

OUTDOOR Adventures

Whether you hang ten or take on the 18th hole, Ventura offers plenty of ways to have fun in the sun.

In the water. On the water. On land overlooking the water. In the hills high above it all. Ventura County offers countless ways to enjoy its expanse of land and water, from surfing at Rincon Point to hiking the Ojai Valley Trail. Take a boat ride to the Channel Islands and spy on some of the world's rarest species, or stick to calmer water and bike along the Ventura River Trail. This stretch of coast offers the geography and wildlife to satisfy any adventurer.

The Real Surf City

While other California cities battle over the name "surf city," Ventura quietly epitomizes the concept. The city's surfing heritage runs deep: During the 1960s, the first prize-money surfing contests were held in Ventura, and it was here that the original shortboard design was created.

The city was picked by *Outside* magazine as America's No. 2 surf town next to Haleiwa, Hawai'i, and it's home to many professional surfers, including wunderkind Dane Reynolds, the 22-year-old who's currently competing on the ASP World Tour. World-class surfers are attracted to Ventura for its matchless coastal geography, weather, and swell angles. The Rincon, one of the state's best point breaks, sits at the northern edge of Ventura County; to the south, Emma Wood and Surfer's Point beaches also draw crowds.

"Pretty much 365 days of the year you can get surf here," says David Pu'u, a longtime professional surfer in Ventura.

Writer Zeke Barlow took up the sport when he moved from Virginia to Ventura. He'd surfed a few times on the Jersey Shore, but that was the extent of his experience. His cousin, a surfer, helped him find a longboard, and Barlow went to a beginner's beach, paddled out, and slowly taught himself.

Now he's reached a point where he can surf the big swells. "The waves here are longer (than on the East Coast)," he says. "They're more gentle. They're easier to stand up on, and Ventura is one of the most consistent wave places in Southern California."

It also has a plethora of surfing camps and instructors. And it's relatively uncrowded, Pu'u says, "so if someone were to travel here, more than likely they'll get good surf."

Unlike Huntington Beach down the coast, which markets itself as California's surfing capital, Ventura's beach is not a long stretch of sand, but instead is interrupted by outer reefs, cobblestone bottoms, point breaks, and other natural geographic formations.

"Up here we have rocks, reefs, and a lot of variety they don't have," says Steve





Getting to the Channel Islands is an adventure in itself. . . . You'll see seals, sea lions, and hundreds of dolphins.

Walden, owner of Walden Surfboards in Ventura. As a result, he says, the water “comes around and breaks in as it follows the geography of the land.” In Huntington Beach, he says, “they don’t have the length of ride” or the quality of surf that Ventura has. —*Stephanie Hoops*

Flora, Fauna, and Fun

Fifteen miles from Ventura lies Channel Islands National Park. Known as “the Galapagos of North America,” the collection of islands is home to some of the world’s rarest flora and fauna.

A journey to one of the park’s five islands—Anacapa, San Miguel, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa—promises miles of undeveloped shoreline with pristine beaches, colorful sea caves, and abundant wildlife sightings.

A collision of warm and cold currents and the deep water surrounding the islands make for incredible

biodiversity. “The islands are a natural habitat and feeding and breeding ground for sea birds and sea mammals, so you never know what you’ll see,” says Yvonne Menard, the park’s chief of interpretation.

Getting to the Channel Islands is an adventure in itself. From the boat (Island Packers ferries passengers from Ventura Harbor) you’ll spot cormorants furiously flapping overhead, western gulls bobbing along, and brown pelicans gliding by in military-straight formation. You’ll see seals, sea lions, and hundreds of dolphins. Most exciting of all, you have an excellent chance of spotting blue whales, the planet’s biggest animal.

About 12 miles from the mainland (a one-hour journey), Anacapa Island offers easy hiking trails, a profusion of wild birds and sea life, and great kayaking. Anacapa’s Arch Rock, a 40-foot-high natural bridge, is one of the park’s most recognizable features.

Anacapa comprises three separate islets (East, West, and



PHOTOS BY TIM HAUF

Middle), but only East Island is open to visitors. Here you can hike around the island, absorb the views at Inspiration Point and Cathedral Cove, and marvel at hundreds of California sea lions at Pinniped Point.

Twenty miles from the mainland, Santa Cruz Island is the park’s largest, with 96 square miles of mountains, canyons, and forests. More than 100 sea caves dot the steep shoreline. Some are so low and narrow that a kayak can barely squeeze through. Others are much larger, such as the stupendous Painted Cave, whose walls are covered with splashes of red, green, and blue lichen. One of the world’s largest and deepest sea caves, it’s a quarter-mile long, 100 feet wide, and 160 feet high.

Known for its wind-swept beaches and sand dunes, Santa Rosa Island is 40 miles from Ventura Harbor — two hours by boat. A coastal trail makes its way uphill to a forest of rare miniature Torrey Pines. At the summit, you can see untouched coves and the emerald-clear sea. On your

return trip, you’ll get great views of Santa Cruz Island and Painted Cave.

Santa Barbara Island, three hours away and the smallest island at about one square mile in size, is an important nesting site for western gulls, brown pelicans, cormorants, storm petrels, and the tiny Xantus’s murrelets. You can spot California sea lions, harbor seals, and elephant seals from trail overlooks.

More rugged adventurers may take on San Miguel Island, the westernmost in the park. The island, three hours from shore, is noted for its crescent-shaped beach, expansive sand dunes, canyon trails, and “caliche” forest of ancient tree roots. Overnight campers can go on ranger-guided walks to Point Bennett —*Maryann Hammers*

Inland Adventures

Ventura is not just about sand and surf. There’s also plenty to do inland, with miles of walking, hiking, and biking trails for those who like to play outdoors.

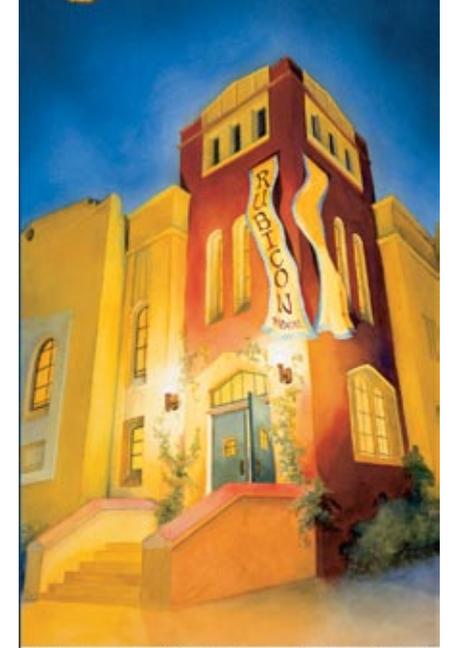
For a beachfront view, there’s the Ventura Coastal Bikeway, which provides a 25-mile roundtrip from the San Buenaventura State Beach in Ventura to Hobson County Beach up the coast.

Tourists and residents alike enjoy the Ventura River Trail’s 6.3-mile walk, which follows the old Southern Pacific Railroad path from Main Street to Foster Park. Public art lines the trail, which connects with the Ojai Valley Trail and the Omer Rains Trail to form a 17-mile path from the Ventura Pier to downtown Ojai.

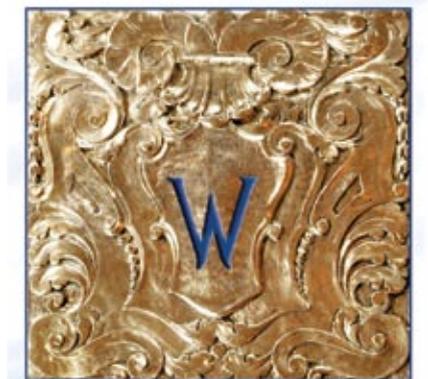
At the end of the Ventura River Trail, those seeking respite from the sun can find shade among Foster Park’s immense trees. Developed in 1906, this historic park is a popular site for fishing and hiking, with the Ventura River running through it. Visitors also find a small amphitheater and plenty of camping and barbecue areas.

For those who’d rather tee off than hike or bike, try Olivas Links, which has been voted Ventura County’s best public golf course for four consecutive years. The 18-hole course also has a driving range, putting green, and chipping area. —*Marjorie Hernandez*

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Above: More than 10,000 gulls nest on Anacapa Island each spring and summer. Right: The Santa Cruz Island jay