

# 805 LIVING

MAY 2016

A woman with long, wavy blonde hair is walking on a beach. She is wearing a light-colored, short-sleeved shirt with dark vertical stripes, a dark bikini bottom, and a straw hat with a dark band. She is smiling and looking towards the right. The background shows the ocean with waves breaking on the shore.

*50 Reasons*  
TO LOVE THE  
CENTRAL COAST

# 50 Reasons to Love the Central Coast

BY HEIDI DVORAK AND JAIME LEWIS

**HOW DO WE LOVE US?** Let us count the ways. It turns out, there are lots and lots of ways. In fact, narrowing down this list (which is in no particular order) took major slicing and dicing, so worthy items like stunning Pacific sunsets, superb art museums, and cool vintage stores didn't make the cut. (Yet we managed to sneak them in here, anyway.) If you don't already know, find out why the Central Coast is tops as we toot our horns about the burgeoning arts and culture scene, civic and environmental commitment, architectural and technological wonders, amazing tri tip, butterfly colonies, and those crazy grunion.





Tacos just like the ones Julia used to eat



# 1. Because Julia Loved This Place, and That's Good Enough for Us

Small in size but big on flavor, Santa Barbara's La Super-Rica taqueria (above, 805-963-4940) was a favorite of Julia Child's and remains a destination for fans of Julia and tacos alike. Don't let the line deter you: The fresh tortillas are worth the wait.



Prince William played here.

# 2. The Game of Kings (or at Least Princes)

Care for a chukker? The Central Coast Polo Club ([centralcoastpolo.com](http://centralcoastpolo.com)) near Los Osos offers lessons for newbies, and Prince William called Carpinteria's Santa Barbara Polo & Racquet Club ([sbpolo.com](http://sbpolo.com)) "one of the most beautiful polo grounds anywhere in the world" after visiting in 2011. If you've never been, we highly recommend participating in the Champagne divot stomp.

### 3. A Can-Do Attitude

Thanks to strong engineering programs at UC Santa Barbara and Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, the Central Coast boasts a spirit of tech-savvy entrepreneurship that's evident in everything from regional start-ups like Keltronix of Santa Barbara, whose software monitors the health of beehives, to international corporations like Amgen in Thousand Oaks. San Luis Obispo, in particular, is a tech powerhouse, with companies such as MindBody named on *Inc.* magazine's list of America's 5,000 fastest-growing private companies of 2015.

### 4. Mother Nature's Bonsai

Cambria's Monterey pine forest ([cambriachamber.org](http://cambriachamber.org)) is one of three native stands remaining in the state and one of only five in the world. The trees are shaped by the coastal gusts, which break off their weak branches, giving them their signature windswept look.

### 5. There Are Sincere Cheers for Piers

Built in 1872, the Ventura Pier, at a little more than 1,600 feet long, is one of the largest wooden piers in California. Built in the same year, Santa Barbara's Stearns Wharf is the oldest working wood wharf in California and home of palm reader Madame Rosinka, the oldest business on the wharf. View Hearst Castle from the San Simeon Pier. Vibrant and well populated, Pismo Beach Pier is oft an event site. In contrast, Cayucos Pier is solitary and quiet, the perfect place to write poetry or ponder your existence, except for on New Year's Day when the annual Polar Bear Dip takes place.

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## 6. Healing Hot Springs

Paso Robles' hot springs have been enjoyed by heat-seekers from all walks of life, including Salinan Native Americans, renowned Polish pianist and diplomat, Ignace Jan Paderewski, and the Pittsburgh Pirates baseball team back in the 1920s and '30s. Legend even has it that outlaw Jesse James visited his uncle Drury James, one of Paso's founders, to heal in the hot springs after sustaining gunshot wounds. Mineral bath locations still remain in Paso Robles at the historic Paso Robles Inn ([pasoroblesinn.com](http://pasoroblesinn.com)), River Oaks Hot Springs Spa ([riveroakshotsprings.com](http://riveroakshotsprings.com)), and Franklin Hot Springs ([franklinhotsprings.com](http://franklinhotsprings.com)), and in San Luis Obispo at Sycamore Hot Springs ([sycamoresprings.com](http://sycamoresprings.com)).



What's hot at the historic Paso Robles Inn

## 7. The Kindness of Strangers Abounds

Stores, restaurants, and companies often donate a portion of sales to charitable causes. Competitive races, food and wine festivals, auctions, art shows, and galas are frequently devoted to worthy causes. Locals contribute to community causes and local chapters of foundations that have a national and an international impact such as the American Cancer Society, the American Heart Association, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, Direct Relief, the Dream Foundation, Food Share, Habitat for Humanity, the American Red Cross, Make-A-Wish, and more.

And local companies such as K-Swiss and Dole in Westlake Village, Fresh Enterprises and Amgen in Thousand Oaks, Big Dog Sportswear, Citrix Online, and Martial Arts Family Fitness in Santa Barbara, Deckers Brands in Goleta, the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians and The DocuTeam in San Luis Obispo, Firestone Walker Brewing Company in Paso Robles and Buellton, Patagonia in Ventura, and many others also give back in a big way.

## 8. A Historical Zin-Terest

Italian immigrants who planted zinfandel throughout Paso Robles in the 1920s could never have predicted it would eventually put the region on the winemaking map ([pasowine.com](http://pasowine.com)). Considered Paso Robles' heritage variety for its longevity and history, zinfandel—the red kind, naturally—is made by dozens of area wineries and racks up international accolades.

## 9. We Satisfy Ceiling Fetishists

Some of the best views around are just over our heads, like the ceiling of recessed illustrated panels transplanted from a 15th-century Spanish convent over the entrance to Montecito's Casa del Herrero ([casadelherrero.com](http://casadelherrero.com)). The delicate wood-cutout design of the ceiling at the Music Academy of the West's Hahn Hall ([musicacademy.org](http://musicacademy.org)) serves acoustic purposes. The historic Hearst Castle ([hearstcastle.org](http://hearstcastle.org)) in San Simeon boasts multiple grandiose ceilings including that of the Casa del Monte Guest House, which is adorned with 22-karat gold. The ceiling of the Fremont Theatre ([fremont.themovieexperience.com](http://fremont.themovieexperience.com)) in San Luis Obispo features Art Deco sculpted swirls and neon lights, while the newly restored Ty Lounge at Four Seasons The Biltmore Resort Santa Barbara ([fourseasons.com/santabarbara](http://fourseasons.com/santabarbara)) fuses Spanish and Moroccan style with 109 richly colored and detailed overhead beams. So, when you're looking around, don't forget to look up.



**What's up at Ty Lounge:** The ceiling, designed with the vision of the hotel's original 1926 architect Reginald Johnson in mind, takes its blue, green, gold, and red palette from the mural room at the Santa Barbara Courthouse.



It's a lot closer  
than Hawaii:  
Channel Islands  
National Park



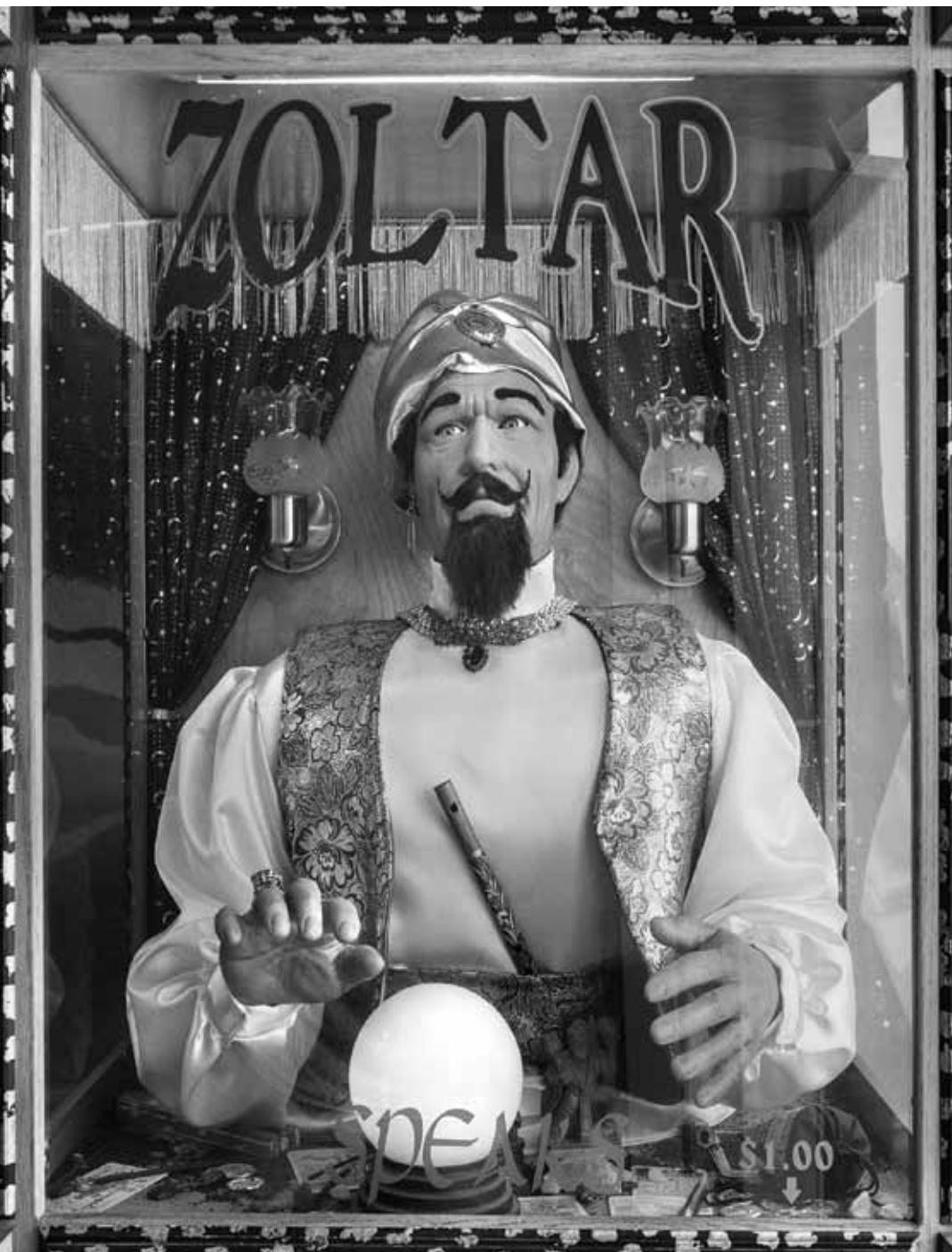
## 10. Not Every Place Has Islands

Remote and isolated, the five islands of Anacapa, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, San Miguel, and Santa Barbara comprise Channel Islands National Park ([nps.gov](https://www.nps.gov)), where humans have walked for the past 13,000 years. Now it is home to 2,000-plus plant and animal species, many of which are endangered or exist nowhere else. It is the only place on the planet to see the island fox and deer mouse. Companies cruise over to provide equipment for kayaking, fishing, and boating, but consider personal endeavors sans equipment: camp primitively, explore the remains of ancient Chumash villages, hike dramatic trails, go tide-pooling, bird-watch, greet an orca, hear the silence, or just breathe.



## 11. McConnell's Fine Ice Creams

The frozen-dessert company ([mcconnells.com](https://www.mcconnells.com)) was established in 1949 in Santa Barbara, where it still produces more than 50 flavors of cold, creamy goodness.



## 12. Zoltar Knows All

He will tell your fortune at the Ventura Village Carousel & Arcade at Ventura Harbor Village ([venturaharborvillage.com](http://venturaharborvillage.com)).

## 13. Not Every State Holds a Mid-State Fair

We're not sure how they do things at those big city state fairs, but attending the California Mid-State Fair ([midstatefair.com](http://midstatefair.com)) in Paso Robles means dancing to headliner entertainment like this year's guests, Duran Duran and Tim McGraw, entering an apple pie-baking contest, and hanging out with livestock, all in the same day. Local artisanship goes on display during Winemaker Nights, homebrewing and olive oil competitions, as well as the Central Coast Wine Competition, which adjudicates 600 types of wine from 150 wineries across the entire state of California.

## 14. The Old West Lives On

You can either watch reruns of *Gunsmoke* or hightail it to authentic sites of the Old West, like the Stagecoach Inn and Museum ([stagecoachmuseum.org](http://stagecoachmuseum.org)) in Newbury Park with its real stagecoaches and period furnishings; the Cold Spring Tavern ([coldspringtavern.com](http://coldspringtavern.com)), which served as a Santa Barbara stagecoach stop in 1886; the Joel McCrea Ranch ([mccreeranchfoundation.org](http://mccreeranchfoundation.org)), a historic landmark in the Santa Rosa Valley; the Union Hotel ([unionhotelvictmansion.com](http://unionhotelvictmansion.com)) in Los Alamos, built in 1880 as a Wells Fargo stagecoach stop; and the Leonis Adobe Museum ([leonisadobemuseum.org](http://leonisadobemuseum.org)), built in 1844 in Calabasas.





## 15. We Get to Use the Word “Gnarly” in Context

Just ask any surfer: Waves of the world-class kind can be had at Malibu Surfrider Beach, designated as the world’s first surfing reserve. Equally gnarly is Rincon Point State Beach, between La Conchita and Carpinteria, the location of the Rincon Classic. Runners up: Leo Carrillo in Malibu and C Street in Ventura. Only radical shredders should attempt Sandspit in Santa Barbara. It ain’t called that for nuthin’.



## 17. It’s Not Just Wine Country

Craft beer is on the rise, with nearly 50 craft breweries, including Figueroa Mountain Brewing Company ([figmtnbrew.com](http://figmtnbrew.com)), which is distributed statewide, and Firestone Walker Brewing Company ([firestonebeer.com](http://firestonebeer.com)), sold nationally, helping to reshape the area as Beer Country. And don’t forget that craft distilleries, like those on the Paso Robles Distillery Trail ([pasoroblesdistillerytrail.com](http://pasoroblesdistillerytrail.com)), are helping to further define the area as Spirits Country.

## 16. Our Hotels Have Hollywood History

Whether they were just passing through or looking to put down roots, the rich, powerful, and otherwise celebrated have long been lured here by our pristine beaches and show-offy weather. You, too, can sleep where the famous slept, like at the Montecito Inn ([montecitoinn.com](http://montecitoinn.com)), founded by Charlie Chaplin and partners in 1928; San Ysidro Ranch ([sanysidoranch.com](http://sanysidoranch.com)) in Santa Barbara, where Vivien Leigh and Sir Laurence Olivier wedded and the Kennedys honeymooned; The Santa Maria Inn ([santamariainn.com](http://santamariainn.com)), visited by President Herbert Hoover, Marlene Dietrich, and Rudolph Valentino; The Ojai Valley Inn & Spa ([ojairesort.com](http://ojairesort.com)), where stars Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy stayed during the 1952 filming of *Pat and Mike*; and the Madonna Inn ([madonnainn.com](http://madonnainn.com)) in San Luis Obispo, frequented by John Wayne and Katy Perry. Digs now defunct: Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio spent their first night as newlyweds at the Clifton Motel (now an apartment complex) in Paso Robles and had lunch at San Luis Obispo’s Motel Inn, America’s first motel, which stands—out of service—at the northernmost end of Monterey Street.



## 18. Fish on the Run

On some moonlit spring and summer nights, masses of small silvery fish can be seen darting out of the surf and up Malibu and Santa Barbara beaches. As high tide recedes, the California grunion bury their tails in the sand to lay their eggs. Peak spawning months are April, May, and June. Not for the faint of heart: catching the fish in hand during open season (March and June through September) to grill and eat. (Fishing license required.) Visit [grunion.org](http://grunion.org).

## 19. Farmers’ Markets That Set the Standard

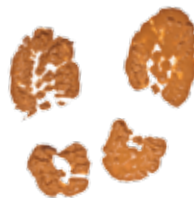
Since 1983, the Downtown SLO Farmers’ Market ([downtownslo.com/farmers-market](http://downtownslo.com/farmers-market)) has been offering fresh produce, barbecued food, entertainment, and a lively street fair with dishes from local restaurants every Thursday night. It’s so successful that the model has been replicated in 60 markets across the United States and as far away as Japan.





## 20. Animals Dig Us

Selfless efforts in the name of animals are evident in the abundance of volunteerism, fundraisers, no-kill shelters, cage-free rescue homes, and innovative programs for fostering and adoption. We also do animal caretaking on a grand scale and the results are impressive, whether at the Santa Barbara Bird Sanctuary ([sbbird.org](http://sbbird.org)), the Ojai Raptor Center ([ojairaptorcenter.org](http://ojairaptorcenter.org)) for birds of prey and other wildlife, Return to Freedom ([returntofreedom.org](http://returntofreedom.org)) wild horse sanctuary in Lompoc, or Sespe Condor Sanctuary in Ventura County. And the future looks hopeful: To give animals a safe and natural (vegetative) passage over the 101 freeway in Agoura Hills, there is a proposal on the table for the Liberty Canyon Wildlife Crossing ([savelacougars.org](http://savelacougars.org)). If built, it would be the largest planned wildlife crossing in the world.



## 21. OUR TRAILS ARE ALWAYS HAPPY

The Central Coast is positively laced with walking and hiking trails, including the multi-use Ventura River Parkway ([americantrails.org](http://americantrails.org)), a designated National Recreation Trail joining the Ojai Valley Trail with the Ventura River Trail to span 16 miles between Ojai's Soule Park and the Ventura coastline. Others include the Santa Monica Mountains' Mishe Mokwa hiking trail ([nps.gov/samo](http://nps.gov/samo)) outside Malibu, a six-mile loop with views of the Channel Islands, and the Bob Jones Trail ([visitavilabeach.com](http://visitavilabeach.com)) in Avila Beach, a three-mile, family-friendly path for walking and cycling.



## 22. Architectural Eye Candy

Missions aside, there are myriad architectural styles distinguishing our cities and neighborhoods, designed for both classic and modern tastes. From south to north: the Greek temple-like classical revival Carnegie Art Museum ([carnegieam.org](http://carnegieam.org)) in Oxnard, built in 1906; the beaux-arts style Ventura City Hall designed by architect Albert C. Martin with 24 faces of Franciscan friars on the terracotta building; in Montecito, the authentic southwestern pueblo-style Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church ([mtcarmelsb.com](http://mtcarmelsb.com)) designed by architect Ross Montgomery in the 1930s and the George C. Stewart house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright ([franklloydwright.org](http://franklloydwright.org)); a slew of Spanish colonial buildings in downtown Santa Barbara; and in San Luis Obispo, the L-shaped red-brick Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Kundert Medical Clinic building.



**Feeding Time**, the newest addition to Lompoc's Art Alley

## 23. Storied Walls

In 1988, the Lompoc Mural Society ([lompocmurals.com](http://lompocmurals.com)) commissioned its first work, *Lompoc's Flower Industry*, at the corner of H Street and Ocean Avenue. Today, the city is home to more than 40 commissioned murals and numerous privately painted ones drawing artists and tourists from across the globe to the city's Old Town neighborhood and nearby areas. For an introduction to Lompoc's murals, check out Art Alley, across South I Street from the Lompoc Chamber of Commerce office.

## 24. WE KNOW A THING OR TWO ABOUT FILMS

It's no wonder that Hollywood's elite attends the annual Santa Barbara International Film Festival ([sbiff.org](http://sbiff.org)): This year it featured a whopping 52 premieres and screenings of more than 200 top new indies, shorts, documentaries, and feature films.

## 25. Grassroots Grow Tall

When surfer and climber Yvon Chouinard opened a climbing gear store more than 40 years ago, he chose a Ventura location because of the area's beauty and proximity to great waves and accessible backcountry. Now a major retailer of outdoor sports, Patagonia ([patagonia.com](http://patagonia.com)) has a synergistic relationship with Central Coast residents due to its commitments to environmental activism, the humane treatment of animals, and charitable efforts.



The Spanish Colonial Revival stylings of the Santa Barbara County Courthouse



Good reads alfresco at Bart's Books

## 26. Bucolic Bookselling

Bart's Books in Ojai ([bartsbooksojai.com](http://bartsbooksojai.com)) combines the best of both worlds: reading and nature. New and used books, some dating back to the 16th century, range from 50 cents to \$6,000 and are displayed inside the bookstore's 1930s cottage or outside under awnings. What better way to peruse through Daniel Gilbert's *Stumbling on Happiness* than with a breeze to turn the pages and the sun for illumination?

**"If, a thousand years from now, archaeologists happen to dig beneath the sands of Guadalupe, I hope they will not rush into print with the amazing news that Egyptian civilization ... extended all the way to the Pacific Coast,"** wrote director Cecil B. DeMille in his autobiography. This clue is said to have led to the recent excavation of what was, in the 1920s, the biggest set ever built for the most expensive film that had ever been made. DeMille is believed to have buried it to prevent rival directors from using it.



## 27. A Lost City, of Sorts

Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes, a National Natural Landmark near Pismo Beach, is California's largest coastal dune-wetlands complex and boasts the highest beach dunes in the Western United States, some as high as 500 feet. Movie sets for Cecil B. DeMille's film *The Ten Commandments*—his first version, a silent film made in 1923—are partially buried in the dunes, making the area a tourist destination. In 2012 and 2014, archaeologists unearthed the remains of two colossal plaster sphinxes from The Lost City of DeMille, one of which is now on display at the Dunes Center ([dunescenter.org](http://dunescenter.org)).



BOOKSTORE: GARDEN AND LION: GARY MOSS PHOTOGRAPHY; LOST CITY: GUADALUPE-NIPOMO DUNES CENTER; SARRARA: LUDOVIC ANNUCCI



Signs of the time on the working Zodiac clock in the Lotusland topiary garden

## 28. Dreams Grow Here

In 1941 Ganna Walska's gardening dream became a reality as she began turning her Montecito estate grounds into a paradise. Today, everyone can enjoy the legacy of her work at Lotusland (lotusland.org), a 37-acre site with 20 gardens displaying Walska's flair for the dramatic and the whimsical. A converted swimming pool is now a water garden for her favorite flower, the lotus; a crazy curlicue of weeping euphorbias flank the estate entry; and animals, chess pieces, and geometric shapes cavort in her topiary garden.



## 29. TOP CHEFS LOVE US FOR US, REALLY

With ideal weather and growing conditions come beautiful ingredients. With beautiful ingredients come high-profile chefs to exploit them for all they're worth. Among the most well-known toques to make their home on the Central Coast are *Iron Chef* Cat Cora (above, center) of Santa Barbara, Moorpark's Fabio Viviani (right) of *Top Chef* fame, *Knife Fight* guest Jason Paluska of Santa Barbara, *Cutthroat Kitchen* contestant Kelly Wangard of Paso Robles, Thousand Oaks' Troy Glass of *MasterChef Junior*, and Moorpark's Damiano Carrara (above, left) of the Food Network's 2015 *Spring Baking Championship* and soon to be featured on *Food Network Star*.



### 30. Those Darn Seals Really Are Cute

More than 1,700 elephant seals flock to the beaches of San Simeon from November to February. Some of them can also be observed sunbathing on the shore year-round at the six-mile-long Piedras Blancas Rookery; check out the live feed at [elephantseal.org](http://elephantseal.org).

### 31. Butterflies Are Free



There's no charge to feast your eyes on hundreds—no, thousands—of Monarch butterflies as the orange-and-black beauties wait out the winter on the coast from late October to early February. One of the largest congregations—one season's estimate was 180,000—is at the eucalyptus grove at Pismo State Beach. Ellwood Mesa at the Goleta Butterfly Grove ([goletabutterflygrove.com](http://goletabutterflygrove.com)) also boasts butterfly-bedecked eucalyptus trees.

### 32. Size Doesn't Matter

Named for the unusually diminutive size of its California live oaks, the El Moro Elfin Forest ([elfin-forest.org](http://elfin-forest.org)) in Los Osos is a 90-acre wooded—but mostly at shoulder-height—wonderland.

The coastal-adjacent forest is home to more than 200 plant species, as well as a menagerie of bird, mammal, reptile, amphibian, and insect species, some of which can be observed from the one-mile boardwalk loop.



### 33. We're Getting Really Good at Golf

Some 86 courses beckon, each with unique characteristics for players of all levels. There is Olivas Links ([olivaslinks.com](http://olivaslinks.com)) in Ventura with views of the harbor, the hills, and the ocean; Lost Canyons ([lostcanyons.com](http://lostcanyons.com)) in Simi Valley, which is a Pete Dye and Fred Couples-designed course; Sherwood Country Club ([sherwoodcc.com](http://sherwoodcc.com)), with a par-72 Jack Nicklaus Signature course in Thousand Oaks; Cypress Ridge ([cypressridge.com](http://cypressridge.com)), a Peter Jacobsen Signature course with elevation variations in Arroyo Grande; and Monarch Dunes ([monarchdunes.com](http://monarchdunes.com)) in Nipomo with two award-winning courses designed by architect Damian Pascuzzo and PGA Tour pro Steve Pate.



Corriganville Park: John Wayne during filming of 1938's *Pals of the Saddle* in the open field that would later become a western street set called Silvertown.

### 34. We Can See Ourselves on the Silver Screen

The Central Coast has been featured in so many movies and TV shows that there's no easy way to visit them all. But we can always visit the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes, where Johnny Depp's ship is carried over the sand by rock crabs in *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*. And Western fans can walk the hallowed ground of late film greats such as Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, and John Wayne at Corriganville Park in Simi Valley, where *Fort Apache*, *The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin*, and *The Lone Ranger* were shot.

### 35. The Best Barbecue in the West

With roots in the barbecue style of 1880s cattle-branding vaqueros, Santa Maria-style tri-tip ([santamariavalleybbq.com](http://santamariavalleybbq.com)) first appeared in the 1950s. Previously considered a throw-away cut, tri-tip became a cut of choice for seasoning and grilling over coast live oak red coals to create such distinct regional flavors that the technique was copyrighted by the Santa Maria Valley Chamber of Commerce in 1978, whose website offers authentic recipes for a feast with *pinquito* beans and other traditional fixings.

### 36. There's Nothing Like a Fresh Warm Æbleskiver

Devouring just-baked *æbleskivers* and other authentic Danish pastries in Solvang ([solvang.ca](http://solvang.ca)) is a delicious way to experience this charming Danish outpost in the Santa Ynez Valley. But the place is loaded with history, too. Find out about the founding of the town in 1911 at the Elverhøj Museum of History and Art ([elverhoj.org](http://elverhoj.org)). Learn about the author of *The Princess and the Pea* and other fairy tales at the Hans Christian Andersen Museum. Visit the Great Hall of the Danes ([thecopenhagenghouse.com](http://thecopenhagenghouse.com)) to see a Viking exhibit. Or attend a traditional holiday celebration such as the Julefest or Summer Solstice (see *Show Your Support*, page 42).





The Santa Barbara Mission

## 37. Mission Possible

Rich in history, six of California's 21 Spanish missions are in the 805 area: San Buenaventura ([sanbuenaaventuramission.org](http://sanbuenaaventuramission.org)), Santa Barbara ([santabarbaramission.org](http://santabarbaramission.org)), Santa Inés ([missionsantaines.org](http://missionsantaines.org)), La Purísima Concepción ([lapurisimamission.org](http://lapurisimamission.org)), San Luis Obispo de Tolosa ([mission-sanluisobispo.org](http://mission-sanluisobispo.org)), and San Miguel Arcángel ([missionsanmiguel.org](http://missionsanmiguel.org)).

With several serving as informative archeological sites, these missions represent the area's first European settlements and are, in part, at the root of Mission-style architecture and our region's winemaking heritage. (Paso Robles wine country has the padres of Mission San Miguel Arcángel to thank for its first vineyards, planted to make wine for mass.) Today these places continue to contribute to local culture as active parishes, schools, and special event venues.



## 38. There Are Things Worth Looking at and Great Ways to See Them

No matter which way you're facing (north, south, east, or west) the Central Coast excels at breathtaking vistas. You can climb to the top of the Santa Barbara County Courthouse clock tower ([sbcourthouse.org](http://sbcourthouse.org)) and take in the city's panoramic elegance (left) or walk the trail to the bluff of Malibu's Point Dume ([parks.ca.gov/pointdume](http://parks.ca.gov/pointdume)) for a view of the entire Santa Monica Bay that extends to Catalina Island on a clear day. In Cambria, the Fiscalini Ranch Preserve ([ffrpcambria.org](http://ffrpcambria.org)) affords a rambling coastal outlook on the Bluff Trail as does the top of the Ontario Ridge Trail in Shell Beach ([visitsanluisobispo.com](http://visitsanluisobispo.com)). Plus, for the ultimate perspective, there's hot air ballooning over Paso Robles wine country ([destinationpasorobles.com](http://destinationpasorobles.com)).



## 40. We Take Our Water Play Seriously

Most all the beach-side cities offer rentals and lessons for sailing, kite boarding, standup paddle boarding, jet skiing, kayaking, scuba diving, and snorkeling, but some go the extra mile: Santa Barbara Sailing Center ([sbsail.com](http://sbsail.com)) offers a Liveboard instructional sailing vacation for newbies or serious sailors who want to earn certification; kayaking on Morro Bay becomes educational on a naturalist-guided excursion with Central Coast Outdoors ([centralcoastoutdoors.com](http://centralcoastoutdoors.com)). Non-athletes might prefer Quadzilla, a four-lane slide at Ravine Water Park ([ravinewaterpark.com](http://ravinewaterpark.com)) in Paso Robles.

## 39. Our Homegrown Bands Walk On the Ocean

Toad the Wet Sprocket formed as an American rock-pop band in Santa Barbara in 1986, taking its name from a Monty Python sketch. Band members include vocalist and guitarist Glen Phillips, guitarist Todd Nichols, bassist Dean Dinning, and drummer Randy Guss. After chart success in the 1990s with singles like "Walk on the Ocean," and "All I Want," the band parted ways in 1998 but officially reunited in 2010. They continue to record and tour while retaining music's most least-understood name.

## 41. SEASIDE LOCOMOTION

We can curl up on a cushy reclining seat, watch the ocean out the window, and forget about traffic on the Amtrak Pacific Surfliner ([amtrak.com](http://amtrak.com)). Partnered with the gentle hum of the rails, the historic route from Santa Barbara to San Luis Obispo (one way takes about two and a half hours) proves to be as relaxing as ever.







Tasting at a Central Coast pace at The Valley Project (thevalleyproject.net) in the Santa Barbara Funk Zone

## 42. Our Wine Country Comes With Elbow Room

For every one of the estimated 378 wineries in the area (from San Luis Obispo to Ventura County and Malibu), there are about 26 square miles in which to roam. Compare that to Napa County, where there are less than two square miles for its 400 wineries, and you can see why the Central Coast enjoys a much more relaxed tasting room experience, with no waiting and no wrestling for space at the bar. (BTW: Although we got our information from real sources, we did so while drinking real Central Coast wine. So don't quote us.)

## 43. WE HAVE PIONEERS OF MEDICATION INNOVATION

Amgen ([amgen.com](http://amgen.com)) in Thousand Oaks is responsible for the development of Neulasta to reduce infection from cancer, the cholesterol-lowering Repatha, Prolia for osteoporosis, and scores of other major life-saving and life-enhancing biopharmaceuticals. But it doesn't stop there. The company's goal is to inspire a whole new generation to strengthen science education worldwide through the Amgen Foundation.

## 44. We Get to Choose the Right Mood for Our Music

An outdoor bowl surrounded by picnickers is the setting for the prestigious Ojai Music Festival ([ojaimusicfestival.org](http://ojaimusicfestival.org); June 9-12); the Music Academy of the West summer music festival ([musicacademy.org](http://musicacademy.org); June 13-August 6) takes place at an ocean-side campus and in various Santa Barbara venues; the Ventura College and Oxnard performing arts centers host the Ventura Music Festival ([venturamusicfestival.org](http://venturamusicfestival.org); July 15-24); and Festival Mozaic ([festivalmozaic.com](http://festivalmozaic.com); July 13-24) spotlights scenic outdoor locations and intimate San Luis Obispo venues.



## 45. We Rounded Down

Despite modern development, tens of thousands of Thousand Oaks' landmark trees still flourish within the city limits.

## 46. It's Not L.A.

Why would celebrities seek out homes here when they can live in L.A.'s notable, wealthy enclaves? Simple. It's not flashy or slick. Fine-dining establishments and high-end shops aren't plagued by the paparazzi. Community members have down-to-earth values. Schools are primo. Regional theater is excellent. Heavy traffic is a rarity. Just ask the neighbors: Jim Caviezel, Jamie Foxx, Tom Selleck, Heather Locklear, Britney Spears, and Angels baseball manager Mike Scioscia in Westlake; Rob Lowe, Oprah, and Christopher Lloyd in Montecito; and Kevin Costner in Carpinteria.

## 47. Coveted Ingredients

Thanks to year-round crop rotation and a seafood-rich coastline, the Central Coast produces a continuous bounty of fresh ingredients that helps feed the world with unique favorites like urchin and the spot prawns caught off the Santa Barbara coast and the Channel Islands. We grow Ojai Pixie tangerines and finger limes, an up-and-coming micro-citrus that bursts with tiny, tangy globules resembling caviar. In January and February of this year alone Oxnard harvested more than 649 million strawberries.



## 48. FLOWER POWER

They're not just for eliciting smiles: Flowers are a major crop on the Central Coast, with growers like Rose Story Farm ([rosestoryfarm.com](http://rosestoryfarm.com)) in Carpinteria, host to 30,000 rose bushes, the Santa Barbara Orchid Estate ([sborchid.com](http://sborchid.com)), which cultivates 1,000 different species and several thousand hybrids, and Pyramid Flowers of Oxnard ([pyramidflowers.com](http://pyramidflowers.com)), owned by the Van Wingerden family, whose flower-farming roots date back to 17th-century Holland. And Lompoc's flower fields (below) stretch as far as the eye can see ([explorelompop.com](http://explorelompop.com)).



## 49. Is Nicely Polished

Labels? We'll take labels. San Luis Obispo keeps landing on "best of" lists like Best Main Street in America, America's Most Romantic Towns, and Most Fitness-Friendly Cities. Thousand Oaks ranks among the top 10 safest cities in America according to the FBI. Carpinteria has the World's Safest Beach. For areas with the highest well being, Gallup ranks San Luis Obispo, Paso Robles, and Arroyo Grande in the top five and Ventura, Oxnard, and Thousand Oaks 18th.

## 50. Breakfast in Hand

In the early 1970s Herb Peterson, owner of a Santa Barbara-area McDonald's ([mcdonalds.com](http://mcdonalds.com)) franchise, was in search of a hand-held breakfast menu item. Yada yada and the worldwide classic Egg McMuffin was born. ♦