THE BEACH BUZZ

OC'S BEST BEACHES FROM SAN CLEMENTE TO HUNTINGTON

By Jane Thomas

Newport's shoreline in summer.

Summer has officially arrived, and what better way to spend the day than at the beach! Whether you desire a family-friendly shoreline, something a bit more secluded or a spot that's bustling with activity beyond swimming, you'll find just what you're looking for in Orange County. This area is home to truly the best beaches from San Clemente to Huntington, and here's a look at some of the top spots from South to North.

SAN CLEMENTE

San Clemente Pier—Convenient, everyday beach
This is an authentic Orange County beach community with easy beach access, many nearby amenities like shopping and restaurants, grassy knolls and picnic benches, an adjacent Amtrak station and classic old downtown San Clemente just steps off the stand.
Location: From PCH, follow Del Mar to the pier
Parking: Metered Lot

Poche—Perfect for relaxing
Poche, or "pocket" accurately describes this northernmost section of beach in San Clemente where parking is scant and the beach is small. Your best bet is to park across the street in the business lot.
Location: 2798 N. El Camino Real, San Clemente
Parking: Minimal; best bet is to park across the street

DANA POINT

Capo Beach—Fantastic fun!
This beach possesses a great sandy shoreline for volleyball and has basketball courts as well. During the summer months, a concession stand offers fishing gear rentals, food and drinks and beach supplies. Public restrooms, showers and fire rings are also available for use.
Location: 34551 Puerto Place, Dana Point
Parking: Metered lot

Doheny Beach—Rich in history and ideal for camping
One of summer's hot spots, Doheny Beach is perfect for all day beach-going. Large grassy pockets with picnic tables are perfect for relaxing, plus there are plenty of shower and restroom facilities available.
Location: 25300 Dana Point Harbor Dr., Dana Point
Parking: $15 per car per day

LAGUNA NIGUEL

Salt Creek—Boogy boarders and skimmers rule
Here a small, offshore reef creates some of the best swells along the entire coastline, and visitors enjoy not only surfing but also swimming and body surfing in the hearty waves. Because the area is populated with so many boarders, skimmers and surfers, there are designated spots for swimming only.
Location: 33333 Pacific Coast Hwy., Laguna Niguel
Parking: Metered Lot
Information: ocparks.com

LAGUNA BEACH

Aliso Creek—Perfect for family day
This is a great spot for families, the waves are good for skim boarding and also swimming, there are fire pits available for day long picnics and barbeques and the whole vibe is very family-oriented. Another bonus—no parking hassles or long walks required for this beach. There is a metered parking lot with ample spaces that put you within steps of the shore.
Location: 31131 S. Pacific Coast Hwy. Laguna Beach
Parking: Metered Lot
Information: 949.923.2280

1,000 Steps—Beautiful and Serene
While you really only need to tackle 284 steps to reach the shoreline, on the way back up it surely feels like 1,000. Probably not the ideal spot for kids unless they enjoy long, steep walks, this beach is a bit quieter and offers the ambiance of seclusion, which can be hard to find in Orange County especially during the summer months.
Location: 9th Street and Pacific Coast Hwy., South Laguna
Parking: Surrounding streets

The Laguna South Strip—Where you'll find the locals
South of Main Beach is a long stretch of coast that is distinguished in name by the surrounding streets. Heading north to south you will find Sleepy Hollow, Cleo, Thalia, Anita, Oak, Brooks, Cress, Mountain, Woods Cove and Moss Street. While the beach you land on will most likely be determined by where you find parking, each spot does have something unique to offer. These beaches offer a more authentic, local experience—you won't find bathrooms, showers or snack bars at any of these spots.
Location: Pacific Coast Hwy. and respective cross streets
Parking: Metered street parking, $1/hour with 2-hour maximum

Main Beach—A one-stop shop
Main Beach has it all: culture, entertainment, activities such as volleyball and basketball, a boardwalk for strolling, benches for gathering and a large play structure for kids who want to burn off some energy. Another bonus—you have access to clean and ample facilities, and the lifeguard station is large and located in the middle of the shoreline, making it easy to look for the green or red flag.
Location: Pacific Coast Hwy. and Broadway
Parking: Metered Street Parking

Crescent Bay—Teens gravitate here
This beach is a bit hidden and not on the tourist radar, and over the years it has been a popular spot for teens. However, the beach is secluded and pretty and offers a great spot to spend the day. Beach access is available from two locations. The first is a steep pathway on the corner of Fairview St. and Cliff Drive; the other option is a stairway at the Crescent Bay sign. This will lead you straight to the center of the beach and allows for better access if you plan on diving on the east side of Crescent Bay.
Location: Barranco and Fairview St., Laguna Beach
Parking: Free street parking

NEWPORT BEACH

Crystal Cove State Park—A Gem along the coast
A true treasure in Orange County, Crystal Cove State Park is perfect for an all-day family outing. The 3.2 miles of beach is popular with surfers and swimmers, and there are plenty of tide pools, rocky jetties and sandy coves waiting to be discovered. The park staff will guide visitors to the best entry and exit points and can also suggest the greatest viewing areas.
Location: 8471 Pacific Coast Hwy., Laguna Beach
Parking: Lot-$15 per vehicle

Corona del Mar—Best for everything beach
Perfect for families, teen-agers or empty nesters, this beach has it all, including a long and ample shoreline, plenty of paved walking spots and miraculous views from the cliffs, deemed as "Inspiration Point," up above.
Location: Ocean Blvd. and Iris Ave., Corona del Mar
Parking: Metered Lot

Newport Pier—The Ultimate OC Beach
Here you'll find plenty to do from bike paths to fishing on the pier to playgrounds or sandcastle building. Newport Pier and the surrounding streets also offer a variety of pubs and restaurants to grab a bite as well as boutiques to shop. This beach truly embodies the Orange County lifestyle and features the best people-watching, sunbathing, dining and shopping for locals and tourists alike.
Location: Off Balboa Blvd. at McFadden Pl. and Ocean Front St.
Parking: Metered Lot

HUNTINGTON BEACH

Dog Beach—Fido friendly every day!
Orange County's only dog beach is located near the bluffs north of Huntington City Beach. The one-mile strip offers a safe haven for dog lovers and their four-legged best friends. There are only two rules: Maintain control over your dog and clean up after your pet.
Location: Seapoint St. on the North and 21st St. on the South
Parking: Metered Lot

Four-legged fun at Dog Beach.