



■ **WANT TO GET AWAY?** ■

# ESCAPE TO Santa Barbara

Need some direction for your next mini vacay? Look no further. Here's your insider's guide to the "American Riviera."

*By Alejandra Saragoza*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BLAKE BRONSTAD



With its enticing beaches, year-round sunshine, and expanse of red-tiled roofs nestled between a brilliant blue swath of ocean and the chaparral-covered Santa Ynez Mountains, Santa Barbara is an idyllic three-day weekend getaway. As soon as you arrive in this laid-back city, you will feel as though you're in a different world—and one you won't want to leave. The salt-kissed air, stunning scenery, and cool marine breeze immediately make you feel refreshed, relaxed, and inspired. That feeling is what made me fall in love with the beach town while touring college campuses, which led me to attend UC Santa Barbara and then stay for three years after graduating. (Can you blame me?) There is so much to do and see—from dining at world-class restaurants, to kayaking in the Pacific Ocean, to taking in iconic Spanish Colonial architecture—and it doesn't take long to realize you're in a truly special place. In case you're not sure where to start, here's a former local girl's guide to Santa Barbara.



## If you're lucky, you might spot dolphins or sea lions frolicking in the waves.

lux accommodations are the ultimate hideaway, featuring personal gated entries and sumptuous spaces outfitted with handcrafted walnut furnishings, Persian rugs, fireplaces, and hand-painted Andalusian tiles. Outside, you'll find a secluded terrace and a heated plunge pool, where you can take a dip whenever the mood strikes. [fourseasons.com/santabarbara](http://fourseasons.com/santabarbara).

### TO THE SEA

Right across the street is **Butterfly Beach**, a pristine strip of golden sand that's a favorite among locals. Kick off your shoes and go for a short stroll on the shore, or meander along the pathway bordering the beach. If you're lucky, you might spot dolphins or sea lions frolicking in the waves.

Afterward, drive 15 minutes to **East Beach** and the historic **Stearns Wharf**. Built in 1872, California's oldest operating wooden pier served the freight-shipping needs of the South Coast for more than a quarter century. Now, the wharf is home to souvenir shops, restaurants, an ice-cream parlor, and a marine museum with an interactive educational facility. At the end of the pier, you may see local fishermen reeling in mackerel or halibut. [stearnswharf.org](http://stearnswharf.org).

### A TASTE OF MEXICO

Santa Barbara has no shortage of excellent Mexican restaurants due to its rich Mexican and Spanish heritage, but the recently opened **Santo Mezcal** is a standout. This elegant eatery draws crowds with its contemporary Mexican cuisine and impressive selection of tequila and, of course, mezcal. The agave liquors shine in specialty cocktails such as *La Flor Ahumada* crafted with mezcal, house-made honey-lavender syrup, and fresh lemon juice. There are also more familiar offerings, including traditional and flavored margaritas.

After picking your poison, order an appetizer of cheesy shrimp empanadas. Follow up with an Instagram-worthy seafood entrée, such as the *pulpo a las brasas* (tender octopus marinated in adobo and tossed with chile oil) or the enchiladas *Cabo Azul* (two enchiladas stuffed with crab and Monterey Jack cheese, smothered in a creamy poblano sauce, adorned with strips of crispy sweet potato, and served alongside a pyramid of rice). [facebook.com/santomezcal](http://facebook.com/santomezcal).

## DAY ONE

### PARADISE FOUND

Visitors have an array of options for accommodations, from hillside hotels to beachfront condos, but for a pampered and luxurious experience, head to the **Four Seasons Resort, The Biltmore Santa Barbara**. Set upon a secluded stretch of coastline, this historic Spanish Colonial-inspired resort features beautiful gardens, ivy-adorned adobe walls, terra-cotta tile floors, and dramatic archways. Its 207 rooms and suites are tucked away in a sprawling 22-acre oasis filled with 2,000 species of tropical plants and palms, plus a towering Moreton Bay fig tree planted in 1876. Also hidden among the lush landscape are tennis courts, a croquet court, and a pool.

Book a "jungle" room if you desire a more tropical retreat, or reserve an ocean-view room if you prefer commanding vistas of the Pacific with your morning cup of coffee on the patio. You can also opt for one of the new bungalow suites with plunge pools. Unveiled earlier this year, these

### insider tips

Due to the offshore oil fields, tar washes up on most Santa Barbara beaches, so you might get some goo on the bottom of your feet. It's best to wear inexpensive sandals if you decide to walk on the shore.

For a unique experience during your stay, make a reservation at the Moroccan-inspired Luna Terrace, where you can enjoy its Tangier Bottle Service or a Moroccan feast.



Opposite page: One Thousand Steps Beach. This page, clockwise from top right: Tangier Bottle Service at Luna Terrace, an open-air lounge at the Four Seasons Resort, The Biltmore Santa Barbara; the bar at Santo Mezcal; Stearns Wharf; lunch at Santo Mezcal; East Beach.





### DOWNTOWN DELIGHTS

Walk off your meal by heading up **State Street** and into the heart of downtown Santa Barbara. The city's main thoroughfare is lined with locally owned boutiques. Buy a breezy dress or Italian booties at **Diani Boutique**; browse for beach reads at **The Book Den**; and descend into **Salt Cave**, a Himalayan salt cave that sells everything from foodstuffs and crystals for cooking to skincare products, candles, and lamps. [dianiboutique.com](http://dianiboutique.com), [bookden.com](http://bookden.com), [saltcavesb.com](http://saltcavesb.com).

### VIEW FROM THE TOP

For a cultural experience, walk to the **Santa Barbara County Courthouse**—it's not your average government building. Designed in the Spanish Colonial style, the courthouse is a stunning local landmark, featuring a red-tile roof and verdant grounds. Inside, you can get a visual history lesson from the elaborate murals depicting Spanish settlement and agriculture, admire ornate wrought iron chandeliers, and go to the top of the clock tower for a 360-degree view of Santa Barbara and beyond. [sbcourts.org](http://sbcourts.org).

### insider tips

◀ Don't miss the side streets off of State. Head down the passageways of La Arcada for more boutiques, and go through Paseo Nuevo to shop at familiar spots such as Nordstrom.

◀ As you tour the rooms of the courthouse, make sure to look up. In the Clock Gallery, the ceiling is decorated with sparkling fiber optics that depict the constellations from the night sky when Santa Barbara was named in 1602.



### AFTER DARK

Refuel at **Olio Pizzeria**, a local haven hidden in a quiet outdoor shopping area off of bustling State Street. Rustic yet sophisticated, this is no pizza joint. Gathered around wood tables in the cozy, dimly lit dining room, hip couples and groups of friends sip Italian wines and devour thin-crust, wood-fired pizzas. While you can't go wrong with any of the pizzas—which are served fresh out of the stone-framed oven—the diavola is perfection, featuring fresh mozzarella, spicy salami, and Gaeta olives. For antipasti, try the fried zucchini blossoms (if available) or the selection of salumi and cheeses from different regions of Italy. And save room for a little dolce: You'll want to dip into the creamy, house-made chocolate-hazelnut panna cotta. [oliopizzeria.com](http://oliopizzeria.com).

Opposite page, from far left: The Santa Barbara County Courthouse and the surrounding area; the city at night. This page: A local enjoys the Funk Zone.

After dinner, walk around the corner to grab a nightcap at **The Good Lion**. Named after an Ernest Hemingway short story, this speakeasy-inspired bar features a weekly rotating drink menu that highlights fruits, herbs, and spices from the Central Coast—making it the perfect watering hole for farm-to-glass cocktail aficionados. Seeing the master mixologists in action is half the fun; deciding what to drink is the hard part. [goodlioncocktails.com](http://goodlioncocktails.com).

## DAY TWO

### RISE AND SHINE

Get up early for a down-home breakfast at **Jeannine's**. Celebrating 30 years as a beloved local spot, this café offers everything from hefty omelets to salsa-doused huevos rancheros, as well as more decadent options such as lobster Benedict and banana Kahlúa French toast. [jeannines.com](http://jeannines.com).

### OUTDOOR FUN

After fueling up for the day, get out on the water, and see the area's natural wonders with **Santa Barbara Adventure Company**. Take a two-hour surfing or stand-up paddleboard lesson to get a total body workout while enjoying the scenery. Or, go for a leisurely ride along the coastline on a kayak tour that takes you past sea lions, kelp forests, and the historic pier. [sbadventureco.com](http://sbadventureco.com).

If you'd rather stay on land, lace up your tennis shoes and hit the trails. One of the most scenic hikes is up to **Inspiration Point**, which offers panoramic views from 1,800 feet above the coast. Two routes lead to this picturesque perch in the Santa Ynez Mountains. If you want a challenging hike, start at San Roque Road (located right off upper State Street), and take the Jesusita Trail to Inspiration Point for a roughly seven-mile round-trip trek. But if you desire a shorter and easier alternative, take the Tunnel Trail (about a five-minute drive from downtown Santa Barbara) to Jesusita for a 3.75-mile round-trip hike. No matter which path you take, you'll get your heart pumping and be rewarded with jaw-dropping vistas. [santabarbarahikes.com](http://santabarbarahikes.com).

### insider tips

◀ Nab a seat at the bar so you can watch the bartenders craft concoctions.

◀ Treat yourself to one of Jeannine's famous cinnamon rolls made with croissant dough.

◀ You can sample the cheeses at C'est Cheese before you buy, so don't hesitate to ask for a taste.

◀ Hikers should arrive before 10:30 a.m. to beat the weekend crowds and the afternoon heat.

### PERFECT PICNIC

Enjoy lunch alfresco at the **Old Mission Santa Barbara**. Known as the "Queen of the Missions" for its exceptional beauty, it was founded by the Spanish Franciscans in 1786 and is still an active parish church after more than 200 years. Its Mission Rose Garden is also an ideal spot for a picnic, boasting 1,500 rosebushes and an expansive lawn—plus breathtaking views of the city and Pacific Ocean.

Pick up provisions at the nearby **C'est Cheese**, a foodie's paradise that offers 120 types of cheese—plus a mind-boggling assortment of cured meats, from jamón Ibérico, to mole salami, to house-cured pancetta. Of course, all these meats and cheeses wouldn't be complete without a bottle of wine, and luckily, the shop has an impressive selection. [santabarbaramission.org](http://santabarbaramission.org), [cestcheese.com](http://cestcheese.com).

### ALL THE BUZZ

Spend the rest of the afternoon exploring Santa Barbara's hippest hood: the **Funk Zone**. Bordered by the beach and State Street, this former warehouse district has been transformed into an edgy, colorful neighborhood with



## Seafood Fest

Visitors to the "American Riviera" can also enjoy the region's bounty during the 16th annual **Santa Barbara Harbor and Seafood Festival** on October 14.

This foodie fete celebrates the 100-plus fishermen who provide local restaurants with high-quality, sustainably harvested seafood from the Santa Barbara Channel. Each year, the free event brings thousands

of people to the waterfront, where they can enjoy succulent seafood such as fresh lobster, crab, oysters, sea urchin, and barbecued albacore—not to mention fish tacos, clam chowder, and paella.

The festival recently added a seafood and wine pairing that allows guests to taste the fruits of the Santa Barbara Channel and Santa Barbara wine country.

"There's truly something for everyone," says festival spokesperson Dominique Samario. "There's live music from local bands, great food, free boat rides, and plenty of activities for youth and families." [harborfestival.org](http://harborfestival.org).

### Getting to Santa Barbara

Drive approximately five hours on U.S. 101 South from the East Bay, or take a direct one-hour flight from San Francisco International Airport for roughly \$400 round-trip.

## Beyond the Vine

All wined out? Here are three spots for alternative sips in the Funk Zone.

**FIGUEROA MOUNTAIN BREWERY:** With a laid-back vibe and sun-dappled patio, this popular taproom draws droves of beer aficionados with its rotating list of suds. Order a pint of one of the Fig Mountain classics, or opt for a flight to sample four of the 20-plus offerings. [figmtnbrew.com](http://figmtnbrew.com).

**BRASS BEAR BREWING:** Tucked away in an unassuming building behind Kunin Wines, this homey hot spot is a worthy detour. Try a flight of four brews on tap, such as Brass Bear's own Hopping Grizzly double IPA or Captain Fatty's Rise and Grind coffee porter. [brassbearbrewing.com](http://brassbearbrewing.com).

**CUTLER'S ARTISAN SPIRITS:** Sip award-winning spirits made with local, organic ingredients at Santa Barbara's first legal distillery. Highlights include the smoky straight bourbon whiskey and Grandma Tommie's Apple Pie, a vodka-based liqueur. [cutlersartisan.com](http://cutlersartisan.com).



This page: Kunin Wines in the Funk Zone. Opposite page: The Valley Project tasting room. produces some of the few champagne-style sparkling wines in Santa Barbara County, and they are must-tries. \$15-\$20 tasting fee, [riverbench.com](http://riverbench.com).

### LIVIN' LA VIDA LOCA

Located on the outskirts of the Funk Zone, **Loquita** has been spicing up Santa Barbara since it made its debut last year. The Spanish restaurant boasts a lively vibe that you can feel as soon as you walk in the door. The expansive wood bar and charming dining room are often packed and abuzz with activity, as friends chat over glasses of sangria, waiters speedily walk by carrying trays of tapas, and chefs hop between stations in the exhibition kitchen.

Kick off your own private fiesta with a *pintxo*, such as Manchego cheese with Ellwood cherry tomatoes and panko, and a gin and tonic. Loquita offers four unique selections, including the refreshing and aromatic Maravilloso G&T, featuring St. George Terroir gin, sangria foam, and rosemary. Continue your culinary journey with the cheesy *croquetas de pollo* and the melt-in-your-mouth Kurobuta pork belly adorned with slices of sweet watermelon and fresh watercress. But the showstopper is the Spanish chorizo and chicken paella dotted with *gigante* beans, hen of the woods mushrooms, and creamy aioli. [loquitasb.com](http://loquitasb.com).

### DAY THREE

#### BEACHSIDE BITES

Indulge in a decadent brunch at The Biltmore's **Bella Vista**. The restaurant provides panoramic ocean views from its Italian marble terrace, making it a picturesque spot for enjoying a leisurely meal. Bella Vista is famous for its Sunday buffet brunch, where you'll find an impressive assortment of mouth-watering fare that goes beyond waffles and made-to-order omelets (though those are offered, too). Think shrimp and oysters; a variety of sushi, rolls, and sashimi; caviar; tacos; cheeses and house-cured meats; a carving station of prime rib, lamb, and wild salmon; and a chocolate fondue and dessert station.

public art installations, gourmet restaurants, and chic shops. This happening part of town is also home to nearly 15 boutique wine-tasting rooms, making it a popular spot to savor local wines. Here are some of the top places to sip and swirl. [funkzone.net](http://funkzone.net).

**Kunin Wines:** Step into this bright, airy tasting room to sample unique Rhône and Loire varietals made with old-world sensibility, including Viognier, Chenin Blanc, Roussanne, and Mourvèdre. Choose either the classic red or white tasting, then sip your way through five wines at the sleek bar or out on the cozy deck. \$15 tasting fee, [kuninwines.com](http://kuninwines.com).

**The Valley Project:** If you want to nerd out on local wines, head to this beautifully minimalist spot, where the friendly staff will take you on a tasting tour of Santa Barbara's viticultural areas (and let you sniff soil samples from each region). As you acquaint yourself with the lay of the land, savor five small-batch wines of your choosing—the winery offers everything from Sauvignon Blanc, to Malbec, to Syrah—and admire the floor-to-ceiling chalk-art mural depicting the diverse terroirs from which you're tasting. \$12 tasting fee, [thevalleyprojectwines.com](http://thevalleyprojectwines.com).

**Riverbench Vineyard and Winery:** Sneak in another stop at this elegant tasting lounge for generous pours of vinos produced in the nearby Santa Maria Valley. You can enjoy a stellar selection of Chardonnays and Pinots, but if you want to switch it up, get the refreshing "Bubbles, Bubbles, Bubbles!" flight. Riverbench

### insider tips

Make a reservation at Loquita well in advance, and request a patio table so you can relax under twinkling string lights and enjoy the ocean breeze.

Though it's not advertised, the \$80 brunch includes bottomless mimosas and Bloody Marys.



### insider tips

Couples can book the luxe Westwind Suite to get an ocean-front private terrace, steam shower with hydrotherapy, and in-room soaking tub.

Book Cabana 24 at the Coral Casino in advance to get a private spot complete with two chaise lounges, a stocked fridge with bottled water and sodas, a retractable awning—and a discreet place to watch for celebs.

You'll definitely want to wear your stretchy pants. [fourseasons.com/santabarbara](http://fourseasons.com/santabarbara).

### RELAX AND REVIVE

Santa Barbara abounds with spas offering massages and body treatments, but if you don't want to go far after brunch, head to The Biltmore's spa for some head-to-toe pampering. Start with a signature facial, then enjoy a relaxing essential oil massage or avocado-citrus body wrap. You can also treat yourself to a mani-pedi in the **Palm Nail Suite** while admiring vistas of the Pacific. [fourseasons.com/santabarbara](http://fourseasons.com/santabarbara).

Continue your day of relaxation at The Biltmore's oceanfront **Coral Casino Beach and Cabana Club**, a posh social club that's only available to members and resort guests. Built in 1937, this historic landmark was created as a lavish hideaway for the Hollywood elite and prominent Santa Barbara families. After undergoing an extensive renovation in 2000, the Coral Casino is now even more luxurious, boasting a world-class fitness center, sauna and steam rooms, and yoga and meditation classes. Even the larger-than-Olympic-size pool—in which Esther Williams once performed water ballets—has been thoughtfully restored. What hasn't changed is the club's exclusivity and glamorous setting, which still attracts celebrities. Spend the rest of the afternoon relaxing by the pool, then grab a craft cocktail at the club's **Coral Reef Bar**. The 275-gallon saltwater aquarium bar is home to more than 450 life-forms—including coral, small fish, and crustaceans—offering a one-of-a-kind experience. [fourseasons.com/santabarbara](http://fourseasons.com/santabarbara).

Right before sunset, head to **One Thousand Steps Beach**. (Don't worry—it's not really 1,000 steps!) A short drive from downtown Santa Barbara, this tucked-away gem in the Mesa neighborhood is a favorite spot to watch the sun go down, as the secluded stretch of sand offers staggering, uninterrupted coastal views. Watch as the sky morphs into breathtaking hues of orange, gold, red, and purple, and linger until the sun drops behind the ocean. It will be the picture-perfect ending to your three-day weekend in Santa Barbara. ■