

Welcome to Coastal California

From towering coast redwoods in the foggy north, to the perfect sun-kissed surf beaches of the south, this slice of Pacific Coast is a knockout beauty.

Beaches & Outdoor Fun

In all of your California dreaming, palm trees, golden sands and Pacific sunsets beckon, right? In coastal California, those cinematic fantasies really do come true. You can learn to surf, play a game of pickup volleyball or light an oceanfront bonfire on cool nights. Sunny beach towns from Santa Cruz south to San Diego, each with its own idiosyncratic personality, give you perfect excuses to head outdoors. Heading north of San Francisco, dramatically windswept sands have inspired generations of poets and painters, offering miles of oceanfront for beachcombing and tramping in solitude.

Big Cities, Small Towns

No less astoundingly diverse than the landscapes are the people who have staked their fortunes here. Start out exploring San Francisco's one-of-a-kind neighborhoods, from beatnik North Beach to historic Chinatown, before going celebrity-spotting and people-watching in LA. In between, hang with radical tree-sitting lefties in the Humboldt Nation, live the very good life in California's wine countries, get groovy with new-age gurus in San Diego's North County, or talk fishing with salty dogs in port towns like Eureka, Bodega Bay and Monterey.

Food & Drink

Maybe your coastal sojourn will be an epicurean quest. Finding the most-killer fish tacos in San Diego alone could take days or even weeks. San Francisco and Los Angeles are both culinary capitals, where citizens passionately argue about the best sushi bar or fusion food truck. LA is also a melting pot of multicultural cooking, from Thai Town to the tamale shops of East LA. Outside the cities, follow your nose and let it lead you serendipitously up and down California's coastal highways, stopping at seafood shacks, rollicking brewpubs, farmers markets and vineyards.

Creative Culture

From the mid-19th-century Gold Rush to the dot-com bubble, California has survived extreme booms and busts, often getting by on its wits. Today Hollywood still makes most of the world's movies and TV shows, fed by a vibrant performing arts scene on stages across the state. Trends are usually kick-started in California not by moguls in offices, but by motley crowds of surfers, artists and dreamers concocting the out-there ideas behind everything from skateboarding to biotechnology. If you linger long enough, you might actually see the future coming.



Why I Love Coastal California

By Sara Benson, Coordinating Author

Like almost half of the people who live here, California wasn't where I was born, but it's where I've chosen to make my home. I never tire of road-tripping along the Golden State's coastal highways, seeking out hidden beaches, new peaks to climb and places to paddle a kayak. The rural vineyards and craft breweries of the Central Coast are practically in my backyard, tempting me to play truant on any given weekday. For weekend escapes, I head north to cool, fog-kissed San Francisco Bay or south to sunny, cosmopolitan Los Angeles.

For more about our authors, see page 528.