

The Original RoadTrip: California's Central Coast Off the Beaten Path Discovery Trail



7 Day Itinerary traveling from San Francisco to Los Angeles

DAY 1

Arrive at San Francisco International Airport (SFO) and drive approximately 76 miles / 122 km, 1 hour 30 minutes, to Santa Cruz County

DAY 2

Begin your trip to California's Central Coast in Santa Cruz County.

In southern Santa Cruz County, Watsonville and the Pajaro Valley are home to a diversity of wildlife habitats, including the Pajaro River, the Watsonville Sloughs and Pinto Lake. Over 200 species of waterfowl, raptors and songbirds live in and migrate through the Wetlands of Watsonville, making it an ideal place to watch for feathered creatures, or enjoy one of the many trails winding through the area. Guided nature walks are offered starting at the Wetlands of Watsonville Nature Center every week. Nearby, the Elkhorn Slough National Estuarine Reserve is one of California's last undisturbed coastal wetlands. Guided tours by kayak are an excellent way to view wildlife in this pristine area.

www.santacruzcounty.travel

Next drive 20 miles / 25 km, 16 minutes, to San Juan Bautista in San Benito County

Nestled in the heart of the noted San Juan Valley and rich with culture and history, San Juan Bautista offers visitors a refreshing small-town atmosphere filled with the charm and character of the past. Whether touring the Old Mission San Juan Bautista, the largest of the California missions; the State Historic Park, with the only Spanish Plaza left in California; or enjoying the downtown dining and quaint shops, San Juan Bautista is sure to become one of your most favored excursions. Located on Highway 156, a short drive from Highway 101, San Juan Bautista offers visitors a year-round opportunity to see structures built in the 1800s. In the park, visitors can gain an appreciation of California peoples, from Native Americans through the Spanish and Mexican cultural influences, right up to the American period in the late 19th century. www.gilroyvisitor.org

Drive 20 miles / 32 km, 23 minutes to Salinas in Monterey County to overnight.

DAY 3

If the thought of meeting the Dreyfus Fund lion, the Exxon tiger, and Brandy, the cinnamon brown bear who has starred in countless Disney movies, intrigues you, look for the unobtrusive sign for Wild Things/Vision Quest Ranch, on River Road off Hwy 68 about 10 minutes off HWY 101 at Salinas. Guided tours for the whole family are given daily at 1 p.m. If you have ever entertained the idea of taking an African Safari and would like to save the long plane ride, not to mention getting special inoculations,

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reserve an overnight stay at the Vision Quest Safari Bed & Breakfast. Adults can get closer to exotic animals and sleep to the sounds of the wild, as they snuggle safely in their luxury tent. Be greeted in the morning with breakfast brought to your front porch by one of the specially trained elephants that call Vision Quest Ranch their home. Continue along River Road south and visit Mission Nuestra Señora de la Soledad and the River Road Wineries. Hahn/Smith & Hook Winery and Paraiso Vineyards have tasting rooms and picnic areas with expansive views of the Salinas Valley. Continue to where the road rejoins HWY 101 at Greenfield to visit Scheid Vineyards' tasting room. Then continue south to King City, one of the largest valley towns. It has several restaurants and cafes, a few motels, and a large campground for RVs and tents in San Lorenzo Park. Take time for the Monterey County Agricultural and Rural Life Museum: it tells the story of valley agriculture through historic buildings and exhibits. More information: www.seemonterey.com

Drive 110 miles / 177 km, 1 hour 40 minutes, to spend the evening and overnight in Atascadero in San Luis Obispo County

DAY 4

Atascadero, a charming town at the crossroads of Highways 41 and 101 is the undiscovered treasure of San Luis Obispo County. Along with the small town ambiance, Atascadero offers visitors a casual destination with home-town experiences. Residents and visitors alike gather in the center of town at the scenic Atascadero Lake Park to stroll along the walking trails that circle the lake or picnic near the shore. Visitors can also enjoy a sand volleyball court, children's playground, horseshoe pits, tables and small BBQ pits, seasonal wading pool and boat and kayak rental. In addition, the park is home to Charles Paddock Zoo, established in 1955 as a recovery center for ill or injured wildlife. Today the zoo is home to over 100 animals and open for the public to enjoy. Small farms pepper the hills of Atascadero, such as Green Acres Lavender Farm. Open to the public for tours and events, Green Acres grows 13,000 lavender plants. Walk through the lavender maze and discover all the natural uses for lavender. More than just a stop-over point, Atascadero offers a variety of local and regional festivals and events, glorious country roads for biking, the DeAnza Trail and other hiking venues, and an excellent golf course. Lodging in Atascadero ranges from the modest to the opulent. In addition to several hotels, you will find a variety of B&Bs. For more information on Atascadero visit www.sanluisobispo.com

Drive 45 miles / 72 km, 53 minutes, to the Guadalupe Dunes in Santa Barbara County

Santa Barbara County is home to the agricultural town of Guadalupe, where the big attractions are the Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes and the Oso Flaco Preserve. The 3.4-acre sanctuary's white expanses of coastal sand hills are the second largest dune site in California. After filming *The Ten Commandments* here in 1923, Cecil B. DeMille left behind his stage sets, parts of which can still be found poking from the sand. Some 18 species of rare endangered plants and birds, including the least tern and the snowy plover, populate the northern end of the preserve. www.SantaBarbaraCA.com

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Overnight in Santa Maria, 14 miles / 22 km, 25 minutes from the Guadalupe Dunes

DAY 5

Begin your day driving south 30 miles / 48 km, 30 minutes to Nojoqui Falls near Solvang in Santa Barbara County

Less than 15 minutes from the village center of Solvang, the “Danish Capital of America,” discover a wondrous waterfall. Just take a scenic drive south on Alisal Road, past the famous Alisal Guest Ranch, horse farms and estates to discover Nojoqui Falls County Park, at Alisal Road & US Highway 101/Old Coast Road. Nojoqui Falls (pronounced NAH-ho-wee) drop nearly 100 feet over a sandstone wall. Maidenhair ferns line the rock walls, creating a lush, serene environment that has few visitors. The falls are only a short, 10-minute easy walk on a wide hard-packed trail from the park entrance— easy for the whole family to visit and enjoy. Admission to the park is FREE and open daily from 8 a.m. to Sunset. Info: www.SolvangUSA.com

For the remainder of your day, take Highway 154 to Cachuma Lake, 25 miles / 40 km, 28 minutes

Camp in a Yurt by the shores of Cachuma Lake in the beautiful Santa Ynez Valley, only 30 minutes from Santa Barbara. Yurts provide a camping experience with homey comforts. A cross between a tent and tepee, the yurts at Cachuma Lake feature platform beds that sleep 5 to 6, lockable door, inside lighting and heating, and screened windows in the wood and fabric siding. Set on the bluff with access to the lakeshore, the view is spectacular. Currently there are only three yurts at Cachuma Lake, which may be reserved year-round up to six months in advance. Fees range from \$60-\$70 per night depending on yurt size and season. A non-refundable \$15 reservation fee will also be charged, and all reservations must be secured with a credit card. There is a 2-night minimum stay for weekends, and a 3-night minimum stay for all major holidays. For yurt information and reservations call (805) 686-5050 Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. More info: www.SantaYnezValleyVisit.com

Overnight at Cachuma Lake

DAY 6

Get an early start and drive 57 miles / 92 km, 1 hour and 4 minutes, Ventura County

Off the beaten path opportunities abound year-round in Ventura County. Leave the traffic behind and unwind on awe-inspiring bike tours to and from Ojai along the scenic Ventura River Bike Trail and downhill from Sulphur Mountain. Grab some swanky surf swag at one of many famous surf shops along Ventura's Thompson Boulevard and head out to nearby Surfer's Point Beach for the best waves around. Oxnard's Heritage Square brilliantly captures the grandeur of yesteryear in one downtown city block, showcasing lush gardens amidst lovingly restored historic homes, two of which serve fantastic food and

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wine. In nearby Heritage Valley, dig into the delectable taste of our agricultural heritage by embarking upon tours provided by Limoneira Ranch Company, including a solar orchard, green waste recycling, hot air balloons, jeeps and an insider's look at a citrus packing house. Just a short hour's boat ride across the channel, experience unspoiled shores and nature's bounty of over 150 endemic species at Channel Islands National Park, America's Galapagos. www.ventura-usa.com

Continue to Oxnard in Ventura County by driving 10 miles / 16 km, 15 minutes

There is nothing more decadent than chocolate and cheese, and when the two are paired with wine – it's pure indulgence! Oxnard's new Wine, Chocolate and Cheese Tour takes visitors off the beaten path to Oxnard's new wineries, historic Heritage Square in downtown Oxnard, and a hidden Victorian estate in Old Town Camarillo. The tours take place every Saturday and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., departing from the California Welcome Center. The shuttle can accommodate groups of up to 24. Advanced reservations required. Hotel packages available. (805) 988-0717. VisitOxnard.com

Overnight in Oxnard

DAY 7

To depart out of Los Angeles International Airport, drive 62 miles / 100 km, 1 hour 12 minutes from Oxnard (recommended drive: 101 South & 405 South).