

# **Some Southern California State Parks – Where There’s More Than Just What Meet the Eye**

## **Leo Carrillo State Park**

Leo Carrillo State Park offers one of the most impressive beaches in the Malibu area of Los Angeles County – and it’s within easy driving distance of Los Angeles, located 28 miles northwest of Santa Monica on Highway One. The park has fantastic coastal as well as inland trails that offer exploration of a number of ecosystems in a small area, ranging from dry coastal sage scrub to wet tidepool and kelp forest zones. Whether visitors explore Leo Carrillo State Park by walking, surfboarding, windsurfing, snorkeling, SCUBA, or kayaking, they can experience a surprising variety of flora and fauna.

Leo Carrillo State Park also offers 135 family camping sites and a group campground. For short time visitors, the park has two day-use parking lots at the South Beach and North Beach areas. The North Beach and South Beach areas have accessible restrooms. The North Beach area also offers a picnic area with barbeques.

Exploring the coves of Leo Carrillo State Park, visitors may catch a glimpse of a pod of dolphins cavorting in the surf or feasting on a school of fish in the kelp forest or even a sea lion sunning on the beach. It’s important to observe the animals from a safe distance and not to disturb them. “Hauling out” on the beach is normal behavior for them in order to warm themselves after swimming in the ocean. (If you notice them noticing you, you are too close.) To explore the sea caves and tunnels, check with the lifeguards for current ocean conditions. Consult a tide table for good low tides. While exploring, visitors may also see many brightly colored sea stars clinging to the wet rocks or cormorants with their long black necks and wings outstretched drying themselves on a remote ledge.

Note: It's important to always keep an eye on the surf, never turning your back to the ocean.

Leo Carrillo also offers hikers a look at native coastal plants on the bluff trail located in-between the North and South Beach areas. While walking on the dirt trail, visitors can find a small stand of a strange Dr. Seuss-looking plants called giant coreopsis. Giant coreopsis is a plant of special interest and concern due to its fragility and limited range in the Malibu area as well as the four northern Channel Islands. This special plant has spectacularly bright yellow flowers and carrot-like foliage January through March, but the rest of the year it's not much more than a brittle thick brown stump. Continuing along the path, hikers may see a plant that is a reminder that there is not much rainfall at this coastal site: the prickly pear cactus with flat, paddle-shaped lobes covered in small hair-like spikes. The plant can have yellow flowers or red fruit, depending on the time of year. In the underbrush, observant visitors may catch sight of a Western fence lizard or a cottontail rabbit scurrying across the trail or a red-tailed hawk swooping in to catch a ground squirrel.

Each day offers something unique at Leo Carrillo State Park. Gray whales migrate offshore December through March as they pass just outside the kelp forest. Monarch butterflies over-winter in the park, clustering in the Eucalyptus grove between Mulholland highway and the campground. The tidepools also change daily. One day there may be hundreds of sea hares grazing on algae and the next day there may be opaleye perch in every small pool.

Leo Carrillo State Park is located on Pacific Coast Highway at the intersection of Pacific Coast and Mulholland highways. It is 35 miles northwest of Santa Monica. For camping reservations contact ReserveAmerica at 1(800) 444-7275. For more park information call (818) 880-0350 or (805) 488-1827.

## **Robert H. Meyer Memorial State Beach**

Robert H. Meyer Memorial State Beach is actually three separate small coves that offer day-use visitation with great scenic beauty and solitude for those willing and able to descend trails and staircases to the beach area. At the bluff-top, parking for day-use is provided as well as chemical toilets and a few picnic benches. The beaches, accessed by descending dirt trails and/or staircases, offer sand, surf, and opportunities for marine life watching. Visitors to all three beaches, El Matador, La Piedra and El Pescador, discover that each offers its own unique scenic beauty and tranquility.

Visitors are encouraged to bring binoculars for bird watching in the coves.

Scenic geologic formations, including rocky reefs, sea stacks and bluffs, make spectacular backdrops for picnicking, sunbathing, fishing and strolling along the beach. Visitors may be able to see marine mammals such as pilot whales, gray whales in season, bottlenose dolphins, harbor seals, and sea lions. Visitors can snorkel, SCUBA, surf or kayak to really get a close look at the kelp forest. Beachcombers can explore the ocean's "wrack" (what was washed up at the last high tide), finding kelp and other marine algae or perhaps the jaws of a sea anemone or maybe the carapace of a lobster. Visitors at low tide may find the many plants and animals of the tidepools, including sea anemones, sea stars, mussels, limpets, and barnacles.

Robert H. Meyer Memorial State Beach is located 30 miles northwest of Santa Monica on Pacific Coast Highway. Look for signs announcing the beaches named El Matador, La Piedra and El Pescador. For additional information about this park call (818) 880-0350 or (805) 488-1827.

## **Point Dume Natural Preserve and State Beach**

Point Dume Natural Preserve and State Beach is a scenic point that juts out into the ocean just north of Santa Monica Bay. It is one of the last remaining open coastal terraces and bluffs in southern California. The Point is a day-use area with two miles of trails and a staircase descending steeply to access the beach and intertidal zones below. An accessible trail is located from the top of the point. Limited parking, including accessible sites, is located on the top of the point. Additional parking is available at Westward Beach part of Zuma County Beach below the point on the northwest side.

The Natural Preserve includes 32 acres of native plant and animal habitat. While walking the trail, visitors may see roadrunners, coyotes, quail, warblers, brown pelicans, and many other bird species. The trail intersects stands of giant coreopsis, a unique flowering plant at its southern-most limit. Another special plant at its southern-most limit is *Dudleya caespitosa*, a succulent-type plant. Beach sand verbena, bush sunflower, lemonade berry and other beach community plants can also be found in this small but diverse natural preserve. Many marine mammals, including migrating whales, seals and sea lions, can be spotted from the point due to the fact that it juts out into the channel.

Point Dume Natural Preserve and State Beach is located off of Pacific Coast Highway just 20 miles northwest of Santa Monica. Take Westward Beach Road to access both the lower parking and bluff top parking. For additional information about this park call (818) 880-0350 or (805) 488-1827.

## **Malibu Lagoon State Beach**

Malibu Lagoon State Beach, with 22 acres of coastline, offers beach lovers many opportunities - from the famous surf spot Surfrider Beach, to a lagoon, sandy beach, picnic area, tidepools and even a historic residence and museum. Day-use visitors will have a hard time deciding whether to go bird watching, fishing on the historic Malibu pier, touring the Adamson House and Malibu Lagoon Museum, or just enjoying watching the surfers while having a picnic on the beach.

Birdwatchers will be amazed at the variety of birds found in the lagoon, including grebes, egrets, terns, gulls, ducks, and cormorants. Over 200 species of birds use the lagoon, including year-round residents as well as migrating birds that use the area as a resting and feeding stop along the Pacific Flyway. The beach has cobble tidepools exposed on a good low tide. Look for ghost shrimp, crabs, sandcastle worms, octopus, and sculpin. The plants in and around this rare coastal wetland include pickleweed, salt bush and sea-blite. All these coastal salt marsh plants have amazing adaptations for surviving in a high salt environment as well as part-time underwater. Glands on the leaves and stems help them to excrete salt. At the Malibu Lagoon Museum and Adamson House find out more about the history of the land that was once Rancho Malibu, a private ranch. Take a tour of the Adamson House, built in 1929. At the Lagoon Museum, visitors can learn about the Chumash Indians who once had a village in this location.

Malibu Lagoon State Beach is located 13 miles northwest of Santa Monica at 23200 Pacific Coast Highway. Call (310) 456-8432 for more information about tours of the Adamson House, hours of the Malibu Lagoon Museum, and upcoming special events. For more information on the lagoon and beach call (818) 880-0350.

While exploring these wonderful natural beaches please leave everything you find for the next visitor. Marine life, including sea stars, limpets and mussels

that are attached to the rocks, need to stay that way. Please leave everything where and how you found it.

For more information about California State Parks, visit the website at

[www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)

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