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Orange County's Arts Scene Takes Center Stage

Orange County presents a vivacious arts and culture scene, featuring performance venues, cultural museums, historical points of interest, artist districts and fascinating festivals. Beginning in Fall 2006, the OC entered a new period of growth with major expansions at two of the area's premier arts centers.

The Orange County Performing Arts Center's expansion opened on September 15, 2006 with a six-week festival of performances. The new development features the 2,000-seat Renée and Henry Segerstrom Concert Hall; the intimate 500-seat Samueli Theater; and a 46,000-square-foot arts plaza, an inviting outdoor public space. Celebrated for its striking architecture and flawless acoustics, the Center presents the world's greatest ballet companies, national tours of leading Broadway shows, and concerts featuring award-winning chamber ensembles, soloists, classical vocalists, jazz musicians, cabaret artists and special events.

Orange County is the home of several acclaimed theatrical productions and world-class theaters. Designed by famous architect Philip Johnson, the Crystal Cathedral features more than 10,000 panes of glass and presents the annual *Glory of Christmas* and *Glory of Easter* pageants. South Coast Repertory is renowned for its commitment to supporting and producing both established theatrical productions and innovative works by up-and-coming American playwrights.

Dedicated to promoting human understanding through art from around the world, Bowers Museum celebrated the grand opening of the state-of-the-art Dorothy and Donald Kennedy Wing on February 18, 2007, with two spectacular new exhibitions – "Ansel Adams: Classic Images" and "Treasures from Shanghai: 5,000 Years of Chinese Art and Culture." The new \$14.6 million expansion measures 30,000 square feet and is the Bowers' second major development in 15 years.

Orange County's rich culture is on display at the Mission San Juan Capistrano, where Early California history comes to life at one of the state's original 21 missions.

Founded by Father Junipero Serra in 1776, the Mission houses the Serra Chapel, California's oldest building still in use, and receives worldwide attention every March during the Return of the Swallows Celebration. The OC also boasts Little Saigon, the cultural and commercial capital of the largest Vietnamese community in the United States, and the Richard Nixon Library & Birthplace, a high-tech venue offering more than 40 years of contemporary history.

Art districts continue to develop in Orange County. Costa Mesa, home of the Orange County Performing Arts Center, is filled with public art displays and recently approved construction of a 39-acre urban district, which will house galleries, artist lofts and live-work studios in a distinctive neighborhood. Emerging artists and art-lovers converge in Santa Ana's colorful Artists Village, featuring museums, historic neighborhoods, sidewalk cafés, poetry readings and an energizing, creative scene.

Laguna Beach is a well-established artists' colony dating back to the early 1900s. Today, galleries line the streets, and visitors are bound to see local artists painting the breathtaking landscape. The city also hosts several annual art festivals during July and August, including Festival of Arts, featuring more than 160 local artists displaying paintings, sculptures, ceramics and more; Pageant of the Masters, in which volunteer models are transformed into life-size versions of paintings, sculptures and other works of art, accompanied by narration and live music; and the Sawdust Art Festival, hosting artists and craftsmen at a unique venue in the picturesque Laguna Canyon.

Orange County also offers an array of eclectic museum exhibitions, featuring contemporary visual arts at the Orange County Museum of Art and nautical memorabilia, classic automobiles and American Impressionism at the county's other intriguing museums. Discover relaxing botanical retreats at the area's Fullerton Arboretum and Sherman Library & Gardens. Bring the kids to experience hands-on learning at the recently enhanced Bowers Kidseum, a center geared to educate children about music, art and stories of different cultures, and Discovery Science Center, an "amusement park for the mind" with live science shows and 120 interactive exhibits.