

A Few of Our FAVORITE THINGS

Writers share their prime California picks / by Barbara Beckley, Christine Delsol, Michele Andrus Dill, Mark Grossi, Archana Ram and Carey Sweet



Bicyclists enjoy a blue-sky day on a coastal trail in Los Angeles County. Attractions along the trail include the Pacific Park Ferris wheel on the Santa Monica Pier, above, and the Venice Fishing Pier, right.



I still remember the fresh briny smell of the Pacific Ocean, the rhythm of the rolling waves, the Southern California sunshine on my shoulders and the light breeze brushing my hair during what turned out to be one of my favorite dates.

My uncle drove my boyfriend (now husband), Michael, and me to the beginning of the paved, mostly flat Marvin Braude Coastal Bike Trail—also known as “The Strand”—near Will Rogers State Beach so that we could pedal the 20-plus miles back to Torrance Beach. We had our own bikes, but rentals are available near both ends of the trail, and also at various other sites by the path.

Along the Los Angeles County route, we stopped at Santa Monica State Beach to watch volleyball players while we sipped sodas from Perry’s Cafe (nowadays, the drink options include fruit smoothies, and the attractions at Santa Monica Pier include “the world’s only solar-powered Ferris wheel”). We paused again at the Venice Fishing Pier, where anglers were reeling in bonito, mackerel and California halibut. At Marina del Rey, we compared notes on which dream boats we’d like to captain, and agreed to return for kayaking. At Torrance Beach, we

LEFT, ED RHODES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; RIGHT, NIGELSPIERS / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT, DENNIS FRATES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; D. HURST / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; SAN DIEGO MUSEUM OF ART

locked up our bikes and bobbed in the waves.

That day of sun and sea, fun and laughter introduced me to many miles of striking Golden State coast (lacounty.gov/things-to-do) that I'd never experienced via pedal power, despite having been born in LA.

MORE SERVICE TO CALIFORNIA

Traveling to and from the Golden State is better than ever since the Alaska Airlines/Virgin America merger. Together, the airlines offer 308 daily flights to California from 51 destinations, including:

- 117 daily nonstop flights from 30 destinations to three Bay Area airports.
- 111 daily nonstop flights from 36 destinations to four LA-area airports.

I learned that the trail was a lovely complement to star attractions such as Disneyland.

In California, it's easy to combine numerous delightful and diverse experiences in the same vacation. You can go from ocean surf to The Happiest Place on Earth. You can tour wine country and see the Golden Gate Bridge. You can ski or mountain bike in the Eastern Sierra and gaze up at giant sequoias in national parks and monuments. You can shop for designer clothes and admire exceptional art. You can explore outstanding museums and visit one of the world's best zoos.

In the following pages, writers share some of their favorite things in Sonoma County/ Napa Valley, San Francisco, Mammoth Lakes, Fresno, Orange County, Palm Springs and San Diego. For more information on California, see visitcalifornia.com, and the visitor websites for individual towns and regions. ✈

—Michele Andrus Dill, senior editor

Clockwise from left: An impressive California sequoia. The "Dumbo the Flying Elephant" ride at popular Disneyland. The San Diego Museum of Art, whose renowned permanent collection ranges from works by Spanish and Italian old masters to 20th century American paintings and sculptures.

Falling for Natural Beauty

By Carey Sweet

The boulders are blanketed in velvety emerald-green moss, hunkered under a bower of maple leaves, all shaded by lush redwood canopies. Thundering through the magical landscape, down a 25-foot mountain slope, a waterfall mesmerizes, plunging in white froth.

This breathtaking spectacle means it's spring, when creeks have been fed by nourishing winter rains. **Sonoma Creek Falls at Sugarloaf Ridge State Park** (sugarloafpark.org), in the Mayacamas Mountains between Sonoma Valley and Napa Valley, is gorgeous March through May, when local hikers know to trek the mostly easy, approximately 450-foot-elevation-gain, 2-mile Pony Gate/Canyon Trail loop for one of nature's masterpieces.

This morning, I rose early and headed out to the park in great anticipation. The air was crisp and fragrant as I strolled the gently sloping, grass-framed Pony Gate Trail. The trees above me whispered, in their languages of coast live oak, laurel and fir. The winter rains were particularly generous, so the path grew damp as I reached the creek-



Sonoma Creek Falls at Sugarloaf Ridge State Park.

side Canyon Trail, and soon I could hear the falls booming not far away. Now I'm sitting on a rock overlooking the waterfall wonderland. I feel totally relaxed.

Spring also brings rainbow carpets of wildflowers to this hiking loop, such as California poppies, cream cups, lupine, penstemon, buttercups, shooting stars and trillium, with blooms typically lasting through early summer. As I pad past petals on the rest of the loop, I'm often alone with my thoughts on the uncrowded trail. Sometimes deer keep me company as they peer from thickets. I'm only a 10-minute drive from civilization, but for now, I may as well be worlds apart.

MORE FAVORITES

Wine Road, Sonoma County (wineroad.com): For more than 40 years, this association of wineries and other wine-country businesses has helped me explore the many winery jewels throughout the Alexander, Dry Creek and Russian River valleys. I check Wine Road's online maps frequently to strategize my self-guided tours, and I often discover new treasures such as the recently renovated **Bubble Room at J Vineyards & Winery** (jwine.com). With sleek gray-leather furniture and handblown

glass-bubble chandeliers, the elegant space pampers guests with a five-course tasting menu paired with fine wines.

St. Helena Shuttle (ridethevine.com/st-helena-shuttle): Part of Napa Valley's regional municipal service, the St. Helena Shuttle is a call-for, door-to-door (\$1) ride with limited-area service that gets me to or near attractions such as the **Culinary Institute of America**, across the street from **Charles Krug Winery**, and along St. Helena's Main Street for tasting rooms, restaurants and shops.

The Sea Ranch Chapel (thesearanchchapel.org): Spaceship meets Salvador Dalí painting meets hobbit hut in this wonderful oasis of meditation. Every inch of the 360 square feet beckons with artful whimsy, from the intriguing curved-wood exterior, with a soaring patinated-copper peacock-tail sculpture jutting from the pointed roof, to the interior's ceramic accents, stained-glass windows and mosaic-tile floor.

Blue Note Napa (bluenotenapa.com): A fabulous extension of New York's famous Blue Note indie jazz club, this new hot spot that opened in October has fewer than 150 seats, meaning I'm never more



Wine-and-food pairing at J Vineyards & Winery's elegant Bubble Room.

CALIFORNIA

Sonoma County & Napa Valley



CRAIG TOOLEY

The Sea Ranch Chapel, known for its intriguing architecture.

than a hundred or so feet from the stage. I savor supper with the show, too, drawn from the snazzy California-Mediterranean menu.

Di Rosa, Napa/Carneros (dirosaart.org):

This is a little-known hideaway for the world's largest collection of modern and contemporary works by Bay Area artists—more than 1,700 pieces.

I love turning onto the tiny drive—amid a 217-acre property surrounded by vineyards—and I'm always delighted by the art displays in the meadow and in the museum buildings. ✈

Carey Sweet writes from Sonoma County. For more information on Sonoma County, go to sonomacounty.com; for information

on Napa Valley, go to visitnapavalley.com.

Alaska Airlines (alaskaair.com) provides regular service to Santa Rosa, gateway to Sonoma County and Napa Valley. In addition, wine flies free from Santa Rosa. For details, see sonomacounty.com/wine-flies-free-when-visiting-san-francisco-wine-country.



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ITINERARY IDEAS

■ **Armstrong Redwood State Natural Reserve** (www.parks.ca.gov): Located about 20 miles northwest of Santa Rosa, the majestic redwood trees stand hundreds of feet tall, and some are more than 1,000 years old. Visitors can admire these giants while walking on the reserve's network of trails.

■ **Guided wine and food tours in Healdsburg** (winecountrywalkingtours.com): Get to know the town of Healdsburg and the area's wonderful wines and foods by taking one of the various guided tours available from **Wine Country Walking Tours**.

■ **Charles M. Schulz Museum** (schulzmuseum.org): Dedicated to the works of the *Peanuts* comic strip creator, the Santa Rosa museum offers insights into Schulz's life, his influences and his art through the displays of original strip panels, Schulz's personal artifacts, *Peanuts* books and other items.

■ **The Hess Collection Winery and Art Museum** (hesscollection.com): The winery, on **Mount Veeder**, about 7 miles northwest of Napa, offers daily tastings and free admission to its renowned art collection that features the works of 20 living artists in painting, sculpture and various other art forms.

■ **Calistoga Attractions** (visitcalistoga.com): One of the quintessential Napa Valley communities, Calistoga is famous for its hot springs, resorts and great wineries. Visit the **Castello di Amorosa** winery, which resembles a Tuscan castle. You can also ride the **Sterling Vineyards** gondola from the valley floor up to the fortresslike winery located on a bluff 300 feet above the town.



A view of the Golden Gate Bridge from Crissy Field Beach in the Presidio.

Breathtaking by the Bay

By Christine Delsol

At the south end of the Golden Gate Bridge, the red-roofed, white-gabled Victorian Officers' Quarters in the Presidio seemed to sparkle like fairy-tale cottages against the rumpled green hillsides when my family took trips to San Francisco during my childhood. I always asked Dad if we could go see the buildings, and he always said no, because it was an Army base.

Now here I am at the Presidio Officers' Club in the Main Post, savoring an ambrosial pork *cemita* (sandwich) while my husband, Ken, orders a second short-rib taco. Who says childhood dreams can't come true?

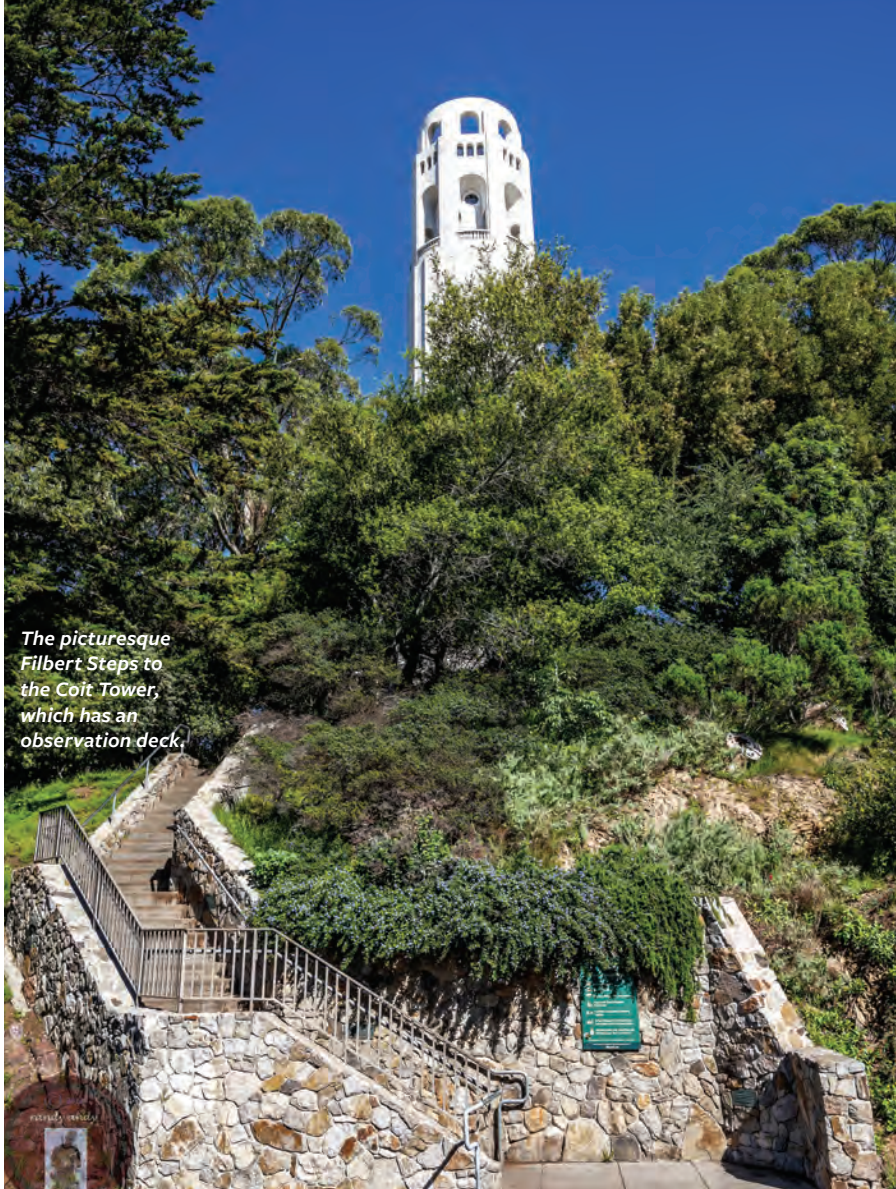
Arguello, the Mexican restaurant where we're eating, shares the Officers' Club with spaces for cultural events, family programs, exhibitions and an archaeology lab preparing to excavate remnants of the original, mud-walled Spanish fortification in front of the club.

This is the hub of a unique 1,491-acre national park (presidio.gov) that has its roots in a 1776 Spanish outpost that later became a Mexican fort, and then a U.S. Army post, and has been evolving since the Army vacated the area in 1994.

The latest milestone is a new permanent visitor center, which opened in February in a

handsome, circa-1900 brick building—a former guardhouse—with ample exhibition space and a San Francisco Bay view. The center is conveniently located in the Main Post, and exhibits showcase the park's four major regions: “the Main Post (cultural heart of the Presidio), the Golden Gate (iconic views), Crissy Field (recreation) and the Southern Wilds (nature exploration).”

The Presidio—part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area—offers miles of coastline on both San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean, as well as forests, hills and hiking trails for every fitness level. But it also houses more than 200 business, cultural and community entities, and 3,000 residents leasing homes and units in the renovated historic buildings—plus restaurants, a golf course, a bowling



The picturesque Filbert Steps to the Coit Tower, which has an observation deck.

alley and even a pet cemetery. A free Presidio Trust-run shuttle loops between downtown San Francisco and the park.

Filmmaker George Lucas' headquarters and the Walt Disney Family Museum are the Presidio's most prominent tenants. Lucas-film doesn't give tours, but my husband and I pay homage, along with other visitors, at the outside Yoda fountain, and we discover a life-size figure of Darth Vader and other Star



Charming historical houses in the Presidio.

Wars memorabilia in the lobby. The Disney museum, which thoroughly engages from beginning to end, focuses on the creative genius's life and art, and entralls children with exhibits of his beloved creations.

On this visit, though, I'm particularly impressed by our self-guided tour of the historical aspects of the Main Post, which includes 1890s barracks; a renovated 1917 fire station; the Officers' Club, with adobe walls dating to the late 1700s; and the Officers' Quarters.

As I take pictures, Ken shares historical tidbits from the free booklet we picked up in the visitor center: The original Spanish fort was just 90 paces square. The trees were planted in the 1880s and '90s to replace sand dunes and marshland. The porches on the Victorian-era homes that tantalized me so

long ago were reoriented in 1878 from the "front," where they faced the parade grounds below, to the "back," on the street that we're walking.

Close up, the houses are every bit as charming as I'd imagined, and signs tell me they are occupied by schools, nonprofits, and financial and family-services firms.

My fairy-tale cottages are in good hands.

MORE FAVORITES

Filbert Steps (Filbert Street at Sansome):

Like many residents, I think these are the most picturesque of San Francisco's stairways—which stand in for streets on hills too steep for cars. The steps pass through lush gardens and a pandemonium of feral parrots, and offer stunning views as they scale Telegraph Hill to the landmark Coit Tower.

Fisherman's Wharf (visitfishermans-wharf.com): Crab cocktails, street performers, antique penny-arcade games, Pier 39's oddball shops, obstreperous sea lions and an aquarium devoted to denizens of San Francisco Bay are just a few reasons so many visitors come here.

Mission District Murals (precitaeyes.org): Colorful murals abound in this predominantly Latino neighborhood, including Balmy Alley, between 24th Street and Garfield Square. Also lined by wall-to-wall murals is Clarion Alley (clarionalleymuralproject.org), between Mission and Valencia streets and 17th and 18th streets.

San Francisco Botanical Garden (sfbotanicalgarden.org): Likely to be in full magnolia bloom through March, the doyenne of the city's gardens creates a virtual walk around the world, from South America's cloud forests to the Mediterranean Sea. ✈

Christine Delsol lives in the Bay Area. For more information on San Francisco activities and attractions, see sftravel.com.

Alaska Airlines (alaskaair.com) provides regular service to Bay Area cities such as San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose.

ITINERARY IDEAS

■ **Alcatraz Island** (nps.gov/alca): Tour the home of the federal penitentiary that once housed Al Capone and other notorious convicts. Learn about the history of the island, the prison facility and how the convicts lived.

■ **Golden Gate Bridge** (goldengatebridge.org): One of the most iconic bridges in the world, the 1.7-mile-long span can be crossed by vehicle, bike or by foot. Experience the bridge up close by walking out onto the main deck for great views and to get a sense of the immense size of the structure.

■ **Golden Gate Park** (goldengatepark.com): This great city park covers more than 1,000 acres and includes some of the city's top museums, such as the **de Young Museum of Art**, which has a priceless collection of American art from the 17th century to the 20th century, and the **California Academy of Sciences**, which is home to an aquarium,

a planetarium, a four-story living rainforest and a natural history museum. The park also has plenty of trails, gardens, lakes, monuments, playgrounds and areas for picnics.

■ **Chinatown** (sanfranciscochinatown.com): The largest and oldest Chinatown in the United States, this San Francisco community is famous for its historic architecture, great restaurants and bustling streets, full of shops selling a wide variety of goods. Take a guided tour or walk the neighborhood to experience its unique atmosphere.

■ **World-Class Art** (famsf.org; sfmoma.org): In addition to the de Young Museum of Art at Golden Gate Park, San Francisco has world-class art museums such as the **Legion of Honor**, in Lincoln Park, featuring art that spans 4,000 years of human history,



ANTON IVANOV / SHUTTERSTOCK

A Tyrannosaurus rex skeleton at the California Academy of Sciences.

and the **San Francisco Museum of Modern Art** in the heart of the city. The newly remodeled museum is home to one of the world's largest collections of postwar and contemporary art.

■ **Muir Woods National Monument** (nps.gov/muwo): At this monument, visit one of the few redwood stands left in the San Francisco Bay Area, located about 10 miles north of the Golden Gate Bridge.

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A family of four is riding mountain bikes on a dirt trail through a forest. From left to right: a young girl in a pink shirt and helmet, a man in a blue and orange shirt and helmet, a young girl in a blue and white striped shirt and yellow helmet, and a woman in a yellow shirt and blue shorts. They are all smiling and looking forward. The trail is made of dirt and small rocks, and the forest is filled with tall, thin trees.

A family pedals
the wide, easy
Downtown Trail.

Sierra Cycling

By Michele Andrus Dill

Zooming, bouncing, pedaling, coasting, I steer around the corners and between the Jeffrey pines of **Mammoth Bike Park's Downtown Trail.** My rented Trek mountain bike flashes in and out of the sun on the dirt trail, and my hefty tires roll easily over pebbles, twigs, exposed roots and shadows. Small trees cast feather-duster patterns. Huge tree trunks create umbras that look like the pillars at Rose Bowl Stadium.

Instructor Miles Weaver leads the way as my husband and I strive to put into practice what he taught us about balance, leaning, turning and shifting during our pre-Downtown lesson at Mammoth Mountain's Discovery Zone. The zone's beginner and intermediate practice trails, and Skills

Park, help riders progress in their ability to navigate features such as corners, berms, drops, rollers and jumps.

Signs provide information and tips for riders who don't want to hire an instructor, but we learned a lot from Miles—including the fact that we'll need many more visits before we're ready to attempt advanced trails.

Fortunately, Mammoth (mammothmountain.com), in California's exceptional Eastern Sierra, has trails for every skill level: six beginner routes, 18 intermediate, 10 advanced, 10 expert and nine pro.

Today, we're having plenty of fun on the easy Downtown route, which leaves from a site near the Discovery Zone and winds 5 miles to the Village Lodge. The trail is

relatively wide and flat, with occasional lattices of paver bricks that aid our faster-speed turns.

When we stop for a break, Miles notes that the red-brown jigsaw bark of Jeffrey pines smells like vanilla. I get off my bike to see what I think. "Butterscotch" is my verdict.

After we've ridden to the end of Downtown in The Village at Mammoth, Miles goes back up the mountain while we board the free Lakes Basin Trolley (estransit.com), placing our bikes in its special tow trailer.

The free trolley stops at four of the lakes in the Lakes Basin, and we take it all the way to Horseshoe Lake so that we can pedal mostly downhill, with a 1,000-foot descent, on the 5.3-mile **Lakes Basin Path** back to The Village.

It's often a forest path—an asphalt ribbon amid red firs, lodgepole pines, Jeffrey pines, western junipers, aspens, alders and wild onions—and we see or hear juncos, Steller's jays, mountain chickadees and Clark's nutcrackers in the wooded habitat. The foliage thins periodically to reveal the blue and green lakes, and to provide views of formations such as the granite 10,000-plus-foot Crystal Crag and of the "Hole in the Wall" lava tube created by volcanic activity on the south side of majestic Mammoth Mountain.

Toward the end of the ride, we come to a stretch with a panoramic vista of obsidian Glass Mountain and the pale-granite White Mountain in the Inyo National Forest. The view is so stunning and the ride so exhilarating, I go back a half mile so that I can pedal into this magnificent vista again.

MORE FAVORITES

Devils Postpile/Rainbow Falls (nps.gov/depo): The summertime Reds Meadow/Devils Postpile Shuttle, which is mandatory, from the Mammoth Mountain Adventure Center by the Main Lodge, stops at numerous hiking-access sites in and near the Ansel Adams Wilderness, including stops that access Devils Postpile National Monument, named for its intriguing 60-foot-tall wall of basalt columns.

Also in the national monument, hike about 2.5 miles from the formation, or 1.2 miles from the Rainbow Falls Trailhead shuttle stop, to see the falls roaring more than 100 feet over a volcanic-rock cliff. Hike back about 1.5 miles from the falls to refuel at the Mule House Cafe at Red's Meadow Resort & Pack Station (redsmeadow.com), and perhaps connect with hikers who are trekking the Pacific Crest Trail.

Fishing (thetroutfitter.com): Mono County has a wondrous number of fishing lakes and rivers, and the experienced guides at The Troutfitter include Scott Flint, who knows exactly where to go, and when. Michael and I were the only ones at the lake he took us to ("Secret Spot 22"),



Breathtaking Rainbow Falls in the Devils Postpile National Monument.

which boasted golden, brook and cutthroat trout—all wild and wily. He helped me so much with my rudimentary fly-fishing technique, I caught and released six feisty trout of various species during our half-day excursion.

Golfing (mammothmountain.com/golf): We were a bit intimidated when we found out that our **Sierra Star Golf Course** instructor would be Ian Birrell, who in 1996, at age 17, became the youngest-ever club champion on the Old Course at St. Andrews in Scotland. But he was a kind, patient, clear communicator during our lesson, and our games took a huge leap forward. That was good, since the 6,708-yard, 18-hole championship course with Eastern Sierra views also has narrow tree-lined fairways, as well as many creeks and lakes. We were grateful the 8,000-foot elevation took our balls farther down the fairways.

Another Mammoth Lakes layout, the nine-hole, 3,306-yard **Snowcreek Golf Course** (livesnowcreek.com/alpine-golf), also both pleases and challenges, with spectacular mountain views on every hole, water hazards on seven holes, and 8,000-foot elevation.

The Village at Mammoth (villageatmammoth.com): From an old-time-style general store to sports-equipment shops, and from sushi to tiki, The Village offers many appealing options, as well as special events.

Yosemite National Park (nps.gov/yose): The eastern entrance to the world-renowned park, and its awe-inspiring formations and waterfalls, is only about 40 miles from Mammoth Lakes, and opens for the summer when weather permits. You can self-drive; take a Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS) public-transit bus (yarts.com); or take a guided day tour with PLAYosemite Private Tours (playosemite.com). 🚗

Michele Andrus Dill is the magazine's senior editor. For more information on Mammoth Lakes/Mono County recreation, go to visitmammoth.com and monocounty.org.

Alaska Airlines (alaskaair.com) provides regular service to Mammoth Lakes.



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ITINERARY IDEAS

■ **Skiing** (mammothmountain.com): Ski season in the Mammoth Lakes area typically lasts throughout spring; last year, the last day of skiing was July 4. Enjoy the slopes at Mammoth Mountain Ski Area or the nearby June Mountain Ski Area. Snowcat tours are also available.

■ **Mammoth Mountain Panorama Gondola** (mammothmountain.com): Enjoy incredible views of mountains, woods, meadows and lakes on the way to the 11,053-foot summit of Mammoth Mountain, where you'll find a cafe, an interpretive center and an approximately 1-mile roundtrip ski/hike/bike trail to a lookout.

■ **Hiking** (mammothtrails.org): The Mammoth area has an array of great hiking trails, such as the moderately easy and scenic hike on the 2-mile Convict Lake Loop, which borders the lake and meanders through groves of trees.

■ **Sierra Rock Climbing School** (sierrarockclimbingschool.com): Take a selection of guided tours or lessons with this Bishop-based climbing school, from half-day Bay Area trips to weekends spent exploring the Eastern Sierra or Joshua Tree National Park.

■ **Hot Creek Geologic Site** (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/recrea/inyo/recrea/?recid=20414>): Get a firsthand view of the geological processes actively shaping the Eastern Sierra landscape by hiking on designated trails along Hot Creek, which contains numerous natural hot springs that also form scenic turquoise pools. Be sure to stay on marked trails; for their own safety, visitors are not allowed to go in the hot springs.

Blossom Trail and Agricultural Bounty

By Mark Grossi

My daughter, Kristin, thought it was snow from a distance. But within a few hundred yards, she could smell the intoxicating white blossoms of orange trees—reminiscent of honeysuckle or jasmine.

Kristin, then age 9, reacted like many kids whose parents take a drive along the connecting **Blossom Trail and Orange Blossom Trail** in nationally renowned Fresno County farm country. “Stop here, Daddy! Please.” Children gawk all along the way. Parents snap photos.

The trails (goblossomtrail.com) offer more than 80 miles of rural driving filled with natural wonder, buzzing with bees, and showing off brilliant white, pink and reddish petals in February, March and April. It’s pure eye candy on a sunny afternoon.

We explained to Kristin and her younger brothers, Joseph, 7, and Nicholas, 3, that the fruit blossoms signaled the start of the growing season for almonds, plums, apricots, peaches, nectarines, limes, oranges and lemons.



Colorful peach trees along the Blossom Trail.

Fresno County’s farm receipts annually total around \$7 billion, ranking it among the top three agricultural counties in the nation. The top crop is almonds, while grapes and peaches are among the other major fruit crops.

The blossom drive became a family tradition over the years, and we also had a habit of passing through nearby locations such as Selma, which in the 1960s proclaimed itself the “Raisin Capital of the World.”

Virtually all of the commercial raisin production in the United States takes place within a 60-mile radius of the city of Fresno, including notable production, processing and packaging in the Selma area, where we could see the grape vines beginning to bud.

We also liked stopping in Kingsburg, a distinctive Swedish-style village with a water tower that looks like a coffeepot.

Special blossom-trails events take place each year, from the Blossom Days Festival & Car Show in the town of Sanger, March 4 this year, to the Orange Cove Blossom Festival in the town of Orange Cove, April 1 this year.

After the trees have finished blossoming, the countryside provides views of green foothills and wildflowers. The drive along the

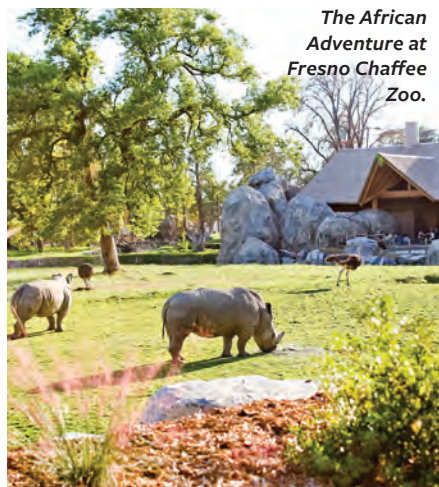
blossom trails takes you to places where you can see gorgeous groupings of California poppies, baby blue eyes, lupines and dozens of other flowers. And since more than 200 different types of crops are grown in Fresno County, many folks stop at local farmers markets when harvest time rolls around later in the year (gofresnocounty.com/farm_markets).

MORE FAVORITES

Fresno Chaffee Zoo (fresnochaffeezoo.org): We especially like the African Adventure and the Sea Lion Cove at this 39-acre site in historic Roeding Park, which was designed and created more than a century ago.

Foretiere Underground Gardens (undergroundgardens.com): Constructed over four decades by a Sicilian immigrant and citrus grower, these three acres of connected underground rooms and courtyards have well-tended fruit trees and vines, some of which date back 90 years. Plants get sunlight and fresh air through wide venting holes, called “skylights,” that go to the surface.

Majestic Mountain Loop (majesticmountainloop.com and nps.gov): Three incredible national parks—Sequoia,



The African Adventure at Fresno Chaffee Zoo.



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Kings Canyon and Yosemite—are all less than 100 miles from Fresno. The Majestic Mountain Loop website provides sample itineraries for self-drive touring of all three parks in three days, and also provides information on guided tours. ✈

Mark Grossi is a Central California freelance writer. For more information on visiting Fresno County, see gofresnocounty.com and playfresno.org.

Alaska Airlines (alaskaair.com) provides regular service to Fresno.

ITINERARY IDEAS

■ Woodward Regional Park

(fresno.gov/parks): Fresno's largest park is located near the **San Joaquin River** and features walking paths, picnic areas, an amphitheater and children's play areas. The park is also home to the **Shinzen Friendship Garden**, a 5-acre space that includes trails, a pond, bonsai trees and an authentic Japanese teahouse. In the summer, the park is the site of the **Woodward Shakespeare Festival**.

■ Fresno Art Museum

(fresnoartmuseum.org): The museum focuses on modern and contemporary American art in the form of painting, sculpture, prints, photography and other media. There are also permanent exhibits of **pre-Columbian** works from **Mesoamerica** and the **Andes**, as well as folk art and modern works from **Mexico**.

■ Kearney Mansion Museum

(valleyhistory.org): The mansion and servants' quarters were built in 1903 and offer a glimpse into life at the beginning of the 20th century. The buildings sit on a beautiful 225-acre park.

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The Surf's Always Up in Surf City

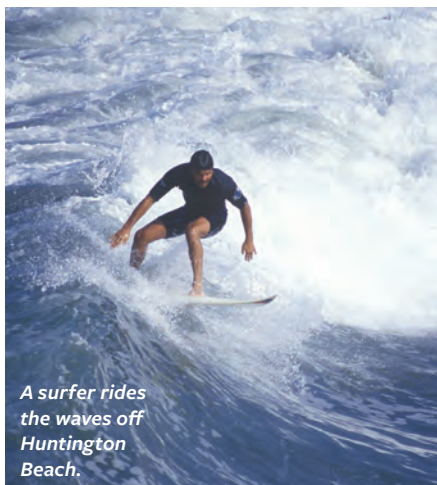
By Barbara Beckley

I stand awestruck beside a wooden long-board from the 1920s that towers 11.5 feet. “How could anyone ride *that*?” I wonder aloud. It’s one of the hundreds of surfboards of every size and era displayed inside the **International Surfing Museum** (surfingmuseum.org) in the Orange County city of Huntington Beach, aka Surf City USA. Museum Executive Director Diana Dehm says the board was most likely used in Hawai‘i to ride some of the biggest waves in the world.

Founded in 1987, the museum pays tribute to surfing around the globe and to the California city that helped turn this Hawaiian sport into a mainland lifestyle phenomenon. Boards are just the beginning of the permanent and rotating displays.

I’m surrounded by posters, photos, clothing, furniture and even the 1914 cornerstone of the original Huntington Beach Pier—representing the area where the U.S. Open of Surfing has been held since 1959. The Beach Boys’ lyrics “Let’s go surfin’ now; everybody’s learning how ...” play in the background.

For visitors, the museum is the perfect



A surfer rides the waves off Huntington Beach.



The Huntington Beach Pier area, site of the U.S. Open of Surfing.

quick course in surf culture. For locals like me who grew up in Southern California, it’s a trip down memory lane. I linger at a display of heritage wood boards painted with scenes of hula girls, woodies (1950s wood-trimmed station wagons) and palm trees. Next I admire a circa-1970s red fiberglass board by Robert August—a legendary Huntington Beach boardmaker, and looking up, I see hanging from the ceiling a 1980s foam-core short board by Carl Hayward, another renowned Huntington Beach surfboard maker.

I smile at the poster of a model in a sexy one-piece swimsuit from the 1970s, designed and manufactured by Huntington Beach-based Merrilee’s Swimwear.

Vintage posters show Jan & Dean—Dean Ormsby Torrence and the late William Jan Berry—famous surf musicians who topped the charts in the 1960s with *Surf City*, *Little Old Lady from Pasadena* and other iconic surf songs. “Dean and many [other] surfing legends pop in to visit the museum on a regular basis,” Dehm says.

Sinking into the red velour cushions of a 1970s wooden couch carved with tiki designs, I’m amazed as I watch the *Big Board Epic Ride* video, which shows how Huntington Beach set two Guinness World Records in 2015—for both “Largest Surfboard” and

“Most People Riding a Surfboard”—when 66 surfers, ages 15 to 79, rode a wave for 13 seconds on a 42-plus-foot board. Stepping outside, I see the orange, white and blue record-setting surfboard displayed alongside the museum building.

Turning the corner onto Main Street, I’m only a few steps from the separately owned **Surfing Walk of Fame**, which features plaques embedded in the pavement to honor surfer greats ranging from Hawai‘i’s Duke Kahanamoku (who was also an Olympic gold medal swimmer) to Lisa Andersen, a four-time world surf champion.

Nearby, I see the **Surfers’ Hall of Fame**, another independently owned sidewalk attraction, where a life-size bronze statue of Kahanamoku presides over cement handprints and footprints of surfing luminaries such as Laird Hamilton, a renowned “big-wave charger,” and Carissa Moore, a three-time world champion. And when I look up from the sidewalk, I see spread out before me the sunny sands and ocean waves of Huntington Beach, one of the key sites where California’s surf scene began.

MORE FAVORITES

Beaches (visittheoc.com, surfcityusa.com, visitlagunabeach.com): Locals and visitors

alike relish Orange County's miles of wide golden sands dotted with piers, fire pits and legendary surfing, from Huntington's City Beach to picture-perfect coves at Laguna Beach.

Bowers Museum, Santa Ana (bowers.org): I enjoy the world-class collection of Pacific Islands, African, Asian, Pre-Columbian and Native American art, and rotating exhibits.

Disneyland Resort, Anaheim (disneyland.com): The Happiest Place on Earth always delights visitors, and this summer "Rivers of America" is expected to reopen, bringing back fun experiences such as the Davy Crockett Explorer Canoes and the Mark Twain Riverboat. Coming to Disney California Adventure Park this summer is "Guardians of the Galaxy—Mission: BREAKOUT!" Breathtaking free-fall sensations—with new visual and audio effects, and music inspired by the film's soundtrack—are promised.



Lovely Laguna Beach.

TRACEROUDA / ISTOCK

Scenic Coastal Hikes (crystalcovestatepark.org): In Crystal Cove State Park, I'm thrilled by the sweeping ocean and mountain views along the Deer Canyon, Moro Canyon and Ticketron trails. In Laguna Beach (lagunacanyon.org), the Laurel Canyon Trail and the Old Emerald Falls Trail (popular for mountain biking) offer equally inspired views.

Roger's Gardens, Newport Beach (rogersgardens.com): This is an upscale destination nursery and home-decor campus where Orange County locals go for plants,

florals and gifts, and fine dining at the new Farmhouse restaurant, which opened in September. ✈

Barbara Beckley lives in Southern California. For more information on Orange County attractions and activities, see visittheoc.com and visitanaheim.org.

Alaska Airlines (alaskaair.com) provides regular service to Santa Ana, gateway to Orange County adventures.



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ITINERARY IDEAS

■ **South Coast Plaza** (southcoastplaza.com): Shop more than 250 upscale boutiques at Costa Mesa's globally renowned **South Coast Plaza**, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. Between perusing luxury brands such as Hermès and Tiffany & Co., visitors can stop for a bite at a selection of 30 restaurants. In addition, the on-site Segerstrom Center for the Arts presents live entertainment, such as ballet, chamber and symphony performances.

■ **"Along El Camino Real" exhibit at The Irvine Museum** (irvinemuseum.org): "Along El Camino Real" explores the history of the area that today approximates Highway 101 (El Camino Real or the Royal Road), including early California missions, with art from many of the 21 original missions in the state.

■ **Laguna Art Museum** (lagunaartmuseum.org): View more than 3,500 works, largely by California artists, at this water-front art museum in Laguna Beach. Permanent collections feature pieces from the 19th century to the present day, and exhibitions include "The Golden Decade: Photography at the California School of Fine Arts, 1945-55," and "From Wendt to Thiebaud: Recent Gifts for the Permanent Collection," both through May 29.

■ **Heritage Hill Historical Park in the town of Lake Forest** (ocparks.com/heritagehill): Take a guided tour of four fully restored and furnished buildings built between 1863 and 1908, including the Serrano Adobe, a historic adobe house from 1863. The park's 4.1 acres are planted with heritage landscaping, using traditional plants to match the buildings' history.

Art Appreciation

By Barbara Beckley

“I love it!” I can’t help exclaiming out loud at *Little Blue Steam Engines*, an oil on canvas by internationally known California artist Linda Herzog.

Her fanciful engine, which balances two steaming cups of tea and is accompanied by three goldfish swimming near the cog, makes me grin from ear to ear. So does the 14.5-inch-tall raku ceramic *Old Spice Bottle* likeness by Karen Shapiro, another well-known California artist.

Nearby, a lady who obviously shares my taste in art exclaims to her husband, “Look at that lipstick!” She points to the shiny coral color of Shapiro’s raku *Clinique Lipstick*.

The paintings, photographs, sculptures, glass pieces and ceramic works, by more than 100 domestic and international artists, at **Coda Gallery** (codagallery.com) in Palm Desert’s famous El Paseo Shopping District are proof that fine art can be fun as well as collectible.

“We’re a joyful art gallery—we don’t do angst,” gallery director Samuel Heaton tells me.

He further explains that Coda displays only contemporary art, mostly by artists still living. “Clients buy because they genuinely



The Coda Gallery showcases contemporary art by U.S. and international artists.

feel connected to the pieces,” he says.

Celebrating its 30th anniversary this year, Coda is the longest-operating art gallery on El Paseo—a street known for fine-art galleries, acclaimed boutiques and stylish restaurants such as the Cafe des Beaux-Arts.

Exploring the 9,000-square-foot gallery is like visiting an art museum. Natural light floods in from a glass-walled rotunda. I sit on a bench and wonder how Michigan artist Mark Lewanski creates his unusual works—strips of glass finely woven together like cloth.

But it’s the whimsical 2-foot-long green glass *Alligator Bowl*, by internationally renowned German Glasstudio Borowski, that wins my heart. The gator’s wide mouth (which creates the bowl), smiling yellow eyes, pudgy clear-glass feet, and saucy little tail adorned with cute pointy yellow scales are adorable. I look at this piece every time I visit the gallery. Maybe I’ll gift it to myself.

MORE FAVORITES

Free Yoga on the Great Lawn at the Sunnylands Center & Gardens

(sunnylands.org): Exercise where the rich and powerful—including President Barack Obama, Warren Buffet, Bill Gates and Queen

Elizabeth II—have attended meetings. The center offers a one-hour yoga or yoga-Pilates class on Fridays through April. No reservations needed.

The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens

(livingdesert.org): I’m always fascinated by the wildlife ranging from leopards, giraffes and zebras to exotic sand cats (which are slightly smaller than domestic cats, and which have a loud bark). The popular attraction also has beautiful desert botanical gardens, and regularly hosts events, including Brew at the Zoo, April 1, with beer-tasting, food from top Coachella Valley restaurants and caterers, and live music.

Palm Springs Modern Tours

(palm Springsmodern tours.com): See the best of Palm Springs’ Mid-Century Modern architecture with owner/guide Robert Imber, a founding member of Palm Springs Modern Committee.

Vintage Shopping: Complementing El Paseo Shopping District’s traditional shops—such as the Cactus Flower Shoe Salon, Wayne’s Collection womenswear, Escada and Louis Vuitton—are Palm Springs-area vintage shops that are among my insider favorites. The list includes Dazzles for jewelry and The Frippery for 1950s to ’70s apparel, both in Palm



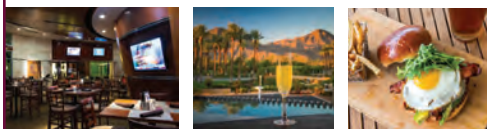
Yoga at the Sunnylands Center & Gardens.



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ITINERARY IDEAS

■ **The Palm Springs Air Museum** (palmsspringsairmuseum.org): Featuring more than 40 planes on display from the World War II, Korean War and Vietnam War eras—including some that still fly—the museum includes exhibits and artifacts, and you can climb inside the cockpits of some of the aircraft. You can also book a 20-minute flight on some of the classic airplanes.

■ **The Palm Springs Art Museum** (psmuseum.org): Offering a collection of modern and contemporary art, the museum has pieces by artists such as **Marc Chagall**, **Roy Lichtenstein**, **Pablo Picasso** and **Andy Warhol**. The museum has two branches, one in Palm Springs and the other in Palm Desert, and it also has major collections of classic **Western** and **Native American** art.

■ **Palm Springs Aerial Tramway** (pstramway.com): The aerial tramway offers passengers great views to and from the Mountain Station, which is located at the 8,516-foot elevation level on **Mount San Jacinto**. While at the station, enjoy two restaurants, observation decks, a museum, documentaries at two theaters and more than 50 miles of trails through **Mount San Jacinto State Park**.

■ **Joshua Tree National Park** (www.nps.gov/jotr): Home to the famous **Joshua Tree**—a species of the yucca tree—the park is nearly 800,000 acres in size and located about 35 miles northeast of Palm Springs. It is a popular hiking area and is known for spectacular rock formations and striking desert landscapes.

■ **Indian Canyons** (indian-canyons.com): The area includes the **Andreas**, **Murray** and **Palm**

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canyons and is part of the **Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians Reservation** in Palm Springs. For a fee, you can hike through the canyons, which include a rich abundance of local plants, fascinating rock formations, a stream, a waterfall and ancient art by native peoples.

■ **Golfing in Coachella Valley** (classicclubgolf.com; indianwells-golfresort.com; silverrock.org): Tee it up at some of the nation's finest municipal courses, including **The Classic Club** in Palm Desert, **Indian Wells Golf Resort** and **SilverRock Resort** in the city of La Quinta.



THE LIVING DESERT ZOO AND GARDENS

Zebras are among the animals at The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens.

Springs, while Hedge in Cathedral City is among my must-stop shops for conversation-piece home furnishings. ✈

Writer Barbara Beckley lives in Southern California. For more information on Greater Palm Springs activities and attractions, go to visitgreaterpalmsprings.com.

Alaska Airlines (alaskaair.com) provides regular service to Palm Springs.

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A Walk in the Park

By Archana Ram

On the surface, **Balboa Park** appears to be a traditional park. There are paths and picnic spots, trees for shade, and benches to while away afternoons. But San Diego's 1,200-acre urban green space doubles as one of the city's biggest cultural hubs, too.

This month the world-renowned **Old Globe** theater is presenting Steve Martin's hit play *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* through March 12, while the **Museum of Photographic Arts** hosts the famed "Prix Pictet" photo exhibition, highlighting sustainability issues, through May 23, following stops in Tokyo, Dublin and Paris. And beginning March 25, **The San Diego Museum of Art**—the largest and most visited art museum in the region—will showcase the sculptures of British artist Richard Deacon.

These are a few of the 15 major museums at the park (balboapark.org), which also has nine performing-arts centers and 17 gardens, not to mention 65 miles of hiking/biking trails, lawn bowling, a hip gastropub and the San Diego Zoo. The 100-year-old, 100-acre zoo, whose sponsors include Alaska Airlines, is home to more than 3,500 rare



Visitors enjoy a water fountain at Balboa Park.

and endangered animals, including the popular giant pandas.

Having so many pedestrian-friendly options in one place is ideal, especially for a car-averse California convert like me. Moving from Manhattan to San Diego four years ago meant getting reacquainted with the driver's seat. But in Balboa Park, I can revert to my preferred means of exploration: my two feet. (For visitors without a car and not within walking distance of the park, the No. 7 bus will take you from various spots downtown to a convenient Balboa Park stop at Park Boulevard and Village Place.)

Living just a half-mile away, I stroll to craft beer and live jazz at **Panama 66**, Shakespearean theater at The Old Globe, free concerts at the open-air **Spreckels Organ Pavilion**, hands-on exhibits at the **Fleet Science Center** and meditation sessions in the **Japanese Friendship Garden**. But for all its marquee attractions, Balboa Park is just as

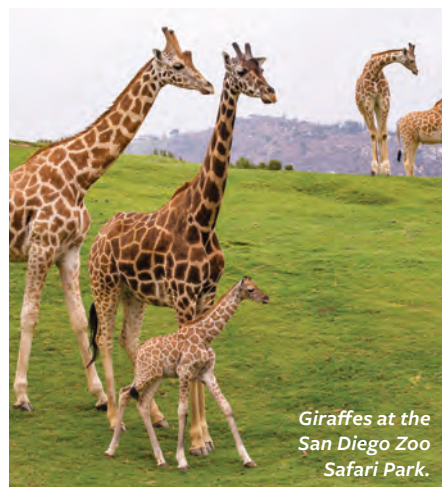
remarkable for the lesser-known areas. I like the trails in the 1,300-plant **Desert Garden** that spill into Florida Canyon. And there's an archery range under Cabrillo Bridge, disc golf in Morley Field, and the **House of Pacific Relations International Cottages** representing 34 countries, with cultural shows on Sundays, March through October.

With so much to offer, Balboa feels like my own personal playground smack-dab in the middle of the city.

MORE FAVORITES

Beaches (sandiego.org/explore/things-to-do/beaches-bays): San Diego boasts more than 70 miles of coastline, including family-friendly stretches, such as La Jolla Shores, and sites for seasoned surfers. No matter who's visiting me, I can find the right beach for them.

Coronado Island (coronadovisitorcenter.com): Rent a bike from one of Coronado's



Giraffes at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park.

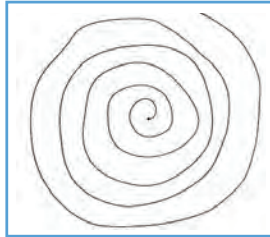
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The iconic Hotel del Coronado.

many outfitters, such as Wheel Fun Rentals (wheelfunrentals.com), for a leisurely one-hour spin around the island, which will take you past Glorietta Bay and the iconic Hotel del Coronado. Then play in the sand at 1.5-mile-long Coronado Central Beach.

San Diego Zoo Safari Park

(sdzsafaripark.org): This sister property to the San Diego Zoo delights young and old, with opportunities to see animals such as lions, rhinos, cheetahs and giraffes; various special safari tours are available. The Safari Park, whose official sponsors include Alaska Airlines, is located in San Diego County's Escondido area.

Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve

(torreypine.org): Choose from six easy to moderate hikes through this coastal landscape, which includes ocean views, a quiet beach and the Torrey pine, a species native to this area. South of the reserve, you can golf the renowned municipal, cliffside

Torrey Pines Golf Course (sandiego.gov/golf). ⌘

Archana Ram lives in San Diego. For more information on San Diego-area activities and attractions, go to sandiego.org.

Alaska Airlines (alaskaair.com) provides regular service to San Diego.

ITINERARY IDEAS

■ **Seaport Village** (seaportvillage.com): Shop in a lively atmosphere along the waterfront, with buskers, artists and a historic 1895 carousel. The Seaport Village offers 54 shops, as well as 17 dining venues.

■ **Old Town Trolley Tours** (trolleytours.com/san-diego): Hop on, hop off at sites of your choice during these trolley tours, with driver narrative, that stop at many attractions, from Coronado to Balboa Park. In addition, the **La Jolla and San Diego Beaches** hop-on/hop-off tour starts in Old Town and stops at Mount Soledad and La Jolla Village.

■ **Sightseeing and wildlife cruises** (hornblower.com): Look for gray whales (mid-December–early April) or blue whales (late June–early September), along with four species of dolphins, sea lions and even hammerhead sharks, on **Hornblower Cruises & Events'** naturalist-narrated Whale & Dolphin Watching Adventure. Additional options include San Diego Bay cruises; the two-hour full-bay tour includes more than 50 landmarks, historic sites and points of interest.

■ **Rock 'n' Roll Marathon San Diego** (runrocknroll.com): Challenge yourself by doing a 5K, 10K, half or full marathon at the **Rock 'n' Roll San Diego Marathon**, June 3–4. The marathon, celebrating its 20th year, will feature live local bands playing along the course. After crossing the waterfront finish line, runners can enjoy the Finish Line Festival and Post-Race Concert. In addition, the San Diego Convention Center will host a weekend-long Health & Fitness Expo. Additional upcoming Rock 'n' Roll Marathons in the West include Alaska Airlines Rock 'n' Roll Seattle.

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California Discoveries

By Andrew Waite

■ There's plenty of gold in California. Not to mention amber, nut brown and stout.

The California Craft Brewers Association calls the state the birthplace of the U.S. craft-brewing movement. It's currently home to more than 800 craft breweries, the most of any state.

Hopping on beer tours is a great way to experience all California has on tap. Whether you prefer pedaling a covered communal bicycle to and from stops (don't worry, a sober driver is at the helm) or being shuttled to breweries in an SUV, California has a full flight of tours. Here's a sampling:

–**Sac Brew Bike**, Sacramento, sacbrewbike.com.

–**Vantigo's San Francisco Brewery Tour**,

San Francisco, vantigosf.com/
san-francisco-brew-tour.

–**Velocipede Tours**, Oakland,
oaklandpedaltours.com.

–**San Jose Brew Bike**, San
Jose, sanjosebrewbike.com.

–**LA Beer Hop**, Los Angeles,
labeerhop.com.

–**OC Brewery Tours**, Orange County,
ocbrewery.tours.

For more to discover, read on.

■ **Abalone Cove Shoreline Park & Ecological Reserve, Rancho Palos Verdes,**

LA County: The 109-acre reserve features spectacular bluff-top vistas, hiking trails, picnic areas, two beaches and tide pools with



TYLER MUSSETER

colorful sea creatures. Within the park, visit Sacred Cove, with its deep teal water, black sand, and tide pools and sea caves that can be explored at low tide (pvplc.org/_lands/abalone_cove.asp).

■ **Carmel-by-the-Sea, Monterey County:** This European-style village above a white-sand beach has been an

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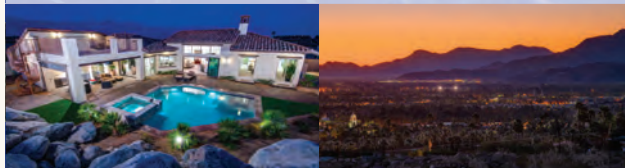
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artists' hub for more than a century.

The walkable community with restaurants, wine-tasting, art galleries, shopping, performing arts and the historic 1771 Carmel Mission Basilica is still inspiring artists and dazzling guests (carmelcalifornia.com).

■ **The Observation Deck at Mount Diablo State Park, Contra Costa County:**

Mounted telescopes let visitors see for nearly 200 miles from atop 3,849-foot Mount Diablo, which is surrounded by rolling green hills and flat valleys.

Spot the Golden Gate Bridge to the west and the intertwined San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers to the northeast (diablovalleyca.com).

■ **Ragged Point, San Luis Obispo County:**

Along the Highway 1 Discovery Route, Ragged Point sits 325 feet above the

Pacific Ocean, allowing for its Million Dollar View. Visitors can gaze at miles of open sea and hike the half-mile trail down to the beach to get a closer look at the breaking surf.

In April, Alaska Airlines will begin offering nonstop service between Seattle and San Luis Obispo (highway1discoveryroute.com; slocal.com).

■ **Build your own La La Land Tour, Los Angeles:**

For fans of the 2016 film starring Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone, consider creating your own tour of destinations seen in the movie.

For instance, The Lighthouse Cafe in Hermosa Beach is a legendary jazz club, opened in 1949, adored by Gosling's character, Sebastian. And Griffith Observatory, which sits on the southern slope of Mount Hollywood and boasts one of the

best views of the iconic Hollywood sign, is the site of a delightful tap dance scene in the film.

For more *La La Land* tour ideas, go to visitcalifornia.com/attraction/create-your-own-la-la-land-tour.

■ **The California State Capitol, Sacramento:**

Part museum, part working state capitol, the building, with its ornate rotunda and Greco-Roman portico, gives visitors a look at California's story, past and present. Guided tours go through the working legislative building, opened in 1869 and renovated in 1982, to legislative chambers.

The extensive artwork collection housed at the capitol's museum includes the California State Senate's Contemporary Art Collection, with acrylics, oils, bronze sculptures, blown glass, mixed media and watercolors (capitolmuseum.ca.gov). ✂

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