

Channel Some Adventure

It's the largest of the Channel Islands, one of the least-visited national parks, and it teems with rare plant and animal species. Autumn's lean tourist season makes it a prime time for exploring Santa Cruz Island.



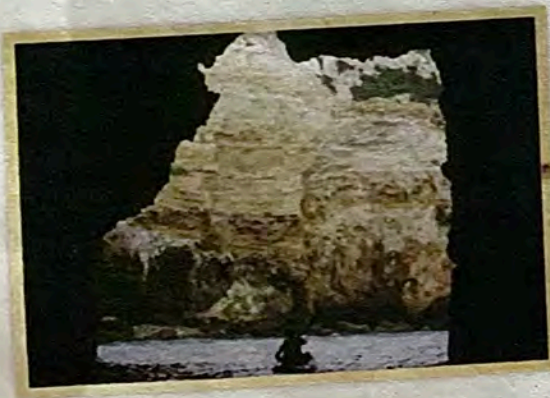
Smuggler Under Cover

One of the best hikes in Channel Islands National Park traverses Santa Cruz Island, offering panoramic vistas and leading to a secluded cove. Head out on a 7.5-mile round-trip journey to Smuggler's Cove (en route you may even spot the island scrub-jay—only found on this island). Start at Scorpion Anchorage and ascend a singletrack trail with sweeping views of inland hills. Follow the trail as it edges along bluffs that drop straight to the crashing waves, and look for the distant Santa Susana Mountains to the east. Continue onto Smuggler's Road, marked by an old windmill on the other side of the path. The trail draws a definite sweat with its steady, steep ascent. The only distraction from your burning legs might be the views of Scorpion Canyon's rolling grasslands flanked by shrub-coated hills. After about 2 miles, things level out and the neighboring Anacapa Islands come into view. Olive trees flank the final steep descent to Smuggler's Cove where a few picnic tables and eucalyptus trees border the slim cobblestone beach. The cove also has tidepools with hardy sea life like green anemones and the scarce black abalone. Head to the west end of the

beach during low tide to catch the best show (be careful, there are some sharp rocks on shore). Return the way you came: the first mile is straight upwards—but don't rush it; a true smuggler knows how to play it cool.

TIP: An alternate return route has you forking left (east) towards Scorpion Canyon at the 2-mile trail marker. The road descends at an old oil derrick after .25 miles into the wide nesting grounds of the island scrub-jay before looping back towards Scorpion campground.

Start at Scorpion Anchorage by taking the ascending road to the right of the pier. Continue for .2-mile until you reach the intersection at Smuggler's Road. Cross the dry creek and begin a steep incline. After 2.25 miles the path begins a descent and then levels as it circles Smuggler's Cove before leading to the beach. Restrooms are available at Smuggler's Beach. There is no water available at Smuggler's Cove, so you must bring plenty for the road. Hiking trail maps are available at the visitor center at Scorpion Anchorage. Trails are well marked.



Potato Pirates

Battling ocean waves and exploring mysterious caverns doesn't just happen in pirate movies. Test your mettle and take to the sea surrounding Santa Cruz Island with the pros at [Channel Islands Outfitters](#). They lead guided kayak trips for overnight campers who get exclusive rights to a 6-mile open-ocean tour to secluded Potato Harbor. Kayakers brave paddling through rock arches and gaping caverns. The bellows of sea lions echo through caves like monsters of the deep. Harbor seals bask on the safety of rocks, watching you navigate the mercurial waters. While currents can be challenging, there are plenty of opportunities to pause in giant kelp beds and look in awe at the islands' towering cliff sides. Keep an eye out: the Channel Islands are prime nesting habitat for many rare seabirds such as Cassin's auklets, ashly storm petrels, and Xantus's murrelets. Look down to spy droves of purple, spiked sea urchins. Nose up to the tranquil cove of Potato Harbor for lunch on the rocky shore. Your guide will share some history of the Chumash natives who once called Santa Cruz Island "Limuw" (in the sea). Fueled up, start the 3-mile trek back. Fear not, the

current carries you home with the ease of a true sea dog.

Potato Harbor tours are only available for people camping on Santa Cruz Island. Other tours are offered for day visitors. Trips run Saturdays and Sundays, unless otherwise requested. All gear is provided for \$120. This tour does not include Island Packers ferry tickets or camping accommodations. Ferry tickets and campsite reservations can be purchased through Channel Islands Outfitters (805-899-4925) when booking this trip.



Scorpion Lair

Get right into the thick of Santa Cruz Island's isolation and beauty by pitching a tent at Scorpion Campground. Surrounded by lush hillsides, it offers easy access to snorkeling in the waters at Scorpion Anchorage Beach. The campsites are nestled among shaded eucalyptus groves accessed by a half-mile hike from the ferry dock. Good bets are sites 20 and 22 (pictured) at the lower loop campground, two spacious lots located near pristine hiking trails. With fewer tourists at this time of year, rustles in the foliage are most likely to come from the protected island fox, Santa Cruz's top predator despite weighing in at just 4 pounds. Take a walk among cream-colored live-forever and endemic island barberry. Or explore the coastline by hiking to neighboring Canyon Point along 2 miles of rugged cliffs. The trail begins at site 22 and loops back to a steep decline at Scorpion Anchorage. Watch the sunset from the point's bluffs or just get a brilliant ocean view from the vantage point before returning to camp.

Camping reservations are required prior to planning ferry travel. An overnight stay at Scorpion Campground is \$15 per night. Sites offer water and primitive toilets. Campfires are not permitted. Make reservations through reseveamerica.com, 877-444-6777. Arrange ferry travel with [Island Packers](#), 1691 Spinnaker Dr., Ventura. Adult day trips, \$56; camping trip, \$75.



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Ride On

This summer may be over, but it's never too soon to start planning next summer's great outdoor adventure—especially when it's a California classic! Now's the time to get your wheels turning on the [2012 AIDS/LifeCycle](#). Weekend Sherpa readers get [\\$10 off the registration fee using discount code "SHERPA"](#). AIDS/LifeCycle is a 7-day bike ride—not a race—from San Francisco to Los Angeles, supporting the San Francisco AIDS Foundation and L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center. Pedal the Golden State from forest to sea: lush farmland, coastal vistas, quiet country roads, and friendly small towns. AIDS/LifeCycle is fully supported with tasty meals, rest stops, gear transport, enthusiastic volunteer roadies, fabulous new friends, and free massages (every day)! Sign up for AIDS/LifeCycle now and benefit from top-level training leaders advising on equipment and what to expect. Then start on regularly scheduled [local training rides](#): socialize with like-minded people while getting into great shape! For the main event, feel like a million bucks as strangers cheer you

roadside and small towns greet you with barbecued burgers, baked goodies, fresh lemonade, and appreciative hugs. Ready to ride? Attend an informal meeting to learn how you can reward yourself by helping others. You belong here!

TIP: Space is filling up quickly—[register online with promo code SHERPA and get \\$10 off](#) your registration fee. Let's go!
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