

PUBLICATION: CHANNEL ISLANDS
NATIONAL PARK

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Exploring 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.

The eight Channel Islands span 160 miles off the coast of southern California (see map at left). There are four northern islands—San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, and Anacapa, and four southern islands—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, 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? Use the Park Newspaper

Whether you go to the islands on your own boat or with a park concessioner you should use the free park newspaper, *Island Views: A Visitor's Guide to Channel Islands National Park*, 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 help you plan your visit. Contact the visitor center for information and to get the park newspaper.

Accessibility

The visitor center in Ventura is accessible for visitors with special needs, but getting onto the islands can be difficult. Ask for details.

Things to See and Do

Visitors to the islands may swim, snorkel, hike, camp, watch wildlife, kayak, sail, and explore tidepools, beaches, and rugged canyons. Naturalists lead hikes. The kelp forests, caves, clear water, and rich diversity of animals and plants place the Channel Islands among 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 newspaper 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, such as whales, seals, and sea lions.
- Pets are prohibited on the islands.
- Check yourself for ticks and watch out for poison oak.

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.

For More Information

Channel Islands National Park
1901 Spinnaker Drive
Ventura, CA 93001-4354
805-658-5730
www.nps.gov/chis

National Park Service: www.nps.gov
Outdoors Santa Barbara
Visitor Center
113 Harbor Way, 4th floor
Santa Barbara, CA 93109
805-884-1475

Commercial Service to the Islands

Channel Islands Aviation
305 Durley Avenue
Camarillo, CA 93010
805-987-1301
www.flycia.com

Island Packers, Inc.
1867 Spinnaker Drive
Ventura, CA 93001
805-642-1393
www.islandpackers.com

Truth Aquatics Inc.
301 W. Cabrillo Blvd.
Santa Barbara, CA 93101
805-962-1127
www.truthaquatics.com

The National Park Islands at a Glance

San Miguel Island

This westernmost island receives the brunt of the northwesterly 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.

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 channel currents brought ashore logs from which they built tomols, plank canoes. For thousands of years unusual animals and plants made the island their home. Flightless geese, giant mice, and pygmy mammoths are 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.

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 more than 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. Today, The Nature Conservancy and 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.

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 species of plants 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 called 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; tidepools; kelp forests; sea caves; arches.

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 Xantus' murrelets, 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.

Islands on the Edge

The Channel Islands lie in a region between the mainland coast and the deep ocean called the Continental Shelf. The sea floor is comprised of canyons, banks (underwater plateaus), escarpments, sea mounts, 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 a diversity of 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 an important 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 these currents, mixing fish and other sea life into a rich living soup. Giant kelp forests encircle the islands and host a wealth of ocean visitors, from tiny plankton and sponges to giant blue whales.