

outdoor activities

Top of the World



Take a Hike

Experience the great outdoors on these nearby hiking trails.

BY ASHLEY BURNETT

South Orange County is home to picturesque trails, with paths winding through gorgeous flora and providing some truly stunning ocean views. While a day spent at the spa or pool can be tempting, it really pays to get out in the great outdoors with fresh air and plenty of California sunshine.

Monarch Beach Resort is particularly spoiled by amazing hiking trails that are all located within a short distance of the property. “Monarch Beach Resort guests can just walk out any door and connect with some great walking paths,” says Gogi Dallis, Chef Concierge at Monarch Beach Resort. “Paths that incorporate parks, beaches, beautiful custom homes and offer views of ... Dana Point Harbor.”

To that end, we’ve rounded up the best trails in Laguna Beach, Dana Point and San Clemente, all of which will make taking a hike in the great outdoors well worth your while.

SALT CREEK TRAIL

This easy to moderate hike takes about two hours, winding its way from Dana Point’s Salt Creek Beach Park to Laguna Niguel’s Golden Lantern Street. With a mix of both scenic landscape views, as well as parts winding their way through two neighborhoods, this trail is ideal for those looking for a more relaxed stroll. Make sure to stop at the beach (perhaps with picnic basket or swimsuit in hand) and catch the view of Mission San Juan Capistrano when you reach Laguna Niguel.

LAGUNA COAST WILDERNESS PARK

Dallis recommends a visit to the Nix Nature Center in Laguna Coast Wilderness Park, which is open from 7 a.m. to sunset. The center serves as the gateway to visitors of the park and its 7,000 acres and plays host to award-winning interpretive exhibits, guided hikes and educational programs. Near the center are forty miles of trails, including



moderate hikes such as Serrano Ridge Trail and Little Sycamore Canyon, as well as difficult trails like Camarillo Canyon Trail.

A fun and easy trail is the one-mile The Lake Trail, which ends at Barbara’s Lake.

TOP OF THE WORLD

Laguna’s most well-known trail and scenic lookout, Top of the World, can be a moderate to difficult hike. You can either start from Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park, or make your way down from Alta Laguna Park. Despite the trail’s difficulty, the view from the top is spectacular, especially at sunset, and well worth the effort.



Crystal Cove State Park

Take a detour and check out Cave Rock, which has multiple shallow caves, or Dripping Cave, which, according to local lore, was once a hideout for bandits. Both eventually meet up with the main trail and are worth the extra distance.

CRYSTAL COVE STATE PARK

Crystal Cove State Park is one of Dallis’ recommendations thanks to the plethora of trails and views of Orange County’s natural land preserves. Located off Pacific Coast Highway, the park is open from 6 a.m. to sunset.

The Moro Canyon trail is a local favorite, a relatively moderate trail with views of the sea. For those confident in their hiking abilities, the trail that winds through Moro Ridge is very difficult thanks to the higher elevation and 5-mile distance. For families, a walk along the beautiful Crystal Cove State Beach or through the area’s Historic District—which is full of charming cottages built in the 1930s and 1940s—might be just the ticket.

DANA POINT HEADLANDS TRAIL

Dallis, a Dana Point local, points to her city as one of the best for hiking trails in South Orange County. “I never tire of the ocean and harbor views, the surprise whale-spotting and amazing homes in this area,” she says.

One standout trail in the area is the hike that starts out at the Dana Point Nature Interpretive Center, the Dana Point Headlands Trail, which takes roughly 20 minutes roundtrip. This easy, clearly marked trail provides stunning views of the ocean—you might even catch a glimpse of dolphins or whales if you head out at the right time. “This trail feeds all my needs and senses, provides a great workout, stress relief and a perspective that allows me to reset mentally and spiritually,” Dallis says. “I love it.” 🦋

HIT THE BEACH

For a hike that combines the best of California’s coastal views with some light exercise, try Monarch Beach Resort’s Beach Hike. The stroll starts near the property’s pool, then winds through the wide-open space of the Sea Terrace Community Park in Dana Point.

From there, the park connects with Salt Creek Beach



A tunnel goes under the highway, connecting the park to the beach.

Park via a tunnel under Pacific Coast Highway. At the beach, you can head north along a paved trail that allows for gorgeous vistas of the Pacific Ocean, as well as the coastline. Keep following the path, which will take you back under the highway, and you’ll find yourself on an urban trail system on the far side of the Monarch Beach Golf Links. After that, a bridge allows you to re-enter the resort near the clubhouse, refreshed from your walk and the sea air.

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