National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Channel Islands National Park
California

Nowhere Else On Earth

Something draws us to the sea and its islands. Maybe it is the thrill of traveling over water to an unfamiliar land or the yearning for tranquility—to walk on a deserted beach with birds, salty breezes, and the rhythmic wash of waves as our companions. You don't have to go far to find such a place. Off the coast of southern California the Channel Islands seem to float on the horizon like ribbons of dark rock. Named for the deep troughs that separate them from the mainland, the eight islands and their encircling waters are home to over 2,000 species of animals and plants—145 are found nowhere else on Earth. Isolation over thousands of years and the mingling of warm and cold ocean currents give rise to the rich biodiversity of these islands. Today, five of the islands, their submerged lands, and the waters within one nautical mile of each island are protected as Channel Islands National Park.

The Channel Islands from the Ice Ages to Today

Living Alone Lower ocean levels during the ice ages narrowed the distance across the Santa Barbara Channel and exposed some of the seafloor. The land offshore, easier to reach then, allowed some species to venture into this new territory. Mammoths swam the channel. Mice and foxes drifted over on rafts of vegetation. Plants and seeds floated. Birds flew. Later, water from melting glaciers raised the sea level. This widened the channel again and increased the isolation of animals and plants from the mainland.

Many species evolved over time and adapted to the isolated environment. Mammoths evolved to a new species of pygmy mammoth, and gray foxes shrank to the size of house cats, becoming today's island fox. Species of mice, scrub jays, and many plants grew larger.

Kinship of Islands and Sea A powerful bond between the land and sea controls everything here, from where plants grow to when seals breed. Together, water currents, winds, and weather create an ecosystem that supports a rich diversity of life. Among the 2,000 species you will find here are northern fur seals, bright orange garibaldi (California's state marine fish), some 28 species of whales and dolphins, intertidal dwellers like sea stars and surfgrass, and squid, a major link in the food chain as predator and prey.

People on the Islands The islands attracted seafaring people long ago; 13,000-year-old remains of a human leg bone found on Santa Rosa record the earliest known human presence in North America. Over time Chumash Indians settled on the northern islands, and Gabrieliño/Tongva settled the southern islands. Prosperous and industrious, the tribes joined in a trading network that extended up and down the coast and inland. The island Chumash used purple olivella shells to manufacture the main currency used for this commerce. The region's temperate climate and bountiful natural resources later attracted Spanish explorers, missionaries, and ranchers.

In October 1542 Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo sailed into the Santa Barbara Channel. His expedition wintered on an island he called Isla de Posesión. On January 3, 1543, Cabrillo died from injuries and may have been buried on one of the islands, although his grave has never been found. Capt. George Vancouver gave the islands their present names in 1793. Early in the 1800s fur traders searched the coves for sea otters, seals, and sea lions, nearly hunting them to extinction.

By 1822 most Chumash had been moved to mainland missions. Fishing camps and ranching had become economic mainstays by the late 1800s. In the 1900s the military set up lookouts on Anacapa and Santa Barbara and practiced bombing raids on San Miguel. These activities had devastating effects on the island ecology, introducing alien plant and animal species that threatened to destroy the ecological dynamics of the islands. Today, ranching and other commercial and military activities have ceased and the islands are regaining some of their natural diversity.

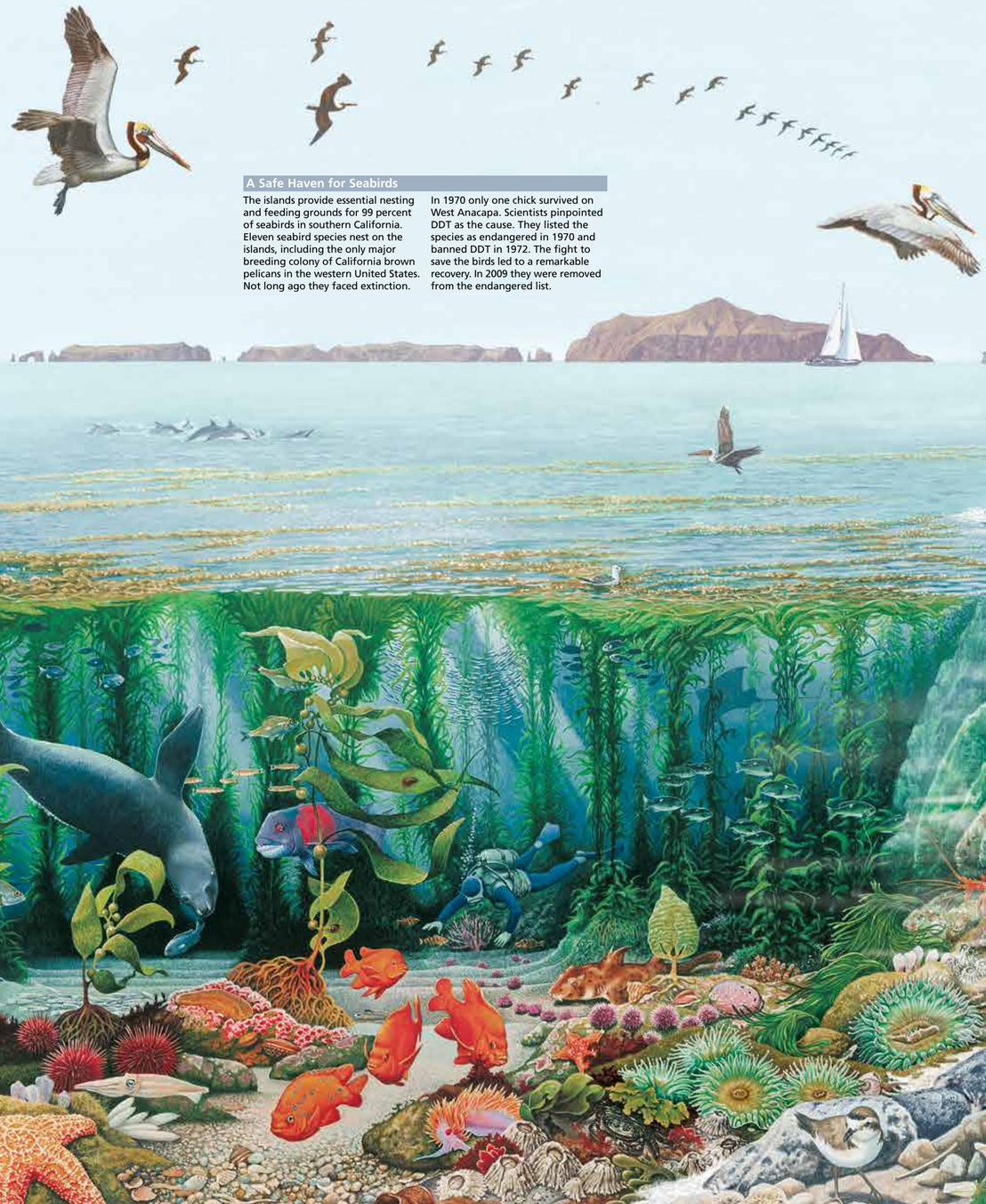
Protection and Restoration Protection for the islands began in 1938 when Anacapa and Santa Barbara became Channel Islands National Monument. In 1980 Congress designated San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, Anacapa, Santa Barbara, and the submerged lands and waters within one nautical mile of each island as Channel Islands National Park. The waters extending out six nautical miles from each island are a National Marine Sanctuary. Channel Islands National Park monitors and protects threatened and endangered species, restores ecosystems, and preserves the natural and cultural resources for you and for generations to come.

This illustration is a composite of the park's five islands.
NPS / MICHAEL HAMPSHIRE

A Safe Haven for Seabirds

The islands provide essential nesting and feeding grounds for 99 percent of seabirds in southern California. Eleven seabird species nest on the islands, including the only major breeding colony of California brown pelicans in the western United States. Not long ago they faced extinction.

In 1970 only one chick survived on West Anacapa. Scientists pinpointed DDT as the cause. They listed the species as endangered in 1970 and banned DDT in 1972. The fight to save the birds led to a remarkable recovery. In 2009 they were removed from the endangered list.



Channel Islands

Exploring Channel Islands National Park

Visiting Channel Islands National Park

When was the last time you gazed at the ocean? Did you see the islands? Feel them call you? Savor the sea—its gulls, barking sea lions, and tiny creatures. Take time for a visit.

Eight Channel Islands range along the coast of southern California for 160 miles. San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, and Anacapa are the northernmost. Four islands lie to the south—San Nicolas, Santa Barbara, Santa Catalina, and San Clemente.

Visitor Centers The visitor center in Ventura has information, a film, an indoor marine life display, exhibits about the natural and cultural features of the islands, a native plant garden, an observation tower, and a bookstore. A small visitor center in Santa Barbara has information and exhibits. Both visitor centers are open daily, except Thanksgiving and December 25.

Planning Your Visit Whether you go to the islands on your own boat or with a park concessioner, you should use the park website (www.nps.gov/chis) to plan your visit. It describes the many tour options that are available and includes information about boat and airplane concessioners that can take you to the islands. It has detailed information about activities on the islands and in the water, boating safety, weather, park regulations, and more. Park staff can also help you plan your visit. Contact a visitor center for information.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information go to a visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check our website. • The Ventura visitor center is accessible for visitors with special needs but getting onto the islands can be difficult. • Service animals are welcome in the visitor center at Ventura. On the islands, they must have a completed and signed "Service Animal Health Background Form," which is on the park website.

Things to See and Do Visitors to the islands may swim, snorkel, hike, camp, watch wildlife, kayak, sail, and explore tide pools, beaches, and rugged canyons. Naturalists lead hikes. The kelp forests, caves, clear water, and rich diversity of animals and plants make this one of the top scuba diving sites in the world.

Protecting the Islands The islands' natural and cultural resources, including all seabirds, marine mammals and other wildlife, plants and wildflowers, artifacts, structures, rocks, fossils, shells, and shipwrecks, are protected by federal law—all collecting is illegal. Keep at least 100 yards away from marine mammals and seabirds. Fish and wildlife laws are strictly enforced. Staying on trails helps prevent erosion and protects fragile vegetation.

For Your Safety Be sure to check the park website for details about safety and regulations. • Weather conditions change rapidly; dress in layers. • There are no supplies on the islands. Take water, food, and other necessities. • Watch your step—ladders, railings, and stairs may be wet. • Stay back from cliff edges; they may be crumbly or undercut—a fall could be fatal. • Do not approach marine mammals like whales, seals, and sea lions. • Pets are prohibited on the islands. • Check for ticks, and watch out for poison oak. • For firearms regulations ask a park ranger or check the park website.

WARNING Deer mice on the islands may carry diseases, including deadly hantavirus. Avoid all contact with mice and other wild animals. Keep food in rodent-proof containers.

In an emergency: On the islands contact a ranger. On the water use marine radio VHF channel 16.

Commercial Service to the Islands
Channel Islands Aviation
305 Durley Ave.
Camarillo, CA 93010
805-987-1301
www.flycia.com

Island Packers, Inc.
1691 Spinnaker Dr., Suite 105B
Ventura, CA 93001
805-642-1393
www.islandpackers.com

More Information
Channel Islands National Park
Robert J. Lagomarsino
Visitor Center
1901 Spinnaker Dr.
Ventura, CA 93001-4354
805-658-5730
www.nps.gov/chis

Outdoors Santa Barbara
Visitor Center
113 Harbor Way, 4th floor
Santa Barbara, CA 93109
805-884-1475

Channel Islands National Park is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn more about parks at www.nps.gov.

Do Not Use This Map For Navigation
For safe boating, National Ocean Survey charts are indispensable.

Authorized park boundary
The Channel Islands National Park boundary extends 1.8 km (1 nautical mile) from the shore of each island.

Authorized marine sanctuary boundary
The Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary boundary extends 10.8 km (6 nautical miles) from the shore of each island.

Ranger station · Campground · Restrooms

Data Sources
Depth tints and terrestrial relief derive from Digital Elevation Models (DEMs) produced by NOAA and the USGS. Bathymetric relief shading was manually produced.

0 5 10 Kilometers
0 5 10 Miles

North

Marine Protected Areas

Within the park and sanctuary is a network of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) that provides a refuge for sea life and opportunities for recreation, education, and science. In 11 Marine Reserves, recreational fishing and commercial harvest are prohibited; limited fishing and harvest are allowed in two Marine Conservation Areas. The MPAs total 318 square miles, the largest such network off the continental United States. For more information visit www.nps.gov/chis.

Islands on the Edge

The Channel Islands lie in a region between the mainland coast and the deep ocean known as the Continental Shelf. The sea floor is made up of canyons, sea mounts, banks (underwater plateaus), escarpments, and deep basins (Santa Cruz Basin is deeper than Arizona's Grand Canyon). This topography—shallow and deep, smooth and rugged, sunlit and dark—creates habitats for many species.

The islands rose from the ocean millions of years ago and were born of plate tectonics, volcanic activity, and fluctuating sea levels. These islands on the edge of the continent were never connected to the mainland. During the ice ages ocean levels dropped as the polar caps expanded. What are now San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, and Anacapa islands were once joined as a single island called Santarosae. When the sea rose again, it created the four islands we see today.

Ocean currents also play a big role in the biodiversity of the islands. A cold current traveling south along the North Pacific coast meets at the Channel Islands with a warm current moving up from the tropics. Upwelling nutrients from the ocean floor mingle with the currents, mixing fish and other sea life into a living soup. Giant kelp forests encircle the islands and feed ocean visitors—from tiny plankton and sponges to giant blue whales.

The National Park Islands at a Glance


© TIM HAUF PHOTOGRAPHY
Over 100,000 seals and sea lions breed and haul out on San Miguel.

San Miguel Island

This westernmost island receives the brunt of the north-westerly winds, fog, and severe weather from the open ocean. The cold, nutrient-rich water surrounding the 9,491-acre, eight-mile-long and four-mile-wide island is home for a diversity of sea life. Submerged rocks make the nearly 28-mile coastline a mariner's nightmare. Rough seas and risky landings did not daunt the Chumash who lived here, nor did they deter the first European explorer, Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, in 1542. Ranchers raised sheep from 1850 to 1948. Later the Navy used the island for a bombing range. Today, native species are making a recovery in this sanctuary.
Island Features: **Chumash sites; Cabrillo Monument; caliche forest; seabird, seal, and sea lion rookeries.**


© TIM HAUF PHOTOGRAPHY
Rare Torrey pines grow only near San Diego and at Bechers Bay.

Santa Rosa Island

The second-largest island, with 53,051 acres—15 miles long and 10 miles wide—beckons you with rolling hills, deep canyons, a coastal lagoon, and beaches adorned with sand dunes and driftwood. The Chumash called it *Wima* or "driftwood" because they built *tomols*, plank canoes, from logs brought ashore by channel currents. For thousands of years unusual animals and plants made the island their home. Flightless geese, giant mice, and pygmy mammoths are now extinct, while the island fox, spotted skunk, and munchkin dudleya (one of six plant species found only on this island) still live here.
Island Features: **Chumash and ranching history; Torrey pines; snowy plover; Lobo Canyon; sand dunes; beaches.**


© TIM HAUF PHOTOGRAPHY
From Smugglers Cove you can see Anacapa in the distance.

Santa Cruz Island

Here are pristine beaches, rugged mountains, lonely canyons, grass-covered hills, and some animals and plants that you have never seen before. This paradise is Santa Cruz Island, a miniature of what southern California looked like over 100 years ago. The largest island in the national park, with 61,972 acres, Santa Cruz is 22 miles long and from two to six miles wide. A central valley splits the island along the Santa Cruz Island fault, with volcanic rock on the north and older sedimentary rock on the south. The Nature Conservancy and the National Park Service preserve and protect the island.
Island Features: **historic ranches; island fox; island scrub jay; Painted Cave, one of the world's largest sea caves.**


© TIM HAUF PHOTOGRAPHY
Sunrise lights up Inspiration Point and Middle and West Anacapa.

Anacapa Island

Twelve miles from the mainland, a five-mile-long spine of rock emerges from the ocean, breaks into three islets, and offers itself as home to 265 plants species and a bevy of seabirds—with the largest brown pelican rookery in the United States. On charts, the island of 737 acres appears as East, Middle, and West Anacapa. The Chumash call it *Anyapakh* or "mirage." It was anything but a mirage on the night of December 2, 1853, when the sidewheel steamer *Winfield Scott*, running at full speed, crashed into rocks off Middle Anacapa and sank. The Coast Guard built a light beacon in 1912 and a light station in 1932.
Island Features: **bird rookeries; Chumash middens; giant coreopsis; tide pools; kelp forests; sea caves; arches.**


© TIM HAUF PHOTOGRAPHY
Giant coreopsis make a showy display at Arch Point.

Santa Barbara Island

Steep cliffs of this smallest island—644 acres or about one square mile—rise above rocky shores to a grassy mesa flanked with twin peaks. Gabrieliño/Tongva Indians fished here. Explorers, seal and abalone hunters, ranchers, and the military took their toll. Today, after years of species and habitat loss, animals and native vegetation are making a remarkable recovery. Among those found here are Scripps's murrelet, a seabird that nests in crevices in the cliffs, and the Santa Barbara Island live-forever, a rare plant found only on this island.
Island Features: **seabird, seal, and sea lion rookeries; island night lizard; wildflowers; kelp forests.**

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