

SAN LUIS OBISPO COAST

This stretch of pristine coastline is a wine lover's playground.

From the palatial digs of Hearst Castle in the north to the soft sands of Pismo Beach on the southern end, the coastline of San Luis Obispo County has been a vacationer's paradise for more than a century. Beachcombing, surfing, hiking, cycling and kayaking present endless outdoor opportunities for all ages. And thanks to the thriving wine countries of Edna Valley and Paso Robles, which sit slightly inland, the college town of San Luis Obispo is now home to culinary gold. Add the quaint villages of Arroyo Grande, Avila Beach, Cayucos and Cambria, and it's no wonder why so many tourists wind up locals. —*Matt Kettmann*



WHERE TO DINE

The county's dining scene skyrocketed when Chez Panisse alum Brian Collins came home to Arroyo Grande and opened **Ember**, whose centrally located wood-fired oven produces both smoky delicacies and eye-dazzling entertainment. Up the coast in Grover Beach, Chef Jacob Town delights with fried chicken and sourdough waffles as well as other soulful dishes at **The Spoon Trade**. In downtown San Luis Obispo, the bottles are boutique and farm-to-table plates pretty at **Foremost Wine Company**. Journey into Cayucos to chow down on the delectable smoked albacore tacos from **Ruddell's Smokehouse**.

WHERE TO STAY

Located in the Shell Beach area of Pismo Beach, just minutes from downtown SLO and Edna Valley, **Dolphin Bay Resort & Spa's** comfortable suites are perfect to settle into for a long weekend. Avila Beach's **Avila La Fonda Hotel** brings colorful Mexican design to the tiny, walkable hamlet. Downtown SLO's **Granada Hotel & Bistro**, on the other hand, delivers upscale urban design, as do the nearby **SLO Brew Lofts**, where one-, two- and three-bedroom suites come with full kitchens,

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hip decor, a shared rooftop deck and brewery below. And the long-awaited **Inn at the Pier** in Pismo Beach opened this year.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The soothing outdoor hot tubs at **Sycamore Mineral Springs Resort & Spa** are as fairly priced as they are tranquil. And if you've got kids in tow, hit **Avila Valley Barn** to feed some animals, load up on locally produced foods, eat grilled corn on the cob and learn about the region's historic agricultural roots.

BUDGET TIP

Get acquainted with the SLO Coast with a stay at the **North Beach Campground** in Pismo Beach, located right next to a monarch butterfly grove and just five minutes from the pier.

WHERE TO TASTE

Estates like **Baileyana** (pictured left), **Chamisal Vineyards**, **Claiborne & Churchill**, **Edna Valley Vineyard**, **Kynsi Winery**,

Talley Vineyards and **Tolosa** are just minutes apart on bucolic country roads off of Highway 227 and Orcutt Road, and each offers the classic tasting experience amid the vines. There's a small urban scene starting to bubble in southeastern SLO, home to both **Refugio Ranch Vineyards** and **Stephen Ross**, where veteran vintner Stephen Ross Dooley pours a wide variety of options. To cast a wider net, try **Tastes of the Valleys** in Pismo, where co-owner Ash Mehta usually has more than 20 local bottles by the glass. Or check out **The Station** in SLO, where tasting, food pairing and educational events happen almost daily in a converted gas station. There's also growing tasting scenes in both Arroyo Grande (**Phantom Rivers**, **Timbre and Verdad**) and Avila Beach (**Croma Vera**, **Peloton Cellars** and **Sinor-LaVallee**).

WHEN TO GO

Like much of the Central Coast, the weather is close to perfect all year long, save for a few rainy days. Being coastal, with cooling breezes from the ocean, it never gets too hot.

PROMINENT WINES

Paso Robles to the north is known for powerful reds, but elegant, often delicate Pinot Noirs and racy, vibrant Chardonnays are found in the cool climates of the Edna and Arroyo Grande Valleys and a smattering of coastal sites to the north around Cayucos and Cambria. Styles range considerably, which means that more structured, rich and brawny Pinots can be found as well as savory Chards. There's plenty of excitement around Rhône grapes, particularly peppery Syrah and rosy yet firm Grenache. Albariño, Grüner Veltliner, Pinot Gris and other aromatic whites are also making headway, while plots of old-vine Zinfandel can be found in the hills.



Claiborne & Churchill



LOCAL IN THE KNOW

At **Six Test Kitchen**, San Francisco-trained Chef **Ricky Odbert** makes 14-course, BYOB dinners for six people per night inside his parents' garage in the Arroyo Grande suburbs. "[Japanese Restaurant] **Goshi** has a massive white board of all their fish, most of it flown in from Japan," he says. "I usually just get nigiri. **Chacho's** [Mexican Takeout] is a tiny shack on Highway 1 in Oceano. It makes its own flour tortillas, which is what makes it so special." He also recommends the **Granada Hotel & Bistro**, a dimly lit, Prohibition-era-vibe kind of place, with great cocktails and "the best burger I've had on the Central Coast."

Dolphin Bay Resort & Spa

