



Chasing Beauty

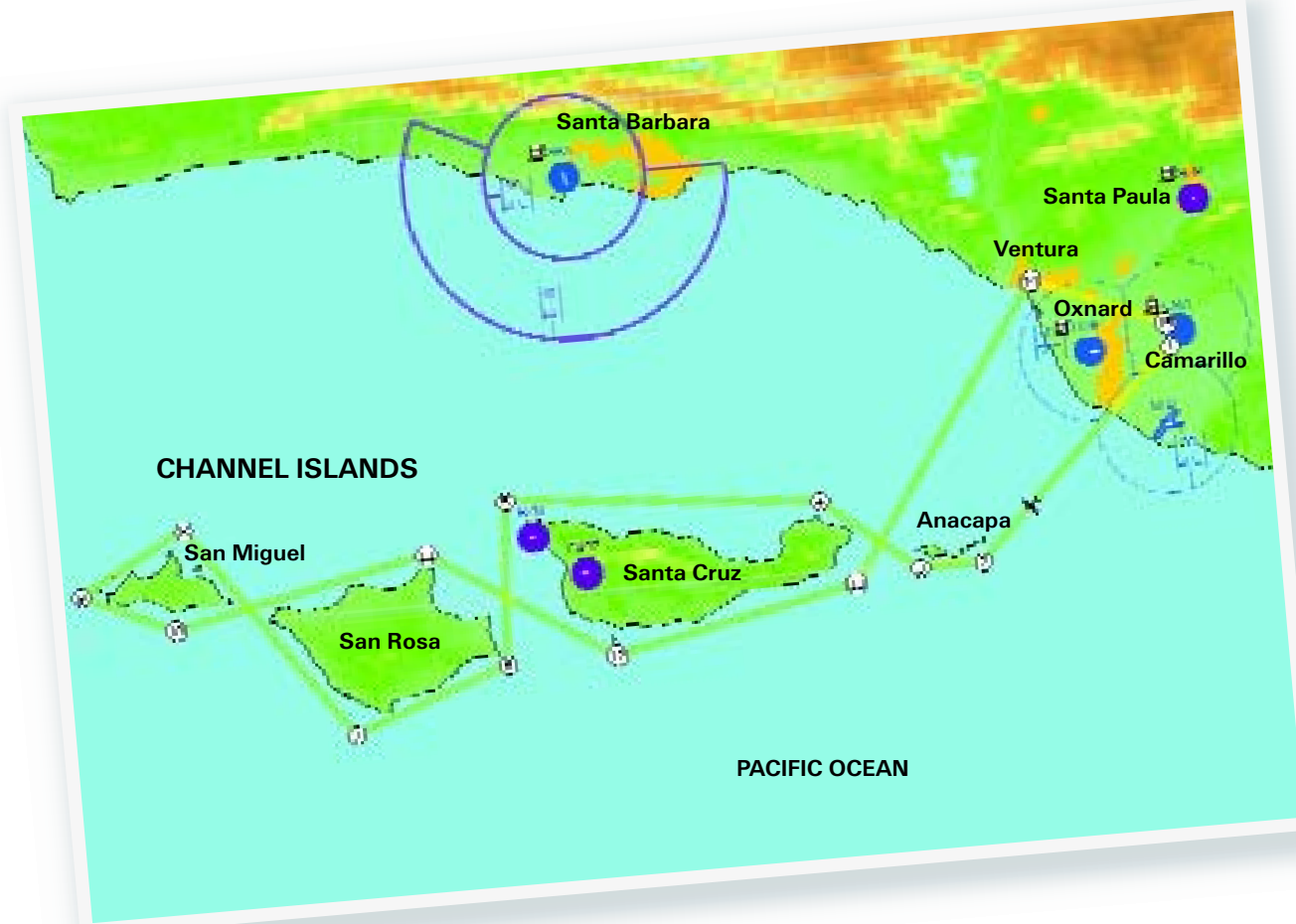
Soaring California's Mystical Channel Islands

Fourteen miles out to sea from California's "city of good fortune" – San Buenaventura to founder Fr. Junipero Serra, whose 1782 Spanish mission christened it; Ventura to the world today – five islands of an eight-isle chain broken off the coast 600,000 years ago shimmer in mysterious allure. So secretive. So pristine. So primitive.

The Channel Islands, lapped by the white-capped waters of the Pacific Ocean's Santa Barbara Channel, are one of the earth's most curious wonderworlds. Here, 2000 species of plants and animals – 145 of which are found nowhere else on the planet – live in blissful, isolated splendor – protected, now, under the islands' designation as a U.S. National Park. Here, tide pools, kelp forests, sea caves, beaches and waters that are a unique alchemy of the cold, nutrient-rich currents of northern California swirled with warmer, clearer streams on the



Paddling in waters among the most bio-diverse on earth; here, 27 species of whales and dolphins and six species of seals, sea lions (and the Southern sea otter) thrive (left); at right, a landing at stunning Santa Rosa island, where vast seagrass meadows are prime habitat for 195 bird species - as well as the diminutive island fox - and the hiking is always memorable; previous page, a view of the beautiful waters surrounding Santa Cruz (foreground) and Anacapa islands



Map provided by Voyager Flight Planning Software

run from Baja, blue whales, gray whales and orcas live; lobster, starfish and abalone thrive; sea lions and seals and sea birds breed. In other words, the Channel Islands are a majestic eco-system so special, so incredible, that a flight to visit can be considered a once-in-a-lifetime must.

Fuel-up, intrepid flyer. Head west or north or south to Ventura, CA, a classic California beach town where famous surf spots abound and Sunshine State's outdoor sports prevail. Wing-in to wonderful Camarillo Airport (CMA) Oxnard (OXR) and Santa Paula (SZP) are also options] and get ready to be rumbled right out of any mood that says there are, sigh, so few adventures left. Just wait. The Channel Islands - Anacapa, San Miguel, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz and Santa Rosa - will blow your blahs right out of the water with their absolutely stunning amazements.

As one of the least-visited of the country's national parks, the wind-swept, sea-defined Channel Islands are a relatively lonely business to visit. Lucky us. Their

distance out to sea is a 30-45-minute flight or 1-5-hour boat ride (depending on the island being visited), a distance that daunts the mobs from descending. This means your personal desire to hike the trail-rich hills or dive the phenomenal waters or kayak the remarkable sea caves, including Santa Cruz's Valdez Cave, the

largest and deepest in the world, will be honored by the islands in a manner that is simply thrilling. After all, how much more wonderful it is sans crowd to enjoy the 35,000 seals and sea lions that hobnob at San Miguel's Point Bennett. How much more moving it is in relative solitude to observe endangered brown peli-





The north shore of Santa Cruz island, or "Limuw" to the native Chumash, who believed it to be the island of their creation

cans and peregrine falcons nesting at Prince Island. And when it comes to exploring the islands' staggering array of archeological and historic sites – from the fossil remains of 13,000-year-old Arlington Woman to the 1923 wreck of the luxury liner *Cuba*...well, nothing says fun so much as lots of time and space and

quiet to take-in all the wonder. Of this, be assured: there is tons.

To orient, why not begin with an exploratory buzz out to and around the islands. Flying yourself the 14 miles there reveals from the air the lands that once upon a time before the last Ice Age were one – called by geologists

Santarosae – but since have individualized themselves (Anacapa and Santa Barbara by underwater volcanic activity). These islands have been home to, variously, long-vanished cultures and creatures like the 4-6-ft tall Pleistocene-era pygmy mammoth; the American Chumash Indians, who believed Santa

Cruz island was the site of their creation; sheep and cattle ranching *vaqueros*, or Mexican cowboys; and most recently, the U.S. Park Service, who shares stewardship of the land with the nonprofit Nature Conservancy, an organization that owns 90 percent of Santa Cruz island.

From the six nautical miles of marine

sanctuary surrounding each island to the impressive stands of Torrey pines, a species that has survived since the Pleistocene era, to a sense-stirring collection of grassy knolls, dramatic cliffs, canyons, streams and 2,400-ft peaks, these islands are a fly-over delight (as you adhere to National Park flight rules, of

course). As tempting it may be, there is no landing allowed on the Channel Islands – except by one designated service, Channel Islands Aviation. That's why your orientation flight best end with a return to CMA. Now, the more intense fun begins. Either let Channel Islands Aviation (flycia.com; 805-987-1678) fly you out to 53,000-mile



Channel Islands Overnight Delight: *Ventura*



While Channel Islands camping is fantastic, frequent is the flyer who prefers that come bedtime, the outdoors stay there. Happily, historic Ventura, with its stunning Spanish mission - San Buenaventura, the only U.S. mission with bells made of wood - and revitalized downtown has all the comforts and fun of overnights spent not in a tent.

Book a room at the beachfront Crown Plaza Ventura Beach (cpventura.com; 800-842-0800) and enjoy an oceanview room that is within walking distance of both the harbor boats out to the Islands and a delicious dinner at Jonathan's. Here, in Ventura's landmark Peirano Market

Building, you will find a full martini bar, extensive wine list, al fresco patio dining on savory Spanish tapas and other Mediterranean fare; there is world-class live jazz as well. (jonathansatpeiranos.com; 805-648-4853.) For delicious country French cuisine, there is the equally splendid 71 Palm, set in a beautiful, historic craftsman cottage (71palm.com; 805-653-7222).

In downtown Ventura, with its charming inns, B&Bs, antique shops, an Art Deco movie palace and more, chances are grand indeed you won't miss your overnight of camp stove and cot.

Santa Rosa island, or head to the Ventura harbor and hop aboard a boat operated by Island Packers (islandpackers.com; 805-642-7688). You may be deposited by plane at Santa Rosa's Becher's Bay or by boat at a harbor on any of the five islands - you decide. Either way, the Channel Islands here you come! Whether it is a half-day excursion for an enjoyable, ranger-led hike, or a camping overnight-or-more in one of the most pleasingly wild, wild places on earth, once you alight on the islands the sights and delights unfurl in a splendor of adventure.

Anacapa, for example, was to the Chumash the "island of deception," so-

The colorful rocks and lichen-covered walls of the islands' hundreds of sea caves entice kayakers to enjoy hours of joyful exploring (left); a transcendent environment of native life beckons





To see such life thriving on islands nicknamed the "American Galápagos" is certain to be a momentous moment in any flyer's life.

called for the mystical lightplay that makes its rugged cliffs seem enormous – or nonexistent – depending on the fog, and 40-ft high Arch Rock appear to change shape. For you, Anacapa's teeming tide pools at French's Cove are as mesmerizing as the colonies of sea lions and harbor seals that can be seen at Cathedral Cove. The wreck of the 1853 steamer *Winfield Scott* is a sight of great interest, too. On Santa Cruz, ancient Chumash village sites are as intriguing as the story is inspiring of how the eco-health of this

island before 1998 was seriously challenged by overgrazing feral sheep. But after a heroic conservation effort between 1998 and 2003, when the Nature Conservancy (kindly) relocated the sheep to an Oregon sanctuary, the island's ecology is on the mend, splendidly. This means native birds like the orange-crowned warbler and rufous-sided towhee, endemic varieties of plants like the spectacular yellow coreopsis, or "tree sunflower," and rare species like the island fox, the smallest fox in North America, are threatened no longer, at least here. To see such life thriving on islands nicknamed the "American Galápagos" is certain to be a momentous moment in any flyer's life. Also on Santa Cruz: the jaw-dropping Valdez, or "Painted" sea cave. Paddling beneath its 160-ft entrance ceiling curtained by waterfalls is, for any kayak fanatic, a never-forget event. Kayaks can be rented from Channel Island Kayak Center (cikayak.com; 805.984.5995), and Scuba Diving from Truth Aquatics (truthaquat-

Go To Information

Channel Islands Information
channel.islands.national-park.com
805.658.5730

Aircraft Transportation to the Islands
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Whether with snorkle (left) or scuba gear, adventurers can expect to meet a myriad of pinniped marvels, like this sea lion

The Way-Point Airport Café

At Camarillo

Coming in to The Way-Point Cafe and just you wait: you will be blissed with great breakfasts (all day) and barbecue tri-tip like nothing else. But then, this favorite aviator hang-out at the Camarillo Airport (CMA), is all about such surprising delights. Hopping at all hours (7-6 Mon-Sat, 8-6 Sun) with pilots who pull-up to the door in their airplanes, The Way-Point smokes up wonderful barbecue (in addition to breakfast, lunch and dinner daily) while filling its happy cafe with close to a hundred photos of airplanes that decorate its walls, many given to the Way-Point's owners, aviators Mike and Kathy, by their hungry guests. Sit outside on the popular patio and let the southern California sun work its wonders on your well-being while you watch the planes come and go. At The Way-Point, it is a mere 30-minute flight to the Channel Islands. So satisfy your appetite before your spectacular aerial flight of the islands. 805.388.2535



From the miniature, fully intact world of the tidal pool, to the beautiful and thriving kelp forest, the islands' unique eco-system is a splendor to explore, especially underwater

ics.com; 805.962.1127) with daytrips and multi-day adventures.

Not only are the bones of accident victim Arlington Woman, at age 13,000 the oldest human remains in the country, found on Santa Rosa island at a must-see archeological site, but the Lobo Canyon Trail is here as well. This, like all great Channel Islands hikes, passes all manner of excitement: Chumash villages, thriving tide pools, the habitats of scoter ducks, western gulls, rare xantus murrelets – in short, shore birds galore. San Miguel island, said arguably to be the wildest place left in the lower 48, is 9,500 acres of amazements. Disembark at Cuyler Harbor and all feels like “land before time” with the island's largest concentration of wildlife in the world (the sea lions and seals at Point Bennett) and the other-worldly caliche forest created of calcium carbonate; today you can see sand castings of the once-living forest. View this and the wreck of Cuba, whose \$2.5 million in gold and silver bullion (plus passengers) was rescued, and you will know you have had quite the Channel Islands day.

Then again, there is snorkeling the

What surrounds you is wonder, the beauty and splendor and magic of the natural world as so rarely encountered today.

fish-rich cove of lonely Santa Barbara island, the farthest out, or hiking its entire 640 acres with the sense you are stranded on an island with nothing, nothing, but ocean around you for miles. That is not accurate, of course. What surrounds you no matter where you stand – or hike or kayak or dive or snorkel or explore – on the Channel Islands is hardly nothingness at all. What surrounds you is wonder, the beauty and splendor and magic of the natural world as so rarely encountered today.

If you want to be chasing beauty, beauty that is true, this is the place.

For all Channel Islands details, click channel.islands.national-park.com, or call (805) 658-5730. ✕

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AIRPORT DATA

Elevation: 75'

Runways: 8/26 6,010'

Approaches: GPS, RNAV, VOR

ATIS / ASOS: 805.484.3351 805.384.9294

FIXED BASE OPERATIONS / FUEL / SERVICES

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Profile map viewed from the Channel Islands to Camarillo Airport looking north

Maps provided by Voyager Flight Planning Software