

**TRIP OF A LIFETIME**

Santa Barbara,  
 Santa Ynez  
 Valley, Big Sur:  
 A Central Coast  
 road trip  
 makes a vintage  
 romantic  
 getaway

# Waves and Wine

**S**unset at the beach: the staple of personal ads, romance novels, and Playmate turn-ons. Thee and me and we. The biggest of all California clichés. But trust me—as sunsets go, this is an epic, a masterpiece. As if van Gogh had decided to work in Cinerama.

We're at Oso Flaco Lake, on California's Central Coast. My wife, Becky, has never been to this spot, so I wanted to show her the lake and, beyond it, a beach with churning, restless surf.

BY MATTHEW JAFFE • PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID ZAITZ

**Glimpses of a golden coast (clockwise from top left): Santa Barbara's shoreline; the Four Seasons Resort; tasting at Foxen Vineyard & Winery; Foxen vintage; vineyards near Inn at the Pinnacles; Foxen winery sign; La Super-Rica.**





We follow the boardwalk along the lake and then through the shifting dunes. The day has been overcast, but the sands begin to brighten to gold. By the time we reach the ocean, the setting sun has emerged beneath the layer of clouds along the horizon. Everything—ocean, dunes, underside of clouds—is suddenly on fire with spinning oranges and reds and purples.

Even though we've both lived in California for a while now, Becky remains a genuine Jersey girl at heart, and I'm still a Chicago guy. Neither of us has ever seen a sunset quite like this. But while we're astounded, we're not entirely surprised. Because when we began our 670-mile round-trip drive through the Central Coast's wine regions and along its incomparable coastline, we were venturing into the California of our dreams.

2 DAYS, 30 MILES

Santa Barbara to Santa Ynez Valley

In my mind, Santa Barbara is California: Mediterranean architecture, palm trees, the beach, and islands veiled in mist. (Chicago winters will do that to you.) But it's a city that has always remained just out of reach. I've lived an hour to the northwest and now live an hour to the east, but never in Santa Barbara itself.

We splurge with a night at the Four Seasons Resort. It's Santa Barbara condensed, all ocean and gardens, archways and decorative tile, trailing bougainvillea and rambling Moreton Bay figs. The mood here is decidedly relaxed, especially compared to posh oceanfront spots in other beach cities that have an almost white-gloved fussiness about them. This too seems to be a reflection of Santa Barbara, where the surf vibe and sea breeze seem to chill out loftier pretensions. Santa Barbara is a city that reveres not just its Dons but its dudes too.

In that spirit, we eschew some of the fancier dinner spots in town for one of the best. La Super-Rica is really



a glorified taco stand, with a zigzag roofline and a covered patio. But what it lacks in decor it makes up for in authenticity, from its handmade tortillas to fire-roasted pasilla peppers stuffed with cheese.

With its long lines, La Super-Rica demands some strategizing. The patrons in line ahead of us are weighing their choices with the solemnity of the condemned choosing a last meal. Becky, a much nicer person than I, senses my escalating impatience. She gives me a sweet but firm “Be nice” look as I feel the declamation “Holy pozole, just

### Road food

■ **Café Quackenbush.** Gourmet sandwiches and art gallery just off U.S. 101. \$; lunch Tue–Sun, breakfast Sat–Sun. 458 Bell St., Los Alamos; 805/344-5181.

■ **Fiala’s Gourmet Deli, Espresso Bar & Chocolatier.** Italian deli with outstanding panini sandwiches in Edna Valley wine country. \$; 8–5 daily. 1653 Old Price Canyon Rd., San Luis Obispo; 805/543-1313.

■ **Taco Temple.** A great spot for fish tacos, hidden on a State 1 frontage road. \$; lunch and dinner Wed–Mon. 2680 Main St., Morro Bay; 805/772-4965.

make a choice!” rising up from the molten core of my being. But it only takes one bite of my taco to make me a contented man.

2 DAYS, 170 MILES

### Santa Ynez Valley to Pinnacles N.M.

Let the *Sideways* backlash begin!

I issue this fatwa not out of any dislike for last year’s best movie. But having watched the Santa Ynez Valley’s emergence from languid ranchland into a top wine region over the past few decades, it was a shock to suddenly see favorite haunts on the big screen. Think of it

this way: You live in the Amazon rain forest and Angelina Jolie or Sting visits your village. You appreciate the attention but also know that things will never quite be the same again.

The joy of the Santa Ynez Valley and its fellow Central Coast wine regions has always been their blend of kick-back vibe and knockout wines. These are places to discover wines without being intimidated by adjective-spouting pedants. Terroir without terror.

Maybe it’s just a coincidence, but our favorite wines come from the

least opulent and most un-faux-finished spots. Near Los Olivos, Foxen Winery’s tasting room is little more than a tin shack, while Garretson Wine Company up in Paso Robles is located in a generic, hard-to-reach industrial center better suited to a plumbing-supply business. It’s symbolic of how the wine industry has become engrained in the life of the Central Coast. In Los Angeles, every young dreamer is an aspiring screenwriter. Here the dream is to create great wines, with waiters, store clerks, and winery employees all eager to talk about their vines.

With our tastings done, I cleanse my palate with a full-bodied and slightly assertive root beer from the 21st Street Drive-In in Paso Robles. Missouri may be the Show-Me State, but California is the What-If State. And as Becky and I drive past rows of vines exaggerating the contours of the rolling hills, we ponder the possibilities of a life in wine country.

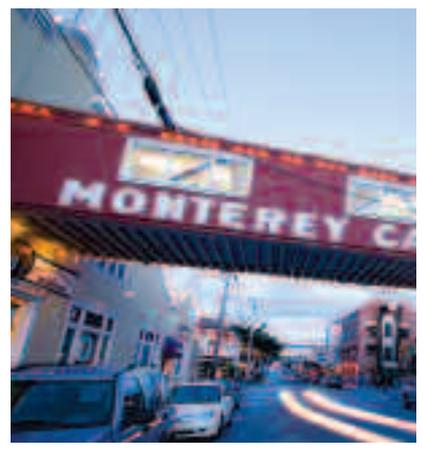
It’s the life that Jan and Jon Brosseau have been building with their own hands since they bought land here in 1978. They’re the owners of the Inn at the Pinnacles, a Monterey County bed-and-breakfast set in the middle of acres of Pinot Noir, Syrah, and Chardonnay grapes. During the week, Jon works in aerospace in the Bay Area, then the couple loads up their car with provisions and heads to the inn for the weekend. Their property sits adjacent to the historic Chalone Vineyard and a few miles from Pinnacles National Monument, the landmark volcanic outcrops that Becky and I are eager to explore.

Roughly 36 million people live in California, but we’re the only 2 at Pinnacles. And for good reason. Just as Becky steps out, the threatening skies stop their threatening and deliver the goods. The rock formations disappear behind a curtain of rain and fog. The rain goes all Ringo on the roof and we listen to the pounding while scanning the skies for the slightest hint of blue. Finally we give up and opt for—what





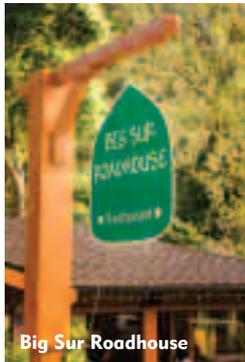
The sweet life  
(clockwise  
from top):  
21st Street  
Drive-In in  
Paso Robles;  
Cannery Row;  
Ed Ricketts's  
Lab; Carmel  
City Beach;  
Pinnacles  
National  
Monument.



# The road trip

## CONTACTS

- **Monterey County visitors bureau**  
(www.montereyinfo.org or 888/221-1010)
- **San Luis Obispo County visitors bureau**  
(www.sanluisobispo.com or 800/634-1414)
- **Santa Barbara visitors bureau**  
(www.santabarbaraca.com or 800/676-1266)



Big Sur Roadhouse

## Dining and lodging

Some of our lodging choices are splurges; for more options, see "Contacts."

### SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

**Four Seasons Resort Santa Barbara.** Oceanfront classic. From \$500, two-night minimum on weekends. 1260 Channel Dr., Santa Barbara; www.fourseasons.com/santabarbaraca or 888/424-5866.

**La Super-Rica.** Mexican food well worth long peak-hour waits. \$; lunch and dinner daily. 622 N. Milpas St., Santa Barbara; 805/963-4940.

**Patrick's Side Street Cafe.** Wine country cuisine in relaxed setting. \$\$\$; lunch and dinner Wed-Sun. 2375 Alamo Pintado Rd., Los Olivos; 805/686-4004.

### ATASCADERO AND PASO ROBLES

**The Carlton Hotel.** Handsome, restored hotel near Paso Robles wine country. From \$225. 6005 El Camino Real, Atascadero; www.the-carlton.com or 877/204-9830.

**21st Street Drive-In.** Sip a root beer at this vintage drive-in. \$; lunch and dinner daily. 2110 Spring St., Paso Robles; 805/238-0360.

### MONTEREY AND PACIFIC GROVE

**Green Gables Inn.** Victorian elegance by the sea. From \$120. 301 Ocean View Blvd., Pacific Grove; www.greengablesinnpg.com or 800/722-1774.

**Inn at the Pinnacles.** Ideal wine country setting at the gateway to Pinnacles. Open weekends only; from \$200, two-night minimum. 32025 Stonewall Canyon Rd., Soledad; www.innatthepinnacles.com or 831/678-2400.

**Loulou's Griddle in the Middle.** Updated take on waterfront breakfast joint. \$; breakfast and lunch daily. On Municipal Wharf II, Monterey; 831/372-0568.

**Monterey Bay Inn.** Newly renovated hotel on waterfront. From \$199, two-night minimum on weekends. 242 Cannery Row, Monterey; www.montereybayinn.com or 800/424-6242.

### CARMEL

**Casanova Restaurant.** Classic romantic setting, Mediterranean cuisine. \$\$\$\$; lunch and dinner daily. Fifth Ave. between Mission St. and San Carlos St.; 831/625-0501.

**La Playa Hotel.** Onetime Carmel estate a couple of blocks from Carmel City Beach. From \$180, two-night minimum on weekends. Camino Real at Eighth Ave.; www.laplaya.com or 800/582-8900.

### BIG SUR

**Big Sur River Inn.** After a meal of fresh fish and organic produce, kick back in a chair in the river. \$; breakfast, lunch, and

dinner daily. On State 1 at Pheneger Creek; www.bigurriverinn.com or 800/548-3610.

**Big Sur Roadhouse.** Cal-Latin fusion cuisine with funky roadhouse decor. \$\$; dinner Wed-Mon. On State 1, about 25 miles south of Carmel; 831/667-2264.

**Treebones Resort.** Upscale camping, where roughing it includes a morning waffle bar. Campsites from \$55 and yurts from \$129, two-night minimum on weekends. 71895 State 1, 1 mile north of Gorda; www.treebonesresort.com or 877/424-4787.



Inn at the Pinnacles

## Attractions

**California missions.** There are eight missions along the way: Santa Barbara, Santa Ynez, La Purísima (now La Purísima Mission State Historic Park), San Luis Obispo, San Miguel, San Antonio, Soledad, and San Carlos (Carmel). We like Purísima for its meticulous restoration and Santa Barbara for its sheer beauty. Fees vary by mission. www.missionsofcalifornia.org for locations and details.

**Ed Ricketts's Lab.** Mentioned in John Steinbeck's Cannery Row, the historic site is occasionally open to the public. On Cannery Row, Monterey; visit www.canneryrow.org for details.

**Hearst Castle.** A classic example of California history and architecture. Five different tours available this month. From \$24, reservations recommended. 750 Hearst Castle Rd., San Simeon; www.hearstcastle.com or 800/444-4445.

**Henry Miller Memorial Library.** Gallery with concerts, lectures, and other events. 11-6 Thu-Sun; free. On State 1, Big Sur; www.henrymiller.org or 831/667-2574.

**Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park.** About 10 miles of trails, including the 0.5-mile round-trip Overlook Trail, which offers a view of a waterfall dropping 80 feet into the ocean. Free. On State 1, 37 miles south of Carmel; www.parks.ca.gov or 831/667-2315.

**Monterey Bay Aquarium.** The nation's top aquarium has added a new octopus habitat and a walk-through wave-crash exhibit. 9:30-6 daily; \$22, \$10.95 ages 3-12. 886 Cannery Row, Monterey; www.montereybayaquarium.org or 831/648-4888.

**Oso Flaco Lake.** Rare coastal lake and dune habitat. \$5 per vehicle. About 3 miles north of Guadalupe, turn west at Oso Flaco Lake Rd. and continue about 3 miles to parking area at visitor center (closed Mon; 1055 Guadalupe St./State 1, Guadalupe); www.dunecenter.org or 805/343-2455.

**Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park.** Plenty of redwood-shaded picnic space and trails that lead to swimming holes; try the 1.5-mile round-trip Pfeiffer Falls Trail. \$8 per vehicle. On State 1, 26 miles south of Carmel; www.parks.ca.gov or 831/667-2315.



Oso Flaco Lake

**Pinnacles National Monument.** Dramatic volcanic outcrops and even California condors. \$5 per vehicle. From U.S. 101 in Soledad, take State 146 12 miles east. www.nps.gov/pinn or 831/389-4485.

**Point Lobos State Reserve.** The 1.4-mile North Shore Trail offers the best look at the reserve's coves and forests. 9-7 daily; \$8 per vehicle. www.pointlobos.org or 831/624-4909.

**Sebastian Store.** Restored 19th-century general store at San Simeon Cove. Closed Thu. 805/927-4217.



Garretson Wine Company

## Wineries

There are many distinct wine regions (American Viticultural Areas, or AVAs) along our route. Our favorite wineries include:

**Chalone Vineyard.** 11:30-5 Sat-Sun and by appointment; \$5 tasting fee. State 146 E. at Stonewall Canyon Rd., 9 miles east of Soledad; 831/678-1717.

**Domaine Alfred.** 10-5 daily; \$6 tasting fee. 7525 Orcutt Rd., San Luis Obispo; 805/541-9463.

**Garretson Wine Company.** 11-5 daily. 2323 Tuley Court, Paso Robles; 805/239-2074.

**Foxen Vineyard & Winery.** 11-4 daily; tasting fee from \$5. 7200 Foxen Canyon Rd., Santa Maria; 805/937-4251.



else—a glass of Pinot by the fire. Both warm with nary a hint of smoke.

## 2 DAYS, 40 MILES

### Pinnacles N.M. to Monterey Peninsula

“The hour of the pearl,” John Steinbeck called it: The early-morning fog hangs low over Monterey Bay and muffles the calls of seagulls and the barks of sea lions as we walk past the Victorians of Pacific Grove, bound for Cannery Row.

The mist obscures the crossovers, the bridges used to transport millions of sardines during the heyday of Monterey’s fishing industry. Fishing boats with upturned bows and low-slung sterns bob along the Monterey Harbor, with its corrugated-iron buildings and lines of heavy wheelbarrows for transporting fish. Otters swim close enough to hear them chew, and I prove my theory to Becky that every harbor has at least one boat named *Sea Wolf*.

Later in the day we head to Carmel, where people don’t name boats, they name cottages. My tastes run more toward the rusted and weathered, so I find today’s Carmel quodidnantly quaint. We watch as husbands, hearing that most dreaded of spousal

orders—“Honey, let’s go in here”—look on with envy at jovial foursomes of guys straight off the 18th hole at Pebble Beach. Fortunately, Becky is not a professional shopper, and soon we veer off into the side streets, where we’re able to get more of the feeling of

the old arts colony that was home to some of the greatest artists that California ever produced: poet Robinson Jeffers and photographers Edward Weston and Ansel Adams.

The fog comes back just in time for our hike at Point Lobos State Reserve, south of Carmel. Harbor seals haul out in hidden coves, and the fog drifts through a grove of rare Monterey cypress, where lace lichen dangles from the branches and an orange algae crusts the trunks. Here nature is more perfect than art: wind-sculpted trees placed just so on granite rocks rhythmically washed by waves rising from a jade-colored sea.

## 2 DAYS, 30 MILES

### Monterey Peninsula to Big Sur

Trailed by a collie mix, the woman appears in the doorway of the Henry Miller Memorial Library at Big Sur. Clad in a fuzzy fake-fur coat, she’s in her 70s and is carrying some paintings. It takes a moment before the library and cultural center’s director, Magnus Toren, notices her, but the woman turns out to be the day’s speaker, Gui de Angulo Mayo. Gui, who chronicled San Francisco’s Beat Generation in photographs, is here to discuss her biography of her father, Jaime de Angulo, a legendary Big Sur figure and celebrated Native American linguist and anthropologist.

I had already decided to buy the book before Gui arrived, and she signs it as Toren praises her work. “Well, I think it’s accurate,” she says simply, then explains how her father didn’t think Henry Miller was very smart and mostly ignored the author and painter who settled in Big Sur in 1944.

It’s very much a Big Sur moment: slightly eccentric and wholly serendipitous. Gui, after all, provides a connection through her father to that pre-State Highway 1 Big Sur, when it was an even more pristine and wild frontier than it is today. “What a scene!” Jaime de Angulo wrote as he

## Road lit

California’s Central Coast has inspired some great works of literature. Here are eight perfect road companions.

■ **Beyond the Outer Shores:** *The Untold Odyssey of Ed Ricketts*, by Eric Enno Tamm

■ **Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch**, by Henry Miller

■ **Cannery Row**, by John Steinbeck

■ **The Chief:** *The Life of William Randolph Hearst*, by David Nasaw

■ **East of Eden**, by John Steinbeck

■ **The Old Coyote of Big Sur:** *The Life of Jaime de Angulo*, by Gui de Angulo

■ **Sideways:** *A Novel*, by David Nasaw

■ **The Wild God of the World:** *An anthology of Robinson Jeffers*, by Robinson Jeffers and Albert Gelpi





Green and easy (clockwise from top left): Pfeiffer Falls Trail in Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park; relaxing at the Big Sur River Inn; Big Sur overlook; McWay Falls at Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park; Treebones Resort; ice cream bus at Big Sur River Inn.



rode horseback down the coast on trails so steep he became dizzy. “Yes, I lost my heart to it, right there and then. This is the place for a freedom loving anarchist. There will never be a road into this wilderness ...”

There is a road along the Big Sur coast now, but also much that Jaime de Angulo would recognize. Big Sur has a way of perpetually remaking itself yet retaining its essence. The fog repaints the Pacific, the ocean keeps carving the land, and the land changes from gold to green with the arrival of the rains. Beautiful as it is to look at, I’m not sure any landscape smells as good as Big Sur either. We stop at a canyon, where the first rains have unleashed the oils in the sage, which join the pine spice of redwoods and the salt air of the ocean into a fragrance that should be bottled as Eau de Sur.

I’d like to claim that, inspired by Jaime de Angulo’s story, we decided to camp alongside a creek with only the redwoods and stars above us. But instead we semi-rough it at Treebones Resort, where we stay in a yurt—complete with electricity and a hardwood floor—that overlooks the ocean at the southern end of Big Sur. The yurt’s insulated canvas walls and wooden lattice supports rise to a roof, where a round skylight offers views of the night sky. Becky sleeps soundly, lulled by the rhythmic crashing of the waves, but I wake up frequently to watch the passage of the stars across our private galactic porthole.

### 1 DAY, 65 MILES

## Big Sur to Hearst Castle

William Randolph Hearst wasn’t satisfied with just gazing out on the universe. He wanted to own it too.

We drop down from the cliffs of Big Sur to the more open coastline of Point Piedras Blancas and San Simeon.

La Cuesta Encantada, better known as Hearst Castle, is the California dream writ large: a Mediterranean fantasy, created by the great Berkeley architect Julia

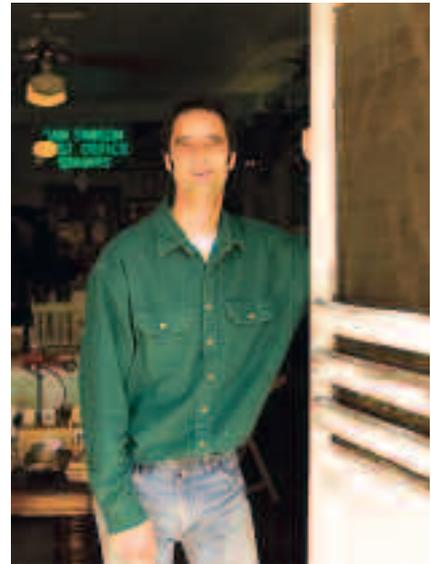
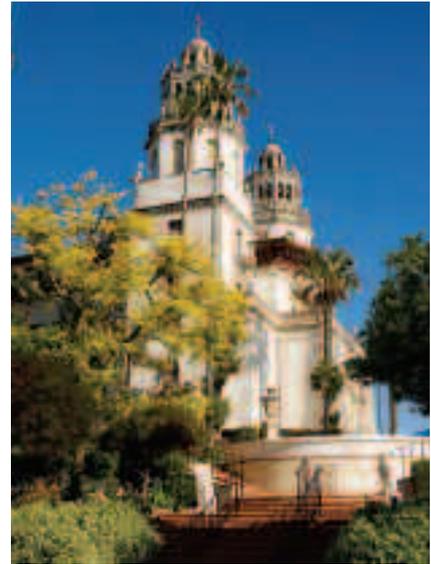
Morgan, where Hollywood stars and the San Francisco elite were brought together by perhaps the only man colossal enough to stand astride both worlds.

Near the wharf where much of the treasures used to build Hearst Castle came ashore, we stop at another San Simeon landmark. The Sebastian Store dates back to 1852, when the whaling industry thrived along this coast. It’s now run by Neil Hansen and has been owned by his family since 1914, when his great-grandparents bought the store from the lighthouse keeper at Point Piedras Blancas. But Hansen’s roots run even deeper: He’s a sixth-generation Californian and can date his father’s side of the family back to mission days.

Hansen spent his summers exploring the grottoes and caves along the coastline, surfing its waves, and playing in the forests on San Simeon Point. He left California to work in Florida before returning to renovate and run the store. It’s no longer the nuts-and-bolts general store that it once was, and Becky browses through its CDs and gifts. But Hansen also points out the vintage equipment that the last of San Simeon’s whaling captains gave to his grandfather, and the old postboxes see a steady stream of locals from up and down the coast. Just as it always has.

Hansen is clearly thrilled to reconnect both to his family’s history and the place he considers home. “For people who are native Californians, it’s good to go away for a year or two to see how the rest of the world functions,” says Hansen. “But there’s always a piece of California that calls you back.”

Unlike Hansen, we’re basically newcomers to California, but I think we’ve heard the call of this coast too. It’s a call where many parts harmonize: the wind, the waves, the high cries of seabirds, and the low moans of elephant seals. You never know. One day our question may change from “What if?” to “Why not?” and this gorgeous coastline of ragged bluffs, sea stacks, and mountains could become home. Or maybe not. But there’s certainly no harm in dreaming, right? ✨



**Central Coast heritage:** William Randolph Hearst’s castle still enchants; Neil Hansen runs the Sebastian Store, which has been in his family since 1914.