

California's

Undiscovered Beaches

Skip the stressful crowds and go straight into beach bum mode at any of these secluded coastal hideaways

BY AMY PATUREL

When you're sitting in bumper-to-bumper traffic on the scenic Pacific Coast Highway (California State Route 1), sometimes a beach retreat feels more like a week on Wall Street: too many people, too much noise, and not nearly enough serenity to enjoy the majestic blue skies and white-crested waves.

Luckily, not every California beach is teeming with overzealous surfers and bikini-clad bombshells. With a little guidance, you can find shorelines unmarred by development, with opportunities for adventure, culture, great food, and yes, even reasonable prices.

From a funky and eclectic beach community to a picturesque central coast village, here are five of California's largely undiscovered coastal hideaways.



Relive Seal Beach's cosmopolitan days through photos and collectibles displayed in the Red Car Museum

Photo courtesy of Orange County Archives

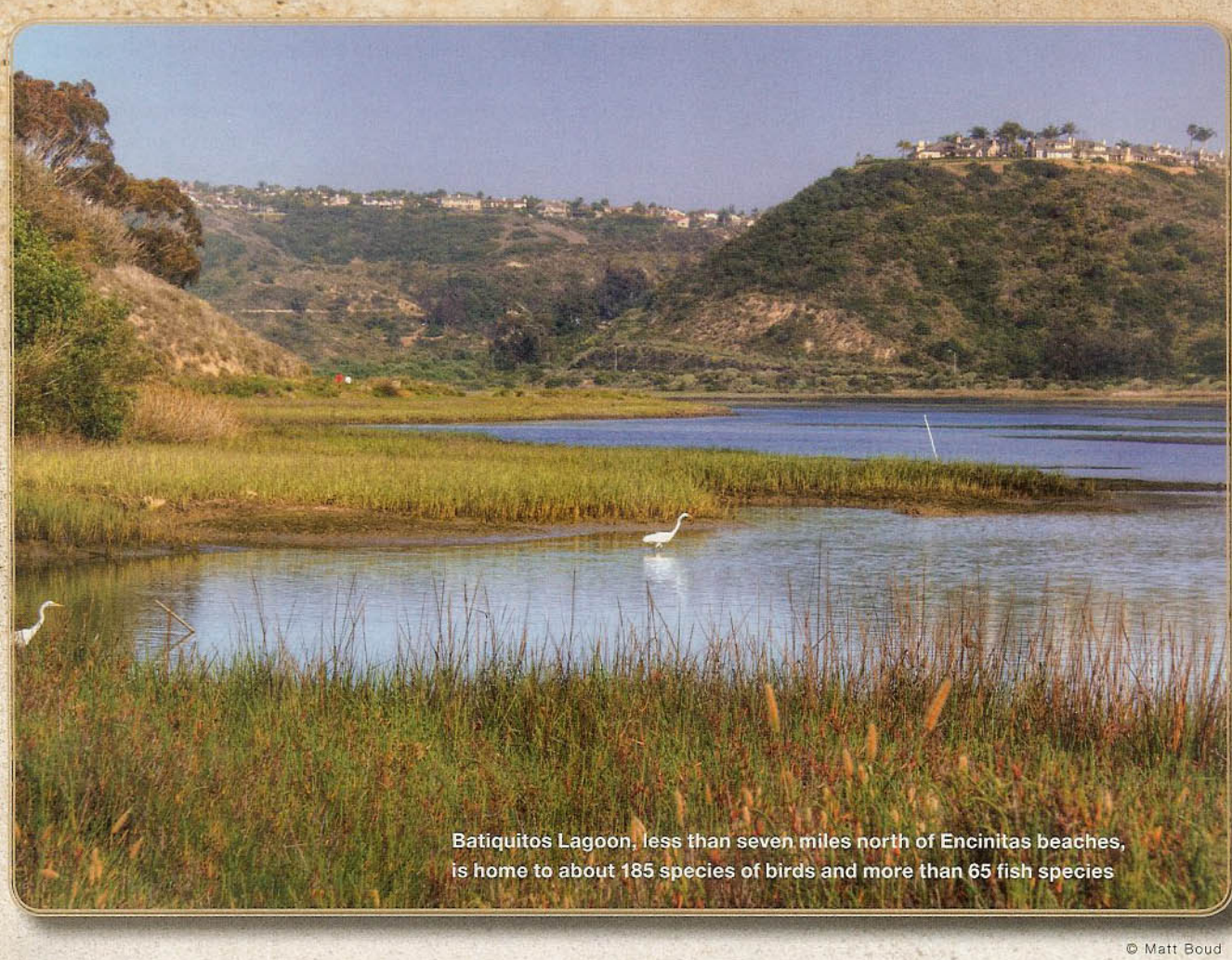
1 Seal Beach

A stone's throw from Huntington Beach to the south and Long Beach to the north, Seal Beach offers the sun, surf, and white sandy beaches of Orange County, but with small-town charm. Southern California's second-longest wooden pier is right off Main Street (Oceanside has the longest).

The goods: Seal Beach is a pedestrian's paradise with 49 boutiques, 29 dining opportunities, six art galleries, and four antique stores — all within a three-block stretch. Seal Beach is also home to a 900-plus-acre National Wildlife Refuge where endangered bird species nest. And at the corner of Electric Avenue and Main Street, you'll find the Red Car Museum. This rare Pacific Electric tower car, Car No. 1734, was built in 1925 and now serves as the museum headquarters. In the Red Car (open from 1 to 4 p.m. every second and fourth Saturday of the month), guests can watch a video documenting what a ride in an electric rail car would have been like during its operations from 1904 to the 1950s.

The grub: A gussied-up neighborhood fish-house, Walt's Wharf serves hard-to-come-by combinations (such as Dungeness crab-stuffed deviled eggs) amid mostly standard fare (think fish and chips), and offers a wine list double the size of the food menu. Walt's doesn't take reservations so don't arrive ravenous. If you're jonesing for a treat, hit Sweet Jill's for fresh-baked cookies, brownies, and cinnamon rolls. For breakfast, saddle up at Old Town Café for casual dining, hot cakes, and fast service.

The digs: While there are plenty of lodging options on the outskirts of town, O'Malley's Bed & Breakfast puts you in the center of the Seal Beach scene. This unique hideaway, perched above the courtyard of O'Malley's Pub on Main Street, has a cozy fireplace, a small kitchenette, and a deep, dual tub (with jets!).



Batiquitos Lagoon, less than seven miles north of Encinitas beaches, is home to about 185 species of birds and more than 65 fish species

© Matt Boud

2 Leucadia Beaches

Just 25 miles north of San Diego, Leucadia's funky beach community includes a magical mix of surfers, hipsters, and tree huggers. The city's beaches — Beacon's, Grandview, and Stone Steps — are a little tricky to find with steep vertical cliffs (and switchback trails) leading down to the ocean, but the payoff is great waves without the crowds. The caveat: Leucadia beaches offer no bathrooms, permanent lifeguards, or facilities of any kind. But what they lack in amenities they make up for with scenic views.

The goods: Sunday's Farmers Market at the Paul Ecke Elementary School runs the gamut from fruits and veggies to baked goods, tamales, and artisan jewelry. Got kids? LEGOLAND®, a 10-minute drive down U.S. Route 101, will entertain them for hours with 22,000 creations built from more than 57 million LEGO bricks. The 610-acre Batiquitos Lagoon, one of the few remaining wetlands on the Southern California coast, is also close by.

The grub: Along the U.S. Route 101, you'll find an eclectic mix to please every palate, from trendy sushi restaurants and ethnic gems to vegan eateries and classic diners. Leucadia's Pannikin Coffee & Tea house, formerly the Encinitas Train Depot, not only serves up great coffee, but also doubles as an art gallery. Mozy Café is a favorite vegetarian eatery with servers sporting dreads and rasta garb. Want to see and be seen? Hit the popular Le Papagayo, which offers a unique fusion of Mediterranean and Latin cuisines along with nightly entertainment.

The digs: The posh La Costa Resort and Spa is just a short drive from downtown Leucadia. In addition to luxury rooms and suites, the resort is known for its sprawling golf courses, spa, and the famed Chopra Center, located right on the grounds.

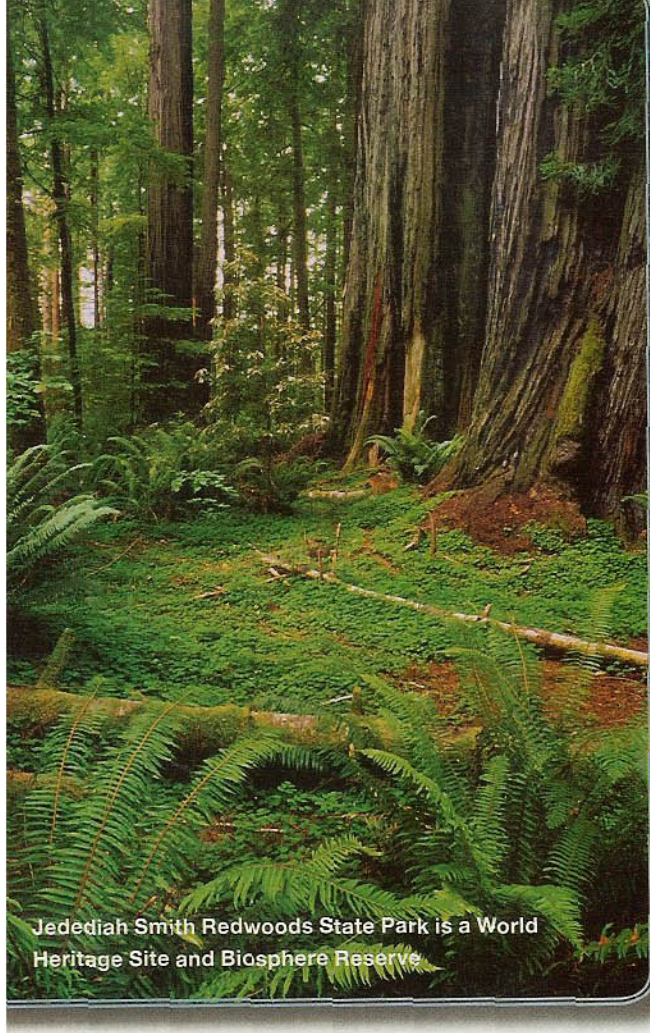
3 Cayucos

Sandy beaches and a balmy breeze usually translate to big crowds. But the bohemian backwater of Cayucos — halfway between LA and San Francisco — manages to operate happily below the radar. A hidden treasure along California's central coast, this scenic stretch of beach has a pier at one end, and a view of Morro Rock in Morro Bay on the other. Cayucos' downtown has everything you need, from restaurants and convenience stores to a video arcade and day spas.

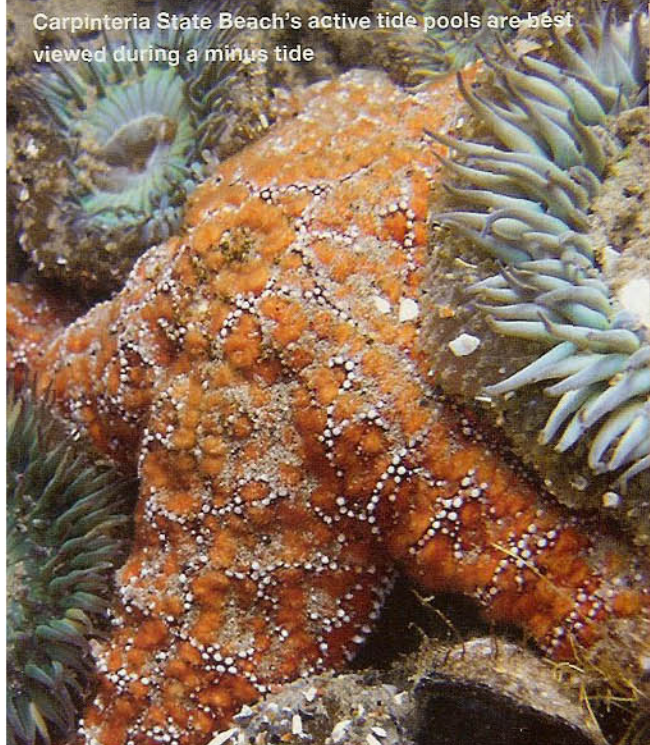
The goods: Cayucos' calm waters are perfect for skin diving, swimming, surfing, and kayaking. Deep-sea fishing boats regularly depart for Morro Bay to the south and San Simeon to the north. Cayucos is also home to a Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park, a 10,000-acre redwood forest with trees topping 300 feet, wildlife (including black bears), and scenic hiking trails. History buffs will love Cayucos' 19th-century buildings and its close proximity to newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst's 127-acre estate. A tour of the famed castle requires a half-mile walk and climbing nearly 400 stairs, so comfortable shoes are key. In the process, you may lose your breath (and some calories from lunch), but you'll gain insight into the fascinating life of America's publishing pioneer.

The grub: The seasonal menu, organic produce, and artisanal cheeses make Hoppe's Garden Bistro a top choice for tourists and locals alike. The restaurant occupies space in the former Cottage Hotel, which was built in 1876 to host the Hearsts before their castle was built. A splurge-worthy alternative: Cass House Inn and Restaurant's delectable three- and four-course tasting menus.

The digs: For a romantic retreat, Sunset Inn's two-person hot tubs, fireplaces, and private balconies can't be beat. Cass House Inn and Restaurant, which opened in Captain James Cass' original home in 2007 after a 14-year restoration, offers a more toned-down, but comfortable stay.



Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park is a World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve



Carpinteria State Beach's active tide pools are best viewed during a minus tide

4 Carpinteria

Just 12 miles south of Santa Barbara, Carpinteria's picturesque coastal hills, peaceful seaside community, and nearby private beaches remain mostly undiscovered. "Carp," as it's affectionately called, is best known for its popular surf spot, Rincon Point. Thanks to perfect waves and long rides, the book *100 Best Surf Spots in the World* ranked Rincon at No. 24.

The goods: Encompassing wooded groves and 4,000 feet of ocean frontage, Carpinteria State Beach offers overnight camping and active tide pools populated with starfish, sea anemones, crabs, octopi, snails, and sea urchins. During the first week of October, the town's tranquil streets turn into a busy thoroughfare brimming with more than 80,000 visitors for the city's three-day California Avocado Festival. Bike through scenic mountain roads, enjoy Sunday matches at the Santa Barbara Polo & Racquet Club, or hop over to Santa Barbara for live music, art museums, and wine country tours.

The grub: Craving beachside eats? Grab lunch to go from The Spot. A fixture in Carp since 1914, this infamous burger

and shake shack is just two blocks from the beach. For a unique dining experience with more than 100 years of history, The Palms lets you cook your own steak and offers chef-prepared seafood/steak combinations. Don't leave town without sampling Jean-Michel and Jill Marie's delectable artisan chocolates at Chocolats du CaliBressan. The couple traveled from Burgundy, France, to open their shop in Carpinteria.

The digs: Vacation rental homes and condominiums are hot here, and most are within walking distance to shops and restaurants. For contemporary, Asian-inspired digs, try Watermark, a four-unit retreat just steps from downtown's vibrant market with a variety of shopping and dining options.

Cove, for example, is famous for Tomales Bay barbecued oysters, Dungeness crab mac and cheese, and clam chowder. Sir and Star is another favorite, boasting faux gras of local duck livers (this foie gras is faux because this mousse is made from free-range ducks) and chanterelles pillaged from the park. Foraging for picnic pickings? Cowgirl Creamery's award-winning cheeses made from organic milk can't be beat.

The digs: Manka's Inverness Lodge has a smattering of cabins tucked in the trees. On the other side of town, Nick's Cove's five waterfront cottages perch on stilts along Tomales Bay with an additional seven water-view cottages up the hill.

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If You Go

Seal Beach: The major highways to Seal Beach are Pacific Coast Highway (California State Route 1) and Interstate 405, which connects with all other major freeways in Southern California. There are three beach parking lots (First, Eighth, and 10th streets). Cost is \$3 for two hours and vehicles with disabled placards/license plates park for free. sealbeachca.gov/visiting

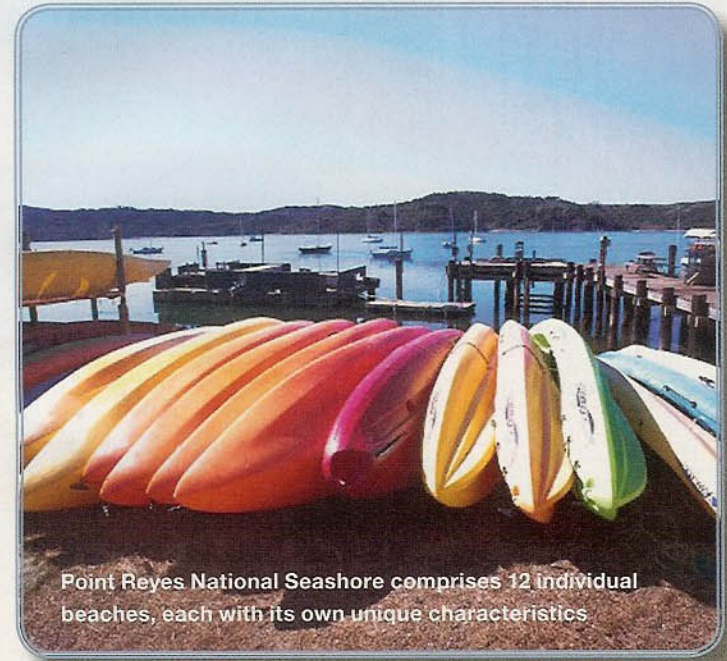
Leucadia Beaches: The three popular surf spots between Leucadia State Beach and Encinitas County Beach — Grandview, Beacon's, and Stone Steps — are accessible via stairways along Neptune Avenue (a one-way running northbound), Grandview Street at the far north end of Neptune leads to Grandview, Leucadia Boulevard is the trailhead for Beacon's, and El Portal Street leads to Stone Steps. There is free parking in residential neighborhoods along Neptune Avenue. sandiego.org/what-to-do/beaches/leucadia.aspx

Cayucos State Beach: This beach, five miles north of Morro Bay, can be accessed at the foot of Ocean Avenue. Parking around town is free. Your best bets are Ocean Avenue (the downtown area) or by the Cayucos Pier. Amenities include picnic tables, play equipment, restrooms, and outside showers. The pier is lit for night fishing and a fishing license is not required while fishing on the pier. parks.ca.gov/?page_id=596

Carpinteria Beaches: Once you pass Ventura on U.S. Route 101, you'll see a series of exits that all point to Carpinteria's area beaches. From Santa Claus Lane to Rincon Point, Carp beaches offer ample free street parking and even a few lots. Lookout Park and Loon Point also have free parking lots. The only caveat: Spaces may be tough to come by on big swell days. parks.ca.gov/?page_id=599

Point Reyes National Seashore: Travelers may approach Point Reyes (approximately 30 miles north of San Francisco) from either northbound or southbound on California State Route 1, and can also reach the park via Sir Francis Drake Boulevard or the Point Reyes/Petaluma Road. Parking in the lot at Point Reyes Historic Lighthouse is free, but if you're visiting on a hot summer day or during whale migration, get there early as the lot fills up quickly. nps.gov/pore/index.htm

5 Point Reyes



Point Reyes National Seashore comprises 12 individual beaches, each with its own unique characteristics

Take a winding 90-minute drive north of San Francisco to Point Reyes National Seashore. Here 80 miles of undeveloped beaches, protected lagoons, marshlands, and sand dunes have been a nature lover's haven since 1962 when President John F. Kennedy declared the area a national seashore. Now, Point Reyes is also revered as an agricultural mecca with organic dairy farms, grass-fed cattle ranches, and 70,000 acres of protected pine forests.

The goods: If you're a foodie, unique culinary adventures at West Marin Food and Farm Tours provide a rare opportunity to sample local delicacies, including artisan cheese, organic wine, and both fresh and saltwater oysters. Whale watchers won't want to miss the Point Reyes Lighthouse. Built in 1870, and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the lighthouse offers the best views during whale migration (late March and April), but at a steep cost: More than 300 steps lead down to the lighthouse, so going back up is a challenge. Don't miss a sunset or full-moon paddle with Blue Waters Kayaking or tidepooling at Sculptured Beach.

The grub: Farm- or sea-to-table dining is the norm in Point Reyes, with most eateries using only local ingredients. Nick's