

# Santa Barbara County: Family Fun Around Santa Barbara



## FAMILY FUN SANTA BARBARA STYLE

The American Riviera® offers families an abundance of year-round fun. Situated 100 miles from the closest metropolis, Santa Barbara is a destination resort unto itself—a self-contained safety net for families seeking to bond without breaking the bank. From the shoreline to the Santa Ynez Mountains, Santa Barbara offers families countless offbeat treks, ocean adventures and opportunities for getting up close and personal with the great outdoors. In addition to 100 miles of prime California coastline, 300+ days of annual sunshine, hike-friendly mountains, nature preserves, recreational lakes, skateboard parks and scenic bike paths, the region offers 20+ interactive museums and child-friendly historic and cultural attractions, including three of California’s 21 missions.

From the hammock to the kayak, Santa Barbara is an easy-to-navigate environment for all ages. Pedestrian-friendly, the city is conveniently linked by a trolley and shuttle system enabling visitors to explore museums, zoos, parks, beaches, and more without a car. The majority of attractions and hotels are in close proximity to one another and the beachfront. An added bonus is the bevy of affordable lodgings (including the original Motel 6) located just two blocks from the beach.

[www.santabarbaraca.com](http://www.santabarbaraca.com)

### **Lions, Tigers and Bears Oh My!**

- If it’s animals you love, zip to the **Santa Barbara Zoo**, a 35-acre refuge mingling gardens and animals in a soothing setting. Some 2,800 species of palm trees, cacti, succulents, ornamental grasses and ground covers dot the premises. Once the site of a palatial estate overlooking the ocean, the zoo has re-created natural habitats for more than 500 animals from around the globe.
  - The zoo’s international “Species Survival Program” is dedicated to saving endangered species and currently houses and breeds 16 endangered animals, including gorillas, lemurs, Channel Island fox and lions. [www.santabarbarazoo.org](http://www.santabarbarazoo.org)
- Close to the zoo is the **Andree Clark Bird Refuge** on East Cabrillo Boulevard near Highway 101. The 32-acre expansive sanctuary with pedestrian and bike paths skirts the peaceful lagoon of tule reeds, coastline sage, willows and lemonade berry. Some 200 species of birds are found here.
- In neighboring Goleta, you will want to be sure to stop at the **Coronado Butterfly Preserve** (free). Monarch madness hits full throttle November through March as hundreds of thousands of butterflies check into their winter digs along Goleta’s shoreline. [www.sblandtrust.org](http://www.sblandtrust.org)
- Kids can feed the ducks at **Los Carneros Lake**.
- A visit to the **Carpinteria Seal Sanctuary** (December - May) allows you to view hundreds of fuzzy mammals frolicking along the shoreline. Also check out the **Carpinteria Salt Marsh Nature Park** (free; 805-684-5405) wetlands where some 200 species of resident and migratory birds visit along the popular Pacific Flyway. Take to the mile-long path or the free docent-led tours Saturdays at 10am. (May - November). [www.sblandtrust.org](http://www.sblandtrust.org)
- Quicksilver **Miniature Horse Ranch** (free; 805-686-4002) located between Solvang and Ballard, is one of the largest miniature horse facilities on the west coast.
- When the potbelly pigs for pets went bust, **Little Orphan Hammies** (free; 805-693-9953) stepped in with a five-acre “rescue” farm. Upon appointment only, kids can get up close and personal with nearly 100+ pigs, each with its own private painted residence enshrined with such glamorous names as “Madonna.” Clean and conveniently just outside of a residential area in Solvang.

# Santa Barbara County:

## Family Fun Around Santa Barbara



- Nearby on Highway 246, fine feathered friends rush up to the fence to greet you at **Ostrich Land** (free; 805-686-9696), a 33-acre breeding farm with a small road-side shop selling fresh eggs, meat, feathers and egg art. Across from the ostriches, gated corals house a cache of emus. [www.ostrichland.com](http://www.ostrichland.com)
- Calling all cowgirls and cowboys for an unbridled adventure at the **Return to Freedom American Wild Horse Sanctuary** (805-737-9246). This 310-acre living museum in Lompoc is a hands-off habitat for a diverse variety of horses living in their natural herd groups. Spend a fun family afternoon immersed in the joys of the wild horse experience with the one hour Sanctuary Tour, or delve into the three-hour Adventure Walk. [www.returntofreedom.org](http://www.returntofreedom.org)

### Museum Exploration

- For young Picassos, the **Santa Barbara Museum of Art** is free on Sundays (805-963-4364) and the Children's Gallery offers children the chance to create their own masterpieces while learning about art. [www.sbma.net](http://www.sbma.net)
- Marked with a giant baby blue skeleton, the **Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History** (805-682-4711) is a must-see for curious kids. Specializing in California and North American West Coast natural history, highlights include marine displays, interactive computers, hands-on activities, the insect area, Lizard Lounge and planetarium. [www.sbnature.org](http://www.sbnature.org)
- For future marine biologists, visit the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History **Ty Warner Sea Center** (805-962-2526). At 6,700 sq. ft., the Center sports terrific interactive exhibits. Kids and adults can encounter live tide pool animals and work like scientists by sampling and testing ocean water, studying animal behavior, and examining microscopic marine life. A theater showcases the wonders of the Santa Barbara Channel. [www.sbnature.org](http://www.sbnature.org)
- **Santa Barbara Maritime Museum** (805-965-8864), where kids will learn about local maritime history all the way back to the days when the Chumash paddled dugout canoes to the Channel Islands. The museum has multiple interactive children's exhibits and a 45-foot-tall U.S. Navy periscope. One of only three in the world in public use, it affords a 360-degree sub's-eye view of paradise. [www.sbmm.org](http://www.sbmm.org)
- Make sure to stop at the **Susan Quinlan Doll & Teddy Bear Museum and Library**. It is one of the world's largest collections of dolls, teddy bears, and related books and items.
- For a taste of the Wild West, mosey on over to **Santa Barbara Carriage and Western Arts Museum** (free; 805-962-2353) on Castillo Street. This 11,000-square foot museum offers exhibits dating back more than 300 years, including horse-drawn carts and carriages used by pioneer Santa Barbara families, buggies, stagecoaches, army wagons and a bright red steam pumper used for fire fighting. [www.carriagemuseum.org](http://www.carriagemuseum.org)
- **Carpinteria Valley Museum of History** (805-684-3112) houses historic artifacts from Chumash times to the end of the 19th century.
- Track down the trains at the **South Coast Railroad Museum** (free; 805-964-3540) in neighboring Goleta. This museum highlights a restored yellow and brown Victorian 1901 Southern Pacific Depot. History buffs will enjoy antique railroad artifacts, a collection of rare photographs and exhibits, including a 300 square-foot model railroad and a miniature train for kids. [www.goletadepot.org](http://www.goletadepot.org)
- Right next door is the historical landmark Stow House. Built in 1873 by a prominent ranching family, visitors can take a tour on Saturday or Sunday to see the furniture, clothing, and toys of that era.

# Santa Barbara County:

## Family Fun Around Santa Barbara



- For two-wheeled enthusiasts, the **Solvang Vintage Motorcycle Museum** (805-686-9522), located in Solvang Village Square, features changing exhibits of classic motorcycles and bicycles from a permanent collection of 100. Check out a rare 1955 Matchless G64, a 1966 Honda Sport Cub and Vincent Black Lighting, one of only 30 built. [www.motosolvang.com](http://www.motosolvang.com)
- For those drawn to the skies, take off to the **Santa Maria Museum of Flight** (805-922-8758), where 11 actual aircraft—including a Bowers Flybaby, 1929 Fleet Model 2, and Rand KR-2—await exploration. [www.smmof.org](http://www.smmof.org)
- Also in Santa Maria, the **Santa Maria Valley Discovery Museum** (805-928-8414) offers interactive exhibits such as Enclose Yourself in a Bubble, Tar Pit, and Rocket Launch Pad. [www.smydiscoverymuseum.org](http://www.smydiscoverymuseum.org)
- For a little bit of time travel, visit one, two, or all three of the Missions in Santa Barbara County.
  - **Mission Santa Barbara** (downtown Santa Barbara) [www.santabarbaramission.org](http://www.santabarbaramission.org)
  - **Mission Santa Ines** (Solvang) [www.missionsantaines.org](http://www.missionsantaines.org)
  - **La Purisima Mission State Historic Park** (Lompoc) [www.lapurisimamission.org](http://www.lapurisimamission.org)
  - All provide a fascinating glimpse into our Spanish colonial past and an opportunity for children to experience mission life through historical recreations of the original rooms, crafts, and activities.

### Spend Family Time Outdoors

- Connected to the beachfront beat is **Santa Barbara Harbor**, with its 1000+ crafts, lively seafood market (Saturdays), restaurants and more. Down from the harbor at the foot of **State Street**, **Stearns Wharf**, the oldest working West Coast pier. Ride on the **Lil' Toot** with Captain Fred over to the Wharf, where you can walk around the stores and get a treat at the ice cream or candy store.
- Touring the waterfront of Santa Barbara can be fun if you jump on **The Land Shark** or take a **Santa Barbara Trolley Company** tour. Rent sailboats and jet skis at the Harbor or sign up for a whale watching excursion.
- Check out the paved 3.2-mile **Cabrillo Bike Path** which affords views of the islands, harbor, Stearns Wharf and city of Santa Barbara. Surrey, segway, rollerblade, and bicycle rentals are plentiful; wheel around on Sunday when the **Arts and Crafts Show** unfolds along the sea. Hardcore skateboarders can slide into **Skater's Point** (free), which boasts 12,000 sq. ft. of bowls, rails and ramps.
- Do not miss the chance to have an outdoor picnic during your visit. Some beautiful spots include the **Rose Gardens** at the Mission; **Alice Keck Park**, where the kids can watch the turtles; and the **Sunken Gardens** at the Courthouse (you can burn a few calories first by climbing up in the tower).
- Santa Barbara is home to more open space per capita than any other city in the country—53 parks of all kinds, from formal and well tended to wild and untrammled, offer the perfect location for picnics, play or simple relaxation.
  - One of the top picks for native California flora is **Santa Barbara Botanic Garden** (805-682-4726), which offers five miles of trails through 65 acres. The diversity alone will keep kids interested, from the towering redwood forest to the manzanita and live oak groves, desert and island sections. [www.sbbg.org](http://www.sbbg.org)

# Santa Barbara County:

## Family Fun Around Santa Barbara



- **Chase Palm Park**, a 10-acre waterfront masterpiece, is a haven for high-energy kids. On tap is a restored antique carousel with 37 carved wooden steeds, a series of faux riverbeds at **The Wilds** for splashing and tramping in and a giant misting whale at **Shipwreck Playground**. A world-class play model of the Winfield Scott schooner that sank off the Channel Islands at the turn of the century rounds out the fun. During the summer, bring a picnic and settle in for a free Thursday night concert.
- The city's oldest and most stately park, **Alameda Park**, is home to the expansive **Kid's World Playground**. Uniquely conceived and designed by children, this park offers hours of fun for kids with its giant shark, scaleable pirate ship and eel-shaped slide.
- Twelve miles south of Santa Barbara lies **Carpinteria State Beach Park**, offering 4,000 feet of beautiful ocean, overnight camping and the best surf fishing and tide pooling in the region.
- More camping can be found at **El Capitan** and **Refugio State Beaches**.
- For families seeking a more docile day, spirit over to **Cachuma Lake Recreation Area** (\$6 day use fee; 805-686-5054). This small lake tucked within an oak-shrouded valley is a fishing paradise with abundant trout, bass and catfish. Rent a boat and pack a lunch. [www.cachuma.com](http://www.cachuma.com)
  - View seasonal wildlife and eagles on naturalist-led cruises aboard the open-air Osprey (\$15 adults/\$7 kids under 12).
  - For a true walk on the wild side, check into one of the park's three Mongolian yurts, complete with heating (\$45 - \$65/night).
- Artists-in-training and history buffs might enjoy a quick stop to visit the historic **Chumash Painted Cave State Historic Park** (free; 805-733-3713), the site of preserved cave paintings depicting the life and times of the local Chumash Indians hundreds of years ago. Located in a steep canyon on Painted Cave Road, just off of the San Marcos Pass (Highway 154), this sandstone cave is accessed by a short hike. The religious drawings by Chumash Native Americans, as well as likenesses of coastal fishermen that date back to the 1600s, can be viewed through protective bars. [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)
- Local hiking trails connect throughout the **Los Padres National Forest** for an all day outing.
- The **Channel Islands National Park & Marine Sanctuary** (805-884-1464) is easily accessible from Santa Barbara Harbor. [www.nps.gov/chis](http://www.nps.gov/chis)
  - Of the five islands, **Santa Cruz Island**, California's largest, makes for a great day trip. **The Nature Conservancy** (805-642-0345) offers tours of this unique ecological preserve. Multi-day tours are also available. [www.tnc.org](http://www.tnc.org)
  - A variety of outfitters offer kayak tours to the sea caves and beyond. On land, the islands offer camping, hiking, kayaking, tidepooling and many rare plant and animal species, ancient pygmy sites and gentle coastal waters.
- The **Santa Ynez Mountains** offer biking, hiking, naturalist excursions, hang gliding and rock climbing opportunities.
- **Los Padres National Forest** (805-968-6640), California's second largest national forest with wilderness areas, lakes, streams and plenty of workout terrain, boasts a variety of trails that wrap around the mountains and afford expansive views of the rugged coastline. [www.fs.fed.us/r5/lospadres](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/lospadres)
  - For more stunning views, check out **Figueroa Mountain**, where Lance Armstrong and the Discovery Team train. Figueroa Mountain is a spectacular site for watching the seasons change: the leaves turn colors in late fall, snow collects in higher

# Santa Barbara County: Family Fun Around Santa Barbara



altitudes in the winter, and an extraordinary display of wildflowers bloom in the spring.

- **Nojoqui Falls** is a daytrip destination certain to blow off steam. Chill out with a picnic or barbecue at the park along Alisal Road, just outside of Solvang. After lunch, trek to see the seasonal 100-ft. bridal veil waterfall via an easy, 15 minute uphill walk along the creek under a canopy of live oak trees.
- After a long day, use the downtown shuttle on State St. (just 25 cents a person) to learn a little about the history of Santa Barbara with visits to **Casa de la Guerra**, **El Presidio de Santa Barbara State Historic Park**, and the **Santa Barbara Historical Museum**.

## Enjoy the Arts

- From June through October, **Solvang Theaterfest** offers concerts, plays, and musicals at a theatre under the stars.
- Bring out the budding artistic talent in your family with creative arts and crafts activities at **Art from Scrap**, which offers Saturday art workshops. [www.artfromscrap.org](http://www.artfromscrap.org)
- **2000 Degrees** (805-882-1817) is popular for its ceramic workshops.
- On the theater circuit, the Ensemble Theatre Company's **Storybook Theater** stages special children's plays each year. [www.ensembletheatre.com](http://www.ensembletheatre.com)