

# Santa Barbara County: Adventure Seekers



## OUTDOOR ADVENTURES IN SANTA BARBARA COUNTY

Active travelers shouldn't be fooled by that Santa Barbara bliss, the easygoing attitude that lingers over the city like a sky-written message saying: RELAX. Because there's another side to Santa Barbara, and it's all about action and adventure—a core component of the city's identity.

For the traveler who is not content to spend a week in a hammock and call it a vacation, Santa Barbara is a high-octane paradise with unlimited opportunities for fun, excitement and adventure. With a full spectrum of natural facilities—mountains, hills, ocean, lakes and streams—plus a mild climate and 300 days of sunshine per year, the American Riviera™ is always right where the action is. Welcome to rush hour, American Riviera-style. [www.santabarbaraca.com](http://www.santabarbaraca.com)

### *Hit the Water, Baby*

If it can be done on, under, or by the water, it's happening in Santa Barbara—probably right now. Come on and take the plunge.

- **Kayaking:** Beginners to expert can rent a kayak, or join a tour, and within minutes be paddling the local coastline. Tour operators can also arrange for boat transit to **Channel Islands National Park & Marine Sanctuary**, where kayakers stand by for naturalist-led tours that take in such highlights as the largest sea cave in the world. Slip inside this natural cathedral and hang with the local sea lions while experiencing the rhythmic breath of the sea.
- **Scuba Diving:** The Channel Islands is also home to some of California's best scuba diving and snorkeling. The islands' kelp forests host more than 800 species of marine life, and underwater visibility is often 100 feet or more. Divers swimming past rock reefs can check out such locals as anemones, starfish, sponges, sea fans, moray eels, octopus, abalone, rock scallops, spiny lobsters, black sea bass, halibut, lingcod and rockfish.
  - Dive boats leave for the islands from **SEA Landing** at the Harbor.
  - No time for a boat trip? No problem, because many great dive spots are readily accessible just a short fin kick from a sandy shore.
- **Fishing:** There are lots of great places to hook calico bass, sand bass, halibut, white sea bass, rockfish, and more, several local companies offer sport fishing charters.
  - If you'd rather secure the catch of the day without spending the day catching it, visit the Saturday-morning fish market at the Harbor, and purchase your favorite fresh fish right from the fishermen's boats.
- **Whale Watching:** The Channel Islands are also among the world's prime whale watching grounds, with more than two-dozen species present at various times as they follow eons-old migratory routes through the nutrient-rich waters around Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa and San Miguel Islands. **Condor Cruises** will put you in the right place to spot Gray, Humpback and Minke whales, plus orcas (killer whales) and five types of dolphins along with sea lions, harbor and elephant seals, and sea otters. Summer visitors often spy 50-ton blue whales—the largest creatures ever to have inhabited the earth.

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## *Surf Trails*

- **Surfing:** With 100 miles of Santa Barbara County coastline to choose from, surfers have been flocking to Santa Barbara for decades, especially in winter, when Arctic storms send perfect waves to local beaches and reefs.
  - Beginners head to the gentler surf at places like **Leadbetter**, **Campus Point** at UCSB, and **El Refugio** (about 15 miles north of town).
  - Professionals and expert locals can be found shredding powerful waves at **Jalama** (near Lompoc) and **Hammond's** (just down from the Four Seasons Biltmore) or getting endless rides at **Rincon**, one of the premiere pointbreaks in the world.
  - While old-school long-boarders mingle with new-school short-boarders at local beaches, die-hards of other kinds don wet suits for wave-riding and water-skimming adventures on a variety of contemporary craft. Surf aficionados can also try the fastest growing water sport in the world, Stand-Up Paddle Surfing.
- **Wind Surfing:** Windsurfers can be seen chop-hopping at a number of local beaches, often alongside kite-surfing experts. Aficionados of this new and radical high-speed, big-air water sport use waves as launching pads to reach heights of 20-plus feet and cover distances of 100 feet and more before returning gracefully to the water and continuing at speeds topping 35 mph.
- **Parasailing:** Those who want the big air without the learning curve – or the risk – can parasail at Stearns Wharf, and then ride high while strapped to a billowing parachute at the end of a long cable hooked to a speedboat below.

## *Sail Away*

- If you prefer to earn your sea spray at lower speeds beneath well-trimmed sails, then visit the **Santa Barbara Sailing Center** or **Sunset Kidd Sailing Cruises** in the Harbor. They offer lessons, cruises, rentals and charters.
- In summer, follow the walkway to the end of the Harbor seawall for a great view of the competitors in the weekly Wednesday-evening regattas. From that same vantage point, you can almost ride “inside the barrel” with surfers at the “Sandspit,” who get tubed just yards from the rocks. Note, however, that it does get wet out there and that the wall may be closed during times of high surf.
- **Gliders:** OK, it's not exactly sailing, but a ride over the wine country in a motor-less sailplane has a lot in common. Gliders tow you to altitude by an engine-powered plane, and when your pilot finds the right thermal, he'll pull the release and send you soaring into the wild blue. You will silently ride invisible waves of wind rising from the vineyards below.
- **Hot Air Balloon Rides:** Or rise to the skies on a hot air balloon tour over the Santa Ynez Valley.

## *Freshwater Fun*

- Of course, Santa Barbara offers plenty of freshwater fun, too, and **Cachuma Lake** is right in the middle of it all. Located just over the Santa Ynez Mountains from Santa Barbara and accessible via Highway 154, Cachuma offers camping, boating and great fishing.
- When you just have to have that freshwater swim, the nearby **Santa Ynez River** awaits. The wide, normally slow-flowing river is home to a number of popular swimming areas. Among the

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best is **Red Rock**, an easy hike from the car park, reached via Paradise Road off Highway 154. (Be sure to pick up an “Adventure Pass” for \$5 per day at the ranger station).

- The fly-fishing is also great along many sections of the river.

## ***Fore! Swingers Ahead***

- **Golfing:** Home to six 18-hole championship public golf courses, Santa Barbara County deserves its acclaimed reputation as one of the nation’s best golf destinations. Lush river courses, oak-studded fairways, bluff-top greens, Pacific Ocean view backdrops and challenging valley courses combine to make golf in Santa Barbara County an experience par excellence.
- Many championship courses designed by golf’s top architects are located here, as is a forgiving weather pattern of nearly year-round sunshine.
- *Golf Digest* and *Golf Magazine* have ranked Santa Barbara’s individual courses as some of the best golf courses in California or even the nation.

## ***Bike Power***

- **Cycling:** If you don’t believe that Santa Barbara’s miles of rolling lowland roads, endless mountain passes and perfect year-round weather make it a cycling Shangri-La, just ask the international professional cyclists who train here every winter.
  - For the ultimate burn, check out **Figueroa Mountain** in the wine country, one of Lance Armstrong’s favorite torture tracks.
  - If more proof is needed, Santa Barbara County played host to two consecutive stages during the first two annual Amgen Tour of California pro cycling races, which spanned 600+ miles through the state of California.
  - Feeling more carefree than hardcore? Then hire a bike in Solvang and pedal fewer miles while making more visits to some of the area’s 80-plus wineries.
- **Mountain Biking:** Mountain bikers love Santa Barbara, too, thanks to a web of trails linking Camino Cielo Road and 3,985-foot La Cumbre Peak with the foothills far, far below.
  - **Los Padres National Forest** has tracks for riders of all ability levels, from narrow off-camber thrillers for experts to wide, relatively flat fire roads for beginning and intermediate riders.
  - Leisure cyclists will find miles of marked bike trails crisscrossing the city and linking it to the sea. Pick up a map at the Visitors Center, and then set off up Santa Barbara Street toward historic Mission Santa Barbara. From there you can head back downhill to the city center, shop and lunch on State Street or climb a bit to **Mountain Road** and follow the smooth, winding, nearly flat route past streams and lookout points en route to lunch in celebrity-stocked Montecito.
  - For a map of great rides or companies that offer guided rides, go to the **Santa Barbara Bicycle Coalition** website. [www.sbbike.org](http://www.sbbike.org)
- **Elings Park** is the place for the BMX crowd to catch big air while riding the well-maintained course, with its series of steep banked turns, whoop-de-dos, trick jumps and other challenges of a carefully manipulated dirt landscape. Races take place on Tuesday nights in summer.
- If you don’t have your own bike, you can rent one. Whether you prefer a single-speed cruiser, a deluxe 21-speed mountain bike or a family surrey (four-wheel bicycles for six, fringe included), you’ll find it about a block from the ocean on State Street.

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- **Skateboarding:** Street surfers will enjoy **Skater's Point**, a 12,000-square-foot arena of sculpted concrete for skateboarders and in-line skaters. The park sits just off the sand on Cabrillo Boulevard, a few hundred yards east of Stearns Wharf.

## *Saddle Up*

- **Horseback Riding:** Santa Barbara County, the Santa Ynez Valley in particular, has long been horse-country and today, is home to Arabian and quarter horse ranches, the **Quicksilver Miniature Horse Ranch** and several dedicated riding facilities. Visitors can choose from three horse ranches in Santa Barbara County to experience the thrill of the Old West.
  - Guided tours are available for unforgettable scenic views. Whether you are an expert-rider or a beginner, there is a trail for you.
  - For a different perspective on the equestrian world, there's the **Return to Freedom American Wild Horse Sanctuary** in Lompoc. Having taken on the mission of "saving the wild American horse," the 310-acre ranch offers tours that range from an hour to half a day and give visitors the rare opportunity to encounter horses that have never been tamed or saddled.
  - The "Man Who Listens to Horses" has a mount in nearby Solvang—**Flag is Up Farms**. Here, legendary author and trainer Monty Roberts' Join-Up techniques are demonstrated and visitors are free to roam the facilities; just sign in and grab a self-guided tour map. The 154-acre breeding and training facility houses a race track, lush manicured lawns and pastures, stables, barns, scheduled clinics/classes and an 24,000 sq. ft. covered arena. Groups of 40+ can access the home and whimsical saloon for private functions. Open daily, 9am-5pm; free.