

Easy Hikes in Southern California State Parks

State Park visitors can discover trails and pathways through beaches, hills and deserts in southern California. It's a great opportunity to enjoy the outdoors with friends and family and get away from city and cement. (To ensure your hike is enjoyable, it's important to wear proper shoes, fit for hiking, wear a hat for sun protection, and bring drinking water. In summertime, an early morning start offers hikers both cooler temperatures and a better chance of seeing wildlife. For a safe and pleasant outing, be sure to check the weather forecast.)

Here are some ideas for easy hike locations:

LOS ANGELES AREA

LEO CARRILLO STATE PARK (LOS ANGELES/VENTURA COUNTIES), 28 miles north west of Santa Monica on the Pacific Coast Highway, is a great place in winter for birds - and visitors. After the summer crowds leave, the beach belongs to beachcombers - and resting cormorants, Western gulls, brown pelicans - and possibly sea lions. Visitors should park in the parking lot and walk under the highway, and on to the sand. Continuing up the hill, visitors can stroll along the bluffs for a view of the kelp forest and possibly some dolphins below, then on to the second staircase for a stroll through the sea tunnel, if the tide allows. A picnic in the cove can be a special treat. For more information, call the park at (805) 986-8591.

The Trippet Ranch entrance to **TOPANGA STATE PARK** (LOS ANGELES COUNTY) leads to an assortment of beautiful hikes. The entrance is

located off Entrada Road, off Topanga Canyon Boulevard, south from the 101 Freeway or north from the Pacific Coast Highway. Visitors can choose from a half-mile nature loop to extensive hikes all the way to Will Rogers State Historic Park (10 miles). There are two paths to Eagle Rock, which offers views of the Santa Monica Bay, the San Gabriel Mountains, and Los Angeles. The fire road trail is a 2 1/2 mile round-trip hike. The Much trail, through the chaparral, is a 4 1/2 mile round-trip hike. The trails can be combined into a loop for a 3 1/2 mile hike. Park maps are available on weekends at the park entrance station for \$2. For more information, call the park at (310) 455-2465.

SANTA BARBARA/VENTURA AREA

POINT MUGU STATE PARK, SYCAMORE CANYON (VENTURA COUNTY) offers visitors a stroll through the fall colors of the sycamore trees and over-wintering Monarch butterflies that take up residence from November through February. From Oxnard on Highway 101, take the Pacific Coast Highway south through Oxnard for 15 minutes to Point Mugu State Park. Make a left into Sycamore Canyon. From the day use parking lot, walk straight back in the campground to the fire gate. Continue back as far as you like into the canyon and return the way you came. A tip for a family hike fun up-and-back game: Pick three significant features that do not move on the way up the trail and see who can find them first on the way back.

For more information, call the park at (805) 986-8591. Point Mugu State Park is a Watchable Wildlife site.

SAN BUENAVENTURA STATE BEACH (VENTURA COUNTY) is a great place to walk along the coast. From Freeway 101, take the Seaward Exit, turn right on Pierpont Boulevard. There's a paved bike trail/walkway that runs along the beach to the Ventura Pier, on to Surfer's Point, and ending at EMMA WOOD STATE BEACH. The trail is approximately one and half miles long. From the trail, hikers can enjoy the beach as well as the hills above the city. In the evening, sunsets can be spectacular. For more information, call the park at (805) 648-4127 or (805) 899-1400.

Visitors to **EL CAPITAN STATE BEACH** and **REFUGIO STATE BEACH** (SANTA BARBARA COUNTY) can enjoy the views of the Pacific Ocean and the Channel Islands from a bluff-top bike trail/walkway. Part of the trail has been closed because of coastal erosion so it is no longer possible to travel from one park to the other, but parts of the trail remain open. For additional information, call (805) 968-1033.

SAN DIEGO AREA

SAN ONOFRE STATE BEACH (SAN DIEGO COUNTY) offers visitors a chance to "design" their own trails. The beach is south of San Clemente on I-5; exit at Basilone and continue south on the west side frontage road past the nuclear power plant to the park entrance.

San Onofre has six 1/4-mile hiking trails from the bluff to the beach. Visitors can choose a trail to the beach, then choose a different trail back. The bluff area is a coastal sage habitat area, which offers great views of the ocean

below. Hikers transition from the sandstone bluffs to the warm, sandy beach below, which offers 3 1/2 miles of coastline for beachcombing.

There is parking at each trailhead with restrooms and drinking water available. There is signage at the park about the trails that lead to the beach. Temperatures vary from 55° to 70°. The beach is open from 6 a.m to 8 p.m in the winter. For more information, call the park at (949) 492-0802.

TORREY PINES STATE RESERVE (SAN DIEGO COUNTY) has many scenic trails overlooking the beach. From Freeway 5, take the Carmel Valley Road exit and proceed west on Carmel Valley Road, turn left on Highway 101. The Guy Fleming Trail is a short, relatively easy hike that runs through Torrey Pine trees and associated chaparral. From the trail, hikers can enjoy spectacular sunsets in the evening. For more information, call (858) 755-2063. Torrey Pines State Reserver is a Watchable Wildlife site.

For more information about California State Parks, visit the website at www.parks.ca.gov.

#