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Santa Barbara – Where the Stars Meet the Sea

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La Super Rica. Photo by Amy Paturel.

Updated on Feb 16, 2014

Santa Barbara is, without doubt, my favorite California beach city. As a former resident, I may be biased, but I've lived in several seaside towns along the Southern California Coast — Manhattan, Redondo, Playa Del Rey and Seal Beach to name a few — so I know my beaches. Plus, A-listers like Rob Lowe, Oprah

Winfrey, and the late Julia Child seem to agree. All three have called Santa Barbara home.

When I first moved to Santa Barbara in 2004, I knew it was beachy and beautiful, but I had no idea it was a historical and cultural mecca. Before long, I had become a tourist in my own city.

Known as the “American Riviera,” Santa Barbara lies just 92 miles north of Los Angeles, but it shares the same sparkling seas, lush gardens and whitewashed buildings as the seaside towns of France and Italy.

From tree-lined streets with vibrant bougainvillea climbing Spanish rooftops to whales and dolphins frolicking off shore, Santa Barbara’s beauty is unmatched.

Even as a local, I never tired of the toe-warming sandy beaches, chic boutiques and fabulous hiking trails. Never mind the city’s farm-(or ocean-)to-table cuisine and award-winning wines. Eating became a sensory adventure with fisherman unloading their catch while I sampled the best straight off the boat and noshing on just-plucked plums and sweet California strawberries at Santa Barbara’s sprawling Farmers’ Market (Tuesdays and Saturdays).

On-The-Go Eats

When I’m back in town food is still my primary focus! My first two culinary stops: [Panino](#), a casual sandwich shop set up on a corner parking lot that serves market fresh salads with ingredients like Asian pears, English Stilton and walnuts, as well as creative concoctions like albacore tuna, artichoke hearts and Kalamata olive tapenade sandwiched between two slices of freshly baked artisan bread.



Courthouse. Photo by Amy Paturel.



Mission. Photo by Amy Paturel.



Spanish arches. Photo by Amy Paturel.

Across the street, [C’est Cheese](#) (one of the stinkiest and most delectable stores in Santa Barbara) boasts 120 different types of cheese alongside more than two dozen cured meats, not to mention assorted gourmet goodies and a rotating selection of grilled cheese sandwiches for lunch, including one boasting truffles. The shop also offers monthly culinary classes featuring commentary and tastings of (surprise!) cheese — or, on occasion, honey, salami, caviar, or my personal favorite, chocolate.

When I’m jonesing for authentic Mexican, I hit La [Super Rica Taqueria](#), rumored to be among Julia Child’s favorite places to dine. The late culinary star once raved about La Super Rica on *Good Morning America*. I may not know how to make beef bourguignon or debone a duck, but like Ms. Child, I know good food, and her take on this otherwise unremarkable corner “taco stand” was spot on.

A Santa Barbara Institution since 1980, La Super Rica still attracts the longest lines in the city, despite the shortage of tables and even posted menus. I always choose a sampling of chorizo, tri tip, carnitas or pork tacos, leaving the tongue tacos for the die-hard Mexican fare fans.

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Amy Paturel writes about health, fitness, food, wine and travel for a wide variety of publications from mainstream consumer interest magazines to niche newspapers and websites. She has a passion for food, adventure and travel.

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