

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 fall and winter:



1 The Celebration Continues!
The century-old *Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk* is always admission-free. Enjoy a self-guided free 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 his board onto Capitola Beach on November 28th at noon 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 Sample Fine Wine: Some of the wineries in the Santa Cruz Mountains offer free



wine tasting. Chart your next wine tasting adventure with free maps and guides from the Santa Cruz County Visitors Council.

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 of *Santa Cruz* and more. Tour brochures are available at the Santa Cruz County Conference and Visitors Council.

5 Wildlife Watching: 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 Conference and Visitors Council's free new 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 October 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.

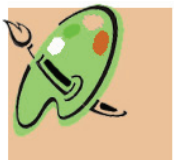
6 Discover Museums: Learn about Santa Cruz surfing legends, the farming methods of a bygone era, and more at admission-free museums such as the *Santa Cruz Surfing Museum*, *Agricultural History Project*, *San Lorenzo Valley Historical Museum*, *Capitola Museum*, and the *Aptos History Museum*. *The Seymour Center at Long Marine Lab* offers free admission on the first Tuesday of each month, 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 Watson-*



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ville Public Library is a brand new free exhibit that chronicles the history of agricultural laborers in the area and the products they harvest.

7 Savor Fine Art: Peruse galleries exhibiting eclectic sculpture, the work of local watercolor painters and more. *The*



Pajaro Valley Arts Council, Santa Cruz Art League, and Santa Cruz Mountain Arts Center are

just some of the free galleries you'll find around town.

8 Attention, sports fans: For exhilarating sports action, the Santa Cruz Triathlon September 20th, Mermaid Triathlon September 27th, and Big Kahuna Triathlon October 25 all lure both participants and fans, complete with incredible ocean views. Surf aficionados can relax on a bluff side bench and watch as talented tube riders shoot the curl at the O'Neill Cold Water Classic November 2 – 8 in Pleasure Point. And wintertime is the season for Maverick's, where big-wave



surfers brave the cold and test their mettle at this world-renown, invitation-only surf contest.

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 for parking.

10 Enjoy the Beach: With 29 miles of coastline, finding an *admission-free beach* for playing in the surf or lazing away on the sand 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 *Downtown 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 online.

The year-round visitor center at *1211 Ocean Street 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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