

Santa Barbara, California: A Visitor's Guide

Santa Barbara is a beautiful coastal city in Southern California, known for its stunning beaches, Mediterranean climate, and Spanish colonial architecture. With a variety of attractions, including museums, restaurants, cafes, unique local stores, and parks, Santa Barbara offers something for everyone.

Museums in Santa Barbara

Santa Barbara boasts a rich and diverse museum scene. Here are a few of the most popular museums in the city:

- **Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History:** Founded in 1916, this museum is nestled along Mission Creek in the Mission Canyon area¹. It features exhibits on the natural history of the Santa Barbara region, including mammals, marine life, birds, insects, and paleontology. It also has the area's only planetarium and a butterfly pavilion¹. The museum and Sea Center are open daily from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM².
- **Santa Barbara Historical Museum:** This museum tells the story of Santa Barbara from its Chumash beginnings to the present day. It features exhibits on the city's Spanish colonial history, its role in the American Civil War, and its development as a tourist destination³. The museum is open Wednesday through Sunday from noon to 5:00 PM and until 7:00 PM on Thursdays⁴.
- **Santa Barbara Museum of Art:** This museum houses a collection of over 25,000 works of art, spanning 5,000 years of human creativity. The collection includes paintings, sculptures, drawings, prints, photographs, and decorative arts from around the world¹. It is home to the largest collection of works by legendary French Impressionist Monet on the West Coast and "Portrait of Mexico Today, 1932," the only intact mural in the United States by David Alfaro Siqueiros⁵. The museum is open Tuesday through Sunday from 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM⁶.
- **Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara:** This museum features rotating exhibitions of contemporary art by local, national, and international artists⁷. The museum is open Sunday, Tuesday through Friday from 11:00 AM to 6:00 PM and Saturday from 11:00 AM to 6:00 PM⁷.
- **Santa Barbara Maritime Museum:** This museum is dedicated to the maritime history of the Santa Barbara Channel. It fills an entire Naval Reserve Building and features exhibits on shipbuilding, fishing, surfing, and the Channel Islands¹. It also offers access to the Santa Barbara Visitor Center¹. The museum is open Thursday through Tuesday from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM¹.
- **MOXI, The Wolf Museum of Exploration + Innovation:** This museum is a great place for kids of all ages to learn about science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM). It features interactive exhibits, a rooftop playground, and a café⁵. The museum is open seven days a week from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM¹.
- **Santa Barbara Botanic Garden:** This "living museum" is set on 78 acres in the foothills of Santa Barbara, with spectacular views of the Santa Ynez Mountains and the Channel Islands¹. It showcases more than 1,000 native Californian plants and offers five miles of hiking trails through thematic terrain, ranging from a desert landscape to a redwood forest¹.

The garden is open daily from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM¹.

Museum	Entry Cost	Hours	Highlights	Reviews
Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History	Adult (18–64 years) - \$15 Senior (65+ years) - \$13 Teen (13–17 years) - \$13 Child (2–12 years) - \$11 Child under 2 years - Free SNA P/Cal Fresh - \$3 ⁸	10:00 AM–5:00 PM ²	Only museum in the area with a planetarium ¹ .	4.5/5 stars ⁹
Santa Barbara Historical Museum	Free ⁴	Wednesday - Sunday: noon - 5:00 PM Thursday: noon - 7:00 PM ⁴	Located in the heart of the historic district. Voted #1 wedding venue ⁴ .	5/5 stars ¹¹
Santa Barbara Museum of Art	Adult - \$15 Senior (Age 65+) - \$10 Child (Ages 6-17 years) - \$6 Child (Under 6 years) - Free ¹²	Tuesday – Sunday: 11:00 AM – 5:00 PM 1st Thursday of each month: 11:00 AM – 8:00 PM ⁶	Largest collection of works by Monet on the West Coast. Only intact mural in the United States by David Alfaro Siqueiros ⁵ .	4.5/5 stars ¹³
Museum of Contemporary	Free ¹⁴	Sunday, Tuesday -	Premier non-collecting	1/4 stars ¹⁶

Museum	Entry Cost	Hours	Highlights	Reviews
Art Santa Barbara		Friday: 11:00 AM - 6:00 PM Saturday: 11:00 AM - 6:00 PM ⁷	contemporary arts institution dedicated to exhibiting, commissioning, and documenting the most innovative and compelling art of our time ¹⁵ .	
Santa Barbara Maritime Museum	Adult (18-64): \$12 Senior (65+): \$8 Student w/ ID: \$6 Youth (6-17): \$6 Child (5 and under): Free Active Military and First Responders Showing a Badge: Free SBMM Member: Free ¹⁷	Thursday - Tuesday: 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM ¹	Fills an entire Naval Reserve Building. Offers access to the Santa Barbara Visitor Center ¹ .	Not available
MOXI, The Wolf Museum of Exploration + Innovation	Not available	10:00 AM – 5:00 PM ¹	Three floors are full of exhibits about science, technology, arts, and math ¹ .	Not available
Santa Barbara	Not available	10:00 AM - 5:00 PM ¹	A living museum with	Not available

Museum	Entry Cost	Hours	Highlights	Reviews
Botanic Garden			78 acres of land and spectacular views ¹ .	

Restaurants in Santa Barbara

Santa Barbara is a foodie's paradise, with a wide variety of restaurants to choose from. Here are a few of the most popular restaurants in the city:

- **Sama Sama Kitchen:** This restaurant specializes in Southeast Asian fare and craft cocktails. It was added to the Michelin Guide in 2021¹⁸.
- **Bouchon Santa Barbara:** This restaurant offers classic French bistro fare with a California twist. It is also a top-rated restaurant according to OpenTable¹⁸.
- **Boathouse at Hendry's Beach:** This restaurant is located on the beach and offers stunning ocean views. It is a popular spot for brunch and dinner¹⁸.
- **Cold Spring Tavern:** This rustic eatery sits nestled in the mountains and is famous for its iconic tri-tip sandwiches¹⁸.
- **Bettina:** This pizzeria is known for its wood-fired pizzas and delicious pasta dishes²⁰.
- **Third Window Brewing:** This brewery and restaurant offers a variety of craft beers and upscale pub fare²⁰.
- **Santa Barbara Shellfish Company:** This restaurant is located on Stearns Wharf and offers fresh seafood with ocean views²⁰.
- **Secret Bao:** This restaurant serves up delicious and authentic Chinese bao buns²⁰.
- **Barbareño:** This restaurant offers modern American cuisine with a focus on seasonal ingredients²¹.
- **Bibi Ji:** This restaurant serves up modern Indian cuisine with a focus on fresh, local ingredients²¹.
- **Yoichi's:** This restaurant is a popular spot for sushi and Japanese cuisine²¹.
- **Silvers Omakase:** This restaurant offers a unique omakase dining experience, where the chef prepares a multi-course meal of sushi and other Japanese dishes²¹.
- **Finch & Fork:** This American restaurant is another top-rated restaurant according to OpenTable¹⁹.
- **OKU:** This Asian restaurant is a top-rated restaurant according to OpenTable¹⁹.

Cafes in Santa Barbara

Santa Barbara has a thriving cafe culture, with a wide variety of cafes to choose from. Here are a few of the most popular cafes in the city:

- **Lighthouse Coffee:** This quaint coffee bar has locations on the Mesa, Chapala Street, and Haley Street in the heart of downtown Santa Barbara²². With its beachy, New England-style interiors showcasing local art, it provides a haven for working professionals²³. Lighthouse

Coffee offers warm brews, ample outdoor seating, a delicious breakfast menu, freshly-baked pastries, and a multitude of dairy alternatives²³.

- **Dart Coffee Co.:** This cafe has two prime locations—one inside the Santa Barbara Harbor and the original nestled in Santa Barbara's Funk Zone neighborhood²³. The art-minded owners contribute to the eclectic coffee experience with an array of drip coffees, pulled-shot specialty drinks, and organic teas²³. At the Funk Zone location, you can watch the beans roast right before your eyes as you decide which drink to order²³.
- **Cody's Cafe:** This cafe is a local favorite and has been serving breakfast, lunch, and dinner to the people of Santa Barbara since 1995²⁵.
- **Shoreline Beach Cafe:** This cafe is located right on Leadbetter beach and offers a variety of breakfast, lunch, and dinner items²⁶.

Unique Local Stores in Santa Barbara

Santa Barbara is home to a variety of unique local stores, offering everything from clothing and jewelry to home goods and gifts. Here are a few of the most popular unique local stores in the city:

- **Lewis & Clark:** This gift store offers a variety of antiques, housewares, jewelry, accessories, and books²⁷.
- **Only In Santa Barbara:** This store offers a variety of clothing, souvenirs, and sportswear that reflect the local culture and lifestyle²⁸.
- **Seaside Makers - Santa Barbara:** This store offers a variety of artisan-made gifts and goods²⁹.
- **Whiskey & Leather:** This lifestyle concept store carries clothing and footwear for women and men and everything you need for a styling home bar³⁰.
- **Upstairs at Pierre Lafond:** This iconic home and gift store features an ample selection of Moroccan rugs and pillows, tabletop décor, and luxurious bedding³⁰. There are rooms dedicated to women's loungewear and pampering products, men's clothing and lifestyle goods, and kids' toys and clothes³⁰. You'll also find coffee table books, sophisticated stationary, and vibrant art works by local painters³⁰.
- **Montecito Country Mart:** This shopping center houses a variety of local shops, including Merci Montecito, Bettina, Alma Fonda Fina, The Farm Stand, Pressed Juicery, Rori's Artisanal Creamery, DÔEN, Clare V, George, Hudson Grace, James Perse, Malia Mills, Mate Gallery, Poppy Marché, and Montecito Natural Foods³¹.
- **Asher Market:** This store carries uniquely printed baby clothes and all-things alpaca. It was started by a local mom who wanted to dress her daughter in math-print clothing³³.
- **Stables:** This store carries screen-printed apparel, succulent planters, locally made jewelry, soy candles, home goods, and an array of unique finds from small makers. Many of the products are designed and made right here in Santa Barbara³³.

Store	Type	Brands	Reviews	Location
Lewis & Clark	Gift store	Not available	Not available	1116 State Street ³⁴
Only In Santa Barbara	Gift shop	Not available	Favorable ²⁸	633 State Street ²⁸
Seaside Makers - Santa Barbara	Gift shop	The Grapeseed Company ³⁵	Not available	727 State St ²⁹ .
Whiskey & Leather	Lifestyle concept store	Not available	Not available	Coast Village Road ³⁰
Upstairs at Pierre Lafond	Home and gift store	Not available	Not available	Upper Village ³⁰
Montecito Country Mart	Shopping center	Merci Montecito, Bettina, Alma Fonda Fina, The Farm Stand, Pressed Juicery, Rori's Artisanal Creamery, DÔEN, Clare V, George, Hudson Grace, James Perse, Malia Mills, Mate Gallery, Poppy Marché, Montecito Natural Foods ³²	Positive ³²	Coast Village Road ³²
Asher Market	Boutique	Asher Market	Not available	535 State

Store	Type	Brands	Reviews	Location
		³³		Street ³³
Stables	Boutique	Stables ³³	Not available	The Shops at Hotel Santa Barbara ³³

Parks in Santa Barbara

Santa Barbara is home to a variety of parks, offering something for everyone. Here are a few of the most popular parks in the city:

North County Parks

- **Los Alamos Park:** Amenities include baseball fields, a basketball court, a children's play area, a community center, a horseshoe pit, picnic areas, restrooms, a skate park, and soccer fields³⁶.
- **Miguelito Park:** Amenities include baseball fields, a basketball court, a children's play area, a community center, a horseshoe pit, picnic areas, restrooms, and soccer fields³⁶.
- **Nojoqui Falls Park:** Amenities include a children's play area, hiking trails, picnic areas, and restrooms³⁶.
- **Ocean Beach Park:** Amenities include a basketball court, a children's play area, a community center, picnic areas, restrooms, and volleyball courts³⁶.
- **Orcutt Community Park:** Amenities include baseball fields, a basketball court, a children's play area, a community center, a dog park, a horseshoe pit, picnic areas, restrooms, and soccer fields³⁶.
- **Rancho Guadalupe Dunes Preserve:** Amenities include hiking trails³⁶.
- **Richardson Park:** Amenities include baseball fields, a basketball court, a children's play area, a community center, picnic areas, restrooms, and soccer fields³⁶.
- **Santa Rosa Park:** Amenities include baseball fields, a basketball court, a children's play area, a community center, a dog park, picnic areas, restrooms, and soccer fields³⁶.
- **Santa Ynez Park:** Amenities include a children's play area, a community center, picnic areas, and restrooms³⁶.
- **Waller Park:** Amenities include baseball fields, a basketball court, a children's play area, a community center, a dog park, picnic areas, restrooms, and soccer fields³⁶.

South County Parks

- **Arroyo Burro Beach County Park:** Amenities include a beach, a children's play area, a dog park, picnic areas, restrooms, and volleyball courts³⁶.
- **Goleta Beach Park:** Amenities include a beach, a children's play area, picnic areas, restrooms, and volleyball courts³⁶.
- **Isla Vista Park:** Amenities include a beach, a children's play area, picnic areas, restrooms,

- and volleyball courts³⁶.
- **Lookout Park:** Amenities include a beach, horseshoe pits, parking on site, picnic tables, a playground, reservable areas, and restrooms³⁷.
- **Manning Park:** Amenities include a basketball court, a children's play area, picnic areas, restrooms, and volleyball courts³⁶.
- **Oceanview Park:** Amenities include benches, a grass field, and picnic tables³⁷.
- **Rincon Beach Park:** Amenities include a beach, restrooms, and volleyball courts³⁶.
- **Rocky Nook Park:** Amenities include a children's play area, a community center, picnic areas, and restrooms³⁶.
- **Toro Canyon Park:** This 74-acre park provides respite from civilization³⁷.
- **Tucker's Grove Park:** Amenities include picnic areas and restrooms³⁶.

Santa Barbara City Parks

- **Elings Park:** This expansive 230-acre park is the largest community-supported non-profit public park in America. It offers a variety of amenities, including hiking trails, picnic areas, a playground, and a dog park³⁸.
- **Stevens Park:** This park is known for its scenic hiking trails, access to San Roque Creek, and array of amenities³⁹.
- **Oak Park:** This park is a popular picnic and recreation site⁴⁰.
- **Ortega Park:** This family-oriented park has a playground and is a popular location for barbecues and birthday parties³⁷.
- **Parma Park:** This enormous park is a popular place with hikers, bikers, and dog walkers⁴⁰.
- **Pershing Park:** This six-acre park includes two softball fields, one baseball field, and eight hard tennis courts⁴⁰.
- **Skofield Park:** This 35-acre park offers a playground, picnic areas, and access to Rattlesnake Canyon Trail⁴⁰.
- **Tucker's Grove:** This park is a popular spot for large picnics⁴⁰.

Piers and Beaches in Santa Barbara

Santa Barbara is known for its beautiful beaches. Here are a few of the most popular piers and beaches in the city:

Beach/Pier	Description	Amenities	Reviews	Location
Stearns Wharf	This historic pier, built in 1872, is the longest deep-water	Shops, restaurants, attractions	Not available	Santa Barbara Harbor ⁴¹

Beach/Pier	Description	Amenities	Reviews	Location
	<p> pier between Los Angeles and San Francisco. It is home to a variety of shops, restaurants, and attractions, including the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History Sea Center⁴¹. </p>			
East Beach	<p> This spacious, sandy beach is bordered by a grassy park that's lined with large palm trees. It is a popular area for outdoor activities both on and off the sand⁴². </p>	Volleyball courts, grassy park	Not available	Near Stearns Wharf Pier ⁴²
Arroyo Burro Beach	<p> This dog-friendly beach is a popular spot for swimming, sunbathing, and surfing⁴². </p>	Not available	Not available	Santa Barbara ⁴²
Leadbetter	<p> This stunning </p>	Not available	Not available	West of Santa

Beach/Pier	Description	Amenities	Reviews	Location
Beach	south-facing beach is located just west of the harbor. It is a popular spot for swimming, sunbathing, and surfing ⁴² .			Barbara Harbor ⁴³
West Beach	This wide beach is located west of and adjacent to Stearns Wharf Pier ⁴³ .	Not available	Not available	West of Stearns Wharf Pier ⁴³
Santa Claus Beach	This beach is located in Carpinteria and is a popular spot for families with young children ⁴² .	Not available	Not available	Carpinteria ⁴²
Mesa Lane Beach	This beach is known for its stunning cliffs and tide pools ⁴² .	Not available	Not available	Santa Barbara ⁴²
Goleta Beach	This beach is located in Goleta and is a popular spot for swimming, sunbathing, and fishing ⁴² .	Not available	Not available	Goleta ⁴²

Beach/Pier	Description	Amenities	Reviews	Location
1,000 Steps Beach	This beach is known for its long staircase that leads down to the sand ⁴² .	Not available	Not available	Santa Barbara ⁴²
Shoreline Park	This park offers stunning views of the coastline and is a popular spot for hiking and picnicking ⁴² .	Not available	Not available	Santa Barbara ⁴²
Summerland Beach	This beach is located in Summerland and is a popular spot for swimming, sunbathing, and surfing ⁴² .	Not available	Not available	Summerland ⁴²
Butterfly Beach	This beach is located in Montecito and is a popular spot for swimming, sunbathing, and whale watching ⁴² .	Not available	Not available	Montecito ⁴²
Rincon Point State Beach	This beach is located in Carpinteria and is a popular spot	Not available	Not available	Carpinteria ⁴²

Beach/Pier	Description	Amenities	Reviews	Location
	for surfing ⁴² .			
Devereux Beach	This beach is located in Goleta and is a popular spot for swimming, sunbathing, and kayaking ⁴² .	Not available	Not available	Goleta ⁴²
Prisoners Harbor	This public pier on Santa Cruz Island is where visitors to the Channel Islands National Park arrive ⁴⁴ .	Not available	Not available	Santa Cruz Island ⁴⁴

Historical Landmarks in Santa Barbara

Santa Barbara has a rich history, and there are a number of historical landmarks to explore in the city. Here are a few of the most popular historical landmarks in Santa Barbara:

- **Santa Barbara Mission:** This Spanish mission was founded in 1786. It is one of the most beautiful and well-preserved missions in California⁴⁵.
- **Santa Barbara County Courthouse:** This Spanish Colonial Revival-style courthouse was built in 1929. It is considered one of the most beautiful courthouses in the United States⁴⁵.
- **El Presidio de Santa Bárbara State Historic Park:** This park preserves the remains of a Spanish presidio that was founded in 1782⁴⁵.
- **Casa del Herrero:** This historic estate was designed by George Washington Smith in the 1920s. It is now a museum and gardens⁴⁵.
- **Moreton Bay Fig Tree:** This massive fig tree was planted in 1877. It is one of the largest fig trees in the United States⁴⁵.
- **Stearns Wharf:** This historic pier was built in 1872⁴¹.
- **Santa Barbara Presidio:** This Spanish presidio was founded in 1782. It is one of the oldest buildings in Santa Barbara⁴⁶.
- **Orena Adobes:** Built in 1849 and 1858, these adobes are a historical landmark⁴⁷.
- **Lugo Adobe/Meridian Studios:** Built around 1830, this historical landmark has undergone renovations in 1922, 1923, and 1925⁴⁷.

- **Tree of Light:** This historical landmark dates back to around 1878⁴⁷.

Bookstores in Santa Barbara

Santa Barbara has a number of great bookstores for book lovers to explore. Here are a few of the most popular bookstores in the city:

- **Chaucer's Books:** This independent bookstore has been serving the Santa Barbara community since 1974. It offers a wide selection of books, including new releases, classics, and children's books⁴⁸.
- **Tecolote Book Shop:** This independent bookstore offers a curated selection of books, with a focus on literature, history, and the arts⁴⁸.
- **Paradise Found:** This bookstore specializes in rare and out-of-print books⁴⁸.
- **The Book Den:** This used bookstore offers a wide selection of books at affordable prices⁴⁸.
- **Godmothers:** This bookstore offers a selection of new and used books, as well as gifts and stationery⁴⁸.
- **Mesa Bookstore:** This small bookstore offers a curated selection of books, with a focus on local authors and independent presses⁴⁹.

Conclusion

Santa Barbara truly offers a diverse range of attractions for every type of visitor. History buffs can delve into the city's past at the Santa Barbara Historical Museum or explore the well-preserved Santa Barbara Mission. Art enthusiasts can immerse themselves in the diverse collections of the Santa Barbara Museum of Art or discover contemporary works at the Museum of Contemporary Art Santa Barbara. Nature lovers can enjoy the scenic beauty of the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden, hike the trails at Elings Park, or explore the tide pools at Mesa Lane Beach. Foodies will be delighted by the culinary scene, with Michelin-recognized restaurants like Sama Sama Kitchen and unique dining experiences like Cold Spring Tavern. And for those who enjoy unique shopping experiences, Santa Barbara offers a variety of local stores, from the eclectic Lewis & Clark to the artisan-made goods at Seaside Makers. With its beautiful beaches, vibrant culture, and rich history, Santa Barbara is a destination that will leave a lasting impression.

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