Sacramento. Today, the old Wells Fargo Building houses the History Museum.

***The Folsom History Museum:*** *The museum in this historic building presents a continuous display of Folsom's past, beginning with the Maidu Indians. You can also see a working model of a gold dredger here – the precious metal was dredged in Folsom until the 1960s. Rotating special exhibits have included a walk through Folsom's gold history, antique quilt shows, the history of medicine from 1850 to 2000 and railroading. The museum is at 823 Sutter St. Hours are Tuesday through Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. 985-2707.*

***The Pony Express:*** *Two markers outside the History Museum honor the riders who brought the mail from St. Joseph, Missouri. Each June, the California Division of the National Pony Express Association reenacts the original ride with a stop in Folsom.*

**8. Folsom Prison:** Folsom Prison, opened in 1880, was the state's second correctional facility, built to relieve the overcrowding at San Quentin. Inmates constructed the prison with granite from a nearby quarry. Now they make California's license plates and street signs. Folsom Prison was the first prison in California to have electric lights, generated by a power plant inmates helped build (see Folsom Powerhouse, below). The prison entrance is at Folsom Prison Road on Natoma Street between the Folsom Dam Road and the city government complex.

***The Prison Museum:*** *The Prison Museum, with artifacts and historical information from the prison's past as a maximum security institution, is open daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.*

***The Prison Gift Shop:*** *This unusual shop sells artwork, jewelry, wallets, purses, even wooden birdhouses, all made by inmates, who are paid 90 percent of the selling price. It's open every day from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.*

**9. Folsom Powerhouse:** With help from inmate labor and power generated from an old dam, the Folsom Powerhouse first supplied electricity to Folsom Prison in 1893. The Folsom Powerhouse made history two years later by generating the first long-distance transmission of electricity in the world. At 4 a.m. on July 13, 1895, a Folsom employee threw a switch in Folsom that lit up the city of Sacramento 22 miles away. At the time, the Folsom plant was hailed as the “greatest operative electrical plant on the American continent.” The powerhouse was closed when the new dam was built. It is now a state historic park and a national registered landmark.

***The Folsom Powerhouse:** Now part of the Folsom Lake State Recreation Area, the Powerhouse is open Thursday through Sunday from noon to 4 p.m. Group tours are available by calling 988-0205. At any time, the interpretive signs are informative and interesting and its spot on the river is cool and peaceful. To get to the Powerhouse, follow the signs from Riley Street just south of Rainbow Bridge.*

**10. Rainbow Bridge:** This 82-year-old structure across the American River in historic Folsom has become the city’s most picturesque landmark. You can walk across the bridge or under it on the bike trail below. The rocky river views from its span are beautiful.

**11. Folsom Dam:** Actually a system of several dams, Folsom Dam, finished in 1955, primarily refers to the main dam at Folsom Dam Road near the Placer County Line. (See separate story.)

***Folsom Dam:** Tours are given Tuesday through Saturday at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. 989-7275.*

**12. Folsom Lake:** This lake, formed when the reservoir for Folsom Dam was filled in 1955, has become one of the state’s most popular recreation areas. At its several sites in Folsom you can swim, hike, fish, picnic or launch a boat. A water festival in June draws many visitors. (See separate story for more information on Folsom Lake.)

**13. Folsom City Park:** Besides its requisite playground equipment and picnic areas, which are far nicer than those of most parks, this sprawling complex behind City Hall boasts the only 12-inch narrow gauge steam train still in operation. It also has a rodeo arena, river trails and a zoo whose mission is to take care of animals that can't survive in the wild. City Park is at Natoma and Stafford streets.

***The Folsom Zoo:** The animals at this little zoo have been rescued from the wild, where they would not survive. All have names and biographies posted on their cages. The zoo is open Tuesday through Sunday and most Monday holidays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. \$2 admission; \$1 ages 5-12.*

**14. The Gingerwood House:** This private home has been an ongoing art project of its owners for more than 20 years. Constructed entirely of natural and artistic materials, it has become an interesting Folsom landmark. Like everything else about this house, its address is unusual. It officially has two: 310 Coloma St. and 402 Figueroa St.

**15. Gekkeikan Sake Tasting Room:** Wine tasting is common in Northern California, but sake tasting is something different. Gekkeikan (say *gay-kay-khan*), a 350-year-old Japanese company that opened a brewing plant in Folsom in 1991, partly because of the city's good water, offers sake tasting Monday through Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Its landscaping is worth seeing. 985-3111.

**16. Intel:** You can't tour Intel's huge complex at Prairie City Road and Highway 50, but its picnic tables and wetlands pond with walking trails are open to the public.

*Returning almost to the beginning of Folsom's history, Intel is across Prairie City Road from the site of the vanished town of **Prairie City**, once one of the biggest cities in California and Folsom's voting place until 1864. By 1865, the gold had been worked out and the town had disappeared. Only a historic marker remains.*

**17. The new Folsom Bridge over Lake Natoma:** The latest tourist attraction in Folsom is its new bridge, scheduled to open for traffic in August. Tourists will enjoy the wide sidewalks and 12 overlooks, with benches, that will allow them to enjoy the spectacular scenery and wildlife. Good spots for construction-watching include Gold Lake Drive, River Way, parts of Sutter Street, the balconies of nearby restaurants, and the American River Bike Trail from Negro Bar State Park.

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