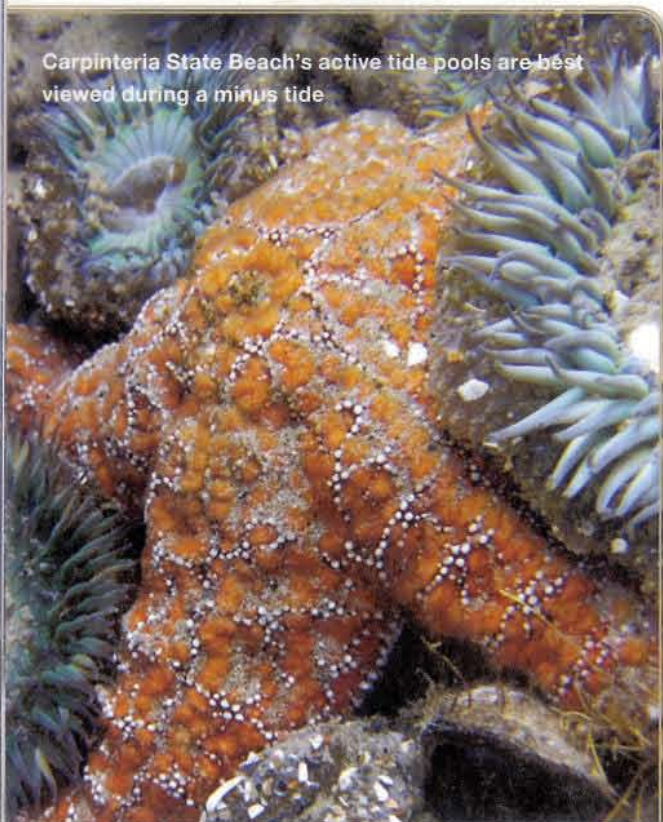


Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park is a World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve



Carpinteria State Beach's active tide pools are best viewed during a minus tide

3 Cayucos

Sandy beaches and a balmy breeze usually translate to big crowds. But the bohemian backwater of Cayucos — halfway between LA and San Francisco — manages to operate happily below the radar. A hidden treasure along California's central coast, this scenic stretch of beach has a pier at one end, and a view of Morro Rock in Morro Bay on the other. Cayucos' downtown has everything you need, from restaurants and convenience stores to a video arcade and day spas.

The goods: Cayucos' calm waters are perfect for skin diving, swimming, surfing, and kayaking. Deep-sea fishing boats regularly depart for Morro Bay to the south and San Simeon to the north. Cayucos is also home to a Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park, a 10,000-acre redwood forest with trees topping 300 feet, wildlife (including black bears), and scenic hiking trails. History buffs will love Cayucos' 19th-century buildings and its close proximity to newspaper tycoon William Randolph Hearst's 127-acre estate. A tour of the famed castle requires a half-mile walk and climbing nearly 400 stairs, so comfortable shoes are key. In the process, you may lose your breath (and some calories from lunch), but you'll gain insight into the fascinating life of America's publishing pioneer.

The grub: The seasonal menu, organic produce, and artisanal cheeses make Hoppe's Garden Bistro a top choice for tourists and locals alike. The restaurant occupies space in the former Cottage Hotel, which was built in 1876 to host the Hearsts before their castle was built. A splurge-worthy alternative: Cass House Inn and Restaurant's delectable three- and four-course tasting menus.

The digs: For a romantic retreat, Sunset Inn's two-person hot tubs, fireplaces, and private balconies can't be beat. Cass House Inn and Restaurant, which opened in Captain James Cass' original home in 2007 after a 14-year restoration, offers a more toned-down, but comfortable stay.

4 Carpinteria

Just 12 miles south of Santa Barbara, Carpinteria's picturesque coastal hills, peaceful seaside community, and nearly private beaches remain mostly undiscovered. "Carp," as it's affectionately called, is best known for its popular surf spot, Rincon Point. Thanks to perfect waves and long rides, the book *100 Best Surf Spots in the World* ranks Rincon at No. 24.

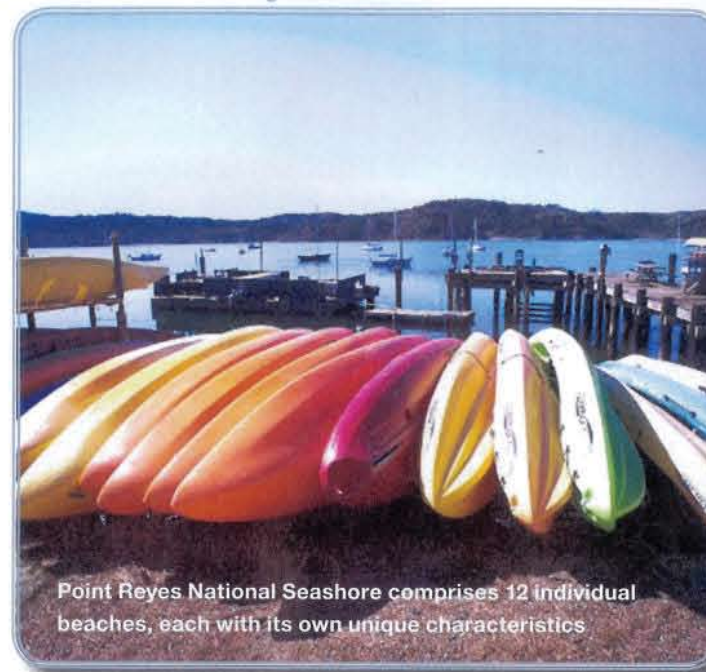
The goods: Encompassing wooded groves and 4,000 feet of ocean frontage, Carpinteria State Beach offers overnight camping and active tide pools populated with starfish, sea anemones, crabs, octopi, snails, and sea urchins. During the first week of October, the town's tranquil streets turn into a busy thoroughfare brimming with more than 80,000 visitors for the city's three-day California Avocado Festival. Bike through scenic mountain roads, enjoy Sunday matches at the Santa Barbara Polo & Racquet Club, or hop over to Santa Barbara for live music, art museums, and wine country tours.

The grub: Craving beachside eats? Grab lunch to go from The Spot. A fixture in Carp since 1914, this infamous burger

and shake shack is just two blocks from the beach. For a unique dining experience with more than 100 years of history, The Palms lets you cook your own steak and offers chef-prepared seafood/steak combinations. Don't leave town without sampling Jean-Michel and Jill Marie's delectable artisan chocolates at Chocolats du CaliBressan. The couple traveled from Burgundy, France, to open their shop in Carpinteria.

The digs: Vacation rental homes and condominiums are hot here, and most are within walking distance to shops and restaurants. For contemporary, Asian-inspired digs, try Watermark, a four-unit retreat just steps from downtown's Linden Avenue with a variety of shopping and dining options.

5 Point Reyes



Point Reyes National Seashore comprises 12 individual beaches, each with its own unique characteristics

Take a winding 90-minute drive north of San Francisco to Point Reyes National Seashore. Here 80 miles of undeveloped beaches, protected lagoons, marshlands, and sand dunes have been a nature lover's haven since 1962 when President John F. Kennedy declared the area a national seashore. Now, Point Reyes is also revered as an agricultural mecca with organic dairy farms, grass-fed cattle ranches, and 70,000 acres of protected pine forests.

The goods: If you're a foodie, unique culinary adventures at West Marin Food and Farm Tours provide a rare opportunity to sample local delicacies, including artisan cheese, organic wine, and both fresh and saltwater oysters. Whale watchers won't want to miss the Point Reyes Lighthouse. Built in 1870, and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the lighthouse offers the best views during whale migration (late March and April), but at a steep cost: More than 300 steps lead down to the lighthouse, so going back up is a challenge. Don't miss a sunset or full-moon paddle with Blue Waters Kayaking or tidepooling at Sculptured Beach.

The grub: Farm- or sea-to-table dining is the norm in Point Reyes, with most eateries using only local ingredients. Nick's

Cove, for example, is famous for Tomales Bay barbecued oysters, Dungeness crab mac and cheese, and clam chowder. Sir and Star is another favorite, boasting faux gras of local duck livers (this foie gras is faux because this mousse is made from free-range ducks) and chanterelles pillaged from the park. Foraging for picnic pickings? Cowgirl Creamery's award-winning cheeses made from organic milk can't be beat.

The digs: Manka's Inverness Lodge has a smattering of cabins tucked in the trees. On the other side of town, Nick's Cove's five waterfront cottages perch on stilts along Tomales Bay with an additional seven water-view cottages up the hill.

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If You Go

Seal Beach: The major highways to Seal Beach are Pacific Coast Highway (California State Route 1) and Interstate 405, which connects with all other major freeways in Southern California. There are three beach parking lots (First, Eighth, and 10th streets). Cost is \$3 for two hours and vehicles with disabled placards/license plates park for free. sealbeachca.gov/visiting

Leucadia Beaches: The three popular surf spots between Leucadia State Beach and Encinitas County Beach — Grandview, Beacon's, and Stone Steps — are accessible via stairways along Neptune Avenue (a one-way running northbound). Grandview Street at the far north end of Neptune leads to Grandview, Leucadia Boulevard is the trailhead for Beacon's, and El Portal Street leads to Stone Steps. There is free parking in residential neighborhoods along Neptune Avenue. sandiego.org/what-to-do/beaches/leucadia.aspx

Cayucos State Beach: This beach, five miles north of Morro Bay, can be accessed at the foot of Cayucos Drive. Parking around town is free. Your best bets are Ocean Avenue (the downtown area) or by the Cayucos Pier. Amenities include picnic tables, play equipment, restrooms, and outside showers. The pier is lit for night fishing and a fishing license is not required while fishing on the pier. parks.ca.gov/?page_id=596

Carpinteria Beaches: Once you pass Ventura on U.S. Route 101, you'll see a series of exits that all point to Carpinteria's area beaches. From Santa Claus Lane to Rincon Point, Carp beaches offer ample free street parking and even a few lots. Lookout Park and Loon Point also have free parking lots. The only caveat: Spaces may be tough to come by on big swell days. parks.ca.gov/?page_id=599

Point Reyes National Seashore: Travelers may approach Point Reyes (approximately 30 miles north of San Francisco) from either northbound or southbound on California State Route 1, and can also reach the park via Sir Francis Drake Boulevard or the Point Reyes/Petaluma Road. Parking in the lot at Point Reyes Historic Lighthouse is free, but if you're visiting on a hot summer day or during whale migration, get there early as the lot fills up quickly. nps.gov/pore/index.htm