Oso Creek Trail
Natural and cultural attractions make this walk a local favorite.

THE DETAILS
Two to three miles, easy, well-marked. From the 5 Freeway, exit at La Paz Road and head east on La Paz. Two lights east of Marguerite Parkway, turn left into the parking lot for the Thomas R. Potocki Conference Center, 27301 La Paz Road.

Oso Creek Trail is a beloved walk along a charming creek that runs year-round (granted it’s suburban runoff, but it’s still scenic). The trail was designed to delight multiple senses. The creek burbles over rocks; a 3-foot hedge maze makes a cute hide-and-seek area for young children; the honeysuckle, rose, and butterfly bushes give off sweet scents; and the trail is dotted with mosaic-tile artworks.

From the parking lot, walk back to La Paz Road, turn right and take the overpass. Just afterward, turn right onto the easy-to-find asphalt trailhead. You’ll pass through a pleasant mix of nature and signs of civilization as the path shifts from pavement to wood chips to dirt and back again. At the one-mile mark, you can lengthen the walk to three miles by turning left through a tunnel onto a less-developed one-mile spur trail along the creek. On the return, you’ll go straight onto the asphalt to rejoin Oso Creek Trail and complete the loop. Bring a book; benches are strewn in serene little spots. Follow the return trail one mile to the parking lot.

Serrano Creek Trail
This path will take you back in time, and into the woods.

THE DETAILS
2.5 or 5 miles, easy, mostly flat, partly paved. From the 405 Freeway, head east on Bake Parkway for 1.9 mile, turn right onto Toledo Way for 0.3 mile, then left on Serrano Road for 0.8 mile. Turn left into Heritage Hill Historical Park, 25151 Serrano Rd., to park and start there.

Begin by visiting Heritage Hill Historical Park, a collection of some of the county’s early buildings. Leave there through the Heritage Hill Plaza shopping center to Trabuco Road and turn left, taking the sidewalk for about one-tenth of a mile.

At the Peachwood Street traffic signal, cross Trabuco Road and turn right; you’ll see the trailhead for the five-mile walk on your left about 20 feet ahead. Follow the wide dirt path next to the creek. At 0.75 miles, take the bridge on the right and continue along a shadier, more rustic path under oak and sycamore trees. At 1.1 miles, walk under the overpass and take the stairs to your left up to the Lake Forest Nature Park, which is a great picnic spot with tables and benches.

Return as you came. If you continue straight after re-crossing Trabuco, you’ll find the start of a 2.5-mile jaunt. A stream and plants—willows and toyon—are on your left, and backyards are on your right. After a mile, you’ll reach Bake Parkway. Turn left over the creek, then left again into Serrano Creek Park. Take the narrow dirt path through the fragrant eucalyptus mini-forest until you come to a wide paved trail, which goes toward a play area. From there, head up to the sidewalk along Serrano Road and turn left, back to Heritage Hill.

POST-WALK EATS
➤ Bagels and Brew is part of a chain, but it has terrific bagels. 21771 Lake Forest Drive, Lake Forest, 949-951-8985, bagelsandbrew.com
**Aliso Peak**

This “hikiest” walk has steep inclines but stunning panoramas.

**THE DETAILS**
Two miles one way, moderately difficult, especially on return. To start at the top, take Crown Valley Parkway east from Coast Highway, turn left onto Pacific Island Drive for 1.7 miles, then left on Talavera Drive. Park on the street at Seaview Park, 22801 Talavera Dr., Laguna Niguel, (just before the gated entrance of the Laguna Sur development) and start there.

A hiking stick helps with this walk, which takes you past lots of unusual native plants. You can go out and back, or go one way by leaving a second car at your destination. Starting at the top, walk along the wooden fence of Seaview Park to peer down into picturesque Aliso Canyon, then take the dirt path into the park itself. There are some rare plant finds, including bush rue and summer holly. After a quarter-mile, this broad, groomed trail ends at a picnic bench with ahhh views of the canyon and ocean.

Find the footpath next to the bench area, and follow the precipitous path down to a saddle between the hills. From there, climb the short, steep hill to Aliso Peak for a meditation-worthy ocean whitewater vantage.

Then, back down at the saddle, find Valido Trail (there’s a sign), and head downhill again through a green gully. If there has been decent rain—wishful thinking, most likely—you’ll find a little stream. The trail ends at Valido Road, where you can park a second car if you’ve planned a one-way excursion. Continue downhill to explore South Laguna. The residential streets above Coast Highway are particularly pretty, with their vintage cottages. Take the same route back to Seaview Park—and be prepared for a tough uphill climb.

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**San Onofre State Beach**

With your back to the power plant, this is a stroll of rugged beauty.

**THE DETAILS**
2.5 miles, easy to moderate, walking on sand, rocks, and dirt. $15 parking. Take I-5 to the Baseline Road exit to San Onofre State Beach, and start there.

Just across the county line, San Onofre State Beach is practically Orange County. And though the 5 Freeway is almost right above you, you’d never guess it down on the sand below the cliffs, where it feels isolated and primitive. Several short, marked trails along the parking lot lead down to the beach. Trail 1 is a 2.5-mile walk, but other paths will take you farther.

Head down to the beach, then turn north toward the shuttered San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station. The beach usually is littered with smooth stones that clatter as the surf comes in. Take time to notice the cliffs; the brown, striated rock is Monterey Shale, part of a vast geological formation that holds two-thirds of the nation’s shale oil reserves.

Look for the sudden split in the cliffs, with a band of white stone continuing northward. This split marks the Cristianitos Fault. Beyond the fault you’ll notice the white shale of the San Mateo Formation, topped by hardened brown alluvial deposits, which are carved by the elements into spectacular badlands.

Once you reach the perimeter of the nuclear plant, return as you came. With the plant behind you, the beach looks much as it must have for millennia before man.
**FULLERTON**

**Fullerton Arboretum**

*The botanical garden offers an immediate sense of stress-busting serenity.*

**THE DETAILS**

1.5 miles, easy. Open daily 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. $5 suggested donation. From the 57 Freeway heading north, take the Yorba Linda Boulevard exit. Turn left onto Yorba Linda Boulevard and then left again at the first light, Associated Road. The arboretum is at **1900 Associated Road**, fullertonarboretum.org.

This place is a refuge with its ponds and streams, historical house, and quiet, meandering pathways among an eye-catching variety of 4,000 plant species. The 26-acre joint project of the city of Fullerton and California State University is stroller-friendly and great for children. Take the wide main path to your right just inside the entrance, heading into the narrow woodlands. On the return, loop around to take in the cactus, succulent, and native Southern California gardens.

Be sure to wander and explore on the narrower dirt paths. There are shrubs of brilliantly colored flowers, and shady nooks under the trees, with benches beside the stream. It’s perfect for reading or contemplative moments.

The sections of native and other drought-tolerant plants will give you ideas for your own gardening, and there are educational events every weekend, including plant sales and classes. Check the website for activities and fees.

**LAGUNA BEACH**

**Main Beach to Crescent Bay Point Park**

*To get a better view of whales and sea lions, bring binoculars for this classic bluff-top walk.*

**THE DETAILS**

Three miles, easy. Metered parking, but challenging in summer. From the 5 or 405 freeways, take the Highway 133 exit south to Laguna Beach until it ends at Main Beach. Start at Coast Highway and Broadway Street, 107 South Coast Highway.

Begin at Main Beach’s famous lifeguard tower, then head north and up the stairs to Heisler Park. You’ll pass rose gardens, sculptures, and, below you, rocky coves. You’ll find drinking fountains and restrooms, too. Keep an eye out for dolphins, or farther out to sea, spouting whales. The park ends after one-half mile; continue north on Cliff Drive, past an eclectic mix of funky beach cottages and multimillion-dollar houses. Turn left onto Marine Drive, which will bend and return you to Cliff; head left, or north, again, until it ends at Circle Way. Right across from you, a small walkway cuts between the houses—take that until you reach a set of stairs that lead to Crescent Bay Drive. Head uphill to the bend in the road; to your left is Crescent Bay Point Park.

At the far end of the groomed and flower-festooned park are two overlooks atop a steep cliff. Seal Rock protrudes in the ocean before you, and you can usually find sea lions basking there. Return as you came, or walk up to Coast Highway and head south, browsing among shops and galleries.

**POST-WALK EATS**

➤ Enjoy the patio at Las Brisas restaurant; it’s like being in a living postcard. The expanded patio lunch menu offers lots of choices. 361 Cliff Drive, Laguna Beach. 949-497-5434, lasbrisaslagunabeach.com
Ask residents near UC Irvine about their favorite walk, and they likely will say Turtle Rock, the high, open space that dominates the landscape. It’s approachable from many angles via networks of informal trails. You haven’t done Turtle Rock, though, unless you’ve experienced the optional workout of climbing to the top of Suicide Hill. This is a modest loop, but it involves a couple of short, steep climbs. Make sure to bring water and a hat.

From Turtle Rock Community Park, walk along Turtle Rock Drive for 0.1 mile and cross the street to Ralph C. Bren Memorial Park. Take the wide paved path at the narrow part of the park. Just before it meets Ridgeline Drive, turn left onto the unmarked but obvious dirt trail, which slopes up and down several times. At 1.2 miles, you’ll reach a paved pathway; turn left for about 500 feet, then right up a set of stairs. To your right are what look like natural steps up to Suicide Hill; there’s a bit of clambering on rocks after that to get to the top, then turn right to a lookout area with a bench. Take the dirt trail down to the left; it then turns right at the base of the hill along a wide firebreak. The first dirt trail to your right will take you back to the bench area.

Turn left, go back down the stairs, and turn right to walk through Chaparral Park, which lies along Turtle Rock Drive. Cross the street and take the sidewalk back to your car.

At the end of Bayview Way, stroll along the paved path, which 2,000 years ago was a favored living area for Tongva Native Americans. You might see mullet jumping in Back Bay, and bobcats make occasional appearances. Look for the offshoot unpaved trails that take you closer to the water.

You’ll pass over a bridge of railroad ties and end at the Peter and Mary Muth Interpretive Center, one of the county’s prettiest and most engaging nature centers. Children will love it. You might want to wander the trails among the nicely restored habitat.

The Bayview Trail is three miles round trip; to double that, once back at Jamboree, cross over the neck of the bay on the sidewalk. Enter the paved trail on your right, making a cloverleaf to head northeast along San Diego Creek paralleling University Drive; UC Irvine will be across the street. When you reach Campus Drive, cross the street and make a left and a quick right turn onto Riparian Way. On a levee above the creek, you’ll get prime views of great blue herons and egrets. The San Joaquin Wildlife Sanctuary is on your left, a natural oasis of ponds and plants (no dogs allowed in the sanctuary). Return as you came.
Carbon Canyon Creek Nature Trail

The surprise treat of this walk: A grove of coastal redwoods.

**THE DETAILS**
2.4 miles, very easy. Dogs allowed. Parking $3 weekdays, $5 weekends. Take the Lambert Road exit from the 57 Freeway. Turn right, and head east 2.5 miles to Carbon Canyon Regional Park, 4442 Carbon Canyon Road. After paying the park entrance fee, turn left on the main park road, following it to the parking lot at the end, where the trailhead is clearly marked.

Located on part of the old Olinda oil boom town, the trail leads across the creek and past another relic of the past—a grove of Monterey pines left over from an early Christmas-tree farm. Continue along the base of a dam to a grove of about 250 coastal redwood trees, many miles from their southernmost natural habitat.

The county planted these trees around 1975, as part of the park’s opening. With the help of an in-ground watering system that keeps the soil forever damp, they’re growing. It doesn’t look like Muir Woods, but these majestic trees have reached about 100 feet.

On the return trip, when you reach the stairs, go through the main, grassy part of the park to loop back. Pleasant picnic areas and playgrounds abound. Bring a lunch and maybe fishing gear to take advantage of the newly restored and stocked 4-acre lake.

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Floral Park

This is a gracious, urban stroll through a special neighborhood.

**THE DETAILS**
2.3 miles, but you can make it shorter or longer. Easy. From the 5 Freeway, take the Main Street exit south (turn right if you’re coming from the north and left if you’re coming from the south). Just past the freeway, turn right on Santa Clara Avenue, left on Broadway, then right on 19th Street through the stone entryway marked Floral Park. Drive 0.1 mile and park on 19th Street and Victoria Drive. Start at 19th Street and Victoria Drive, 406 W. 19th Street.

We seek out nature walks for their beauty, serenity, and visual interest. And this historical Santa Ana neighborhood offers the same qualities. Floral Park has wide, tree-lined streets and charming cottages next to imposing yet gracious mansions from multiple eras and in various styles.

You can find a street map online and many ways to enter and explore the neighborhood. This route is particularly scenic and will take you past the more iconic houses.

Walk a few blocks west on 19th Street and turn right on North Flower Street, continuing for a half-mile; then turn right on Riverside Drive and walk 0.4 miles to North Park Boulevard, again making a right. Three blocks later, turn left on Heliotrope Drive and 0.3 mile later you’ll arrive back at 19th. You’ve walked 1.5 miles so far. Now turn right onto 19th, and right on Flower, but instead of going all the way to Riverside, turn right on Santa Clara for four blocks, and right on Victoria, which will lead you back to your car at 19th.

The neighborhood also offers an annual home and garden tour in April. The 2015 tour is scheduled for April 25 and 26. Check the neighborhood association website: floralpark.com

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For turn-by-turn directions on the MapMyHike app (login required), go to bit.ly/OCwalks. Click “options” next to desired route, copy, then swipe down for the option to open via app. From a desktop browser, click “options,” copy, check the “send to phone” box and click “save route.”