

Free Wintertime Fun for Travelers in Santa Cruz County

Budget-minded travelers have a plethora of options this fall and winter season

Santa Cruz County delivers added value this winter, when mild temperatures, fewer crowds and lower hotel rates, help make family travel more affordable. This season, there are plenty of free activities and events to indulge in that won't cost a penny. Santa Cruz County may be known as a Nuclear-Free and Hate-Free Zone, but that's not all that's free! Listed below are the top 12 free things to do and see in Santa Cruz County this winter:



1 The Celebration Continues!
The legendary *Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk* is always admission-free. Enjoy a free self-guided walking tour of this historic seaside gem or hit the adjacent Neptune's Kingdom, where the latest arcade games and classics from the past join a two-story miniature golf course with robotics, fiber optics, and special effects plus a restaurant and game areas.

2 Surfin' Santa Returns to California's Oldest Seaside Resort Town: Before appearing in countless parades and department stores, Santa rides onto Capitola Beach on Saturday, November 26th for free visits with families. Accompanied by wetsuited "reindeer", *Surfin' Santa* then settles into a beach chair to greet children and families with candy canes and cheer.

3 Year-Round Events: Are you too impatient to stand during an hours-long parade? Check us out on-line and find out more about "*The Missing Arm of William Waddell*" event at Big

Basin Redwoods State Park in October. Or check out the admission-free *Scotts Valley Christmas Tree Lighting Festival* in December. The Santa Cruz County Conference & Visitors Council is helping visitors find free, fantastic, and always fun events and festivals to enjoy, all with the click of a mouse. In fact, there are over 120 free year-round events in Santa Cruz County hosted annually on www.santacruzcounty.travel!

4 Tour the Historic and Eclectic: A variety of free walking tours bring to life the history of *Capitola*, the logging days of *Boulder Creek*, the Victorian homes of *Watsonville*, the outdoor art and architecture of *Santa Cruz* and more. Tour brochures are available at the Santa Cruz County Conference and Visitors Council.

5 Wildlife Watching: Free weekly guided nature walks of the *Wetlands of Watsonville* are an up-close way to experience the area's bird population. The Santa Cruz County Con-

ference and Visitors Council's free official *Birding and Wildlife Kit* is a great way to get your bearings on where to go and what to look for. Free docent-led tours of the Monarch butterfly grove at *Natural Bridges State Park* are offered through March, and the cliffs above Davenport provide one of the best spots to watch the California Gray Whale migration from December through early spring.

6 Discover Museums: Learn about Santa Cruz surfing legends, the farming methods of a bygone era, and more at admission-free museums such as the *Santa Cruz Surfing Museum, Agricultural History Project, San*



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Lorenzo Valley Historical Museum, Capitola Museum, and the Aptos History Museum. The *Seymour Center at Long Marine Lab* is open Tuesday-Saturday, 10 AM to 5 PM and Sunday, noon to 5 PM, and the *Museum of Art & History at the McPherson Center* is admission-free the first Friday of every month. And the *California Agricultural Workers' History Center at the Watsonville Public Library* is a free exhibit that chronicles the history of agricultural laborers in the area and the products they harvest.

7 Savor Fine Art: Peruse galleries exhibiting rare glass artwork, the work of local watercolor painters and more. The *Pajaro Valley Arts Council, Santa Cruz Art League, and Santa Cruz Mountains Art Center* are just some of the free galleries you'll find around town.



8 Attention, Outdoor Enthusiasts: A multitude of free outdoor adventure opportunities await. Capture the surfing spirit and watch surfers at *Steamer Lane*, or check out *Pleasure Point*, where experienced wave riders challenge themselves at "The Hook".



Santa Cruz County's state parks offer epic cycling opportunities. Families will enjoy scenic rides along *East Cliff* and *West Cliff Drives* in Santa Cruz. And the trails at *U.C. Santa Cruz* are popular with all riders and skill levels. The 18-hole *Pinto Lake Championship Disc Golf Course* in Watsonville offers a free way to try out another type of golf – just bring a Frisbee® and you're set!

9 Hike Amid Towering Redwoods: A number of Santa Cruz County parks with great hiking trails are admission-free, including *DeLaveaga Park, Quail Hollow Ranch* and others. State parks like *Big Basin Redwoods State*

Park or *Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park* only charge a parking fee.

10 Enjoy the Beach: With 29 miles of coastline and mild off-season temperatures, finding an admission-free beach for a romantic stroll or watching a sunset is easy. Favorites include *Main Beach, Capitola Beach, Rio Del Mar Beach, Manresa, Twin Lakes Beach* and *Seabright Beach*.



11 People Watch and Window Shop: Stroll *Down-town Santa Cruz*, where pedestrian-friendly, tree-lined streets boast unique shops and sidewalk performers. Or breathe in the Mediterranean essence of quaint *Capitola Village*.

12 Explore Magical Gardens: Wander through bamboo gardens, smell the scents of rare roses, and see exotic plants from around the world. *Bamboo Giant Nursery, Roses of Yesterday and Today, Sierra Azul Nursery* and many other gardens are free to explore. The *UCSC Arboretum* offers free admission the first Tuesday of each month.

In addition, visitors who choose to travel mid-week can save money on lower hotel rates. And, the Santa Cruz County Conference & Visitors Council is making it easier than ever to plan a vacation on-line with packages and specials on www.santacruzcounty.travel. Special activities like surfing, kayaking, visiting the *Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk* or *Roaring Camp Railroads* can all be arranged on-line.

The year-round visitor center at *303 Water Street, #100 in Santa Cruz* can provide *Official Santa Cruz County Traveler's Guides, Bicycle Adventure Kits, Birding and Wildlife Viewing Kits*, and other free information on a variety of topics to make this season's vacation a memorable experience.



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