Daily Visitor Activities

• Pack a picnic, escape the city to fresh mountain air. At 4,200 feet, with Santa Clara (‘Silicon’) Valley and San Francisco Bay at your feet, Mount Hamilton offers the best views in the Bay Area.

• Stroll through the marble-halled Visitors’ Center, with exhibits explaining Lick research. Learn how we find planets beyond our solar system, how exploding stars teach us about the evolution of the universe, how we discern the nature of galaxies and black holes, and how new technologies are used to undo the blurring effects of Earth’s atmosphere.

• Join a free tour for an awe-inspiring close-up view of the Great Lick Refractor, one of history’s most notable—and notably beautiful—telescopes, conducted every hour, on the half-hour, from 12:30 pm to 4:30 pm, in the Visitors’ Center.

• Learn about Lick’s rich past from interpretive exhibits of historical artifacts, and about the work of the Lick Observatory Historical Collections Project (website: collections.ucolick.org).

• Check out Lick Observatory apparel, souvenirs, astronomical photos, posters, educational toys, and other astronomy-related goodies in the Gift Shop.

• Take a walk to the gallery of the Shane Reflector to see the telescope and learn about its activities.

Before visiting, please be aware that:

• There are no food services at the observatory beyond vending machine snacks and soft drinks.

• There are no gasoline or automotive services on Mount Hamilton.

• In winter, snow occasionally closes Mount Hamilton road. Check for road closures.

• Please respect traffic, parking, and other notices, prevent fire, and abate noise and litter.

• Please do not visit out of hours when, to minimize light pollution, access is restricted and gates lock automatically.

Driving Directions To Lick Observatory

Lick Observatory is located at the summit of Mount Hamilton in the Diablo Range, East of San Jose. There are no gasoline or automotive services on Mount Hamilton.

Map data ©2012 Google


From the East: Take I-580 (West) to I-680 (South). Then follow the directions above. Alternatively, from I-5, take Patterson exit (West). Turn North-West onto Puerto del Canyon Rd (California Route 130). At The Junction bar & grill, turn South onto San Antonio Valley Rd (California Route 130). Allow 2 hours from Patterson.


University of California Observatories

Lick Observatory

Located east of San Jose on the summit of 4,200-foot Mount Hamilton, this renowned astronomical observatory, with its sweeping views of the San Francisco Bay Area, is open to the public free of charge. Visitors are welcome from noon to 5 pm daily during the summer months and Thursday-Sunday in other seasons.

Lick Observatory Visitors’ Center

Year-round: Thu–Sun, Noon–5 pm

Phone: 408-274-5061

Website: www.ucolick.org/public

Facebook: Lick Observatory

AAA GEM designation: A “must-see” . . . of exceptional interest and quality

*Also selected holidays & events. For latest information visit: mthamilton.ucolick.org/GiftShop/
About Lick Observatory

Lick Observatory was the world’s first permanently equipped mountaintop astronomical observatory. It demonstrated the feasibility of sustained work at a high, remote site, where the best observing conditions are found. Almost all subsequent research observatories have followed suit. The observatory is the legacy of self-made California millionaire James Lick (1796–1876) who donated a large fortune to endow an observatory on his ranch. The observatory opened on the morning of 9 January 1888.

James Lick, Deed of Trust (1874)

"...A powerful telescope, superior to and more powerful than any yet made... and more suitable observatory to... useful in promoting science... and connected therewith... and make them..."