

Channel Islands National Park is one of the few national parks with built-in capacity limits. It's easy to find your own space here.



ISLAND TIME

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO CHANNEL ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK

Just a hop, skip, and jump away from Ventura Harbor is the stunning Channel Islands National Park. Discover one of the country's least explored national parks for an unplugged adventure.

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THE GALÁPAGOS OF NORTH AMERICA

A BUCKET LIST TRIP

Nicknamed “the Galápagos of North America,” Channel Islands National Park is made up of five islands that are home to 2,000 plant and animal species — 150 of which are found nowhere else in the world. From north to south lie the isles of San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Cruz, Anacapa, and Santa Barbara, each with its own unique history and biodiversity.

Santa Cruz Island is the largest and the perfect place for disconnected exploring. From enormous sea caves and crystal-clear tide pools to unspoiled beaches and trails, a day trip to Santa Cruz should not be missed. And as one of the few off-the-grid experiences left nowadays, we promise you won't mind the lack of cell service one bit. Here's how you can maximize your day on Santa Cruz Island.



PLAN AHEAD

Since Santa Cruz Island is isolated with limited access — only a few ferries transport visitors daily — reserve boat passage well in advance.

Contact **Island Packers Cruises** for tickets (see p. 56).

SAVVY SAILOR:

It's roughly an hour-long boat ride from Ventura Harbor to Santa Cruz Island. Follow these tips to prevent sea sickness.

- 1 Purchase seasick bands and ginger chews at Island Packers Cruises' office, just in case.
- 2 Line up early to ensure a good seat. We recommend the outer upper or lower decks at the back of the boat.
- 3 Stay in your seat and stare out at the horizon. Don't walk around or go into any interior spaces on the boat.

HOT TIP Keep your eyes peeled for dolphins and whales during the crossing.



Island fox.

JEFF BARTLETT

ANIMAL SIGHTINGS

From unique bird species to curious four-legged critters, plenty of creatures call the island home.

Thanks to its isolation, Santa Cruz Island is home to 34 unique animal and bird species found nowhere else on earth. On any given day, you might see a bald eagle, orange-crowned warbler, Peregrine falcon, or island scrub jay — a species endemic to the national park. And if you're really lucky,

the islands have been known to host the rare brown booby. (Yep, that's its actual name.)

Back on land, you can't miss the island fox. Roughly the size of a small house cat, the fox is the main mammal seen on the islands, often wandering around looking to steal snacks from unsuspecting visitors.

Before You Go

Make sure to bring these things!



PACKING PRO

There's a fine line between overpacking and making sure you're well prepared. Bring a backpack that has enough space to hold the following:

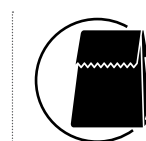
- **Light, warm layers** that are easy to peel off and pack away.
- **Appropriate shoes** for hiking; flat shoes with rubber soles. Leave the heels at home.
- **A change of clothes** for after kayaking or water play.

- **Sunscreen, sun-screen, sunscreen!** Even on cloudy days you'll need it.

- **Bottled water and something to eat.** There are no restaurants on the island, so bring lunch with you.

- **A separate trash bag.** There are no trash cans on the island, either.

- **A device with a camera.** Trust us, you're going to want to snap those pics.



FUEL UP

It's undeniable: When exploring Santa Cruz Island all day, you're going to get hungry. So if you are fresh out of PB&J makings, head to any of these purveyors and grab your lunch to go.

- **Vons deli** (open 7 a.m.-9 p.m.) on Harbor Boulevard can put together a box lunch prior to your departure. Call or go online to place your order, and schedule a pickup for the morning of your trip.

- **Harbor Cove Cafe** (open 7:30 a.m.-2 p.m.) in Ventura Harbor puts together Lunch Boxes — which include a sandwich, chips, apple, water, and a cookie — for island explorers. Order online or call ahead.

- **Ventura Harbor's Boatyard Pub** is known for its seafood specials, (open 7:30 a.m.-9 p.m.), but also offers its menu to-go. A sandwich or breakfast burrito makes an easy island lunch.

HOT TIP



If you forgot your bag at home, check out the well-stocked backpack wall at **Real Cheap Sports** in Downtown Ventura.

STAY A WHILE

Fancy an overnigher? Santa Cruz Island has a 31-site campground tucked into a valley shaded by towering eucalyptus trees. But just like ferry rides, campsites fill up fast, so book your stay early.

Paddling Out

Santa Cruz Island has a series of sea caves that are ripe for exploration.

Book a guided sea kayak tour with **Channel Islands Adventure Company** for a chance to explore the craggy coastline like never before. From one of the largest and deepest sea caves in the world to narrow chutes just wide enough for one kayak, sea caving is a must while you're on the island. We chatted with Channel Islands Adventure Company's Will Adams for some tips on your next adventure.

1 Read your itinerary and pack smart. Your Channel Islands Adventure Company booking confirmation will include a ton of important guidance on visiting the islands and kayaking sea caves, including what to bring and wear.

2 Have any questions? Call (805) 884-9283 to speak with the team. The friendly staff is available from 8 a.m.-5 p.m., seven days a week, and are always happy to provide suggestions and answer any questions that you have about your Channel Islands sea cave kayak trip.

3 Don't just bring sunscreen — use it! And reapply hourly regardless of the weather.



Kayak around Santa Cruz Island.

TREKKING AROUND

On the eastern side of Santa Cruz Island, pick the path that's right for you.

With loads of trails just a short walk from the dock, all you have to decide is which path to traverse. There are few shady trails on the island, so don't forget a hat, sunscreen, sunglasses, and water.

EASY: A flat, half-mile stroll from Scorpion Anchorage is **Scorpion**

Ranch — a settlement dating to the late 1800s that features a blacksmith shop, old farm tools, and visitor center.

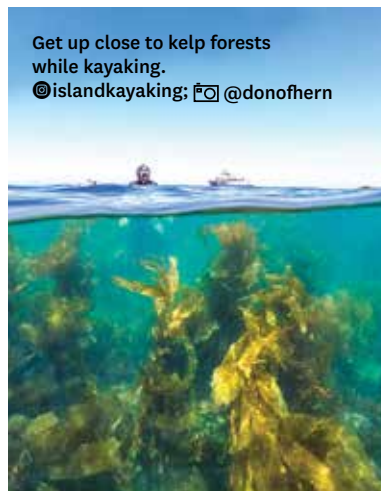
MODERATE: For sweeping ocean vistas and blue as far as the eye can see, the two-mile **Cavern Point Loop** is not to be missed. A great spot for whale watching,

as well as views of Santa Cruz's neighbors to the north and south, this loop trail is breathtaking. To avoid a steep climb, hike clockwise from the campground (near site #22) before looping back to the beach. Or continue west along the **North Bluff Trail** for two miles out to **Potato Harbor**. Another trail offering coastal views, Potato Harbor ends rather abruptly at a sheer drop off. There is no beach access, so leave the fishing poles and snorkels behind.

STRENUOUS: For an epic all-day trek, head southwest towards **Smugglers Cove**. The 7.5-mile round trip trail follows Smugglers Road the entire way, leading down to the beach at Smugglers Cove. There are no water refill stations here, so bring enough water.

HOT TIP

Grab a free National Park Service map of the Channel Islands at the Island Packers office prior to your trip.



Get up close to kelp forests while kayaking. @islandkayaking; @donofhern

CAN'T HELP MYSELF

Did you know that roughly one third of Southern California's kelp forests are found within the Channel Islands National Park? It's true! Thanks to the combo of both cold and warm ocean waters, kelp and seaweed thrive here and support an abundant, diverse array of sea life. You might glimpse sea otters, sunflower stars, harbor seals, and more.

Hike Santa Cruz for sweeping views.

