



# An American Tour: 165



## Santa Cruz's Beach Boardwalk

The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk is an oceanfront amusement park in Santa Cruz, California. Founded in 1907, it is California's oldest surviving amusement park and one of the few seaside parks on the West Coast. The boardwalk extends along the coast of the Monterey Bay, from just east of the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf to the mouth of the San Lorenzo River. At the western edge of the park lies a large building originally known as The Plunge, now Neptune's Kingdom, a pirate-themed recreation center which contains a video arcade and an indoor miniature golf course. Next to this is the Casino Fun Center which includes a laser tag arena and next to that is the Coconut Grove banquet room and conference center. A Laffing Sal automated character, from San Francisco's Playland, is viewable near the miniature golf course.

East of the casino, the boardwalk portion of the park stretches along a wide, sandy Main Beach which visitors can access easily from the park. The eastern end is dominated by the Giant Dipper, a wooden roller coaster that is one of the most visible landmarks in Santa Cruz. The Dipper and the Looff Carousel, which still contains its original 342-pipe organ built in 1894, are both on the US National Register of Historic Places. They were, together, declared to be a National Historic Landmark in 1987. There are old-fashioned carnival games and snack booths throughout the 24-acre park.

Fred W. Swanton formed the Santa Cruz Beach, Cottage, and Tent City Corporation in 1903 and the following year, the city granted permission for commercial buildings. On 14 June 1904, the Neptune Casino opened with an arcade, grill and dining room, and a theater. The beach was a destination for railroads and trolleys from 1875.

The park has won the Best Seaside Amusement Park Award from *Amusement Today* every year since 2007 except for 2015. Although there is no admission and the beach is public, parking is charged a fee when the rides are open. Season or day passes can be purchased or tickets for \$1; each ride costs between 3 and 7 tickets. The park shut down in mid-March 2020 due to the COVID pandemic. It reopened on November 7, 2020. It had to shut down again on November 10, 2020, and reopened select rides to California residents on April 1, 2021.

