



Central Coast

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Passionfish (p479)
- ➔ Ember (p513)
- ➔ Cracked Crab (p513)
- ➔ San Luis Obispo Farmers Market (p505)
- ➔ Penny Ice Creamery (p463)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Post Ranch Inn (p487)
- ➔ Dream Inn (p462)
- ➔ Cass House Inn (p494)
- ➔ HI Santa Cruz Hostel (p462)
- ➔ Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park Campground (p486)

Why Go?

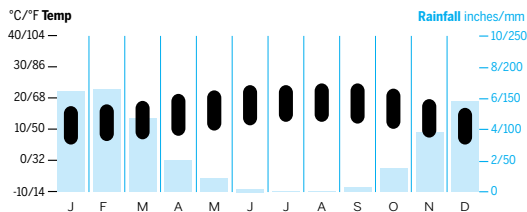
Too often forgotten or dismissed as 'flyover' country between San Francisco and LA, this stretch of California coast is packed with wild beaches, misty redwood forests, and rolling golden hills of fertile vineyards and farm fields.

Coastal Hwy 1 pulls out all the stops, scenery-wise. Flower-power Santa Cruz and the historic port town of Monterey are gateways to the rugged wilderness of the bohemian Big Sur coast. It's an epic journey snaking down to vainglorious Hearst Castle, past lighthouses and edgy cliffs atop which endangered condors soar.

Get acquainted with California's agricultural heartland along inland Hwy 101, called El Camino Real (the King's Highway) by Spanish conquistadors and Franciscan friars. Colonial missions still line the route, which passes through Paso Robles' flourishing wine country. Then soothe your nature-loving soul in collegiate San Luis Obispo, ringed by sunny beach towns and volcanic peaks.

When to Go

Santa Cruz



Apr–May Balmy temperatures, but fewer tourists than summer; wildflowers bloom.

Jul–Aug Fog disappears as ocean waters warm up for beach season.

Sep–Oct Sunny blue skies, smaller crowds and wine country harvest festivals.



Central Coast Highlights

1 Screaming your head off aboard the Giant Dipper on the beach boardwalk, then learning to surf in **Santa Cruz** (p458).

2 Cruising Hwy 1, where the sky touches the sea, along the rocky coastline of mystical **Big Sur** (p481).

3 Being mesmerized by aquatic denizens of the 'indoor ocean' at the kid-friendly **aquarium** (p468) in Monterey.

4 Marveling in disbelief at the grandiosity of **Hearst Castle** (p490) after meeting the neighbors: ginormous elephant seals.

5 Hanging loose in college-town **San Luis Obispo** (p503), surrounded by beaches, vineyards and mountains.

6 Exploring down-to-earth novelist John Steinbeck's blue-collar world in the agricultural small town of **Salinas** (p498).