

The Original Road Trip: California's Central Coast State & National Parks



7 Day Itinerary traveling from Los Angeles to San Francisco

DAY 1

Arrive at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) and drive approximately 62 miles / 100km, 1 hour, 12 minutes to Ventura County (recommended drive: 405 North & 101 North)

DAY 2

Spend the day in Ventura County

Venture into Ventura County to experience a scenic selection of California State Parks and National Parks. All of the State Parks in Ventura County are situated in stunning seaside settings comprising what the locals refer to as the “Gold Coast.” They include Point Magu State Park, Mandalay State Beach, McGrath State Beach, San Buenaventura State Beach, and Emma Wood State Beach. These parks collectively are a treasure trove of opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts who enjoy camping, surfing, hiking, kayaking, paddle-boarding, fishing, picnicking and wildlife viewing.

The boundaries of two National Parks – the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and the Channel Islands National Park -- extend into and are accessed within the limits of this vast region. Open daily, the Visitor Center for the Santa Monica National Recreation Area is in Thousand Oaks, while the Visitor Center for the Channel Islands National Park is in charming Ventura Harbor Village.

Comprising 150,050 acres, the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (SMMNRA), is the world's largest urban national park. Because the region has the nation's largest population of Native American Indians (over 150,000), the Satwiwa Native American Indian Cultural Center, located within the SMMNRA, serves as a learning institution to preserve all of these diverse Indian cultures.

Home to over 150 endemic species and considered America's Galapagos, the Channel Islands National Park is comprised of Santa Barbara, Anacapa, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa and San Miguel islands. In addition to the incredible biodiversity found both on land and in the sea, island treasures also include: the oldest dated human remains found in North America in one of the most well-preserved archaeological sites on the Pacific Coast; the largest Marine Protected Areas on the West Coast; one of the world's largest sea caves; and the oldest example of ocean-going watercraft in North America, the Chumash tomol canoe. The live underwater dive feed called “Channel Islands Live” and the “Live Eagle Cam,” connect people on the mainland to nature through the power of state-of-the-art technology. www.ventura-usa.com

Overnight in Ventura County

DAY 3

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Spend the day in Santa Barbara County

***Drive 51 miles / 82 km, 50 minutes, to Gaviota Beach State Park in Santa Barbara County
(recommended drive: 101 North)***

Gaviota Beach State Park, 11 miles south of Buellton on U.S. Highway 101 and only 14 miles from the Danish Village of Solvang, is located right on the Pacific coast with dramatic, sweeping vistas and unspoiled natural beauty. Marked by a magnificent railroad trestle that crosses Gaviota Creek, this oceanfront park is a popular spot for swimming, picnicking, hiking and camping. Anglers and scuba divers use the pier on the west end of the beach, and surfers use its boat hoist to access the Santa Barbara Channel. Ambitious hikers can experience a hot sulfur spring along the trail climb to Gaviota Peak, where a spectacular view of the Pacific coastline awaits. A great place to refresh on the way as you travel up or down the California coast. www.SolvangUSA.com

Drive 60 miles / 97 km, 1 hour, 3 minutes to Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes Complex in Santa Barbara County (recommended drive: 101 North to Highway 1 North)

California State Parks is one of several agencies in the Dunes Collaborative, which oversees the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes Complex. The Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes Complex is one of the most ecologically significant and largest intact coastal dune ecosystems on Earth. A major portion of the nearly 22,000 acres is under public management and open for recreation. More than 1,400 species of animals call the dunes home. The dunes are easily accessible from scenic Highway 1 in the Santa Maria Valley. The best place to start a dunes adventure is at the Dunes Center in Guadalupe, which features several family-friendly exhibits that showcase the remarkable biodiversity, geology and history of the dunes. The Dunes Center also offers guided walks and hikes, as well as children's activities.

www.SantaMaria.com

Overnight in Santa Barbara County

DAY 4

Spend the day in San Luis Obispo and Monterey Counties

***Drive 71 miles / 114 km, 1 hour, 24 minutes to Hearst Castle State Park in San Luis Obispo County
(recommended drive: 101 North to Highway 1 North)***

Set atop the rolling hills in San Simeon is Hearst Castle®, one of the most popular tourist destinations in California. Originally built as the private estate of art collector and publisher William Randolph Hearst, it has become recognized around the world for its glamour, elegance and authentic art pieces. Today it is a California State Park, open to the public daily for guided tours. Feel the allure of this fascinating country house, where Mr. Hearst entertained movie stars and business tycoons with lavish dinners, private film screenings and glittering parties. For more information, please visit www.sanluisobispo.com

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***Drive 97 miles / 156 km, 2 hours, 19 minutes to Asilomar State Beach in Monterey County
(recommended drive: Highway 1 North)***

If Monterey County's spectacular coastline is your calling, consider Highway 1. Designated as California's first scenic highway and a National Scenic Byway, Highway 1 lures travelers with its ever-changing cliffs, pounding surf, spouting whales and dramatic skies. This scenic highway will take you along California's most amazing stretch of coastline, from San Francisco to Los Angeles going through Big Sur with lunar-like dunes giving way to sheer mountain cliffs rising from the ocean to the majestic coastal mountain range. At the north end of Monterey, the Marina Dunes Preserve and Marina State Beach is a haven for kite boarders and hang-gliders. Carmel hikers who value nature at its naked best, experience true bliss at Point Lobos State Nature Reserve, home to some of the region's most dramatic seascapes and thousands of seabirds, seals, sea lions and migrating whales. The crown jewel of the state park system, Point Lobos is also home to the only two naturally growing strands of Monterey Cypress trees remaining on Earth. Head toward Big Sur and break up the day with a hike to the waterfalls at Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, where trails traverse tan oak, redwood, madrone and chaparral to an 80-foot waterfall, or spot gray whales from the vista point on Overlook Trail then slip in for a restful lunch at Nepenthe. A unique lodging choice is the Julie Morgan-designed Asilomar State Beach and Conference Grounds, a 107-acre protected retreat that has been part of the California State Parks system since 1956. Asilomar State Beach is adjacent to Sunset Drive in Pacific Grove, and is part of the Pacific Grove Marine Gardens Fish Refuge and the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. Asilomar has over 300 guest rooms and comes with three meals a day.

Overnight in Monterey County

DAY 5

Spend the day in San Benito and Santa Clara Counties

***Drive 80 miles / 129 km, 1 hour, 38 minutes to Pinnacles National Monument in San Benito County
(recommended drive: Highway 1 North, to Highway 156 Southeast, to Highway 25 South, to Highway 146 West)***

Comprising 26,000 acres, the Pinnacles National Monument is a truly otherworldly landscape of stone spires and crags formed by the collapse of an ancient volcano centuries ago. There are more than 30 miles of trails to hike, rock faces to climb, caves to explore and a variety of wildlife to look for. The east entrance to the monument is open 24 hours a day, every day of the year.

www.sanbenitocountychamber.com

***Drive 71 miles / 115 km, 1 hour and 45 minutes to Henry W. Coe State Park in Santa Clara County
(recommended drive: Highway 146 Northeast, to Highway 25 North, to Highway 101 North)***

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Henry W. Coe State Park is the largest state park in northern California with over 87,000 acres of wide open spaces. The terrain is rugged, varied and beautiful. The park headquarters is at the main entrance, which is at the end of East Dunne Avenue out of Morgan Hill. Hiking, bicycling, camping and picnicking are all available at the park. Coe Park is truly an example of nature at its finest. www.coepark.org

Overnight in Santa Clara County

DAY 6

Spend the day in Santa Cruz County

Drive 61 miles / 99 km, 1 hour, 51 minutes to Big Basin Redwoods State Park in Santa Cruz County (recommended drive: Highway 101 North, to Highway 85 North, to Highway 17 South, to Highway 9 South, to Highway 236 West)

Santa Cruz County is home to 14 state parks. Established in 1902, Big Basin Redwoods State Park is California's oldest state park. Big Basin is home to the largest continuous stand of ancient redwoods south of San Francisco, encompassing 18,000 acres of old growth and recovering redwood forest. The 108-year-old park offers over 80 miles of trails alongside creeks, waterfalls and giant trees.

Drive 25 miles / 41 km, 47 minutes to Santa Cruz in Santa Cruz County (recommended drive: Highway 236 East, to Highway 9 North, to Highway 17 South, to Highway 1 North)

Santa Cruz Mission State Historic Park, built in 1791 on a bluff overlooking downtown Santa Cruz, is the last remaining original building of 12 Franciscan missions in California. The historic Meder farmhouse at Wilder Ranch State Park is a hands-on living history museum and a turn-of-the-century dairy farm with 34 miles of hiking, biking and equestrian trails overlooking Monterey Bay. One of the most picturesque spots on the coast is Natural Bridges State Beach, featuring a sandstone arch that rises from the sea and is shaped by wind and waves.

www.santacruzcounty.travel

Overnight in Santa Cruz County

DAY 7

To depart out of San Francisco International Airport (SFO) drive approximately 60 miles / 96 km, 1 hour 10 minutes from Santa Cruz County