

# Santa Barbara's Sense Appeal

## An indulgent weekend getaway to the American Riviera



By Michelle Lyn

Nestled 200 miles north of San Diego, between the lush Santa Ynez Mountains and the Pacific Ocean, sun-drenched Santa Barbara is the perfect weekend getaway for foodies to sip and savor, outdoor enthusiasts to surf, hike or bike along the coast or anyone who simply enjoys good weather and a European village experience without the hassle of getting on a plane.

For me, the drive to Santa Barbara always illicit memories of driving up the rugged coastline, past breaks like Malibu and Rincon where surfers dot the water, and through the fragrant strawberry fields before dropping me in the wooded enclave of Montecito.

Next time you find yourself planning a weekend escape, here are some recommendations that will appeal to all five senses.

### Sleep

Tucked away a couple blocks from State Street, the secluded Inn of the Spanish Garden is a luxury boutique hotel that offers guests a private, quiet retreat in the heart of Santa Barbara's Historic Presidio District. Constructed in 2001, the hotel's Spanish-Colonial architecture of white adobe walls, red tile roofs, ornate ironwork, courtyard fountains, vaulted ceilings and arches conceals modern amenities. Centrally located, you are within walking distance of all shops and restaurants, as well as the beach.

The well-appointed rooms are posh, yet incredibly com-



*Junior Suite at the San Ysidro Ranch.*

fortable. Luxury is found in each guest room or suite, with gas fireplaces, soaking tubs with imported bath amenities, French press coffeemakers, decadent Italian linens and a private balcony or garden patio. A complimentary deluxe continental breakfast can be delivered to your room while you sit by the fire and read the local newspapers in privacy.

In the heart of downtown Santa Barbara is Canary Hotel, a modern hotel with eclectic Moroccan decor. The hotel's rooftop, "The Perch," is famous for its breathtaking 360-degree views of

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Santa Barbara.

The rooftop pool is the perfect place to unwind after a long day of shopping, eating and drinking. In fact, they make it easy to enjoy the view by hosting activities such as wine tasting with local wineries. Not a big wine drinker? No problem. On the weekends, happy hour goes until midnight and drinks can be taken to the roof while you dip your weary toes in the jacuzzi.

Another rooftop activity offered by the hotel is "Ready, Set Cook." Kitchen stations are set up and groups are broken into teams and led through the preparation and execution of the entire meal, learning tricks of the trade along the way in a fun atmosphere.

If there was ever a resort that you wanted to splurge on, San Ysidro Ranch, A Rosewood Resort is definitely worth the investment. Recently named the No. 1 resort in the U.S./Canada by Travel + Leisure, San Ysidro Ranch lived up to its reputation with an attention to detail that was beyond compare. Discreetly hidden in Montecito, at the base of the Santa Ynez Mountains, the hotel is a collection of cottages concealed in a garden oasis of lavender, rosemary and hummingbirds dipping into an array of flowers everywhere you look.

Serenity envelopes the property and invites you to take a deep breath, exhaling the stress of city life left. A private gate opened to our cottage, Pepper, where our last name was thoughtfully noted on the porch with wood letter chips, surrounded by hearts (for our anniversary).

Inside our cottage, we were welcomed by a bottle of wine, a piece of carrot cake and a thoughtful anniversary card from the hotel's manager. A fireplace, heated bathroom tiles, a deep soaking tub and candles provided just the right amount of coziness necessary for a chilly night. Our private patio boasted a jacuzzi and outdoor waterfall shower cloaked by a blanket of lush greenery.

Exclusivity, privacy and tranquility abound at this magical hideaway where JFK and Jackie O honeymooned and Hollywood royalty go to escape. Dinner at The Stonehouse, the on-site restaurant, is ambient and the irresistible mint gelato is made from mint grown in the property garden.

### Indulge

A bike ride along Channel Drive will lead you along picturesque Butterfly Beach to the stunning property that is The Biltmore, a Four Seasons Resort. Housing modern-day comforts within original 1927 architecture, it emanates historic grandeur from every angle.

The Spa at The Biltmore has a reputation for the best spa experience in Santa Barbara and after our day of indulgence there, I concur.

Upon arrival, we were taken to a couples treatment room



with an ocean view, perfumed by breezes from the rose garden. Eager for an aromatic experience, I received Grape de Vine, their Signature Ritual that extracts the toxins with a Grape Seed Body Scrub native to Santa Barbara wine country. My skin was gently exfoliated, while the anti-oxidizing and relaxing benefits of grape seed were enhanced by rose gel. Lavender essential oil was then applied during a full body massage.

Next to me, my husband received the Stone Therapy and Energy Balancing Ritual that consisted of a full body massage with hot and cold stones combined with traditional Native American energy work and cleansing rituals that harmonize the emotions, calm the mind and the nervous system. His treatment began with a gentle ringing of meditational bells and the immediate burning of sage leaves to cleanse the space of evil and negative energies and influences.

At that moment I was grateful to be in the same room, so I too, could benefit from the vibrations of the bells and the cleansing affect of the burning sage.

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## Travel

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## Wine and Dine

Across from the arresting Santa Barbara Courthouse and Sunken Gardens, Elements is a great brunch option during your stay in town. The young, friendly staff is welcoming and the homelike patio view can't be beat.

The house specialty, brioche french toast served with strawberry maple syrup, honey creme fraiche and mint is decadent and one indulgence you shouldn't feel guilty about experiencing. A hike up Cold Spring Trail will make you forget you even had it.

Any visit to Santa Barbara would be remiss without a dining experience at Seagrass Restaurant. Proprietor Mitchell Sjerven and his gracious wife Amy were both on hand to welcome us as if we were old friends. The space is small, warm and cozy, decorated in earth tones with seagrass wallpaper appropriately covering the walls.

As Santa Barbara's first fine dining 'coastal cuisine' restaurant, their seafood is drawn from the Pacific Ocean and procured from the Santa Barbara Fish Market. The produce is as local and seasonal as can be, as the chef visits two local farmer's markets weekly.

To begin our experience, we sampled an amuse bouche of chilled watermelon consomme that was refreshing and flavorful, in contrast to its deceptive resemblance to water. Per the chef's recommendation, we moved on to Pacific Oysters on the half-shell with a banyuls mignonette. The freshness of the oysters paired nicely with a Roederer Estate Brut Rose.

Local heirloom tomatoes complemented by a salad of burrata cheese, mixed greens and a banyuls vinaigrette were then served with the highly rated Vogelzang 'Happy Canyon' Sauvignon Blanc. The flavor of an heirloom tomato in season is unparalleled, especially when paired with burrata that melts in your mouth.

For main courses, we selected the Local Red Snapper with Spanish chorizo, green zebra coulis and yuzu-clam emulsion, and the Local White Seabass, served with sorrel, caperberries and pancetta. Both fish had a nice golden sear, were well balanced and cooked to perfection. Our favorite wine of the night, Tyler Bien Nacido Vineyard Chardonnay added the perfect finish to a lovely dinner.

When planning our journey to wine country, we decided to visit Palmina. Recently featured on the "Today" show, Palmina's tasting room is a standout in the Lompoc Wine Ghetto, an industrial park that has evolved into the next up-and-coming wine-tasting destination for wine aficionados who appreciate wonderfully crafted wines over sprawling romantic vineyards.

Palmina's passionate owners Steve and Chrystal Clifton have always considered wine to be "an extension of the plate," a philosophy rooted in food, cooking, gatherings of people around a table and all the goodness that comes from eating locally and



seasonally. Keeping their production small allows them to continue their strong commitment and zeal for creating high quality Italian varietals.

Just as in Italy, Palmina's focus is to craft wines expressly made to complement and enhance food. Palmina's recently expanded tasting room now includes a "Wines on Tap" refillable wine program (one of the first) that offers fresh and affordable wine with less packaging waste.

## Plan

Appropriately described as America's Riviera, Santa Barbara shines amid long stretches of beach, palm trees, Spanish-influenced architecture and red tiled roofs. Green in every sense of the word, this walkable picturesque town offers mountains, beaches, farmer's markets and highly sustainable gastro-tourism programs.

Graced by a mild year-round climate, Santa Barbara is richly Mediterranean, with Spanish colonial heritage reflected in romantic architecture...perfect for a weekend retreat.

For more information, visit [santabarbaraca.com](http://santabarbaraca.com).

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