



# 8 local-approved secrets to planning the perfect California vacation

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Californians glow with pride when we show off our state — yet we gripe when our favorite beaches, restaurants and hideaways get “discovered” and start swarming with crowds. We’re also of the opinion that most visitors spend far too much time on guidebook “must-see attractions” and leave without ever experiencing what we consider [the real California](#).

Here are the secrets we share with those who really want to be in the know.

## The Central Coast is California’s best-kept secret

The vast majority of visitors to California choose to focus their visit on [sunny southern California](#) or the cultural mecca of the [San Francisco Bay Area](#), possibly with a Yosemite or [wine country adventure](#) tacked on. That means most vacationers entirely miss out on seeing the central part of the state, something Californians know is a big mistake.

Because from San Luis Obispo, with its historic Spanish mission and fast-rising food and wine scene, to the [vineyards and tasting rooms](#) of Paso Robles and the Edna Valley, to the classic beach town vibe of Pismo Beach, California’s middle ground offers some of the state’s least crowded (and most crowd-pleasing) getaways. Not to mention that the stretch of Highway 1 between Monterey and Santa Barbara boasts some of that iconic road’s most spectacular vistas, including those of [Big Sur](#). Now served by Alaska Airlines and United by way of San Luis Obispo airport (SBP), the Central Coast is *the* hot new area to explore for travelers ready for something new.

Downtown San Luis Obispo (or SLO, as locals call it), saw a big boost at the end of 2019 with the opening of not one but two new hotels, both offering a welcome combination of upscale amenities and down-home warmth. The rooms at [Hotel San Luis Obispo](#) look out over Mission Plaza and the [Ah Louis Store](#), built in 1874 and now home to local festivity planners Karson Butler Events. Helmed by chef Ryan Fancher, the [Ox & Anchor](#) has quickly become one of the town’s destination restaurants. At nearby [Hotel Cerro](#), many of the airy rooms feature private patios opening onto a lush vegetable garden that supplies [Brasserie SLO](#).

In Pismo Beach, the new [Vespera on Ocean](#), a member of Marriott's Autograph Collection, is so close to the beach you could throw a seashell from your balcony into the waves (book a room from 40,000 points per night on off-peak dates). The [Allegretto Vineyard Resort](#), Paso Robles' newest and most exciting property, is the perfect home base for both wine tasting and a visit to the [Field of Light at Sensorio](#), easily one of California's most talked-about outdoor art installations.