

The good life

Welcome to the coast of California, where wine, surfing and song go hand in hand, writes Jo Cooke

The 'C' in California could well stand for choice. Travellers to the Golden State are spoilt for it, and the itineraries you could create for clients - from desert to evergreen forest, cities to volcanoes - are infinite. But suggesting a little time beside the seaside could prove to be the icing on the cake.

The towns that dot the Pacific Coast Highway (PCH), between San Francisco, Los Angeles and San Diego, don't just have pretty faces to glance at as you drive by, they're also packed with reasons to make a pit stop, detour or spend a few nights. Each has a different vibe, and all give a unique insight into the coveted California lifestyle.

Here's a guide to some of the main contenders.

▶ LOS ANGELES AND BEYOND

The 'beach cities', or coastal neighbourhoods, of LA - bustling Santa Monica, funky Venice and laid-back Manhattan Beach, among them - are all close enough to LA's 'must-sees' that clients can slink off for a few hours' R&R on the sand.

If they've more time to spare, suggest Malibu. This sophisticated enclave backed by mountains offers great hiking through meandering canyons and quintessential California beaches. Get a taste of what makes Malibu special at Lagoon State Park. You can laze around the sheltered shallows, birdwatch across the saltmarsh, or head to Surfrider Beach, where buff guys and gals make

taming waves look like child's play. Check out The Adamson House, too, a waterfront Spanish Revival-style home built in the 1920s. Its dream setting and detailed interior set the standard for the bespoke homes you'll see throughout Malibu today.

Just over an hour to the north is Santa Barbara. Art lovers and green-fingered gardeners could find their heaven here. The Museum of Art has a world-class collection that includes pieces by Joan Brown, Renoir, Rodin, Dali, Picasso and Warhol. Lotusland, meanwhile, is among the most exceptional gardens on the planet. Around 200 types of cacti and nearly 400 types of palms, including the most whimsical of their species, join ponds of lilies and lotus flowers.

Back in Santa Barbara's compact and elegant downtown, how about some wine tasting? Santa Barbara County has more than 200 wineries, and you can follow the Urban Wine Trail to many of their tasting rooms downtown or in the Funk Zone, an upcoming arty district set among former fishing warehouses.

Wine buffs should check out Jim Clendenen's Au Bon Climat, and for location, you can't beat The Conway Family Wines' Deep Sea Tasting Room on Stern's Wharf overlooking the ocean. **Where to stay:** Ramada Santa Barbara, a short drive to downtown, set around an ornamental pond and with a complimentary breakfast. sbramada.com

TOP TIP

Pacific Coast Highway is closed for renovation between Big Sur Ranger Station and Ragged Point. Route 101 is the alternative.



North America Travel Service offers a 15-day Pacific Coast fly-drive, flying into San Francisco and out of Los Angeles, from £2,415 based on travel in April 2018, staying in San Francisco, Carmel, Morro Bay, Santa Barbara, LA, Huntington Beach and San Diego. northamerica.travelservice.co.uk

Trafalgar has a 10-day Coastal California with Yosemite National Park group tour that goes from LA to Malibu, Santa Barbara, Paso Robles, Monterey and Yosemite, finishing with Napa Valley and San Francisco. Prices start at £2,515 land-only for travel in May 2018, including 14 meals, sightseeing tours and all hotel tips and taxes. trafalgar.com/uk



LEFT: Wine tasting, Santa Barbara



RIGHT: La Jolla, San Diego

BELOW: Newport Beach

SAN DIEGO SERENADE

After SeaWorld, Legoland, the Zoo, Maritime Museum and Gaslamp Quarter, La Jolla is the place to unwind. This swanky seaside community to the northwest of San Diego has innumerable galleries and boutiques, plus three great beaches. La Jolla Cove is the place to snorkel, kayak or watch the seals and sea lions, while the flat, sheltered bay of La Jolla Shores is perfect for families. Prefer something a little more dramatic? The beaches of Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve could take your breath away. Follow nature trails dotted with wildflowers, ferns and rare Torrey pines to the cliff edge, then descend to virgin sands.

If the name Torrey Pines rings a bell, it's probably because of the PGA golf course here. Hang-gliding is the other big sport in La Jolla, or if you fancy a surf lesson, make for Encinitas half an hour north. This hippy-chic community has a groovy main street with one-of-a-kind stores, a yoga studio or surf shop on every corner, plus it's home to Swami beach, said to have inspired the



Rent an electric boat and pootle about Newport's extensive marina, admiring luxury waterfront homes

Beach Boys' song *Surfin' USA*.

The biggest swells in California, though, can be seen in Newport Beach. At The Wedge, waves rise to a whopping 30 feet. Get to know more of Newport on an electric bike, with local suppliers such as Pedego Electric Bikes, which offers 10% agent commission. Freewheel to the picturesque Corona del Mar bay, pedal through peaceful wildlife haven Crystal Cove State Park, then do some sunbathing on Balboa Peninsula's three-mile stretch of sand.

Clients can also rent an electric Duffy boat (drivers must be over 21),

unique to Newport, and use it to pootle about the extensive marina, admiring luxury waterfront homes. Celebrity residents include Cyndi Lauper, and you can also see the former abode of John Wayne. When you're ready for dinner, just dock at one of the many high-end eateries – perhaps Nobu at the new Lido Marina Village?

Where to stay: Hyatt Regency Newport Beach, offering resort-style accommodation with multiple pools, great for families. newportbeach.regency.hyatt.com

SOUTH OF SAN FRANCISCO

If you haven't already left your heart in San Francisco, you'll probably leave it in Monterey, two hours south of the metropolis. Offering Americana, early Californian history and incredible ocean vistas, this is a great-value stop.

A tree-lined walking and biking trail links the incredible Aquarium, iconic Cannery Row with its aerial bridges, and Fisherman's Wharf. You can have a bunch of fun on this





LEFT:
Paso Robles
vineyard

RIGHT:
Hearst Castle

BELOW:
Oceano Dunes



➔ pier. Glass-bottomed boat rides, deep-sea fishing and whale watching trips depart, while seafood restaurants galore vie for business by offering free samples of their superlative clam chowder.

Monterey was the first state capital of California, and a free audio tour – accessible via mobile phone – takes you on a walking tour between preserved adobe-style buildings of the Spanish and Mexican periods of Cali’s past, plus the state’s first theatre, first brick building and old whaling station.

Monterey is also a starting point for 17-Mile Drive, a private road (\$10 fee to drive) that hugs the ocean revealing spectacular stretches of coastline.

Take this scenic route to popular and charming Carmel. This petite oceanside town framed by trees has a village

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For a thrill ride, drive an off-road buggy across the towering dunes of Oceano Sand Dunes Preserve

feel and is perfect for a romantic beach walk and speciality-store shopping.

For a change of pace, keep heading south to SloCal, the nickname given to the communities that make up San Luis Obispo. The region includes Paso Robles, a renowned wine-growing area with vineyard tours, tasting rooms and fancy restaurants, and delightfully sleepy Cambria. This seaside

town makes a great base for visiting Hearst Castle, a palatial folly dominating the hillside. The brainchild of late media mogul William Randolph Hearst, it comes complete with a herd of zebra. At its feet lies the hypnotic Moonstone Beach State Park where misty mornings add a sense of enchantment and the sunsets can be spectacular.

If you do find yourself in need of a thrill ride, they don’t come much better than driving

an off-road buggy across the towering dunes of nearby Oceano Sand Dunes Natural Preserve. The sturdy vehicle spins across this vast, Martian-like landscape, taking on the banked curves and sheer drops with ease – and at speed! SunBuggy offers agent commission.

Where to stay: Cambria Beach Lodge is stylish, comfy and footsteps from Moonstone Beach.
cambriabeachlodge.com



Tried & Tested

THE LODGE AT TORREY PINES

This sumptuous 170-room hotel enjoys an enviable position in secluded grounds edging Torrey Pines Golf Course, where guests enjoy preferential tee times. Walking through the gabled entrance, you instantly feel a sense of grandeur, created by the dark-wood interiors, stained glass and fireplaces, typical of

the Craftsman style. Book clients into a spacious Palisade Room, with ocean views, fireplace and balcony. There’s a spa and two excellent restaurants, while a short stroll takes you to Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve with its hiking trails and beaches.
Book it: Rooms from \$359 a night.
lodgetorrey.com

