

# Beaches + Relaxation

Every beach from San Simeon to San Diego, ranked for your trip

March 29 - April 5, 2026 | Water temp: 55-62°F | Wetsuits recommended

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Spring break week. Plan to arrive early at all beaches.

Sunday 3/29 | Central Coast | Water 52-55°F

### **Moonstone Beach ★**

Local, scenic

P: Free

Tide pools, moonstone hunting, boardwalk. Pebbly sand, dramatic views. No swimming.

[→ Maps](#)

### **Piedras Blancas**

Wildlife

P: Free

17,000 elephant seals. Free viewing platforms. March is prime molting season. Arrive before 10 AM.

[→ Maps](#)

### **Hearst Memorial Beach ★**

Quiet, scenic

P: Free

Sandy, calm. Near Hearst Castle. Less visited than Moonstone.

[→ Maps](#)

### **San Simeon State Beach**

Family, accessible

P: Free

Easier access than Moonstone. Multiple tide pool spots. Bluff trails.

[→ Maps](#)

## **Eat Near the Beaches**

### **FUEL UP Linn's Restaurant**

Cambria. Famous olallieberry pie. Non-negotiable.

[→ Maps](#)

### **FUEL UP Robin's**

Cambria. Eclectic global cuisine, garden setting.

[→ Maps](#)

### **FUEL UP French Corner Bakery**

Cambria. Authentic French pastries, espresso.

[→ Maps](#)

## **Drive-By Stops: Central Coast**

## Quick stops to break up the drive

**Morro Bay:** 60 mi south. 576-ft Morro Rock, photo stop + seafood lunch. 30 min. →

**Shell Beach:** 80 mi south. Black sand coves, tide pools, rocky formations. 20-30 min. →

**Pismo Beach:** 80 mi south. Wide sandy beach, pier, gentle waves. \$5 parking. 30-60 min. →

**Avila Beach:** 86 mi south. Sheltered, calm. Small resort town. 30-60 min. →

**Butterfly Beach, Montecito:** 160 mi south. Upscale, peaceful. South-facing sunset. Channel Islands views. →

**Hendry's Beach, SB:** 165 mi south. Local favorite. Great sunset walk. →

## **FUEL UP** La Super-Rica Taqueria

SB. Iconic taqueria. Long lines but worth it. Cash recommended.

→ [Maps](#)

## **FUEL UP** Brophy Bros.

Ventura Harbor. Seafood + clam bar with harbor views.

→ [Maps](#)

Days 2-3 | Orange County (Newport + HB + Laguna | Lido House base | Water 58-60°F)

### **Crystal Cove State Park** ★

Secluded, natural

P: \$15

3.2 mi sandy beach. Historic tide pools, sea caves. No dogs. Your Chicken Ranch Beach.

[→ Maps](#)

### **The Wedge**

Extreme surf

P: Free street

Legendary bodyboarding. Watch from shore, don't swim. East end of Balboa Peninsula.

[→ Maps](#)

### **Balboa Peninsula**

Classic OC

P: Metered

Long sandy beach, harbor views, bike path. Walk from Lido House.

[→ Maps](#)

### **Huntington Beach Pier**

Iconic

P: Metered

Surf City USA. Iconic pier. Sunset walk. Family day base.

[→ Maps](#)

### **1000 Steps, Laguna**

Adventure

P: Hard to find

223 actual steps. Tide pools, sea caves at low tide. Worth the effort.

[→ Maps](#)

### **Victoria Beach, Laguna** ★

Romantic

P: Metered

White sand, blue-green water. Pirate Tower landmark. Natural saltwater pool at low tide.

[→ Maps](#)

### **Salt Creek, Dana Point** ★

Local favorite

P: \$1/hr

Mile-long beach. Dramatic bluffs. Catalina sunset views. Tide pools in marine reserve.

[→ Maps](#)

## Eat Near OC Beaches

### **FUEL UP** Portola Coffee Roasters

Costa Mesa. Influential OC roaster. Precision espresso.

[→ Maps](#)

### **FUEL UP** Bear Flag Fish Co

Newport. Counter seafood. Your alaMar equivalent.

[→ Maps](#)

### **FUEL UP** Mama's On 39

HB. Top breakfast spot. Family favorite. Hearty plates.

[→ Maps](#)

Days 4-7 | San Diego (La Jolla to Coronado | Water 60-62°F)

### **La Jolla Cove ★**

Famous

P: Hard to find

#1 Beach in US (TripAdvisor). Crystal water, snorkeling, sea lions. Arrive before 8 AM.

[→ Maps](#)

### **Windansea Beach ★**

Secluded cove

P: Limited

Cliffs, tide pools, surfer culture. Quieter than Cove. Your kind of spot.

[→ Maps](#)

### **Sunset Cliffs ★**

Dramatic

P: Free

68-acre park. 300-ft sea cliffs, caves. No beach, just dramatic views. Sunset 7:15 PM.

[→ Maps](#)

### **Torrey Pines State Beach ★**

Nature

P: \$15-25

300-ft sea cliffs, native pines. Hiking + beach. Guy Fleming Trail. Your Sibley equivalent.

[→ Maps](#)

### **Coronado Beach**

Relaxed

P: Free (limited)

Wide white sand. Calm water. Hotel del Coronado. Ferry from downtown.

[→ Maps](#)

### **Ocean Beach**

Eclectic

P: Metered

Vintage SoCal charm, dog-friendly, eclectic. Dive bars + tacos. Your neighborhood.

[→ Maps](#)

### **Pacific Beach**

Vibrant

P: Metered

Vibrant boardwalk, young crowd. Good people-watching. Not the quietest.

[→ Maps](#)

## Eat Near SD Beaches

### **FUEL UP** The Mission

North Park. SD staple. House-made bread, Zen Breakfast.

[→ Maps](#)

### **FUEL UP** South Beach Bar & Grill

Ocean Beach. World-famous Mahi fish taco since 1992.

[→ Maps](#)

### **FUEL UP** Madi

North Park. Award-winning Best Brunch in SD.

[→ Maps](#)

## Beyond the Beach

**Torrey Pines Reserve:** **HIKING**. 300-ft sea cliffs, native pines. Guy Fleming Trail (easy), Razor Point (moderate). \$15-25 parking. →

**La Jolla Kayaking:** **WATER**. Guided kayak + snorkel tours. Sea caves, leopard sharks, sea lions. ~\$30-50.

**Balboa Park Gardens:** **GARDENS**. 1,200 acres. 15+ botanical gardens. Free grounds. Sunday organ concert 2 PM.

**Ojai Valley Inn Spa:** **SPA**. Forbes Five-Star. 31,000 sq ft. Day spa available. \$100-400+.

**Glen Ivy Hot Springs:** **HOT SPRINGS**. Thermal mineral baths. Club Mud. The Grotto. 90 min from SD.

# Beach Comparison Table

| Beach           | Vibe           | Crowds    | Parking | Best For          |
|-----------------|----------------|-----------|---------|-------------------|
| Moonstone Beach | Local, scenic  | Busy      | Free    | Moonstone hunting |
| Crystal Cove    | Secluded       | Moderate  | \$15    | Tide pools        |
| Victoria Beach  | Romantic       | Moderate  | Metered | Photos            |
| Salt Creek      | Local favorite | Moderate  | \$1/hr  | Sunsets           |
| La Jolla Cove   | Famous         | Very busy | Hard    | Snorkeling        |
| Windansea Beach | Secluded cove  | Moderate  | Limited | Solitude          |
| Sunset Cliffs   | Dramatic       | Light     | Free    | Evening walk      |
| Torrey Pines    | Nature         | Moderate  | \$15-25 | Hiking            |
| Coronado Beach  | Relaxed        | Moderate  | Free    | Families          |
| Ocean Beach     | Eclectic       | Busy      | Metered | Local scene       |

## Our Top 5 Picks

### 1. Sunset Cliffs at golden hour

Most romantic. Free, uncrowded, 300-ft cliffs. Thursday or Friday evening.

### 2. Crystal Cove tide pools

Your Chicken Ranch Beach equivalent. Sea caves, secluded. Tuesday morning.

### 3. Torrey Pines hike + beach

Your Sibley mapped to SD. Guy Fleming Trail, then beach below.

### 4. La Jolla Cove snorkeling

#1 beach in US. Arrive 7 AM, rent gear.

### 5. Victoria Beach, Laguna

The Pirate Tower. Natural saltwater pool. Most photogenic.