



## SANTA CRUZ ISLAND THE ORIGINAL CALIFORNIA ADVENTURE PARK

STORY AND PHOTOS  
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**A** gentle wind blows through the canyon as Monarch butterflies hover in the trees and ravens glide overhead. The Pacific ocean is visible in the distance as the sun glistens off white-capped waves. Hikers trek through the mountains hoping to spot the elusive island fox, while kayakers search for pods of dolphins. These are just a few of the daily occurrences on Santa Cruz Island.

Santa Cruz, the largest of California's Channel Islands at 96 square miles, lies approximately 20 miles off the coast between Santa Barbara and Ventura and offers spectacular landscapes, impressive tidal pools, enormous cliffs and sandy beaches. The flora and fauna are diverse and plentiful, including nine endemic and unique plant species. Some have even nicknamed it "a miniature Galapagos."

Adding to the island's charm are Adobe ranch houses, blacksmith and saddle shops, barns, and antique farming equipment. They show the many historical uses of the island in the 17th and 18th centuries. Ranching began on the island in 1839 and

continued into the early 1980s. Before that, the island was visited regularly by Spanish explorers.

According to legend, Santa Cruz Island was named for a priest's walking stick, lost on the island during the 1769 Portola expedition. A Chumash Indian found the cross-tipped staff and returned it. The Spaniards were so impressed that they named it "La Isla de Santa Cruz," the Island of the Sacred Cross. Originally colonized by the Chumash Indians for more than 6,000 years, the Nature Conservancy now owns the western 75 percent of the island and the National Park Service the eastern 25 percent.

Camping on the island is rustic and not for the faint of heart. Campers can choose between two locations: Scorpion Ranch, a half-mile hike from the pier, and Del Norte, a hardy 3.5 mile trek. Camping on both sites is primitive but made easier by numerous shaded locations, potable water (at Scorpion Ranch only), and pit toilets.

There are plenty of activities to participate in while visiting the island. Kayaking is very popular and should include a trip to visit Painted Cave, the

largest known sea cave in the world at nearly 100 feet wide and a quarter-mile long. Boasting colorful lichen, algae and complex rock formations, the cave is magnificent.

Santa Cruz is a hiker's dream and there are plenty of trails, from easy to hard, depending on your fitness level. Some trails meander through interior canyons while others skirt the craggy coastline. From many vantage points you have a good chance to see marine wildlife. California sea lions and harbor seals seek refuge in coves, while dolphins and whales feed in the numerous kelp forests. With its deep-rooted history, abundant plant and animal life, and beautiful scenery, Santa Cruz Island is an adventure not to be missed.