

# Bolsa Chica & Huntington State Beaches



## Our Mission

The mission of California State Parks is to provide for the health, inspiration and education of the people of California by helping to preserve the state's extraordinary biological diversity, protecting its most valued natural and cultural resources, and creating opportunities for high-quality outdoor recreation.



California State Parks supports equal access. Prior to arrival, visitors with disabilities who need assistance should contact the park at (714) 377-5691. This publication can be made available in alternate formats. Contact [interp@parks.ca.gov](mailto:interp@parks.ca.gov) or call (916) 654-2249.

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### Bolsa Chica State Beach

17851 Pacific Coast Hwy. (714) 377-5691

Huntington Beach, CA 92648

### Huntington State Beach

21601 Pacific Coast Hwy. (714) 536-1454

Huntington Beach, CA 92646

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

*Bolsa Chica and Huntington State Beaches offer an extraordinary combination of oceanside recreation close to tidal wetlands wildlife.*



**F**lat, sandy expanses at Bolsa Chica and Huntington State Beaches draw hundreds

of thousands of visitors year round. Just off Pacific Coast Highway, Bolsa Chica State Beach and Huntington State Beach are both perfect places to surf, sunbathe, watch the sun set, and enjoy a blazing bonfire. Average summer temperatures range in the high 70s, while winter brings slightly cooler mid-60-degree weather. Morning fog is common.

### **PARKS HISTORY**

#### **Native Californians**

For more than 8,000 years, indigenous people prospered in what is now called Orange County. The inhabitants of the Los Angeles basin between the present-day cities of Topanga and Laguna Beach have come to be called the Tongva and the Kizh. Another group, the Acjachemen, dwelled in coastal villages between northern Los Angeles and San Onofre Creek.

Spanish King Carlos III wanted to expand Spain's presence in Baja California north to Alta California in the mid-1700s. Soldiers and missionaries claimed the native people's land to establish military presidios, religious missions and villages.



*Huntington Beach, ca. 1950*

The Acjachemen, conscripted into building Mission San Juan Capistrano in 1771 by Franciscan friars and Spanish settlers, were renamed Juaneños; the Tongva and Kizh who built the mission at San Gabriel in 1776 were then called Gabrielinos or Gabrieleños. These tribal groups were forced to abandon their villages and cultural traditions. They were converted to Christianity and labored at such trades as adobe brickmaking and grape growing for the missions.

Today, surviving Acjachemen/Juaneño, Tongva/Gabrielino, and Kizh/Gabrieleño native people continue to celebrate their cultures and heritage at local gatherings.

#### **Rancho to Subdivision**

In 1784 Spanish Governor Pedro Fages granted 33 leagues (nearly 114 miles) of this coast to Don Manuel Perez Nieto. Nieto called the land Rancho Las Bolsas (pockets) because its pockets of land were isolated by wetlands and the ocean. Nieto's brother-in-law Don Joaquin Ruiz inherited this portion, Rancho La Bolsa Chica—the little pocket.

#### **Oil Derricks and Tin Cans**

A 40-acre housing and commercial development, Pacific City, was built above the beachside bluffs in 1901, in hopes that Pacific City would rival tourist mecca Atlantic City on the East Coast. After railroad tycoon Henry Huntington extended his rail lines south, Pacific City was incorporated as Huntington Beach in 1909. The city's growth remained slow until Standard Oil Company struck large oil and natural gas reserves on 500 leased acres in 1920; the well was called Bolsa Chica #1. The town's population tripled, yet many buildings were moved aside for speculative oil drillers sinking wall-to-wall oil derricks.

The Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) was completed in 1925, giving motor vehicles access to the oceanside towns. Beach visitors sunbathed alongside oil wells. Some derricks still exist, but as the price of coastal land grew, most wells were capped and the land developed.

Huntington State Park was acquired by the State in 1942; it was reclassified as a state beach in 1963.





*"Tin Can Beach", ca. 1960*

Nearby, Post-World War II beachgoers seeking an escape from valley heat pitched canvas tents or shacks and slept on the unfenced sand at Bolsa Chica in the 1940s and '50s. The litter left by visitors earned Bolsa Chica the nickname "Tin Can Beach." Eventually, local residents convinced the State to buy the eyesore; Tin Can Beach became Bolsa Chica State Beach in 1963.

### The Birth of Surf City USA

In 1910, city founder Henry Huntington had hired Hawaiian-born surfer George Freeth, the "father of modern surfing," to demonstrate the ancient Polynesian art of riding waves on a long wooden board. Heavy Hawaiian surfboards ranged from 10 to 16 feet long. The sport grew more popular in California after Hawaii's Duke Kahanamoku surfed at Huntington Beach Pier in 1925. The first West Coast Surfing Championship was held here in 1959. Surfing became widespread in the early 1960s, hyped by "surf musicians" such as guitarist Dick Dale and vocalists The Beach Boys, Jan & Dean, and The Surfaris. Surfboards continually evolved to become shorter, lighter and more maneuverable.

The sport crested in Huntington Beach, now nicknamed "Surf City USA." Home to

the Surfing Hall of Fame and the International Surfing Museum, the city hosts the weeklong U.S. Open of Surfing — the world's largest annual surf competition — and other surfing events.



*George Freeth*

### RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Bolsa Chica and Huntington State Beaches are popular spots for sunbathing, volleyball, water sports and family outings. Anglers catch perch, corbina and croakers. Scheduled summer grunion run events draw crowds for bare-handed fishing. Grunion spawning schedules and fishing license information is available at [www.dfg.ca.gov](http://www.dfg.ca.gov).

A paved beachside trail runs for 8.5 miles between Bolsa Chica and Huntington State Beaches, with 3.5-mile Huntington City Beach wedged between them.

**Camping** — Huntington State Beach is for day use only. Bolsa Chica has more than 50 campsites with electric and water hookups for self-contained RVs. Tent camping is not allowed. For RV camping reservations, call (800) 444-7275 or visit [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov) up to seven months in advance.



*Oil derricks along the coast, ca. 1940*

*Photo courtesy of Orange County Archives*

**Events** — The beaches are home to many special events and competitions. For special event or group picnic-site rental reservations, contact (714) 377-9422 or email [northsectorevents@parks.ca.gov](mailto:northsectorevents@parks.ca.gov).

**Interpretive Programs** — Bolsa Chica State Beach Visitor Center features year-round interpretive displays and exhibits. To view a calendar of Bolsa Chica's many scheduled programs, visit [www.parks.ca.gov/bolsachica](http://www.parks.ca.gov/bolsachica).

### Junior Lifeguard Program

Youths 9 to 16 years old who pass a qualifying swim test may participate in California State Parks' Junior Lifeguard ocean safety and interpretation program. "Junior Guards" practice team-building, leadership and aquatic safety while gaining respect for the environment, for others and for themselves.

Junior lifeguards improve their physical health and conditioning as they learn and practice open-water swimming, paddle boarding, body surfing, body boarding, surfing, and open-water lifesaving skills.

For a fee, the young people spend four weeks in six-hour daily training sessions, where they also learn first aid and CPR. Tuition assistance may be available.

The Huntington State Beach Junior Guards program blends recreation, education, interpretation and competition. To learn more about the Junior Lifeguard program, visit [www.hsbjg.com](http://www.hsbjg.com).

## STATE BEACH LIFEGUARD PROGRAM

Aquatic recreation is the primary reason people visit the state's parks and beaches. In 1950, California State Parks hired former Newport Beach lifeguard Robert Isenor to develop a lifeguard program at Huntington State Beach. Isenor hired and trained 17 seasonal lifeguards, who were spread among 10 towers. One jeep serviced all 10 towers, with no radio or telephone communication ability.

The program soon expanded to other state beaches, with San Diego County's Silver Strand State Beach the next to hire seasonal lifeguards. In 1954, Isenor was appointed as the state's first lifeguard with peace officer powers. The permanent lifeguard job classification was created in 1956, and Isenor became its first chief, the Aquatic Safety Program Manager.

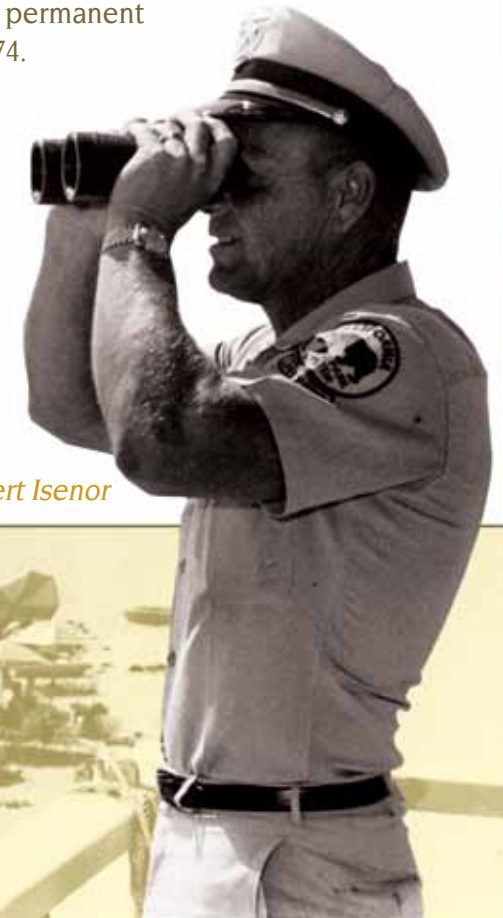
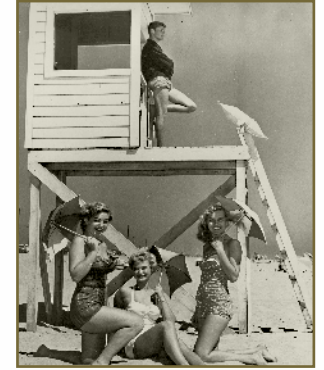
The mid-sixties saw the addition of rescue boats. *Surfwatch* launched in 1964; shortly afterward, the *Sea Ranger* rescue boat began patrolling Salton Sea.

To better protect visitors to the coast and inland lakes, California State Parks became America's first agency to train and arm permanent lifeguards, giving them full peace officer status in 1974.

Today, Huntington and Bolsa Chica State Beaches have 28 lifeguard towers. Their lifeguards watch over several thousand visitors each day and perform an average of 4,000 rescues each year.

Since 1967, when such data was first tracked, California State Lifeguards have rescued nearly 300,000 people. Lifeguards pulling in two or more victims at a time is very common. Seasonal lifeguard tryouts are held at beach parks each March: [www.parks.ca.gov/seasonalguard1](http://www.parks.ca.gov/seasonalguard1).

*First California State Parks lifeguard, Robert Isenor*



## ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

Bolsa Chica's visitor center, an 8.5-mile paved beachfront trail along both beaches, parking, RV campsites, picnic tables, outdoor showers and restrooms are accessible. A beach wheelchair is available for loan at both parks, with ramps for sand access. For all accessibility updates, visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

## NATURAL HISTORY

Bolsa Chica and Huntington beaches consistently draw prime waves due to the interaction of wind, water, and sand carried by currents. Surf breaks in shallower water, causing incoming waves to form a desirable curled shape as they crest.

### Habitats and Wildlife

This area's vegetation was originally native coastal strand. Offshore, Pacific bottlenose dolphins, California sea lions and gray whales cavort in the waves.

California round stingrays (*Urobatis halleri*) also lurk offshore at flat, sandy beach breaks like Bolsa Chica. Stingrays feed in somewhat



*California least tern*

shallow, calm waters. The gray or mottled brown rays vary in size; stings from their barbs are painful.



*California round stingray*

Photo courtesy of Robin Miller

Birders will delight in the variety of local and migratory waterfowl and shorebirds visiting Bolsa Chica and Huntington State Beaches. Once-endangered California brown pelicans skim the shoreline in formation.

The parks offer sanctuary to the threatened western snowy plover and the endangered California least tern. Several other tern species visit in the summer to feed offshore; sanderlings, black skimmers and western sandpipers stop over at different times throughout the year. Sand crabs and beach hoppers abound along the shoreline.

## PLEASE REMEMBER

- All natural and cultural features are protected by law and may not be disturbed or removed.
- Please pick up and pack out litter.
- Fire pits are available first-come, first served. Please do not burn pallets.
- Fires may be built only in designated fire pits. Do not leave hot embers; do not bury them in the sand.
- Except for service animals, dogs are not allowed on the sand.
- Dogs on leash (six-foot maximum) are permitted only on paved areas.
- Possession of alcohol is prohibited throughout both parks.
- Parking and day-use fees support lifeguard and other beach services.
- The beaches are open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Gates close at 9 p.m. daily.

## WATER SAFETY TIPS

- **Swim near a lifeguard tower and with a friend**—Supervise children closely. Flotation devices are not reliable.
- **Water use areas**—Swimming and surfing zones are separate from each other; check to make sure your activity is taking place in the proper zone. Contact park staff for additional beach safety information.
- **Rip currents**—If you become caught in a rip current, relax, swim parallel to the shore until the pull stops, and then swim back to shore. If you are unable to return to the beach, tread water and signal for assistance.
- **Avoid spinal injuries**—Do not dive headfirst into unfamiliar waters.
- **Be alert**—Never turn your back on the ocean. Sudden waves can sweep you away from shore or tide pool areas.
- **Avoid stingray barbs** at Bolsa Chica by shuffling your feet in the water. If you are stung, hot water breaks down the painful protein that stingrays inject.



