You might have a great number of expectations about what you’ll discover when you arrive in sunny Southern California. Surf, endless fun and sun, youth culture inventing itself before your eyes, and the legends of Hollywood and the ‘Old West’ surrounding you everywhere. And they are all here. But just for a moment, let us give you a slightly different take on the mythology of Los Angeles and Southern California.

There’s a jutting outcrop of barren and heat-blasted rock high above Death Valley known as Aguereberry Point. The only way you can reach it is by taking the twisted and treacherous road wrenched and hewn in the 1930s by the eccentric prospector (Pete Aguereberry) after whom it is named. From here you can look out across 100 miles of one of the most desolate and forbidding landscapes on the planet and ask yourself, ‘Why on earth would human beings ever risk their lives to cross this barren, hellish place?’ To the east you’ll spy the desolate mountains that pioneers just barely made it through; while to the west you will be able to make out towering mountains, their peaks covered with snow and the promise of life-giving water.

From this elevated viewpoint you can begin to imagine that even the slightest hope of what lay ahead was enough to keep early settlers alive for the last leg of their westward journey. If they did survive, their dreams would have been fulfilled. Among the wonders they found were alpine mountains soaring to over 10,000ft; coastal plains and beaches without equal; soil as rich as anywhere on earth, able to sustain livestock and produce wine, vast groves of fruit and fields of vegetables; and weather and sunlight that’s the envy of all who live anywhere other than the Mediterranean. This was Southern California, the land of dreams and dreamers. And it is no less wondrous now.

Today’s Southern California, or ‘SoCal’ as its new natives call it, is the culmination of the efforts of generations of such dreamers. Bear in mind that on the pages that follow we’re talking about one half of a single American state. It has an economy roughly the equal of Spain. Its universities are plentiful and world class. From Los Angeles, the imagery spun by Hollywood dominates the digital transmissions and cultural trends of the entire planet. Surf, sand and sex will endure as long as there is a SoCal coast.

But SoCal is not a finished work. It remains one of the most dynamic places on earth in which to live and play. Just consider space probes, Disneyland, the internet, automotive and fashion design, the movie industry and its attendant media slaves – all are headquartered in or managed from here. The region’s growing pains have largely found an equilibrium. The problem now is growth itself.

The nightmares of the ’90s – the race riots and the catastrophic Northridge earthquake among them – seem already to belong to a different age. But perhaps it’s because of this very adaptability and equanimity that SoCal has found that the human wave continues to crest and threaten. Every New Year’s Day, the largest commercial for living here – the Rose Parade – snare the imagination of folks freezing in Wisconsin or struggling to make ends meet in the American rust belt. Many of them choose...
to move here. With this burgeoning humanity come the attendant problems of horrific traffic and skyrocketing costs of living and real estate. Public transport is woefully inadequate, so everyone hits the freeway where average ‘rush hour’ speed is a whopping 17mph. Sheer human impaction is a palpable force and begs the question that Rodney King so famously asked: ‘Can’t we all get along?’

The current mayor of Los Angeles – Antonio Villaraigosa, himself of Mexican descent – is a fellow with bold ideas about social initiatives and it’s extremely difficult to envision a return to the infamous ‘Zoot Suit Riots’ of the ’40s or the uproar that followed the ‘all-white jury’ verdict in the Rodney King beating case. You may be astonished to see the ethnic and racial mix of colleagues and friends walking along boulevards and beaches or gathering for meals together in SoCal’s plethora of world cuisine restaurants. As we joke locally, ‘Whatever happens in SoCal today will happen to the rest of the world a few years later.’ We can only hope that, in terms of race and ethnic relations, this timetable speeds up enormously. Time and again, SoCal has proven itself to be resourceful, resilient, adaptive and innovative. With global warming threatening, you can bet the bank that Caltech, UCLA and other universities are directing their brains toward solving the issues.

The myths surrounding SoCal have somehow come true. You truly can surf in the morning in pleasant climes, spend the afternoon skiing down alpine slopes and end the day with alfresco dinner in the desert. Who wouldn’t want to live here, even with the horrifying commuting times? Who wouldn’t want to visit, or perhaps become a part of, one of the world’s greatest and most successful natural and social experiments?
Southern California (SoCal) has excellent tourism infrastructure, and backpackers, families and urban nomads will all find their needs and expectations met. Room and travel reservations are a good idea between June and early September and around major holidays, but otherwise you can keep your advance planning to a minimum. Traffic in the heavily congested coastal areas can be a nightmare at times. Avoid traveling between 3pm and 7pm on weekdays or, in the spirit of slow travel, consider using alternative transportation – such as the train or bus – for at least part of your trip.

WHEN TO GO
SoCal’s a great destination year-round, but most people visit in July and August when cloudless skies and high temperatures are pretty much guaranteed. This is the best time for frolicking on the beach, enjoying alfresco dinners and attending festivals and other open-air events. The mountains are gorgeous, especially if you’re into hiking, biking or other outdoor pursuits. Summer is not ideal for exploring the desert, where the mercury can soar as high as 120°F. In all areas the desert lodging is scarce and costly during these months and you’ll be jostling for space at major attractions. Note that in June thick clouds often blanket the beach towns, but by July the coast is usually clear, so to speak.

The shoulder seasons (March to May and September to November) bring smaller crowds, lower prices and more temperate weather. In spring wildflowers often brighten meadows, mountains and deserts, while in fall it can still be warm enough to swim in the Pacific.

Unless you’re planning a beach vacation, winter (December to February) is a great time to visit, despite the greater chance of rain. It’s ideal for exploring the desert, when temperatures are mild and pleasant. The mountains, meanwhile, have turned into a winter wonderland, drawing skiers and boarders to the slopes. City cultural calendars are in full swing, skies usually clear, temperatures still agreeable and lines as short as they’ll ever be (except around holidays).

For information on holidays see p414, and for details of festivals and special events see p413.

COSTS & MONEY
SoCal ain’t a bargain destination. Most people here make a pretty handsome living and appreciate the good life, which drives up the overall standard of living. What you spend depends largely on what kind of traveler you are,
what experiences you wish to have and the season in which you’re visiting. In summer and around holidays, renting a car, staying in midrange hotels, enjoying two sit-down meals a day and spending some money on sightseeing, activities and going to bars or clubs will cost between $200 and $300 per day (per person, traveling as an adult couple). Families can save by booking hotels that don’t charge extra for children staying in the same room as their parents and by taking advantage of discounts at museums, theme parks and other sights. (See p72 for details.) Even to merely survive you probably won’t be able to spend less than $70 per day, and this will have you sleeping in hostels, riding buses, preparing your own meals or eating fast-food, and limiting your entertainment. For ways to keep costs down, see p413.

Comfortable midrange accommodations starts at around $120 for a double room, although budget chains, especially along the freeways, may have lower rates. A two-course meal in an average restaurant, without alcoholic drinks, costs between $30 and $45, plus tax and tip. Museums charge anything up to $15 entry, while attractions such as Disneyland will set you back about $65 per person. Car rentals start at $20 per day, excluding tax and insurance.

TRAVEL LITERATURE
To get you in the mood for your trip, pick up some of these titles that paint vivid pictures of the land and society you’re about to visit.

An engrossing tale that weaves together the fates of an environmental writer and an undocumented Mexican couple, *The Tortilla Curtain* (1996) by TC Boyle is an elegant novel about the clash of cultures and the elusiveness of the American dream.

Mike Davis’ seminal work *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (updated edition 2006) takes a razor-sharp look at LA’s social history, power structures, absurdities and contradictions and examines how these realities will affect its future.

*California Uncovered* (2004), edited by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, is an insightful anthology of poems, profiles and essays – by seasoned and fresh voices – about California’s many different faces and its complex, constantly evolving identity.

*Hollywood Babylon* (1958), Kenneth Anger’s ‘tell-all’ book about the tawdry, sad and scandalous lives and times of Hollywood’s Golden Era stars, is a classic, even if reportedly rooted more in rumor than reality.

Marc Reisner’s must-read *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (1993) examines, in dynamic prose, the contentious, sometimes violent, water wars that gave rise to modern California.

In *Los Angeles: People, Places and the Castle on the Hill* (2002), AM Holmes checks into the legendary Chateau Marmont on the Sunset Strip to create this quick-witted and entertaining cultural dissection of the city and its people in all its surreal glory and glamour.

In *Where I Was From* (2003), Joan Didion’s thoughts on California shatter palm-fringed fantasies as she skewers the stinking rich, the violence and shallowness as we accompany her pioneering family’s own history on this warped shore.


INTERNET RESOURCES
Hunt down bargain airfares, book hotels, check on weather conditions or chat with locals and other travelers about the best places to visit – or avoid – on the internet. Start with lonelyplanet.com, where you’ll find travel news, links

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<tr>
<td>Dinner for 2 in Los Angeles: $60+</td>
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<td>Motel room in San Diego: $80-120</td>
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<tr>
<td>Movie ticket to feature film: $11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bottle of wine in Santa Barbara Wine Country: $20+</td>
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<td>Cup of coffee at roadside diner: $1.50</td>
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<td>Cup of coffee at fancy restaurant: $4</td>
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<td>Valet parking: $3.50+</td>
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to useful resources, an accommodations booking engine and the interactive Thorn Tree forum. For more cool websites see p100.

**California Department of Transportation** ([www.dot.ca.gov](http://www.dot.ca.gov)) Packed with tourist assistance, route planning, mapping assistance and highway and weather conditions.

**California State Government** ([www.ca.gov](http://www.ca.gov)) Links to general information, history, culture, doing business and environmental protection.

**California State Parks** ([www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)) Indispensable site for history, information and services at all state parks.

**California Tourism** ([www.visitcalifornia.com](http://www.visitcalifornia.com)) Links to all visitor bureaus throughout the state.

**Roadside America** ([www.roadsideamerica.com](http://www.roadsideamerica.com)) The ‘online guide to offbeat attractions’ covers lots of places they won’t tell you about at the local tourist office.

**Theme Park Insider** ([www.themeparksinsider.com](http://www.themeparksinsider.com)) Visitors rate and evaluate rides and attractions at major theme parks in SoCal and elsewhere.

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**TRAVELING RESPONSIBLY**

Since our inception in 1973, Lonely Planet has encouraged readers to tread lightly, travel responsibly and enjoy the magic of independent travel. Travel is growing at a jaw-dropping rate, and we still firmly believe in the benefits it can bring. But we also encourage you to consider the impact of your visit on both the global environment and local economies, cultures and ecosystems.

Traveling sustainably within congested Southern California is a challenge but there are some things you can do to lessen your impact. Build an itinerary around more than just Disneyland and other impacted hot spots. Get out of the car and onto a bike or hit the trail in gorgeous parks and wilderness. This book is full of ideas to get you off the beaten path. You might even want to put it away sometimes and just get lost. (Tell us if you find a great new place.)

For background on the wider environmental issues facing Southern California and how these are being tackled, see p61.

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**Getting There & Away**

Flying has become second nature and few of us stop to consider using alternative travel methods. Yet, depending on where you’re based, traveling to Southern California by land may be easier and more comfortable than you think. Amtrak operates three long-distance trains each day (p424) and Greyhound’s bus network is extensive (p423). If you’re driving, rent an efficient car – preferably a hybrid – rather than using your own vehicle, especially if it’s an old gas-guzzler. And decline those ‘free’ upgrades – how big a car do you really need? Consider ride-sharing (p424). If you do choose to fly, offset your carbon emissions. See [www.climatecare.org](http://www.climatecare.org), [www.terrapass.com](http://www.terrapass.com) or [www.sustainabletravelinternational.org](http://www.sustainabletravelinternational.org) for details.

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**Slow Travel**

Southern California is practically synonymous with car culture but, with time and patience, you can get around using public transportation. The trick is to focus your itinerary and do in-depth explorations of smaller areas rather than a sweeping loop. Even if you have a car, consider ditching it at least part of the time. Amtrak’s *Pacific Surfliner* (p424) links all the coastal cities from San Diego to Santa Barbara, while inland destinations are served by Greyhound buses (p423). Cities and towns have local bus systems. Even in LA you’ll be OK as long as you limit your ambition to seeing only one or two neighborhoods a day. Santa Barbara, Palm Springs and the Orange County beach towns are compact enough for exploring by bicycle. If you take an organized tour, make sure it operates on sustainable itineraries.
GREEN MEDALISTS
Southern California may not have a reputation for being leaders in the green movement, but the concept is definitely catching on.

1 Guided Tour – Sustainable Vine Wine Tour (p400)
2 Wildlife Viewing – Newport Bay Ecological Reserve (p264)
3 Getaway – Joshua Tree National Park (p363)
4 Alternative energy – Palm Springs Windmill Tours (p355)
5 Sustainable Winery – Alma Rosa Winery (p399)
6 Initiative – Santa Barbara’s Car Free Project (p385)
7 Organization – Heal the Bay (p236)
8 Natural food store – Erewhon (p212)
9 Restaurant – Leaf Cuisine (p179)
10 Hotel – Ambrose (p169)

TOP READS
Great storytelling opens up a window on a destination’s culture and people. Get ready for your trip by curling up with these works set in SoCal and penned by some of the finest local writers. For reviews, see p48.

1 *The Big Sleep* (1939) Raymond Chandler
2 *Day of the Locust* (1939) Nathanael West
4 *Play it as it Lays* (1970) Joan Didion
5 *Less than Zero* (1985) Bret Easton Ellis
7 *Floaters* (1996) Joseph Wambaugh
8 *Manhattan Beach Project* (2005) Peter Lefcourt
9 *There Will Never be Another You* (2006) Carolyn See

ROAD-TRIPPING TUNES
Create a SoCal playlist for your iPod, grab a convertible, crank up the volume and get drivin’. SoCal, so cool!

1 ‘California Dreaming’ – The Mamas and the Papas
2 ‘Straight Outta Compton’ – NWA
3 ‘Los Angeles’ – X
4 ‘Hollywood Swingin’ – Kool & the Gang
5 ‘Come a Long Way’ – Michelle Shocked
6 ‘City of Angels’ – Red Hot Chili Peppers
7 ‘Ventura Highway’ – America
8 ‘California’ – Phantom Planet
9 ‘All I Wanna Do’ – Sheryl Crow
10 ‘Surfin’ USA’ – Beach Boys
Accommodations
Most hotel managers have thus far been reluctant to jump on the green bandwagon in Southern California and even such simple eco-initiatives as offering you the option of reusing your towels and sheets, switching to soap dispensers, replacing plastic or Styrofoam cups with glass and dropping prepackaged items from the breakfast buffet are still pretty rare. The more committed hotels recycle food and other waste, and some even put recycle baskets in guestrooms. Many now loan guests bicycles for free or a small fee. You can help raise awareness among hotel staff by thanking them for any ecofriendly programs they offer; if they don’t have any, encourage them to do so and offer a few constructive hints.

Food
Fortunately, California cuisine is all about being local, organic and seasonal, so eating like a 'locavore' shouldn’t be a tall order. Certified farmers markets abound (see www.farmerfet.net.com for a complete list), as do organic food stores such as Whole Foods or Wild Oats. Choose restaurants that make use of organic produce whenever possible and only order fish, seafood or meat that’s from sustainable sources. Bottled water shipped over from Fiji or France? No thank you, filtered tap will be fine (and cheaper). If carrying a bottle of water, refill it in restrooms or at water fountains. Take fast food off the menu.

Responsible Travel Schemes
There are various organizations and accreditation programs that identify tourist facilities by a series of sustainable-travel criteria:
California Green Lodging Program (www.ciwmbox.ca.gov/EPP/GreenLodging) List of state-certified green hotels throughout California.
Green Hotels (www.greenhotels.com) Membership-based green hotels association with directory.
Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms (www.wwoofusa.org) Volunteering opportunities on organic farms, with about 10 farms in SoCal.

For an exhaustive trove of advice on how to go green (including intriguing tips on how to green your sex life), check out www.treehugger.com/gogreen.php.
Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

THE GRAND CIRCLE

Kick off in Los Angeles (p78), where top-notch sights, beautiful beaches and terrific food form a trifecta of treats. Follow up with a date with Mickey at Disneyland (p232) and a day of pleasure-filled downtime in Laguna Beach (p270) before heading south to San Diego (p281) for culture in Balboa Park and animal encounters at the zoo and SeaWorld. Escaping civilization, head to starkly beautiful Anza-Borrego Desert State Park (p368), the eerie Salton Sea (p372), which is a major migratory bird refuge, and to Joshua Tree National Park (p363) with its whimsical trees. Squeeze in a day of margarita-sipping and golfing in nearby Palm Springs (p346) before climbing from palms to pines en route to alpine Big Bear Lake (p221) for biking, hiking, fishing and skiing. From here it’s west via the scenic Rim of the World Dr to Ventura (p402) for some great thrifting and an excursion to the Channel Islands National Park (p405). The final stop is Santa Barbara (p375), whose gorgeous Spanish-Mediterranean downtown has fun shopping and dining. Before heading back south to LA, stock up on fine pinots in Santa Barbara Wine Country (p395).

Southern California is a rich quilt of spirit-lifting coast, mystical deserts, bustling cities and impressive mountains, as you will discover on this 900-mile loop. Take your sweet time to fully immerse yourself in this banquet of treats, treasures and temptations.
COASTAL DELIGHTS

One Week

Book-ended by San Diego and Santa Barbara, this route hugs the Pacific for most of its 240 miles. Before steering northward, admire fine art in Balboa Park (p297), leaping killer whales at SeaWorld (p320) and buff dudes in Mission Beach (p319), all in San Diego. Legoland California (p337) in Carlsbad gets a thumbs up from the preteen set while, further north, history buffs salivate over the beautifully restored Mission San Juan Capistrano (p277).

Our vote for prettiest OC town is artsy Laguna Beach (p270) whose secluded coves, craggy cliffs and azure waves create a Riviera-like feel. Want ritzy? Plow on to Newport Beach (p261), still reveling in its post-The OC glow, where bobbing yachts, the giant Fashion Island mall and dare-devil surfers are prevailing presences. Speaking of surfing, the official ‘Surf City USA’ – Huntington Beach (p256) – is just up the road and truly epitomizes the surf-sand-sex way of life. Still, to party big-city style, Huntingtonians head across the LA County border to Pine Ave in Long Beach (p130), while families find plenty of stimulus at the Queen Mary ocean liner and the state-of-the-art Aquarium of the Pacific.

Continue with a meander along surreally beautiful Palos Verdes Dr (p128) before plunging headlong into the South Bay towns of Redondo Beach (p128), Hermosa Beach (p127) and Manhattan Beach (p127). Their American-as-apple-pie vibe contrasts sharply with boho-chic (but wacky) Venice (p125). Increasingly sophisticated Santa Monica (p124) beckons with a lively pier, fun shopping and excellent restaurants. The busy but scenic Pacific Coast Hwy quickly takes you to celebrity haunt Malibu (p120), beautifully hemmed in by the ocean and mountains. Stop briefly in Ventura (p402) for a look at the mission and a bit of shopping before wrapping up in Santa Barbara (p375), a symphony of red-tile roofs, great architecture and restaurants.
NO CAR? NO PROBLEM!

May we present: the logistics for three fun-filled carless days in LA, the city infamous for its traffic. **West Hollywood** (p109) makes a handy base of operation and puts you within walking distance – or short DASH bus ride (p219) – of the **Farmers Market/Grove** (p110), **Museum Row** (p110), hip restaurants and bars, and stylish shopping. Explore your immediate surroundings on day one, then the following morning catch the DASH bus north on La Cienega Blvd for **Hollywood Boulevard** (p103), perhaps stopping for a gut-filling breakfast at the **Griddle Café** (p176). Explore the legendary strip, then board the **Metro Rail** (p219) Red Line subway at Hollywood & Highland and head to **Union Station** (p133) in Downtown LA. Spend the afternoon following our walking tour on p155, making sure to return to Union Station before 5pm. Catch the Red Line to Pershing Sq, then take Metro Rapid Bus 720 from Broadway & 5th St West to Fairfax & Wilshire and catch the last DASH at 6pm.

On day three, pack a swimsuit because you’re headed to the beach. But first, Beverly Hills. Board the DASH on La Cienega, transferring to the Metro Rapid 720 west bus at Fairfax & Wilshire. Get off at **Rodeo Drive** (p114) for a whiff of the lifestyles of the rich and famous and perhaps breakfast at **Nate ‘n Al’s** (p177). Then it’s back on the bus and on to **Santa Monica** (p124). Spend a couple of hours in the sand, check out the Santa Monica Pier or squeeze in some quality shopping along Third St Promenade. Catch the Metro Rapid 720 east no later than 5pm, again changing to the last 6pm DASH at Wilshire & Fairfax.

**Three Days**

- **Hollywood Sign.**
- **Walk of Fame.**
- **Walt Disney Concert Hall.**
- **Rodeo Dr.**
- **Beach.**

Yup, it can be done. LA without a car. You’ll need patience, an open mind, a sense of direction and a couple of Metro day passes. Get an early start and plan on being back in the hotel at dinnertime.
DESSERT RAMBLINGS

One Week

Start your trip with a couple of days in dynamic Los Angeles (p78), then head east to retro-chic Palm Springs (p346), the hip-unhip-and-hip-again former hangout of Elvis and Sinatra. Budget some time for the Desert Hills Premium Outlets (p361) to snap up deals from Gap to Gucci, then spend the afternoon kicking back poolside with margaritas and planning the next day. Options: exploring palm-studded canyons, trading the heat for a pine-scented alpine wonderland, going Gumby with a massage – or all of the above.

Then it’s goodbye to civilization and off to near-mystical Joshua Tree National Park (p363), whose weathered boulders and whimsically twisted namesake trees have inspired many artists, most notably the band U2. Take time to linger, maybe joining a ranger-led walk to better engage with and understand this unique ecology. If you think this is stark beauty, turn your wheels north toward the starker-still Mojave Desert, a quiet pastiche of sand dunes, mountains, volcanic cinder cones and ghost towns.

By now, you’re surely ready for a big-city fix. So step on it, and head northeast for Vegas (p224), baby. Sin City is exciting, seductive, outrageous and absolutely unique. Where else can you climb the Eiffel Tower, kiss your sweetie in a gondola and witness sexy sirens battle it out with pirates, all in a couple of hours? Before you gamble away your life savings, get back in the car for the drive west to Death Valley National Park (p223), where the desert puts on a truly spectacular show. Singing sand dunes, desert floor covered in saw-toothed miniature mountains, hills erupting in fireworks of color and mysteriously footloose boulders are just some of the amazing features awaiting you.

Open roads, big skies and breathtaking scenery await on this 800-mile magical mystery tour through the SoCal desert and the glamour capitals of Los Angeles and Las Vegas. Pack a good camera, a keen eye and an open mind.
IT'S KIDDIE TIME

It’s no secret: kids love Southern California, with its glorious beaches, sunny skies and head-spinning trove of theme parks, outdoor adventures and cool museums. It will leave you thrilled and exhausted, but there’s no question an audience with Mickey at Disneyland (p232) is an essential SoCal experience. To meet the adorable Peanuts, head to nearby Knott’s Berry Farm (p249), America’s oldest theme park, which pairs Old Western themes with futuristic roller-coasters and Camp Snoopy. Hard-core coaster freaks, though, will feel the g-force pull of Six Flags Magic Mountain (p221), with its fleet of stomach-wrenching brain-blasters. Lest your kids think SoCal is all about thrills, take them to such fabulous interactive museums as the Discovery Science Center (p250) in Orange County or the Aquarium of the Pacific (p130) in Long Beach. San Diego is also about animal magnetism: the famous San Diego Zoo (p298) has an entire Noah’s Ark worth of critters, while at SeaWorld (p320) you’ll enjoy the antics of Shamu, the killer whale, and his finned friends. And don’t miss the Wild Animal Park (p341), where large mammals such as giraffes and zebras roam ‘freely’ in large enclosures.

SIDE-TRACKING SIDEWAYS

Following in the footsteps of Miles (Paul Giamatti) and Jack (Thomas Haden Church), the anti-heroes of the 2004 surprise hit movie Sideways, has become a popular diversion in the Santa Barbara Wine Country (p395). In Buellton, Miles and Jack stay at the otherwise unremarkable Days Inn and walk to the Hitching Post II (p393) and their meeting with Maya (Virginia Madsen). Nearby Solvang is where the two have breakfast at the Solvang Restaurant (p394). North of Buellton, Zaca Station Rd heads off Hwy 101 past the Firestone Vineyard (p397), where the two couples – Jack and Stephanie (Sandra Oh), Miles and Maya – share some romantic moments in the perfectly lit cask room. A bit further, Foxen Canyon Rd is a star in its own right. The Fess Parker Winery (p398) does almost too good a job posing as the pedestrian Frass Canyon Winery (you know they make a mean merlot). North, Foxen Winery (p398) also does a star turn (it’s the tiny roadside place where Miles and Jack surreptitiously chug). In the south, Foxen Canyon Rd ends at Los Olivos where the couples have a romantic meal at Los Olivos Café (p400).
MAY THE SPIRIT MOVE YOU
Judging by the gossip rags, you might think SoCal is Sodom and Gomorrah reincarnate, but the region is actually among the most religiously diverse in the nation. After all, its recorded history begins with a string of Franciscan-founded missions, starting with Mission San Diego de Alcalá (p302) and moving north to Mission San Juan Capistrano (p277), San Gabriel Mission (p150), Mission San Fernando Rey de España (p151), Mission San Buenaventura (p402) and Mission Santa Barbara (p380). Beautifully restored, they provide a window on a time when SoCal was just a remote and dusty outpost. Jump two centuries ahead and you have some of the world’s finest architects building new houses of worship, most notably Rafael Moneo’s boldly modern Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels (p135) in LA and Philip Johnson’s glass shrine, Crystal Cathedral (p250) in Orange County, the base of Robert Schuller, one of the first televangelists. In fact, the Southland is famous for spawning new religious movements, including Yogi Paramahansa Yogananda’s Self-Realization Fellowship Retreat & Hermitage (p336), headquartered in Encinitas with another outpost in Pacific Palisades, LA (p123). In Carlsbad, Deepak Chopra is one of the leading New Agers with his Chopra Center (p338), and spiritualists are also drawn to the zen powers of the town of Ojai (p404).

MODERNIST MASTERPIECES
Being on the leading edge has been a SoCal characteristic since the early 20th century, and this is true of the field of architecture as well. As early as 1908, the brothers Charles and Henry Green created the seminal Craftsman bungalow, the Gamble House (p148) in Pasadena, whose terraces, sleeping porches and overhanging eaves extend the house into its natural environment. This principle was later expanded upon by Frank Lloyd Wright with his Hollyhock House (p108) in LA. Wright disciples Richard Neutra and Rudolph Schindler, both immigrants from Austria, took things even further by embracing the minimalist Bauhaus aesthetic from Europe. Schindler House (p110), the architect’s former home and studio, offers essentially a primer on the modernist elements that so greatly influenced midcentury California architecture, such as an open floor plan, flat roof and sliding glass doors. Nowhere was modernism embraced more than in Palm Springs, where architects such as Albert Frey (p350) built bungalows for Hollywood’s elite. Louis Kahn’s Salk Institute (p329) in San Diego is another fine example. Postmodern work is mostly concentrated in LA with Frank Gehry’s Walt Disney Concert Hall (p134), Richard Meier’s Getty Center (p117), Rafael Moneo’s Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels (p135) and Thom Mayne’s Caltrans District 7 Headquarters (p155) – all of them Pritzker Architecture Prize winners and undisputed standouts.
THE GREAT OUTDOORS
On land, in the water and in the sky you’ll find plenty of opportunities to get your heart pumping in Southern California – and we’re not talking about spotting Jake Gyllenhaal or Leonardo DiCaprio in the flesh. Water babies can don a mask or strap on a tank for close-ups with garibaldi, sea anemones and other ocean creatures at either La Jolla Underwater Park Ecological Reserve (p330) in San Diego or Casino Point Marine Park (p220) on Catalina Island – both are protected ecoreserves. Catalina, with its craggy, coved coastline, provides perfect terrain for kayaking, especially for beginners, while saltier types may want to do battle with the waves at Channel Islands National Park (p405). The best mountain biking is at Big Bear Lake (p221), where a ski mountain morphs into a championship-level bike park during the summer. Rock climbers are spoiled for choice with a multitude of challenges on the desert-baked boulders of Joshua Tree National Park (p363), while golfers will enjoy smacking a Titleist down the fairway at one, or several, of more than 100 golf courses in nearby Palm Springs (p346). Bird-watchers will have a field day at Malibu Lagoon State Beach (p120) and especially in the Newport Bay Ecological Reserve (p264), while Del Mar (p334) is a prime area for hot air ballooning.

ROAD RAVES
In Southern California the road always beckons, so drop the convertible top, cue up ‘California Dreaming’ and step on it. One of our favorite drives delivers surreally beautiful ocean vistas along the Pacific Coast Highway through Malibu (p120). It’s easily combined with a swing through the canyonland, undulating fields and bizarrely shaped buttes of the Santa Monica Mountains (turn inland on Topanga Canyon Rd, left on Mulholland Hwy and left again on Malibu Canyon Rd back to the Pacific Coast Hwy). Another evocative seaside route travels along Palos Verdes Drive (p128), while legendary Mulholland Drive (p106) will have you snapping close-ups of the Hollywood Sign and mammoth LA below. North of the city, San Marcos Pass Road (Hwy 154; p401) skirts Chumash rock art, thick forests and a placid lake en route to the Santa Barbara Wine Country. Mountain drives, meanwhile, are ideal for escaping the summer heat. The meandering Angeles Crest Highway (Hwy 2; p150) quickly delivers you to pine-scented heights, but the Rim of the World Drive (Hwy 18) to Big Bear Lake (p221) is actually more spectacular. The aptly named Palms to Pines Highway (Hwys 243 and 74), carved into the San Jacinto Mountains above Palm Springs, is another cool road and is also popular with motorcyclists.
GREEN GETAWAYS
Yes, it’s crowded and congested, but there’s also a ‘wild’ side to the Southland that most visitors never venture out to explore. Trust us, getting away from the high-velocity metro areas will feel like a mini-vacation, and you don’t even have to travel far. If you’re LA-based, head up Pacific Coast Hwy to the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (p153), the world’s largest protected zone within an urban setting. Scramble along riverbeds, through shady canyons, past bizarrely formed pinnacles and visit famous movie sets. North of here, Ojai (p404) is a little inland Shangri-la with an artsy pedigree, stunning scenery, a spiritual vibe and otherworldly spa experiences. It’s at the edge of the Los Padres National Forest (p401), an outdoor wonderland of rocks, creeks and waterfalls that’s perfect for overnight camping. The same is true of Big Bear Lake (p221), a laid-back mountain town that morphs into SoCal’s premier skiing area in winter. In summer, hikers and mountain bikers invade to escape the heat in the LA Basin. Another cool spot is Julian (p339), an old mining town in the hills east of San Diego, where you can pan for gold and gorge on scrumptious apple pie.

CAMP, KITSCH & CULTURE
We dare you count the number of times during your trip you’ll be saying ‘Only in Southern California!’ The region is truly the capital of quirk and you’ll encounter unique characters, places and experiences wherever you go. If aliens landed on LA’s famous Venice Boardwalk (p125) they’d probably blend right in with the human zoo of chainsaw-jugglers, Speedo-clad snake-charmers and a roller-skating Sikh minstrel. Inland from here, the Museum of Jurassic Technology (p119) is a subversive repository of mind-twisting curiosities that’ll bamboozle and astound you. The desert has always lured kooks, including George van Tassel who built a giant rejuvenation machine called the Integratron (p368) in the Mojave. Off the I-10, you’ll do a double-take near Cabazon, where the World’s Biggest Dinosaurs (p353) house exhibits on – of all things – creationism. In Palm Springs, octogenarian showgirls do the cancan in the Palm Springs Follies (p360), while at Glen Ivy Hot Springs (p251) you’ll have fun making devil’s horns on your head from sticky clay while wallowing in the mud pool. Cap the day at Medieval Times (p249) near Disneyland, where you can fancy yourself knight and damsel while watching jousting horsemen, eating chicken with your hands and wearing a paper crown. And then there’s always Las Vegas (p224)…
ALL MY LIFE I’D DREAMED ABOUT THIS MOMENT, WHEN THE TIDAL SURGE BRINGS TEAMING SWARMS OF FISH TO REPRODUCE IN THE SANDS OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA BEACHES. HERE I HAD JUST ADDED A LITTLE WATER TO DRY SAND AND WATCHED, AMAZED, AS TINY GRUNION HATCHLINGS EMERGED AND SWAM INTO LIFE. ONLY IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA!

ANDREW BENDER

After lunch in Thai Town, a friend and I browsed the bakeries, acupuncturists and other restaurants we now have to return to. Every visit to one of SoCal’s ethnic neighborhoods brings a light-bulb moment, as I discover things I never knew existed – though they may have been there for years.

AMY C BALFOUR

What inspirational thought was I thinking after the one-mile hike to the top of gorgeous Cavern Point on Santa Cruz Island? ‘I hope these Bono sunglasses don’t look too stupid.’ See the unfortunate answer for yourself in the above photo. Clearly an emergency purchase. And clearly a once-in-a-lifetime view.