

Cataviña

Santa María Mission

Trail Data

Length = 22.9 km. Exertion index = 284 going, 456 returning. Maximum elevation = 598 m.

The trail to the Santa María Mission crosses rugged terrain to an unlikely oasis in the midst of stony desert. All that's left of the mission are some badly eroded walls of the mission church. But the stand of palm trees in a little swamp is still there, flourishing. Follow the stream as far as you like.

Temperatures can reach over 100°F, so summer isn't a good time of year.

The trailhead is at the Santa Inez Ranch. You can park there for a small fee. You also can camp; the facilities are modest but it's cheap. And there's a restaurant; if it's not open you'll have to go into the nearby town.

When you start out, be sure to tell someone at the ranch about your plans. If you're overdue they may be able to send out a rescue party. Alternatively, if you're going to be out overnight they need to know not to send one.

To start, go around the ranch buildings from the NE corner of the camping area. If the gate is locked then you have to go around to the other side of the ranch buildings and go through the gate into the livestock yard.

Early in the hike there are two side-trails leading to private residences. Once you're past those, the trail is distinct and easy to follow, thanks to ATVers who motor their way up. It's not actually a good ATV trail, because there are patches of loose stones and some very steep parts. But it's an excellent hike, with great, even dramatic, scenery.

Locals claim that water is always available near the mission. If you intend to replenish your water there, be sure to treat it, even if it's running and clear.

