

Ocean Recreation in National Marine Sanctuaries



Photo: NOAA

A humpback breaches in Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary, one of the top whale watching destinations in the country.



Photo courtesy of Sanctuary Classic

Angler displays a permit she caught while fishing within Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary.



Photo: G.P. Schmahl, NOAA

Diverse corals, sponges and fish are among the marine life divers can see in Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary.

Who We Are

Our national marine sanctuaries are places of inspiration. Within their waters and along their shores, you can find vibrant tapestries of marine life, ancient mysteries of our past and thriving communities of men and women who have relied on the sea for generations. Marine sanctuaries are places where anyone can go to experience the power and beauty of the ocean and form lasting memories in spectacular natural settings, from the vibrant coral reefs of American Samoa, to the towering kelp forests of Monterey Bay, to the haunting shipwrecks of Thunder Bay and among the majestic whales of the Hawaiian Islands. These underwater treasures are sources of national pride, part of a system of 14 protected areas that cover more than 170,000 square miles of ocean and Great Lakes waters.

Recreational Opportunities

Each visit to America's special ocean places provides an opportunity for adventure, with the vast majority of sanctuary waters open to recreational activities like:

- Sportfishing
- Diving and snorkeling
- Surfing
- Paddling
- Whale watching and wildlife viewing
- Sailing and boating
- Birding

The National Marine Sanctuary System works closely with partners to protect the marine environment and foster marine stewardship while still providing for sustainable recreational activities. We encourage visitors to practice good ocean etiquette that safeguards our sanctuary resources.

Highlights of the ocean recreation opportunities awaiting visitors include:

Fishing: Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary's productive mangroves, seagrass meadows and coral reefs support a diverse array of fish species, making the Keys a world class fishing destination.

Other prime sanctuary fishing spots: Channel Islands, Flower Garden Banks, Gray's Reef, Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale, Monterey Bay, Olympic Coast, Stellwagen Bank and Thunder Bay.

Unique Diving: Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary caters to a wide variety of underwater explorers; from snorkelers to technical divers there is something for everyone. The cold, fresh waters have helped preserve the more than 200 shipwrecks within the sanctuary, so divers can harness their inner treasure hunter as they explore these underwater relics.

Other popular sanctuary diving spots: American Samoa, Channel Islands, Florida Keys, Flower Garden Banks, Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale, Monitor, Monterey Bay, Olympic Coast and Stellwagen Bank.

Ocean Etiquette Tips

Whether you are fishing in the sanctuary or are crossing sanctuary waters to reach another destination, boaters should remain vigilant to avoid striking reefs, fishing gear, other boaters and marine animals, such as whales and sea turtles. Take advantage of mooring buoys that reduce potential damage associated with attempts to anchor in sensitive areas.

Diving and snorkeling are great ways to get a first-hand look at sanctuary underwater treasures; however, remember to leave ocean resources and shipwrecks untouched for the next visitor to enjoy. As a rule of thumb: **Take only pictures; leave only bubbles!**

NATIONAL MARINE SANCTUARY SYSTEM



Paddle Sports: Kayaking in Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary is a great way to experience the refreshing sea breeze while also getting a workout. You can explore the numerous sea caves around the islands and spot brown pelicans and other seabirds soaring overhead. When the light is shining just right, you can glimpse at the underwater kelp forests or fish darting in the ocean below.

Whale Watching and Wildlife Viewing: Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary is frequented by many different species of marine mammals, but one of the regular visitors is the magnificent humpback whale. From May through October, the humpbacks are joined by other marine mammals as they feed on the abundant marine life that congregates at Stellwagen Bank. Numerous charter companies offer tours to see these amazing animals in their natural habitat.



Photo: NOAA

Big waves are part of the action in California's Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary.

From November to May, Hawaiian Islands Humpback Whale National Marine Sanctuary's namesake breeds in sanctuary waters. Visitors to the sanctuary can also help scientists track whale populations during the annual Ocean Count hosted every January, February and March.

Channel Islands, Cordell Bank, Greater Farallones and Monterey Bay national marine sanctuaries are all well known for the whales and other marine mammals that glide through their waters. Dolphins and porpoises are almost always found along the coast, while gray whales, humpbacks and blue whales come at varying times in the year. During the summer, visitors might see a blue whale. Up to 90 or even 100 feet in length, blue whales are some of the largest creatures to ever live on Earth! The diverse seabirds that come to feed or roost in nearby rookeries are popular among birders as well.



Photo: NOAA

Canoeing, kayaking and paddleboarding provide participants with a unique, interactive avenue to experience national marine sanctuaries.

Further north in Washington State, Olympic Coast National Marine Sanctuary is frequented by 29 species of marine mammals and scores of seabird species. Gray whales visit as part of the longest mammal migration on earth, and albatross visit here from as far as the mid-Pacific islands and atolls.

Visitors can check out the west coast's Whale Trail to find prime shore-based locations to view these majestic ocean giants and learn how to protect them.

Historic Sightseeing: *Monitor* National Marine Sanctuary is among the highlights of the Outer Banks Maritime Heritage Trail. Discover the shipwrecks, historic lighthouses and marine environment that define the maritime history of coastal North Carolina.



Photo: Tane Casserley, NOAA

A diver explores *Lucinda Van Valkenburg* shipwreck in Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary.