



ORANGE COUNTY
COASTKEEPER®

A GUIDE TO VISITING ORANGE COUNTY'S

MARINE PROTECTED AREAS



Tide pool in Laguna Beach State Marine Reserve.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S



This project is made possible through a grant from Coastal Quest with support from California Ocean Protection Council. For more information, visit their website at: www.coastal-quest.org



The **California Department of Fish and Wildlife** is the primary agency responsible for managing our State's Marine Protected Areas. For more information, visit their website at: www.wildlife.ca.gov



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This resource guide was produced by **Orange County Coastkeeper**. For more information on our organization, visit our website at: www.coastkeeper.org



Shoreline of Crystal Cove State Marine Conservation Area

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HISTORY OF MPAS

PROTECTING CALIFORNIA'S MARINE ECOSYSTEMS

From wetlands to kelp forests to the rocky intertidal, California's marine ecosystems boast extraordinary biodiversity. These ecosystems, whose intrinsic value is immeasurable, support the air we breathe and the food we eat. In order to protect the ecological health of the ocean, collaborative conservation and management was needed across the state to preserve the integrity of the iconic coastline.

MARINE LIFE PROTECTION ACT

The **Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA)** was passed by California State legislature in 1999 as a means to redesign a previously incohesive "patchwork" of marine reserves.

PLANNING PROCESS

California took a regional approach to design the MPA system, dividing the coast into 4 regions. Regulations for the South Coast Region (Point Conception to the California-Mexico border) was implemented in January of 2012. Planning included stakeholder and public involvement, providing community members opportunity for public comment. Coastkeeper was heavily involved in order to advocate for our marine ecosystems here in Orange County!

Goals of the MPA System

- 1 Protect the natural diversity and abundance of marine life, and the structure, function, and integrity of marine ecosystems.
- 2 Help sustain, conserve and protect marine life populations, including those of economic value, and rebuild those that are depleted.
Improve recreational, educational, and study opportunities provided by marine ecosystems that are subject to minimal human disturbance, and to manage these uses in a manner consistent with protecting biodiversity.
- 3 Protect marine natural heritage, including protection of representative and unique marine life habitats in California waters for their intrinsic values.
Ensure California's MPAs have clearly defined objectives, effective management measures, and adequate enforcement and are based on sound scientific guidelines.
- 4 Ensure the State's MPAs are designed and managed, to the extent possible, as a network.

Main Beach in Laguna Beach State Marine Reserve



An underwater photograph showing a school of blue fish swimming among green kelp in clear water.

BENEFITS OF MPAS

A Decade of Marine Protected Areas

The final design of the South Coast Region of the MPA system was implemented in 2012. In January of 2023, the first [Decadal Management Review](#) was published which comprehensively evaluated factors such as design cohesion, species and community responses, ecosystem resiliency, and human engagement. Trends varied across regions, between species, and between habitats, but generally show positive results in protecting marine ecosystems.



Increased fish biomass

The South Coast Region saw the most significant increase in fish biomass in MPAs compared to non-MPA sites. This can lead to populations "spilling over" into fishable areas and contribute to connectivity. This region also saw increases in some invertebrate populations, like spiny lobsters and sponges.



Increased ecological connectivity

Habitats inside of MPAs provide more larvae to each other and areas outside of MPAs than non-MPA sites. Ocean circulation patterns were also found to be a key driver in connectivity.



Improved recovery and resilience

Although MPAs were not found to mitigate against initial effects, communities appeared more resilient and demonstrated quicker recovery than non-MPA sites following events like a marine heatwave.

In the face of threats like overfishing, pollution, and climate change, MPAs safeguard marine ecosystems and increase the resilience of our coastal ecosystems.

Types of MPAs

What can or can't you do in an MPA?

Much like our National Parks System on land, the MPA system sets forth an effort to balance conservation and recreation. In order to protect marine ecosystems while also maintaining our ability to recreate in these spaces, non-extractive activities (e.g. boating, diving) are allowed, while extractive activities (e.g. fishing) are regulated and often restricted. There are three main types of MPAs, each with varying sets of rules.

In a **STATE MARINE CONSERVATION AREA (SMCA)**,

injury, damage, take, or possession of any living, geological, or cultural marine resource is prohibited *except* for species expressly allowed for recreational and/or commercial take (which varies by location).

In a **STATE MARINE PARK (SMR)**,

injury, damage, take, or possession any living, geological, or cultural marine resource for commercial exploitation purposes is prohibited but all other uses such as research and recreational harvest are allowed.

In a **STATE MARINE RESERVE (SMR)**,

injury, damage, take, or possession any living, geological, or cultural marine resource is prohibited.

There are additional classifications such as State Marine Recreational Management Area and special closures that are not present in Orange County.



**QUICK
TIPS**

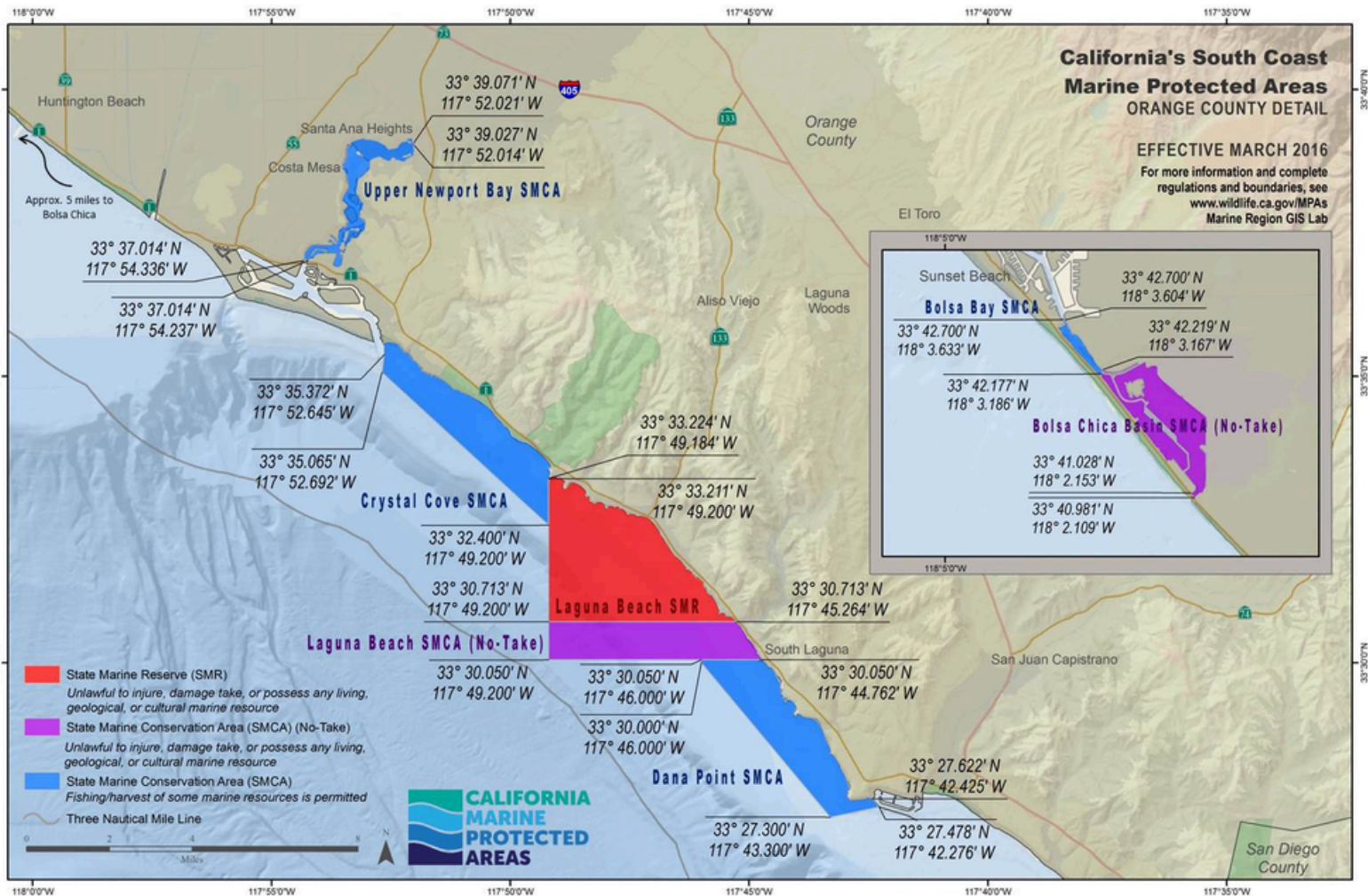
**ALWAYS CHECK THE
RULES BEFORE YOU GO!**

Each MPA is going to be managed to address its unique set of issues resulting in variations in its rules and regulations - even between MPAs of the same classification. Rule of thumb: always check the rules before engaging in “extractive” activities in an MPA. More resources on MPA regulations can be found [here](#).



Photos (top to bottom): Bolsa Bay SMCA, Upper Newport Bay SMCA, Laguna Beach SMR.

Orange County's Marine Protected Areas



From north to south:

- Bolsa Bay State Marine Conservation Area
- Bolsa Chica Basin State Marine Conservation Area (No-Take)
- Upper Newport Bay State Marine Conservation Areas
- Crystal Cove State Marine Conservation Area
- Laguna Beach State Marine Reserve
- Laguna Beach State Marine Conservation Area (No-Take)
- Dana Point State Marine Conservation Area

BOLSA CHICA BASIN

STATE MARINE CONSERVATION AREA (No-Take)

QUICK FACTS

- MPA Size: 0.70 square miles
- Habitat types: 0.65 sq. miles estuary, 0.05 sq. miles eelgrass, 2.95 sq. miles coastal marsh

THINGS TO DO



Fish from shore at the designated fishing location in the Bolsa Bay SMCA.



Observe the hundreds of bird species that call the Bolsa Chica wetlands home.



Walk or run the trails that meander the Bolsa Chica Ecological Reserve that connects the two MPAs.



Students overlooking the bridge that crosses the Bolsa Chica Basin



No collecting



Recreational take of fin-fish by hook-and-line is permitted ONLY from the shore to the right of the pedestrian bridge adjacent to the parking lot on Warner Ave.



Boating, diving, swimming, and wading are all prohibited.



Access is limited to designated trails during the hours of 6 A.M. and 8 P.M.

BOLSA BAY

STATE MARINE CONSERVATION AREA

QUICK FACTS

- MPA Size: 0.07 square miles
- Habitat types: 0.07 sq. miles estuary, 0.70 sq. miles coastal marsh

TRANSPORTATION & ACCESS

North parking lot - FREE (18000 Pacific Coast Highway Huntington Beach, CA 92647)

Public Transit - OCTA bus stop (Warner-Pacific) across from North parking lot

South parking lot - FREE (18000 Pacific Coast Highway Huntington Beach, CA 92647)

RULES & REGULATIONS

Great blue heron walking through the Bolsa Chica wetlands.







UPPER NEWPORT BAY

STATE MARINE CONSERVATION AREA

QUICK FACTS

- MPA Size: 1.24 square miles
- Habitat types: 1.24 sq. miles estuary, 3.71 sq. miles coastal marsh
- Largest remaining estuary in Southern California

THINGS TO DO



Fish from designated on-shore locations, such as Castaways Beach or Rocky Point.



Kayak or paddleboard through the main channel of the Bay



Walk, run, bike, or blade the 10.5 mile Back Bay Loop Trail.

RULES AND REGULATIONS



Recreational take of fin-fish by hook-and-line from shore only is allowed from designated locations.



Swimming is only allowed in the area near North Star Beach.



Boats are limited to speeds of 5 mph, and not allowed beyond North Star Beach.



Access is limited to designated trails, paths, or other designated areas.



No collecting

PARKING AND ACCESS

Peter and Mary Muth Interpretive Center - FREE (2301 University Dr, Newport Beach, CA 92660)

Castaways Park - FREE (700 Dover Dr, Newport Beach, CA 92660)

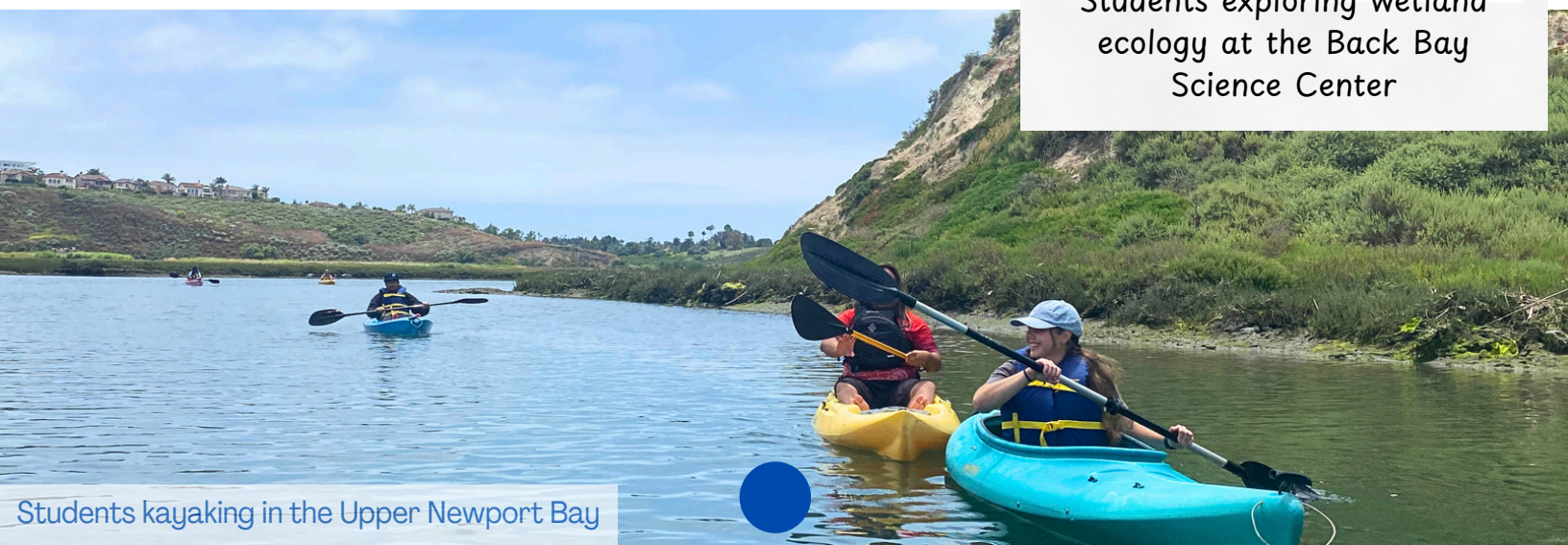
Back Bay Drive - FREE (No Address)

North Star Beach - FREE (498 N Star Ln #200, Newport Beach, CA 92660)

Big Canyon Parking and Trailhead- FREE (No Address)



Students exploring wetland ecology at the Back Bay Science Center



Students kayaking in the Upper Newport Bay



1. **Peter and Mary Muth Interpretive Center**

Educational facility that is open Tues-Sun from 10am-4pm. Stop here for interactive exhibits, programs, or to park before heading out on the trails.

Address: 2301 University Dr, Newport Beach, CA 92660

2. **North Star Beach**

Public beach that is also home to the Newport Aquatic Center where you can find hourly rentals for paddle-operated recreation. Have a beach day or depart here with a paddleboard or a kayak to explore the Bay from the water!

Address: 1 Whitecliffs Dr, Newport Beach, CA 92660

Upper Newport Bay State Marine Conservation Area

Southwest Boundary



3. **Back Bay Science Center**

Educational and research facility that is open to the public for select programming. Stop by for Community Day on Sundays, or sign up for a Marine Life Inventory!

Address: 600 Shellmaker Rd, Newport Beach, CA 92660

CRYSTAL COVE

STATE MARINE CONSERVATION AREA

QUICK FACTS

- MPA Size: 3.53 square miles
- Habitat types: 1.19 sq. miles rock, 2.99 sq. miles sand/mud
- Spans 4.3 miles of coastline

THINGS TO DO



Explore the tide pools at Little Corona del Mar Beach or Crystal Cove State Park



Fish by hook-and line, spearfish, or dive for lobsters and sea urchins



Swim, snorkel, or scuba dive through offshore kelp forests

RULES AND REGULATIONS



Recreational take of fin-fish by hook-and-line, spearfishing, and take of spiny lobster and sea urchin is allowed.



All non-consumptive activities are allowed including swimming, boating, surfing, and paddling.



The take of any marine resources from the tide pools is not permitted.

PARKING AND ACCESS

Corona del Mar Beach -

- Residential parking off Ocean Blvd
- Public transit - OCTA bus stop Coast-Poppy
- Corona del Mar State Beach - Hourly or day-parking fees apply

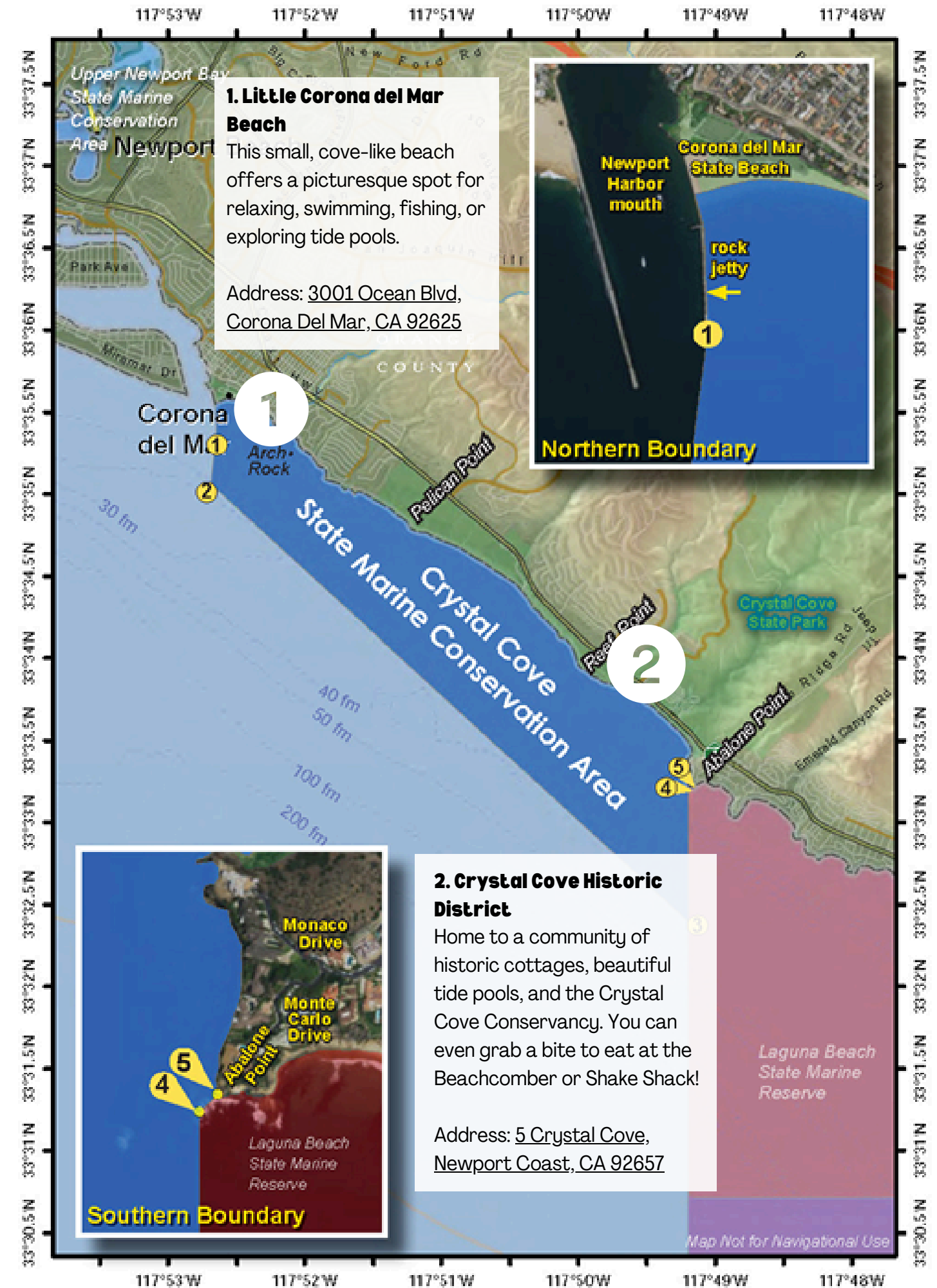
Crystal Cove State Park -

- \$15/day (or check out a vehicle day-use pass from your local library.)
- Public transit - OCTA bus stop Coast-Crystal Heights



Students conducting biodiversity surveys at Little Corona del Mar





1. Little Corona del Mar Beach

This small, cove-like beach offers a picturesque spot for relaxing, swimming, fishing, or exploring tide pools.

Address: 3001 Ocean Blvd, Corona Del Mar, CA 92625



2. Crystal Cove Historic District

Home to a community of historic cottages, beautiful tide pools, and the Crystal Cove Conservancy. You can even grab a bite to eat at the Beachcomber or Shake Shack!

Address: 5 Crystal Cove, Newport Coast, CA 92657



LAGUNA BEACH

STATE MARINE RESERVE

QUICK FACTS

- MPA Size: 3.09 square miles
- Miles of shoreline: 4.4
- Habitat types: 3.09 sq. miles sand/mud, 0.09 sq. miles rock

LAGUNA BEACH

STATE MARINE CONSERVATION AREA (No-take)

QUICK FACTS

- MPA Size: 3.09 square miles
- Habitat types: 6.28 sq. miles sand/mud, 0.90 rock

THINGS TO DO



Spend the day recreating and relaxing at one of Laguna's beautiful beaches



Explore the tidepools that form in the rocky intertidal at low tide



Swim or snorkel to see other marine species that call Laguna's kelp forests home!

PARKING AND ACCESS

Public beach parking mainly includes residential streets and City lots, which are paid via meter. Luckily, Laguna has a FREE trolley that can take you from Crescent Bay (north Laguna) to Salt Creek (south Laguna) and up to Lot 16 in the canyon. Visit the City's website [HERE](#) for more parking information.

RULES AND REGULATIONS



The take of any marine resources is not permitted.



2. Crescent Bay

This beach is a popular spot for snorkeling, skim boarding, and tide pool exploring! Visit nearby Shaw's, Fisherman's, and Divers Coves for more relaxing beaches.

Address: 1259 Cliff Dr, Laguna Beach, CA 92651

Public Transit Stop: Cliff Dr and Marine

1. Main Beach Park & Heisler Park

Main Beach offers a wide beach, volleyball and basketball courts, and nearby restaurants, museums, and shops. The boardwalk continues north towards Heisler Park, home to a popular tide pool location and art sculptures.

Address: Broadway St & Pacific Coast Hwy, Laguna Beach, CA 92651

Public Transit Stop: Coast-Ocean or Cliff Dr. & Jasmine St.

3. Treasure Island Park

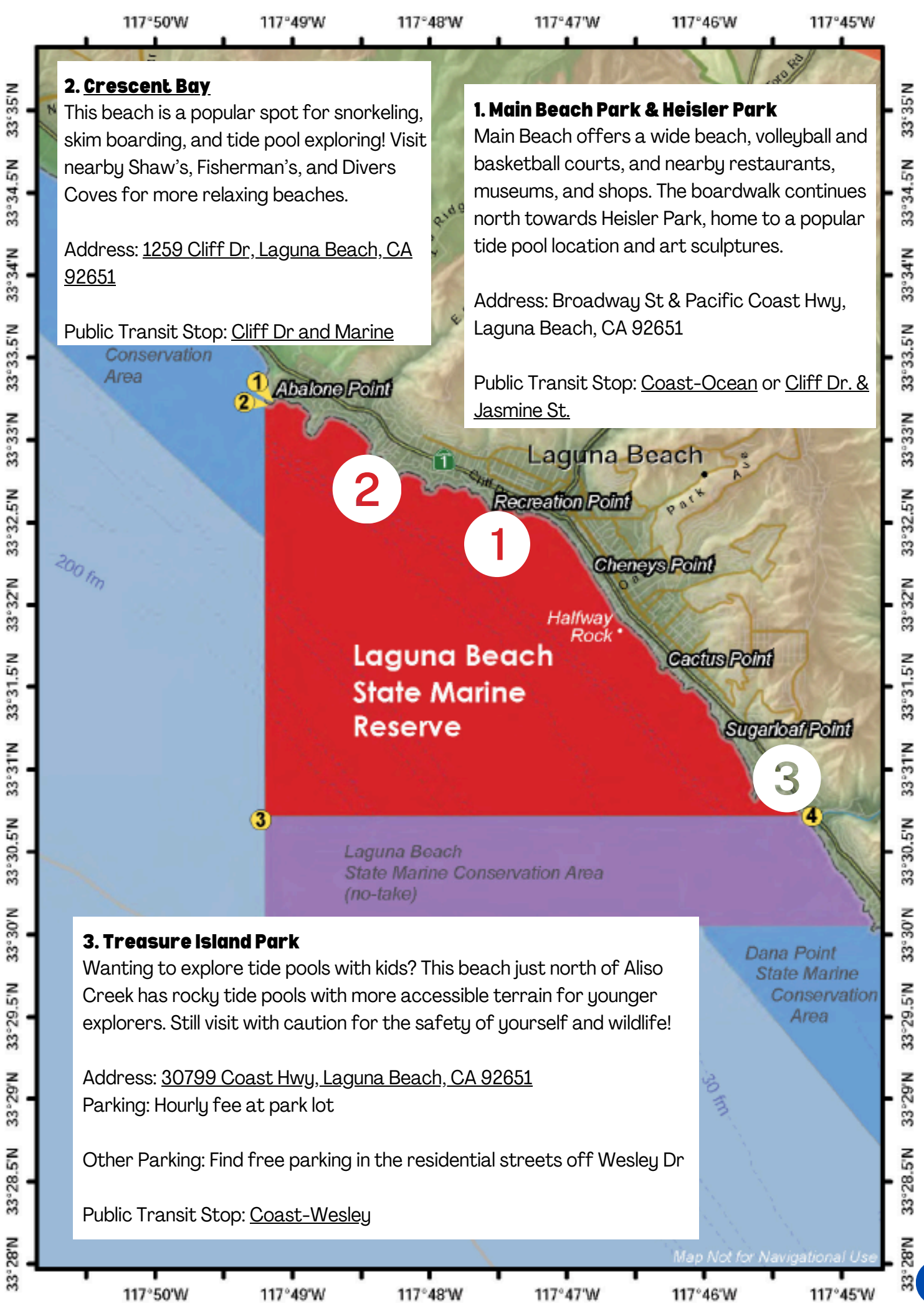
Wanting to explore tide pools with kids? This beach just north of Aliso Creek has rocky tide pools with more accessible terrain for younger explorers. Still visit with caution for the safety of yourself and wildlife!

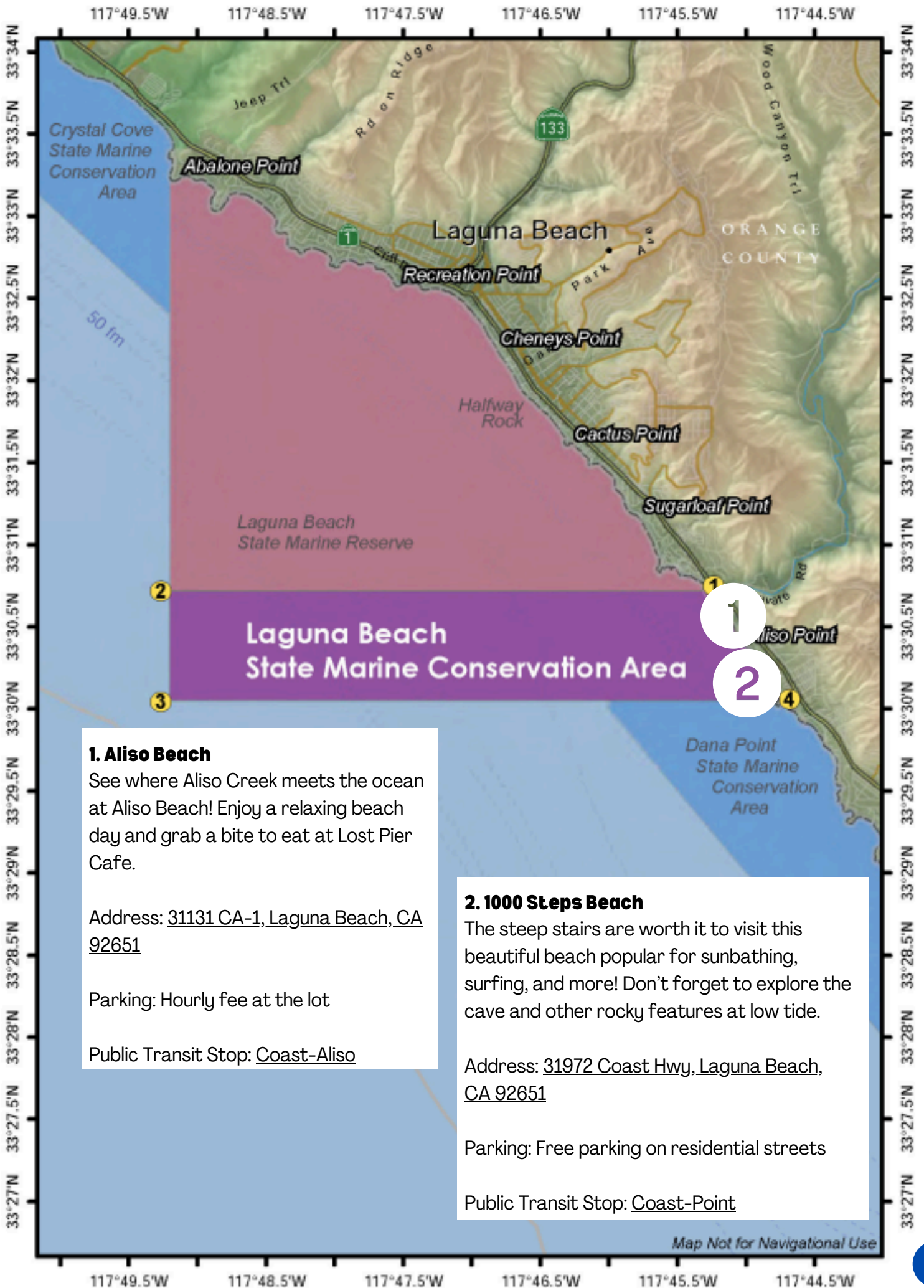
Address: 30799 Coast Hwy, Laguna Beach, CA 92651

Parking: Hourly fee at park lot

Other Parking: Find free parking in the residential streets off Wesley Dr

Public Transit Stop: Coast-Wesley





1. Aliso Beach

See where Aliso Creek meets the ocean at Aliso Beach! Enjoy a relaxing beach day and grab a bite to eat at Lost Pier Cafe.

Address: [31131 CA-1, Laguna Beach, CA 92651](#)

Parking: Hourly fee at the lot

Public Transit Stop: [Coast-Aliso](#)

2. 1000 Steps Beach

The steep stairs are worth it to visit this beautiful beach popular for sunbathing, surfing, and more! Don't forget to explore the cave and other rocky features at low tide.

Address: [31972 Coast Hwy, Laguna Beach, CA 92651](#)

Parking: Free parking on residential streets

Public Transit Stop: [Coast-Point](#)

DANA POINT

STATE MARINE CONSERVATION AREA

QUICK FACTS

- MPA Size: 3.47 square miles
- Miles of shoreline: 4.0 miles
- Habitat types: 2.82 sq. miles of sand/mud, 1.60 sq. mile rock

THINGS TO DO



Spend the day at one of Dana Point's beautiful beaches.



Swim or snorkel to see other marine species that call Dana Point's kelp forests home!



Explore the tidepools that form in the rocky intertidal at low tide. Learn more about the best time to visit tide pools on page 22.

RULES AND REGULATIONS



All non-consumptive activities are allowed including swimming, boating, surfing, and paddling.



Recreational take of fin-fish by hook-and-line, spearfishing, and take of spiny lobster and sea urchin is allowed.

PARKING AND ACCESS

Dana Point Harbor - FREE

(24000-24198 Dana Point Harbor Dr, Dana Point, CA 92629)

Salt Creek - Hourly rate

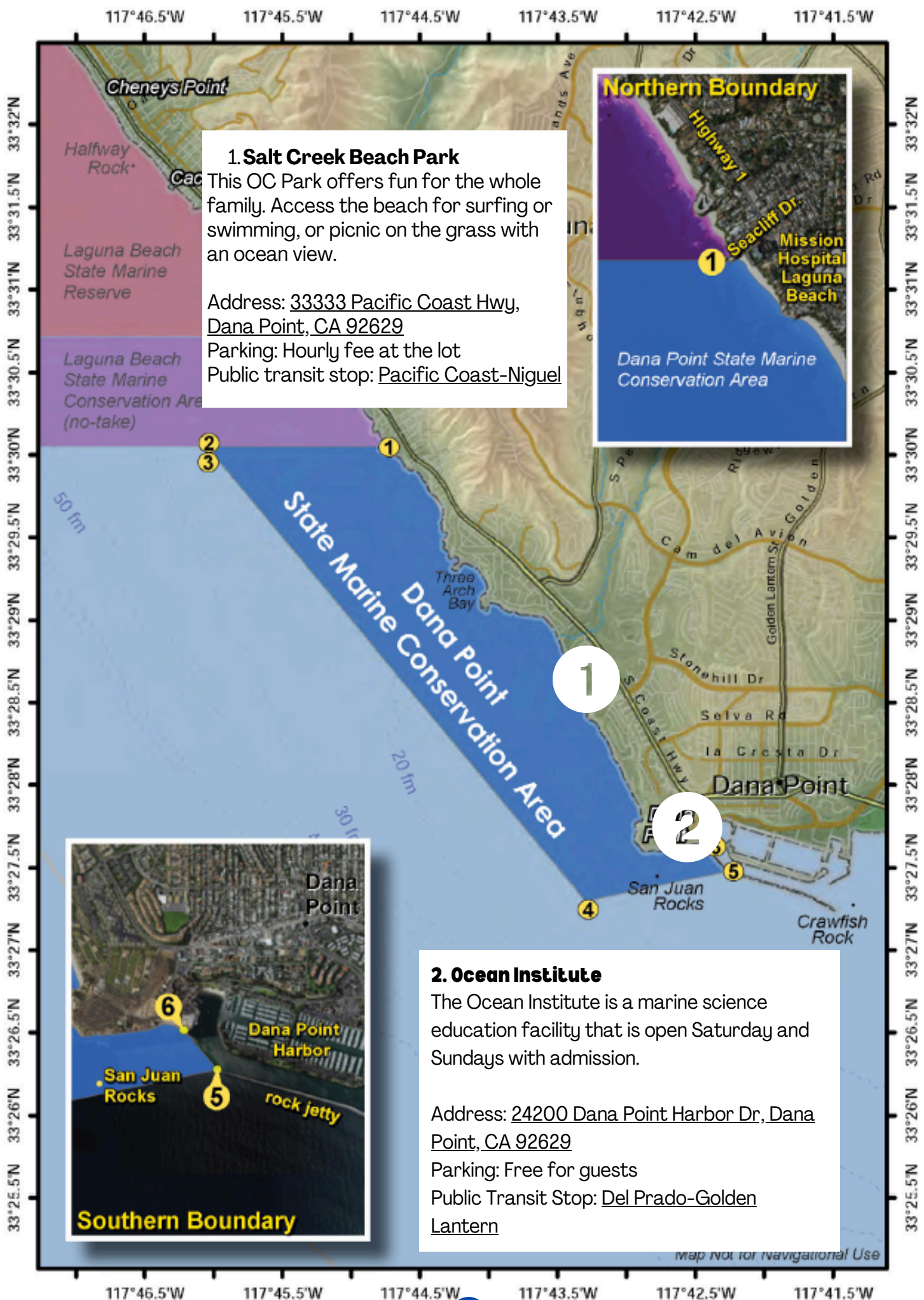
(71 Ritz Cove Dr, Dana Point, CA 92629)

Strands Beach - FREE

(Pacific Coast Hwy & Selva Road, Dana Point, CA 92629)



The take of living marine resources from the tide pools is not permitted.



1. Salt Creek Beach Park

This OC Park offers fun for the whole family. Access the beach for surfing or swimming, or picnic on the grass with an ocean view.

Address: 33333 Pacific Coast Hwy, Dana Point, CA 92629

Parking: Hourly fee at the lot

Public transit stop: Pacific Coast-Niguel

2. Ocean Institute

The Ocean Institute is a marine science education facility that is open Saturday and Sundays with admission.

Address: 24200 Dana Point Harbor Dr, Dana Point, CA 92629

Parking: Free for guests

Public Transit Stop: Del Prado-Golden Lantern

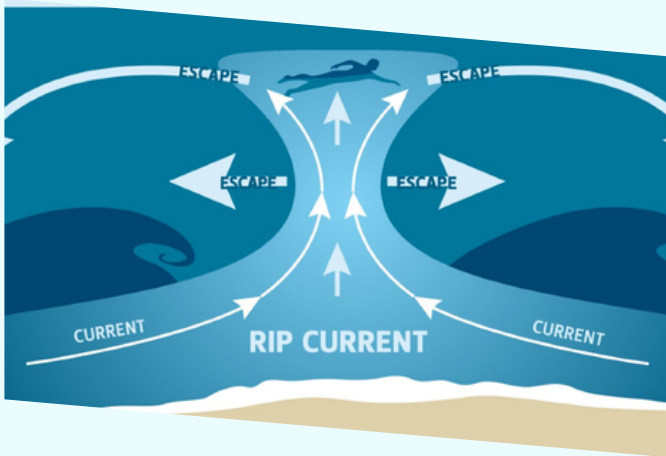
SAFETY FIRST

HOW TO KEEP YOURSELF, OTHERS, AND WILDLIFE SAFE

Whether you are in the ocean, on the beach/rocks, or on the trails, staying safe outdoors should always be a priority. In case of an emergency, alert the nearest lifeguard, or .

In the ocean,

- **Rip Currents** - These powerful channels of water flowing from shore to deeper water can be dangerous for swimmers. If you get caught, stay calm, swim parallel to the shore, and signal for help.



- **Sting Rays** - These adorable skates live on the seafloor and have a barbed spine on their tails to protect themselves from predators. When walking in the shallow ocean, do the “stingray shuffle” by shuffling your feet in the sand to disturb the sand and alert nearby rays to your presence.

On the beach or rocks,

- **Incoming waves** - Ocean waves come in sets with lulls in between. Stay alert to oncoming waves by never turning your back to the ocean and/or using a buddy system!

More Best Practices

- **Avoid dehydration and heat stress** - Especially in the summer, Orange County can get extremely hot. Be sure to bring ample water, avoid strenuous activity in peak heat, seek shade when possible, and wear appropriate attire.
- **Protect your skin** - Long-term exposure to sun can cause damage to your skin. Protect your skin by wearing long sleeves or pants, or using ocean-safe sunscreen!

- **Rising tides** - Exploring our beaches at low tide can uncover unique formations and wildlife. Stay aware of when the tide will be rising by checking a tide chart (see page 22) and ensure your exit remains accessible.

On the trails,

- **Snakes** - The same trails we enjoy hiking are home to a variety of snake species, including a few venomous species. If you encounter a snake, stay calm, keep your distance, and wait for the snake to move away. Snakes can feel vibrations in the ground and will likely slither away if they feel you coming!
- **Poison Oak** - Learn to identify this common plant (pictured below) that can cause uncomfortable rashes if your skin comes in contact with its oils. Remember the rule: leaves of three, leave it be!



GET INVOLVED

Check out these other organizations for ways to get involved in local conservation efforts!

Bolsa Chica Basin & Bolsa Bay SMCA

Bolsa Chica Conservancy connects people to wetland science, coastal ecology, and sustainability through community education and restoration programs. Join in on habitat restoration during their public service days, or become a long term volunteer to lead tours or host the interpretive center.

<https://bolsachica.org/>

Amigos de Bolsa Chica protects Bolsa Chica through education and advocacy. Volunteer for habitat restoration programs, become a reserve watch volunteer, a water quality monitor, and more!

<https://www.amigosdebolsachica.org/>

Bolsa Chica Land Trust protects Bolsa Chica through restoration, education, and research. Volunteer for habitat restoration programs, outreach events, or train to become a docent.

<https://bclandtrust.org/>

Upper Newport Bay SMCA

Newport Bay Conservancy works to protect and preserve the Upper Newport Bay. Take a tour of the bay on land or by kayak, join a habitat restoration event, or sign-up to be a long-term volunteer.

<https://newportbay.org>

Back Bay Science Center educates the public and students on the importance of the Upper Newport Bay. Join the CA Dept of Fish & Wildlife for monthly Marine Life Inventories or visit the facility for Community Days on Sundays.

<https://www.backbaysciencecenter.org>

Project Grow combines restoration with education to improve the health of terrestrial habitats surrounding the MPA. Join them for habitat restoration events on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

<https://www.projectgrowca.org>

Crystal Cove SMCA

Crystal Cove Conservancy works to protect Crystal Cove's coastline and backcountry through conservation, restoration, and education. Visit their website to find public programs and other ways to get involved!

<https://crystalcove.org/>

Laguna Beach SMR & SMCA

Laguna Ocean Foundation works to protect Laguna's ecosystems through science, education, and community involvement. Help protect Laguna's sensitive tide pools by volunteering as a docent!

<http://lagunaoceanfoundation.org>

Laguna Bluebelt Coalition consists of community members and organizations that work to protect Lagunas marine life and biodiversity. Join their meetings on the 2nd Thursdays of each month to get involved.

<https://www.lagunabluebelt.com/>

Dana Point SMCA

Ocean Institute is a non-profit that educates visitors on marine science and maritime history. The Institute hosts general admission to their learning center, whale and marine life tours, and tall ship excursions. Visit their website for tickets and more information.

<https://oceaninstitute.org/>

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I know if I am in a Marine Protected Area?

If you are on land, you will know you're in a Marine Protected Area when you see the "Harry the crab" sign (pictured to the right) when you are entering the beach. If you are offshore on a boat, confirm whether you are inside or outside of a MPA's boundaries by checking GPS coordinates.

Are dogs allowed in MPAs?

Whether or not dogs are allowed will vary depending on the beach and/or city:

- **Newport Beach:** Dogs are allowed on-leash year-round before 10:00 AM and after 4:30 PM.
- **Crystal Cove:** Dogs are not allowed on the beach at any time.
- **Laguna Beach:** Dogs are allowed on-leash except only before 9:00 AM and after 6:00 PM from June 15th to September 10th.
- **Dana Point:** Dogs are not permitted on certain beaches (e.g. Salt Creek); check the rules before you go!

When is a good time to go to the tide pools?

Visiting tide pools is best at low tide when as much of the rocky intertidal zone is exposed as possible. To find out when low tide is, visit [NOAA's Tide Predictions](#) calendar. We recommend visiting when the tide is *at least* 1 ft or below - the lower the better!



What should I do if I see someone committing an MPA violation?

If you think you see someone committing an MPA violation, you can call and report the instance to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Dial 1-888-334-CALTIP to call, or report the violation via text at 847411. You can also report the violation to the relevant City's Marine Safety Officers.

- **Newport Beach:** (949) 644-3681
- **Laguna Beach:** (949) 497-0310
- **Dana Point:** (949) 248-3527

Additional Resources

See resources below for more information on Orange County's Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and statewide MPA management.

1. [California Department of Fish and Wildlife Marine Protected Areas \(MPAs\)](#)
2. [California MPA Flyers](#)
3. [Bolsa Bay State Marine Conservation Area](#)
4. [Bolsa Chica Basin Marine Conversation Area](#)
5. [Upper Newport Bay State Marine Conservation Area](#)
6. [Crystal Cove State Marine Conservation Area](#)
7. [Laguna Beach State Marine Reserve](#)
8. [Laguna Beach State Marine Conservation Area](#)
9. [Dana Point State Marine Conservation Area](#)
10. [California Department of Fish & Wildlife - South Coast Region](#)
11. [Fishing Directory](#)
12. [Sport Fishing Licenses and Report Cards](#)
13. [Fishing and Hunting Regulations](#)
14. [California's MPA Decadal Management Review](#)
15. [City of Newport Beach Natural Resources](#)
16. [City of Laguna Beach Ocean Wildlife and Ecology](#)
17. [City of Dana Point Natural Resources](#)

