A Special Place

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary boasts picture-postcard scenery nearly everywhere you look—pockets of sunlit blue contrast with the cold, dark waters surrounding it. Thriving in the nutrient-rich cold waters are beds of kelp and waves crashing wildly on a rocky shore. It is home to a rich array of marine life and diverse habitats. The sanctuary stretches along one quarter of the central California coast and is deeper than the Grand Canyon at its deepest point.

Variety of Habitats

Encompassing more than 5,300 square miles, Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary is one of the richest, most diverse marine environments in the world. Wave-swept beaches, lush kelp forests, active tide pools and one of the deepest underwater canyons in North America are just a few of the habitats found within the sanctuary. Each of these vastly different environments teem with life, from tiny plankton to the largest animal that has ever lived on Earth—the blue whale.

Things To Do:

For those who love nature and outdoor activities, the sanctuary offers exciting adventures for everyone. Whether it’s watching whales, paddling among kelp forests or exploring tide pools, there is no more spectacular place to enjoy the ocean and outdoors.

Sanctuary Visitor Centers

Stop by one of our free interpretive centers to enjoy exciting, interactive exhibits. Knowledgeable volunteers are on-hand to answer your questions and enhance your understanding of the sanctuary.

Sanctuary Exploration Center, Santa Cruz

Located at William Randolph Hearst Memorial State Beach on beautiful San Simeon Bay, the center celebrates the connection between land and sea, offering interactive displays and programs that highlight the cultural and natural history of the region.

Sanctuary Visitor Centers

Coastal Discovery Center, San Simeon

Located at William Randolph Hearst Memorial State Beach on beautiful San Simeon Bay, the center celebrates the connection between land and sea, offering interactive displays and programs that highlight the cultural and natural history of the region.

Sandy Beaches

Stunning beaches hardest a world of life that is rarely out of sight. Worms, snails, crabs, snails and clams live beneath the sand. Rocks and shells provide a tasty meal.

Seafloors

Beyond the waves, much of the seabed is covered with sand or mud flats, and sand dollars, tubeworms, anemones, crabs, snails, and eels live here. Worms, sand eels, and skates enjoy this habitat.

Lush Kelp Forests

Supporting a rich tapestry of life, including fish, snails, crabs, squids, octopuses, starfish, anemones, sea stars and kelp, kelp can grow up to 10 feet a day, and cover 100 feet all the way across the floor.

Open Water

White droplets water away from the cool, which spread cold-water nutrients from below. This process fuels the growth of phytoplankton, the base of the sanctuary’s abundant food web.

Deep Canyons

The largely unexplored submarine canyons, some descending more than two miles, harbor a variety of animals and plants that are adapted to a life of darkness.

Tranquil Wetlands

Elkhorn Slough, part of the sanctuary and one of California’s last great coastal estuaries, is an important nesting, feeding and breeding area for a huge variety of species.

Tide Pools

Rocky shores are ideal environments for small creatures. When the tides ebbs, tide pools form to become shallow basins for the diverse range of animals like seashells, sea stars, small fish, anemones and more.

SCUBA Diving

Abundant sea life and kelp forests make Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary one of the world’s greatest destinations for SCUBA diving.

Fishing

Whether from shore, a public pier or charter fishing boat, the sanctuary offers lots of fishing opportunities. Please follow regulations, and respect other divers where necessary.

Boating

Whether from a motor, sail, deep sea fishing, glass bottom, whale watching or whale watching boat, you are almost guaranteed to have a wonderful experience on the sanctuary.

Paddle Sports

Canoeing, kayaking and paddleboarding provide a unique, interactive experience with nature. Many local businesses provide rentals, lessons and group tours.

Surfing

Monterey Bay is a popular year-round surfing destination for beginners and veterans alike. Always be prepared of submersion’s rocks and powerful waves.

Whale Watching

Monterey Bay is the marine equivalent of going on an African safari. The diversity in the sanctuary is amazing. Look for more than 20 species of whales, dolphins and sea lions.

Whale Watching

Looking for an exciting ocean adventure? Go no further than the sanctuary’s coastal waters. Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary is home to an amazing amount of diverse creatures.

Wildlife Viewing

One of the world’s great basking and surfing areas is the sanctuary’s central coast. Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary is home to an amazing amount of diverse creatures.

Sightseeing

Enjoy breathtaking views of the Pacific Ocean, whale watching, whale watching, whale watching, whale watching and more. Contact us to learn about the great opportunities.

MontereyBay.NOAA.gov
Wildlife Viewing

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary is one of our nation’s most spectacular marine protected areas, and offers some of the best year-round wildlife viewing in the world! This “Gateway of the Sea,” stretches along the central California coast from San Francisco to Cambria and includes pristine beaches, jetty-like tide pools, lush kelp beds, deep canyons and an offshore seaward swimming area—From tiny shrimp to giant blue whales.

Whales and Dolphins
• Outstanding place to see whales
• 27 birds seen in the sanctuary
• Some seen seasonally, some year-round
• Many travel between Arctic and Baja, CA

Sea Birds
• Use rocks to open and eat shellfish
• Wing to help prevent drifting away
• Groom to keep their fur waterproof
• Many bring on wetlands & beaches
• Some only come to shore to breed

Sea Otters
• One of the last bachelor’s sites in U.S.
• Over 180 species of marine mammals
• Many bring on wetlands & beaches
• Some only come to shore to breed

Harbor Seals
• Most of their time is spent offshore
• Dead and not visible
• Engage in bloody fights for turf and females
• Dead seen in Año Nuevo & Piedras Blancas

Elephant Seals
• Intelligent, playful and live a rocky bark
• Feeding together on rocks and drift
• Agile underwater, can keep out of water

Sea Lions
• Shy and curious
• Rest on offshore rocks
• Hunt offshore for fishes and squid

Watch out for:
• Chumming for great white sharks
• Rest on offshore rocks
• Shy and curious

Fun Facts

Lone Cypress
• Monterey Cypress naturally grows no place on Earth as shown by the Lone Cypress
• One of the most photographed trees in the world

Lighthouse Tour
• Point Pinos, Point Montara, Point Bonita, San Carlos
• Adjacent to the sanctuary is one of the world’s highest
• One is located on Cannery Row

Bixby Bridge
• A colossal structure along the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary—It is both a local and tourist favorite.

America’s Underwater Treasures

The Office of National Marine Sanctuaries serves as the trustee for a network of underwater parks encompassing more than 170,000 square miles of marine and Coastal National Marine Sanctuaries. For more information on the National Marine Sanctuaries, visit http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov

How Deep?
The sanctuary is 5,100 square miles, one and a half times the size of the largest national park in the continental United States. The average depth of Monterey Bay is 1,000 feet, with the deepest point being 10,575 feet. (Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument, is 16,700 feet in depth. 1,000 feet).