



Central Coast

Includes ➔

Along Highway 1.....	276
Santa Cruz.....	276
Monterey.....	287
Pacific Grove.....	295
Carmel-by-the-Sea.....	297
Big Sur.....	301
Along Highway 101.....	316
Salinas.....	317
Paso Robles.....	320
San Luis Obispo.....	323
Avila Beach.....	327
Pismo Beach.....	330

Why Go?

Too often forgotten or dismissed as ‘flyover’ country between San Francisco and LA, this fairy-tale stretch of California coast is packed with wild beaches, misty redwood forests where hot springs hide, 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 and craft-beer country. Then soothe your nature-loving soul in collegiate San Luis Obispo, ringed by sunny beach towns and volcanic peaks.

Best Places to Eat

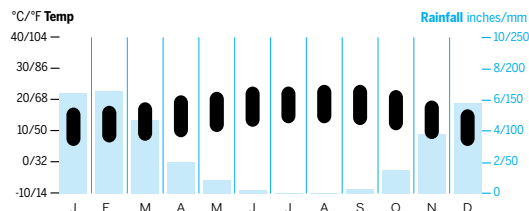
- ➔ Assembly (p282)
- ➔ Ember (p332)
- ➔ Foremost Wine Co (p326)
- ➔ Thomas Hill Organics (p324)
- ➔ La Cosecha Bar & Restaurant (p321)

Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Post Ranch Inn (p306)
- ➔ Jabberwock (p292)
- ➔ Cass House Inn (p313)
- ➔ Avila La Fonda (p329)
- ➔ Summerwood Inn (p321)

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** Learning to surf, and scaring yourself silly on the Giant Dipper along the famed beach boardwalk in **Santa Cruz** (p276).
- 2** Cruising Hwy 1, where the sky touches the sea along the rocky coastline of mystical **Big Sur** (p301).
- 3** Being mesmerized by aquatic denizens of the 'indoor ocean' at the superb aquarium in **Monterey** (p287).
- 4** Marveling at the jawdropping grandiosity of Hearst Castle in **San Simeon** (p309) after meeting the neighbors: ginomous elephant seals.
- 5** Chilling out in easygoing college town **San Luis Obispo** (p323), surrounded by beaches, vineyards and mountains.
- 6** Exploring **Salinas** (p317) and the blue-collar world of Nobel Prize-winning, down-to-earth novelist John Steinbeck.