

PATHS TO *Peace*

Finding balance
through nature in
South Orange County



Las Ramblas Trail. Photo: Eric Heinz

When we choose to actively participate in the environmental beauty right outside our doorstep, we are embarking on a journey that encourages reflection and invites a sense of balance into our lives.

For some, “natural” and “balanced” may not be the first adjectives that come to mind when discussing getting into nature in Orange County. But it is ubiquitous and all around us and that tapping into it may hold the key to discovering our inner peace.

Considering the often overwhelming complexity of modern society, it is understandable that we often find ourselves yearning for a simplified experience to counter-balance our sophisticated lifestyles. Through this pattern, however, we often find ourselves ping-ponging back and forth between the familiarity of routine and the relief of escape.

“We truly live in the land of confluence,” stated Melanie Schlotterbeck of Friends of Harbors, Beaches, and Parks, “Here in South Orange County, simply by stepping

outside, you are inevitably stepping into a natural intersection. Like few other places on earth, we have it all. You can literally taste the salt air from the mountain tops.”

South Orange County’s natural spaces have many unique aspects that inspire an awakening to the natural balance that is important to prioritize in our lives, therefore relieving ourselves of the anxious quest to find it.

Cristianitos Trails San Clemente

The San Onofre State Park trail system is the most visited in California, but it is possibly also one of the most underutilized. By following the path of the San Mateo Watershed, the last completely untapped watershed in the state of California, pure sea-to-summit experiences are attainable in south San Clemente. From the San Onofre Bluffs and the world-renowned beaches of Trestles, a series of uninterrupted trails cross the Old Pacific



Caspers Wilderness Park. Photo: Danny Ritz

Highway and meander along the San Mateo Valley. Viewing the 9,000-year-old former site of the Acjachemen civilization of Panhe below as you walk along parallel to Cristianitos Road toward the campground at San Mateo State Park, you slowly turn due east along Camp Pendleton’s western border and look directly into the snow-capped peaks of the San Jacinto Mountains. Here, with multiple trails of varying intensity, one can take in the plethora of native plant species before enjoying the jaw-dropping panoramic vistas.

For more information, visit San Onofre Parks Foundation website at www.sanonofreparksfoundation.org or stop by any of the local State Park kiosks.

Las Ramblas Trail San Juan Capistrano/Dana Point

Possibly the most accessible of the bunch, the Las Ramblas Trail begins only minutes from the Interstate 5 exit bearing the same name. Lush after this past winter’s continuous rains, these gently rolling hills offer a wide variety of options for casual walking, running, and mountain biking.

Leisurely alternating from crest to valley, this is a fantastic opportunity to breathe in some fresh air and relish as to just how tightly knit the different parts of our communities are woven into the environmental fabric. Ultimately, all trails crescendo at panoramic viewpoints that look out upon Capo Beach and Dana Point Harbor to the west and the hills of Laguna to the north.

Caspers Wilderness Park San Juan Capistrano

As you drive east on Ortega Highway outside of San Juan Capistrano, the approach to Caspers Wilderness Park ushers you into a California of old. Bordered by the National Audubon Starr Ranch Sanctuary to the north, Caspers Wilderness Park offers more than 20 trails in its present day 8,000-acre form. Upon arrival at the entrance, one quickly becomes entrenched in the deep river terraces and impressive sandstone canyons.

Complementing the groves of native Coastal Live Oak and California Sycamores, several late-season wildflower plumes are still there to be enjoyed by those willing to spend time walking on what used to be the floor of the Pacific Ocean. Orange County’s largest County Park, Caspers Wilderness Park offers multi-generational appeal through a variety of educational centers and interactive exhibits.

For more information on Caspers Wilderness Park, contact park officials at 949.923.2210 or visit www.ocparks.com/caspers.

It has been said that not all those who are happy are grateful, but all those that are grateful are happy. Taking the time to achieve greater depth of understanding and appreciation of the awe-inspiring spaces that surround us may encourage us to consider looking more closely than ever for the personal sense of balance we seek.

San Mateo Watershed. Photo: Danny Ritz

