

Save the whale-watching dates!

By Angela Hill

Oakland Tribune

Posted: 12/29/2014 12:00:00 PM PST [0 Comments](#) | Updated: 2 days ago



Visitors enjoy live music as part of the annual Dana Point Festival of Whales, just south of Laguna Beach. The 2015 event runs March 7-8 & 14-15. (Dana Wharf)

California's coastline boasts a boatload of whale festivals this winter, all celebrating the annual migration of various species.

And while the events provide great opportunities to view whales -- especially California gray

whales on their 10,000-mile round trip between Baja calving lagoons and the Bering Sea -- they're also about awareness and learning how to protect these spectacular beings. Oh, and there's fun stuff, too -- music, chowder tastings, fun runs, hiking trails and more. And it's always a great excuse to visit beach towns from Mendocino to Southern California. Many area hotels offer whale-watching packages, so make it a whale of a mini vacation.

Whalefest Monterey



Spectacular views of whales migrating along the coast are part of the annual Dana Point Festival of Whales, March 7-8 & 13-14 just south of Laguna Beach. (Dana Wharf)

Monterey has trademarked the title of "Whale Watching Capital of the World," and with good reason. This past year alone, visitors have had the chance to view hundreds of whales, orcas, dolphins and pelicans as they feast on a krill and anchovy "buffet" in the Monterey Bay. The 2015 Whalefest on Old Fisherman's Wharf later this month will be the fifth annual event. The two-day fest highlights community conservation efforts and awareness of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary with lectures and documentaries on ocean and marine life, a 60-foot model of a gray whale that visitors can climb inside, live music and whale-watching tours, weather permitting.

Advertisement

Details: Jan. 24-25; www.montereywharf.com

Dana Point Festival of Whales

By March, the gray whales will be headed to Baja, and hundreds of the 35-ton leviathans will splash through the waves near the seaside community of Dana Point, just south of Laguna Beach between Los Angeles and San Diego. The 44th annual Dana Point event includes an opening day parade and family-friendly street fair, a Polynesian cultural event, sand sculpting, concerts on land and water and, of course, whale-watching excursions from Dana Point Headlands Conservation Park. Unique shops fill Mariners Village, and miles of trails rim the cliffs that overlook the 2,500-slip yacht harbor.

Details: March 7-8 and 14-15; festivalofwhales.com

Mendocino Whale Festival

The Mendocino coast offers four whale festivals each year. The first is at Mendocino Headlands State Park, a prime spot for whale viewing. The festival includes a wildlife art exhibit, plein-air artist displays and chowder tastings -- and a chance to explore the beautiful village of Mendocino itself.

Details: March 7-8; mendowhale.com

Point Cabrillo Light Station Whale Festival

This light station was established in 1909 on a point where the light would be the most visible to ships off the hazardous coast of Mendocino. This same attribute makes it a perfect spot from which to watch the annual migration of gray whales. The 1st Assistant Lightkeeper's House, now a museum, will be open for docent-led tours depicting the lonely lives of lightkeepers and their families in the 1930s. Weather permitting, docents also will lead walks to nearby Frolic Cove and relate the story of the clipper brig, Frolic, which wrecked off the cove in 1850. Details: March 7-8 and 21-22; mendowhale.com

Little River Whale Festival

A fundraiser to save the Spring Ranch barns, the annual Little River Whale Festival -- two miles south of the town of Mendocino -- offers food, wine and art tours, plus lodging specials.

Details: March 14-15; mendowhale.com

Fort Bragg Whale Festival

Enjoy chowder and microbrew tastings while visiting local shops and inns. Whale watch from Pomo Bluffs Park in Fort Bragg and sign up for the Whale Run and Walk, offering everything from a "kiddie race" and competitive walks to a 10K run.

Details: March 21-22; mendowhale.com

Whale of a Day

Rancho Palos Verdes in Los Angeles County holds its annual Whale of a Day celebration on the main grounds of the Point Vicente Interpretive Center. Along with face painting, exhibits, children's crafts, chalk drawing and story telling, tours of the Point Vicente Lighthouse will be available for ages 7 and older. The surrounding area offers walks along the California Coastal Trail, and visits to Abalone Cove Shoreline Park, which features two beaches, tide pools, bluff-top viewing areas and trails.

Details: April 4; www.losserenos.org/woad.htm