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The Best of California

by Erika Lenkert, Matthew Richard Poole & David Swanson

In my early 20s, I took the requisite student pilgrimage to Europe, exploring its finer train stations and sleeping on park benches from London to Istanbul. I was just another tanned and skinny, blond and blue-eyed American lugging around 60 pounds of backpack. That is, until I crossed over into the former Eastern Bloc.

The reaction was dramatic. I would wander through the streets of Prague and people would stop, stare, and sidestep. It wasn't until a man who spoke faltering English approached me that I discovered the reason for my celebrity status.

"Eh, you. Where you from? No, no. Let me guess." He steps back, gives a cursory examination followed by pregnant pause. "Ah. I've got it! You're from California, no?" There's a gleam in his eyes as I tell him that, yes, he's correct. "Wonderful! Wonderful!" A dozen or so pilsners later with my new friend and it all becomes clear: To him, I am a celebrity—a rich, convertible-driving surfer who spends his days lazing on the beach, fending off hordes of blondes while I argue with my agent via my portable phone. *I am* the Beach Boys. *I am* *Baywatch*. Hollywood has done what no NATO pact could achieve—they've leapfrogged the staid issues of capitalism versus communism by offering a far more potent narcotic: the alluring mystique of sunny California, of stars strolling down Sunset Boulevard, of beautiful women in tight shorts and bikini tops roller-skating along Venice Beach. In short, they've bought what we're selling.

The allure is understandable. It really is warm and sunny most of the year, movie stars do abound in Los Angeles, and you can't swing a cat by its tail without hitting a rollerblading babe in Venice Beach. This part of the California mystique—however exaggerated it may be—does exist, and it's not hard to find.

But there's more—a lot more—to California that isn't scripted, sanitized, and broadcast to the world's mesmerized masses. Beyond the glitter and glamour is an incredibly diverse state that, if it ever seceded from the Union, would be a productive and powerful nation. We've got it all: redwood forests, an incredibly verdant Central Valley, the Sierra Nevada mountains, deserts, a host of world-renowned cities, and hundreds of miles of stunning coastline.

And despite the crime, pollution, traffic, and earthquakes for which California is famous, we're still the golden child of the United States: America's spoiled rich kid everyone else either loves or loathes. (Neighboring Oregon, for example, sells lots of license-plate rims that proudly state, "I hate California.") But, truth be told, we really don't care. Californians *know* they live in one of the most diverse and interesting places in the world, and we're proud of the state we call home.

Granted, there's no guarantee that you'll bump into Arnold Schwarzenegger or learn how to surf, but if you have a little time, a little money, and—most importantly—an adventurous spirit, then Erika, David, and I will help guide you

through one of the most fulfilling vacations of your life. The three of us travel the world for a living, but we *choose* to live in California, because there's no other place on earth that has so much to offer.

—*Matthew Richard Poole*

1 The Best of Natural California

- **Redwood National & State Parks:** Come see the world's largest and most majestic trees at this arboreal Eden. More than 300 bird species and 100 mammals can also be seen, many of them year-round. Howland Hill Road is a must-do. See "Redwood National & State Parks" in chapter 7.
- **Lake Tahoe:** One of the world's most magnificent bodies of fresh water, sparkling Lake Tahoe is famous for its pure, azure water and incredible volume. In fact, it's so deep that the water it contains—close to 40 trillion gallons—could cover the entire state of California to a depth of 14½ inches. See "Lake Tahoe" in chapter 8.
- **Yosemite National Park:** You're in for the ultimate treat at Yosemite. Nothing in the state—maybe even the world—compares to this vast wilderness and its miles of rivers, lakes, peaks, and valleys. With 3 out of 10 of the world's tallest waterfalls, the largest granite monolith in the world, and some of the world's largest trees, Yosemite is one of the most fantastic natural places on the planet. You'll have a sweeping 180° view of it all from atop Glacier Point, where a majestic High Sierra panorama unfolds at 3,200 feet. See "Yosemite National Park" in chapter 9.
- **Big Sur:** Rock-strewn beaches, towering cliffs, and redwood forests combine to form what may be the world's most dramatic coastal panorama. Our favorite vantage point for taking it all in is Garrapata State Park, a 2,879-acre preserve that lords over 4 spectacular miles of coastline. See "The Big Sur Coast" in chapter 11.
- **Cachuma Lake:** On mountainous and scenic Calif. 154, halfway between Solvang and Santa Barbara, is this winter home to dozens of American bald eagles. Loons, white pelicans, and Canada geese are some of the other migratory birds that call this glassy lake home part of the year. See "The Central Coast Wine Country: Paso Robles & the Santa Ynez Valley" in chapter 12.
- **Channel Islands National Park:** Paddle a kayak into sea caves; camp among indigenous island fox and seabirds; and swim, snorkel, or scuba-dive tide pools and kelp forests teeming with wildlife. The channel waters are prime for whale-watching, and winter brings elephant-seal mating season, when you'll see them sunbathing on cove beaches. See "Channel Islands National Park" in chapter 12.
- **Joshua Tree National Park:** You'll find awesome rock formations, groves of flowering cacti and stately Joshua trees, ancient Native American petroglyphs, and shifting sand dunes in this desert wonderland—and a brilliant night sky, if you choose to camp here. See "Joshua Tree National Park" in chapter 15.
- **Anza-Borrego Desert State Park:** The largest state park in the lower 48 attracts the most visitors during the spring wildflower season, when a kaleidoscopic carpet blankets the

desert. Others come year-round to hike more than 100 miles of trails.

See “Anza-Borrego Desert State Park” in chapter 15.

2 The Best Beaches

- **Drake’s Beach:** This is a massive stretch of white sand at Point Reyes National Seashore. Winds and choppy seas make it rough for swimmers, but sun worshippers can have their Marin County tan for the day. If the rangers say it’s all right, beach driftwood can make a romantic campfire in the early evening. See “Point Reyes National Seashore” in chapter 7.
- **Sonoma Coast State Beaches:** Stretching about 10 miles from Bodega Bay to Jenner, the beaches attract more than 300 species of birds. From December to September, look for osprey. Seal pups can be spotted from March to June, and the gray whale from December to April. See “Along the Sonoma Coast” in chapter 7.
- **Santa Cruz’s Beaches:** Santa Cruz has 29 miles of beaches that are varied enough to please all comers: surfers, swimmers, fishers, sailboarders, the sand-pail-and-shovel set, and the bikini and biceps crowd. For starters, walk down the steps from the famous Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk to the mile-long, white sand Main Beach, complete with summer lifeguards and golden oldie tunes drifting over the sand from the boardwalk’s live concerts. See “Santa Cruz” in chapter 11.
- **Pfeiffer Beach:** This is one of Big Sur’s best-kept secrets. It can be accessed via an unmarked paved road on the right-hand side of Calif. 1, 1 mile south of Pfeiffer State Park. There are no signs, so you’ll have to do some sleuthing, but once you’ve parked behind the trail of cars on the side of the road and made it to the beach, you’ll know why locals want to keep this spot all to themselves. See “The Big Sur Coast” in chapter 11.
- **Santa Barbara’s East Beach:** This wide swath of white sand hosts beach umbrellas, sand-castle builders, and volleyball games. A grassy, parklike median keeps beachgoers insulated from busy Cabrillo Boulevard. On Sundays, local artists display their wares beneath the elegant palm trees. See “Santa Barbara” in chapter 12.
- **Hermosa City Beach:** Our favorite beach in L.A. county, this wide white-sand beach offers plenty of street parking, restrooms, lifeguards, volleyball courts, a fishing pier, playgrounds, and good surfing. It also includes “The Strand,” a wide, smooth pedestrian lane that runs its entire length. See “Exploring the City” in chapter 13.
- **La Jolla’s Beaches:** *La jolla* means “the jewel,” and the beaches of La Jolla’s bluff-lined coast truly are gems. Each has a distinct personality: Surfers love Windansea’s waves, harbor seals have adopted the Children’s Pool, La Jolla Shores is popular for swimming and sunbathing, while the Cove is a top snorkeling spot, your best chance to spot the rare California state fish, the garibaldi. See “Beaches” in chapter 16.

3 The Best Golf Courses

- **Pebble Beach Golf Links:** The famous 17-Mile Drive is the site of 10 national championships and the celebrity-laden AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am. The nearby Pacific and a backdrop of

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the Del Monte Forest justify astronomical greens fees. See “Pebble Beach & the 17-Mile Drive” in chapter 11.

- **Poppy Hills** (Pebble Beach): *Golf Digest* has called this Robert Trent Jones Jr.–designed course “one of the world’s top 20 courses.” It cuts right through the pines of Del Monte Forest. See “Pebble Beach & the 17-Mile Drive” in chapter 11.
- **The Links at Spanish Bay** (Pebble Beach): The Links were also designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr., with a little help from Tom Watson and former USGA president Frank Tatum. Their aim was to simulate the experience of playing golf on Scottish links. See “Pebble Beach & the 17-Mile Drive” in chapter 11.
- **PGA West TPC Stadium Course** (La Quinta): The par-3 17th hole has a picturesque island green where Lee Trevino made Skins Game history with a hole-in-one. The rest of Pete Dye’s 7,261-yard design is flat with huge bunkers, lots of water, and severe mounding throughout. See “The Palm Springs Desert Resorts” in chapter 15.
- **Torrey Pines Golf Course** (La Jolla): Two gorgeous 18-hole championship courses overlook the ocean and provide players with plenty of challenge. In February, the Buick Invitational Tournament is held here; in 2008 the U.S. Open will be played. The rest of the year, these municipal courses are open to everybody. See “Outdoor Pursuits” in chapter 16.

4 The Best Californian Travel Experiences

- **Hot-Air Ballooning over Napa Valley:** Sure, you have to rise at dawn, but there’s no better way to view Napa Valley than drifting over the vineyards in a balloon. Flights are offered in the morning on clear days, when the air is calm and cool. Hotels throughout the valley can arrange a trip for you, or you can book one with **Bonaventura Balloon Company** (☎ 800/FLY-NAPA) or **Adventures Aloft** (☎ 800/944-4408). See “Hot-Air Ballooning over the Valley” in chapter 6.
- **Taking a Mud Bath in Calistoga:** Some might consider submerging yourself in a tub thick with mud as creepy. It is indeed a unique sensation, being suspended in the volcanic-ash mud mixed with mineral water. But for spa-lovers it’s a must-try. You can book a treatment at a dozen or so places, which often include whirlpool baths and steams. See “Find the New You—in a Calistoga Mud Bath” in chapter 6.
- **Rafting Scenic Northern California Rivers:** You can white-water raft through thrilling cascades of raging Class IV water or float through tranquil vistas of blue skies, deep forests, and wildlife. The fastest flows are in the spring, naturally. Depending on the river and the time of year, some trips are okay for children over age 6. See chapters 7 and 8.
- **A Train Ride through the Redwoods:** Where else on this planet would you get an opportunity to ride a historic steam train through a remote coastal redwood forest? The **Skunk Train** (☎ 800/77-SKUNK) in Fort Bragg once lugged logs and now takes tourists on an all-day outing through a redwood forest, an 80-mile journey that crosses over 31 bridges and trestles and through two deep tunnels. See “Fort Bragg” in chapter 7.
- **Exploring a Real Gold Mine:** Don your hardhat, “tag in,” board the mine shuttle, and experience what it’s like to be a modern gold

miner. The **Sutter Gold Mine** tour company (☎ 866/762-2837) takes you deep into a gold mine that's loaded with gold deposits. You'll even get an opportunity to sluice for some real gold and gemstones. See "A Modern Gold Mine Tour" in chapter 10.

- **Celebrity Spotting at L.A. Cemeteries:** Okay, it's a rather morbid method for seeing stars, but we guarantee you'll get within 6 feet of many famous (and very former) celebrities. Los Angeles cemeteries such as **Westwood Memorial Park** and **Hollywood Forever** are the resting places for Marilyn Monroe, Natalie Wood, Walter Matthau, Alfalfa, and Douglas Fairbanks *père et fils*. See "Stargazing, Part II: The Less-than-Lively Set" in chapter 13.
- **Taking a Studio Tour:** Studio tours are an opportunity to see the actual stage sets for shows such as *ER* and *West Wing* (sometimes during filming), and you never know who you're going to see

emerging from his or her Star Wagon. See "Exploring the City" in chapter 13.

- **Visiting Venice's Oceanfront Walk:** You haven't visited L.A. properly until you've rented some skates in Venice and embarrassed yourself in front of thousands while taking in the human carnival around you. Nosh on a Jody Maroni's haute dog; buy some cheap sunglasses, silver jewelry, or ethnic garb, all while enjoying the wide beach, blue sea, and performers along the boardwalk. See "Exploring the City" in chapter 13.
- **Getting Up Close to the Desert's Gigantic Windmills:** Anyone who's driven through the desert near Palm Springs has marveled at these structures. Now visitors have a chance to see, touch, and learn about the efficient power generators, why they're clustered here, and just what the difference is between wind *turbines* and wind *mills*. See "En Route to the Palm Springs Resorts" in chapter 15.

5 The Best of Small-Town California

- **St. Helena:** In the heart of the Napa Valley, St. Helena is known for its Main Street, lined with Victorian storefronts featuring intriguing wares. In a horse and buggy, Robert Louis Stevenson and his bride, the cantankerous Fanny, made their way down this street. Come for the old-timey, tranquil mood and the food. See "Napa Valley" in chapter 6.
- **Arcata:** Arcata has it all: its own redwood forest and bird marsh, a charming town square, great family-owned restaurants, and even its own minor-league baseball team, which draws the whole town together for an afternoon of pure camaraderie. See "Eureka & Environs" in chapter 7.
- **Nevada City:** The whole town is a national historic landmark and the best place to understand Gold Rush fever. Settled in 1849, it offers fine dining and shopping and a stock of multi-gabled Victorian frame houses of the Old West. Relics of the cannibalistic Donner Party are on display at the 1861 Firehouse No. 1. See "The Gold Country" in chapter 10.
- **Pacific Grove:** You can escape the Monterey crowds by heading 2 miles west to Pacific Grove, known for its tranquil waterfront and quiet, unspoiled air. Thousands of monarch butterflies flock here between October and March. See "Pacific Grove" in chapter 11.
- **Cambria:** Near Hearst Castle, Cambria benefits from a stream of

visitors, who bring the right amount of sophistication to this coastal town. Moonstone Beach holds a string of seaside lodges; farther north are dozens of sunbathing elephant seals, while the village is filled with B&Bs, artists' studios and galleries, and shops. See "San Simeon: Hearst Castle" in chapter 12.

- **Ojai:** When Hollywood needed a Shangri-La for the movie *Lost Horizon*, filmmakers drove north to Ojai Valley, an unspoiled hideaway of eucalyptus groves and small ranches nestled among soft, green hills. Ojai is the village at the valley's heart. It's a mecca for

artists, free spirits, and weary city folk in need of a restful weekend in the country. See "The Ojai Valley" in chapter 12.

- **Ventura:** This charming mission town is filled with colorful Victorians. It's also home to an eclectic old Main Street lined with thrift and antiques shops, used-record stores, diners, and old-time saloons. Don't miss the historic mission on its landscaped plaza, and the Deco-era Greek Revival San Buenaventura City Hall looming over the town, bedecked with smiling stone faces of the founding Franciscan friars. See "En Route to Los Angeles: Ventura" in chapter 12.

6 The Best Family Vacation Experiences

- **San Francisco:** The City by the Bay is filled with pleasures for every member of the family. Ride the cable cars that "climb halfway to the stars," visit the Exploratorium, the California Academy of Sciences (including the Steinhart Aquarium), the zoo, the ships at the National Maritime Museum, Golden Gate Park, and much more. See chapter 4.
- **Lake Tahoe:** Lake Tahoe has loads of family-fun things to do. Skiing, snowboarding, hiking, tobogganing, swimming, fishing, boating, water-skiing, mountain biking—the list is nearly endless. See "Lake Tahoe" in chapter 8.
- **Yosemite National Park:** Camping or staying in a cabin in Yosemite is a premier family attraction in California. Sites are scattered over 17 campgrounds, and the rugged beauty of the Sierra Nevada Mountains surrounds you. During the day, the family calendar is packed with hiking, bicycling, white-water rafting, and even mountaineering to rugged, snowy peaks. See "Yosemite National Park" in chapter 9.
- **Santa Cruz:** Surfing, sea kayaking, hiking, fishing, and shopping, not to mention those fantastic beaches and the legendary amusement park on the boardwalk—this funky bayside town has everything you need for the perfect family vacation. See "Santa Cruz" in chapter 11.
- **Big Bear Lake:** Families flock year-round to this lake in the San Bernardino Mountains, and not just for the skiing. Horseback riding, miniature golf, watersports, and the Alpine Slide (kind of a snowless bobsled) are fun alternatives, and you can see and learn about wildlife at the Moonridge Animal Park. The village has a movie theater, arcade, and dozens of cutesy bear-themed businesses. The area's woodsy cabins are perfect for families. See "Big Bear Lake & Lake Arrowhead" in chapter 14.
- **Disneyland:** The "Happiest Place on Earth" is further enhanced by its sister theme park, **California Adventure**. Whether you're wowed by Disney animation, thrilled by the roller-coaster rides, or interested in the history and hidden secrets of

this pop-culture icon, you won't walk away disappointed. Get a FASTPASS to skip those long lines! See "The Disneyland Resort" in chapter 14.

- **San Diego Zoo, Wild Animal Park & SeaWorld:** San Diego boasts three of the world's best animal attractions. At the zoo, animals live in habitats such as Tiger River and Hippo Beach. It's one of only three zoos in the U.S.

where you can see giant pandas. At the Wild Animal Park, most of the 3,500 animals roam over a 1,800-acre spread, crossed by a 5-mile monorail loop plus several hiking trails. And SeaWorld, with its animal shows and detailed exhibits, is an aquatic wonderland of pirouetting dolphins and 4-ton killer whales who love to drench visitors. See "The Three Major Animal Parks" in chapter 16.

7 The Best Architectural Landmarks

- **The Golden Gate Bridge** (San Francisco): More tomato red than golden, the famous bridge remains a stunning visual for the San Francisco skyline. It's also an excellent expanse to walk. See "Exploring the City" in chapter 4.
- **The Painted Ladies** (San Francisco): The so-called Painted Ladies are the city's ornately decorated Victorian homes. Check out the beauties around Alamo Square. Most of the extant 14,000 structures date from the second half of the 19th century. See "Exploring the City" in chapter 4.
- **The Carson House** (Eureka): This house is a flamboyant Victorian—and one of the state's most photographed Queen Anne-style structures. It was built in 1885. Today, it's the headquarters of a men's club. See "Eureka & Environs" in chapter 7.
- **Mission San Carlos Borromeo del Río Carmelo** (Carmel): The second mission founded in California in 1770 by Father Junípero Serra is perhaps the most beautiful. Its stone church and tower dome have been restored, and a garden of poppies adjoins the church. Sights include an early kitchen and the founding father's sleeping quarters. See "Carmel-by-the-Sea" in chapter 11.
- **The Theme Building** (Los Angeles): The *Jetsons*-style "Theme Building," which once loomed over LAX, still holds court in the center of the airport and signals your arrival. Enjoy the view of arriving and departing jets from the building's observation deck or its groovy *Star Trek*-ish Encounter LAX restaurant and bar, whose purple neon lights flood the area after dark. See "Exploring the City" in chapter 13.
- **Balboa Park** (San Diego): These Spanish-revival style buildings along El Prado were built as temporary structures for the Panama-California Exposition (1915–16). Set amidst the beautifully landscaped terrain of mesas and canyons that comprise one of the country's finest city parks, the ornately decorated and imposing facades create a romantic fantasia abounding with Mediterranean flourishes. The buildings also house many of San Diego's museums. See "Exploring the Area" in chapter 16.
- **Hotel del Coronado** (Coronado): The "Hotel Del" stands in all its Victorian red-tiled glory on some of the loveliest stretch of beach in Southern California. Built in 1888, it's one of the largest remaining wooden structures in the world.

Even if you're not staying, stop by to take a tour of the splendidly restored interiors, elegant grounds, and fascinating mini-museum of the hotel's spirited history. On your

way to Coronado, you can't miss the soaring **Coronado Bay Bridge**, an architectural landmark in its own right. See p. 662.

8 The Best Museums

- **California State Railroad Museum** (Sacramento): Old Sacramento's biggest attraction, the 100,000-square-foot museum was once the terminus of the Transcontinental and Sacramento Valley railways. It displays 21 locomotives and railroad cars, among other attractions. One sleeping car simulates travel, with all the swaying and flashing lights of lonely towns passed in the night. See p. 312.
- **J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Center** (Los Angeles): Since its opening in 1997, the Getty has been deluged by visitors eager to see whether this ambitiously conceived complex fulfills its promise as the cultural cornerstone of L.A. Besides boasting a permanent art collection and notable visiting exhibits, the center is a striking—and starkly futuristic—architectural landmark. From its picturesque vantage point, the Getty offers panoramic city and ocean views. See p. 499.
- **Autry Museum of Western Heritage** (Los Angeles): Relive California's historic cowboy past and see how the period has been depicted by Hollywood, from Disney cartoon re-creations to founder Gene Autry's "singing cowboy" films to popular 1960s TV series. Highlights include a life-size woolly mammoth and a glimmering vault of ornate frontier firearms. See p. 513.
- **Petersen Automotive Museum** (Los Angeles): This museum is a natural for Los Angeles, a city whose personality is so entwined with the popularity of the car. Impeccably restored vintage autos are displayed in life-size dioramas accurate to the last period detail (including an authentic 1930s-era service station). Upstairs galleries house movie star and motion-picture vehicles, car-related artwork, and exhibits. See p. 514.
- **The Museums of Balboa Park** (San Diego): In a relaxed, verdant setting, these venues offer a variety of experiences. My favorites are the Aerospace Museum, the Museum of Photographic Arts, the Model Railroad Museum, the Botanical Building, the Timken Museum of Art, and the Mingei International Museum of Folk Art—that's just half of what's here. Check in at the House of Hospitality for a map and "Passport to Balboa Park," a low-cost pass to a combination of the museums. See "Exploring the Area" in chapter 16.

9 The Best Luxury Hotels & Resorts

- **Ritz-Carlton San Francisco** (☎ 800/241-3333): Two blocks from the top of Nob Hill, San Francisco's Ritz is world-renowned for its accommodating staff, luxurious amenities, and top-rated restaurant. Another bonus is the most lavish brunch in town, served on Sundays in the Terrace Room or on the patio amidst blooming rose bushes. See p. 84.

- **Auberge du Soleil** (Rutherford; ☎ 800/348-5406): The “Inn of the Sun,” a Relais & Châteaux member in a 33-acre olive grove, stands above the vineyards of Napa Valley. This French country-style inn is the Wine Country’s best resort. Each of the villas is named after a region of France and exudes an ambience of romantic exclusivity. And the spa is to die for. See p. 173.
- **Meadowood Napa Valley** (St. Helena; ☎ 800/458-8080): An utterly luxurious retreat, this 256-acre Wine Country estate was inspired by New England’s grand cottages. With its plethora of sports facilities and stress-relieving treatments hidden amidst a wooded hillside, it attracts such clients as megabuck novelist Danielle Steele. See p. 174.
- **The Estate by the Elderberries** (Oakhurst; ☎ 559/683-6860): Close to Yosemite, the Château du Sureau and Erna’s Elderberry House evoke the best of Europe. Exquisite furnishings, individually decorated rooms, and a cuisine worthy of the stars make for a memorable lodging and dining experience at this gateway to the wilderness. See p. 279.
- **Casa Palmero Resort** (Pebble Beach; ☎ 800/654-9300): A small, ultra-luxury resort on the first tee of the Pebble Beach Golf Course, Casa Palmero has 24 cottages and suites, all very intimate and private. In addition, you have the splendors of Pebble Beach, its fabulous golf links, fine restaurants, and gorgeous scenery to amuse you. See p. 366.
- **Ventana Inn and Spa** (Big Sur; ☎ 800/628-6500): A luxurious wilderness resort on 243 mountainous, oceanfront acres, this place is chic, tranquil, and hip—the pioneer sylvan retreat at Big Sur is a magnet for celebrities. Accommodations in one- and two-story buildings—each “worthy of the wild”—blend in with the dramatic Big Sur coastline. The cuisine is first-rate. See p. 379.
- **Shutters on the Beach** (Santa Monica; ☎ 800/334-9000) and **Casa del Mar** (Santa Monica; ☎ 800/898-6999): If a luxurious oceanfront room at either of these hip hotels doesn’t put a spring in your relationship, it’s hard to imagine what will. Which one is best for you depends on your taste: Shutters is dressed up like a really rich friend’s contemporary-chic beach house, while the glamorous Casa del Mar is an impeccably restored Deco-era delight. See p. 458 and p. 457.
- **Ritz-Carlton Laguna Niguel** (Dana Point; ☎ 800/241-3333): This jewel in the Ritz-Carlton chain is known for its warmth, charm, picture-perfect setting, and impeccable service. On dramatic cliffs overlooking 2 miles of prime beach, the Ritz is done in an easy yet elegant nautical-seashore decor, accented by well-chosen antiques and fine art. See p. 590.
- **La Quinta Resort & Club** (La Quinta; ☎ 800/598-3828): This luxury resort, set in a grove of palms at the base of the Santa Rosa Mountains, is surrounded by some of the desert’s best golf courses. Single-story, Spanish-style cottages are surrounded by a gardenlike setting and 24 “private” swimming pools. The lounge and library in the unaltered original hacienda hearkens back to the early days of the resort, when Clark Gable, Greta Garbo, and other luminaries escaped to the seclusion of La Quinta. See p. 616.

10 The Best Affordable Small Hotels & Inns

- **St. Orres** (Gualala; ☎ 707/884-3303): Designed in a Russian style—complete with two Kremlin-esque onion-domed towers—St. Orres offers secluded accommodations constructed from century-old timbers salvaged from a nearby mill. One of the most eye-catching inns on California's North Coast. See p. 205.
- **Albion River Inn** (Albion; ☎ 800/479-7944): One of the best rooms-with-a-view on the coast, the Albion River Inn is dripping with romance. Perched on a cliff overlooking the rugged shoreline, most of the luxuriously appointed rooms have Jacuzzi tubs for two, elevated to window level. Add champagne and you're guaranteed to have a night you won't soon forget. See p. 212.
- **River Ranch Lodge** (Lake Tahoe; ☎ 800/535-9900): Alongside the Truckee River, the River Ranch has long been one of our favorite affordable inns at Lake Tahoe. It has everything you'd want in a mountain lodge: rustic decor, a great bar and outdoor deck overlooking the river, a restaurant serving wood-oven-roasted Montana elk loin and other hearty dishes, and a happening après-ski scene. See p. 253.
- **The Mosaic** (Beverly Hills; ☎ 800/463-4466): This Beverly Hills boutique is a perfect blend of art, luxury, service, location, and value. Huge rain forest showerheads, Frette linens, Bvlgari bath products, Wolfgang Puck refreshments, and piles of pillows add up to hotel heaven. See p. 465.
- **Casa Malibu** (Malibu; ☎ 800/831-0858): This beachfront motel will fool you from the front. Its cheesy 1970s entrance, right on Pacific Coast Highway, belies the quiet, restful charm found within. Around the courtyard garden are 21 rooms, many with private decks above the sands. Rooftops and balconies are festooned with bougainvillea vines, creating an effect reminiscent of a Mexican village. There's easy beach access, and one elegant suite that was Lana Turner's favorite. See p. 459.
- **Olallieberry Inn** (Cambria; ☎ 888/927-3222): Nestled in the charming town of Cambria, this 1873 Greek Revival house, furnished in a floral-and-lace Victorian style, is a perfect base for exploring Hearst Castle. The gracious innkeepers have your comfort and convenience at heart, providing everything from directions to Moonstone Beach to restaurant recommendations—and a scrumptious breakfast in the morning, of course. See p. 391.
- **Casa Cody** (Palm Springs; ☎ 760/320-9346): You'll feel more like a house guest at this 1920s Spanish-style *casa* that's blessed with peaceful, blossoming grounds and two swimming pools. The Southwestern-style rooms are large and equipped for extended stays, and the hotel is just a couple of easy blocks from the heart of the action. See p. 614.
- **La Pensione Hotel** (San Diego ☎ 800/232-4683): In the Little Italy neighborhood, on the fringe of downtown, this find feels like a small, modern European hotel and offers tidy lodgings at bargain prices. There's an abundance of great dining in the surrounding blocks, and you'll be perfectly

situated to explore the rest of town by car. The neighborhood is filled with galleries and some of the

city's most dashing new architecture. See p. 651.

11 The Best Places to Stay with the Kids

- **The Lost Whale Bed and Breakfast Inn** (Trinidad; ☎ 800/677-7859): Parents will love the beautiful inn and the outdoor spa, and kids will love the play area and the menagerie of horses, goats, and other animals down the road. It has a private beach, and it's near interesting redwood parks. Best of all, no one has to cook because a fabulous breakfast is included. See p. 226.
- **KOA Camping Kabins** (Point Arena; ☎ 800/562-4188): Once you see the adorable log cabins at this KOA campground, you can't help but admit that, this is one cool way to spend the weekend on the coast. Rustic is the key word: mattresses, a heater, and a light bulb are the standard amenities. All you need is some bedding (or sleeping bags), cooking and eating utensils, and charcoal for the barbecue out front. See p. 207.
- **City Hotel and Fallon Hotel** (Columbia; ☎ 800/532-1479): Some parents may roll their eyes at this preserved Gold Rush town that looks like a television set, but it's rather remarkable, with rides on a 100-year-old stagecoach, a blacksmith shop, lots of relics from mining, and Victorian hotels that are reasonably priced and dish up a great buffet breakfast. Cars are barred from the dusty main street. See p. 334.
- **Grey Squirrel Resort** (Big Bear Lake; ☎ 800/381-5569): Like a camp for kids and adults alike, this cluster of kitchen-equipped cottages near the lake and Big Bear's village offers economical lodgings for a night or the entire season (winter or summer). Enjoy a heated, enclosed pool, barbecues, volleyball and basketball courts—plus skiing, boat rental, and plenty of other family recreation. See p. 568.
- **Disneyland Resort Hotels** (Anaheim; ☎ 714/956-MICKEY): The Holy Grail of Disney-goers has always been the "Official Hotel of the Magic Kingdom," the original **Disneyland Hotel** (p. 578) and newcomers **Paradise Pier Hotel** (p. 578) and the **Grand Californian** (p. 579). An easy monorail or tram ride to the parks' gates (the Grand Californian opens directly into California Adventure) means you'll be able to return to your room anytime, whether to take a much-needed nap or to change your soaked shorts after a water ride. These hotels are the best choice for Disney-bound families with small children.
- **Marriott's Desert Springs Spa & Resort** (Palm Desert; ☎ 800/331-3112): In the spirit of Disneyesque resorts, this oasis welcomes with a whimsical lobby "rain forest" that features tropical birds and gondolas ferrying guests to their rooms. Once settled, kids will find hours worth of fun at the lagoonlike pools and play areas (supervised children's programs are available), while grown-ups luxuriate on the golf course, tennis court, or in the 30,000-square-foot day spa. See p. 616.

- **Crystal Pier Hotel** (San Diego; ☎ 800/748-5894): Occupying a private pier that extends into the Pacific Ocean, this property affords guests the experience of

sleeping *over* the ocean in a cottage. Families can enjoy the soothing sound of waves or head out for boardwalk; beach gear is available for rent. See p. 655.

12 The Best Restaurants

- **San Francisco's Finest:** We can't choose! It's practically sacrilege to even attempt to name the "top" San Francisco restaurant. But for a perfect combo of food and atmosphere, we count on **Boulevard** (☎ 415/543-6084; p. 94), **Restaurant Gary Danko** (☎ 415/749-2060; p. 99), **Zuni Café** (☎ 415/552-2522; p. 104) and **Kokkari** (☎ 415/981-0983; p. 96).
- **Chez Panisse** (Berkeley; ☎ 510/548-5525): This is the domain of Alice Waters, "the queen of California cuisine." Her food captivates the senses and the imagination. Originally inspired by the Mediterranean, her kitchen has found its own style. Chez Panisse delights include dishes like grilled fish wrapped in fig leaves with red-wine sauce, and Seckel pears poached in red wine with burnt caramel. See p. 140.
- **Bistro Don Giovanni** (Napa; ☎ 707/224-3300): *Shhh . . .* Don't tell anyone, but in this Napa Valley dining room you can get an incredible meal without a reservation. Just drop in to the cheery, large restaurant, wait for a seat at the bar, and order off the fantastic Italian menu. It does the trick every time. See p. 179.
- **The French Laundry** (Yountville; ☎ 707/944-2380): The best restaurant in the Wine Country happens to be one of the top-ranked restaurants in the nation. Chef and owner Thomas Keller, dubbed "Chef of the Nation" in

1997 by judges of the James Beard Award, offers an insanely over-the-top multicourse experience that for die-hard foodies justifies the struggle to get a reservation and huge price tag. See p. 178.

- **Restaurant 301** (Eureka; ☎ 800/404-1390): Mark and Christi Carter are passionate about food and wine, which is why their hotel restaurant is considered the best on the northern coast. Most of the herbs and many of the vegetables served are picked fresh from the hotel's organic gardens. Indulge in their prix-fixe five-course dinner menu—artichoke, green lentil, and fennel salad; warm chèvre cake appetizer; tiger prawns with sesame, ginger, and soy—where each course is paired with a recommended wine by the glass (Mark is a Grand Award recipient from *Wine Spectator* magazine). See p. 223.
- **Erna's Elderberry House** (Oakhurst; ☎ 559/683-6800): It's like a beacon shining across the culinary wasteland of the region around Yosemite. The six-course menu—which changes nightly—is an almost perfect blend of continental and Californian. The food is bountiful and as fully satisfying as the elegant European ambience. Fresh, fresh, fresh ingredients are skillfully handled to bring out their natural flavors. See p. 279.
- **bouchon santa barbara** (Santa Barbara; ☎ 805/730-1160): With an always-intriguing seasonal menu derived from Santa

Barbara County's Wine Country and fresh ingredients, this intimate restaurant (whose name means "wine cork") lies hidden behind a shrubby portal in the heart of downtown. The food and service are impeccable, and an experienced staff stands ready to help coordinate by-the-glass (or even half-glass) wines for each course. See p. 421.

- **Patina** (Los Angeles; ☎ 323/467-1108): The flagship restaurant of superchef Joachim Splichal, who also conceived the (slightly) more affordable Pinot eateries, Patina's menu wows jaded Angelenos, who keep coming back to this comfortable Cal-French dining room. Seasonal menus are fine-tuned to perfection, featuring partridge, pheasant, or other game in winter, and spotlighting exotic vegetables and tropical fish in summer. See p. 487.
- **Röckenwagner** (Santa Monica; ☎ 310/399-6504): L.A.'s gossipy

tongues wag about handsome chef Hans Röckenwagner, but he seems more concerned with maintaining the culinary perfection that propelled him from obscurity in Venice to this gallery-like space on Santa Monica's Main Street. Although he trained in Europe, Röckenwagner co-opts ethnic dishes from around the world and elevates them to culinary works of multicultural art. Don't be surprised to find Scandinavian treats like spätzle, Knödel, and smoked salmon sharing space with Pacific Rim elements like mangoes and hoisin. See p. 475.

- **Laurel** (San Diego; ☎ 619/239-2222): The polished service and elegant setting at this beloved restaurant near Balboa Park are urbane and discriminating. But the food is prepared with inventive flair and the Rhone-heavy wine list soars, making Laurel a rewarding splurge for a special occasion. See p. 667.

13 The Best Culinary Experiences

- **A Dim Sum Lunch, San Francisco Style:** Eating a dim sum lunch is like Christmas morning, only the continual stream of presents is edible, including the wrappers. Throughout the meal, waiters stop at your table and offer an exotic selection of appetizer-size Chinese dishes—from dumplings and pot stickers to salt-fried shrimp, shark-fin soup, and stuffed eggplant. Our favorite place to indulge is **Ton Kiang** (☎ 415/387-8273). See p. 105.
- **Grazing at San Francisco's Farmers Market:** In 2003 San Francisco's favorite outdoor culinary fair moved to the newly renovated Ferry Building where some of the best artisan food producers and restaurants have opened new

storefronts. Stop by anytime to peruse the shops or visit during open-air market days—Tuesday and Saturday—to join the locals as they feast on the freshest vegetables, fruits, and prepared foods from some of the city's beloved restaurants. See "Exploring the City" in chapter 4.

- **A Decadent Meal in the Wine Country:** The Wine Country atmosphere sets a better stage for indulgent dining than anywhere else in the state. Add the best wines and some of the most talented chefs in the nation and you've got what we consider the ultimate dining experience. Deep-pocketed diners must reserve an evening at **The French Laundry** in St. Helena (☎ 707/944-2380)—if,

that is, they can get through to a reservationist; see p. 178. More moderately priced memories can be made at **Bistro Jeanty** (☎ 707/944-0103; p. 180) and **ZuZu** (☎ 707/224-8555; p. 183).

- **Gourmet Food Shopping in Napa Valley:** Gourmet shopping at its finest. New York's **Dean & DeLuca** (☎ 707/967-9980) opened its gastronomic warehouse as a world's fair of foods, where everything is beautifully displayed and often painfully pricey. If you're into food, you've got to check this place out. Across the street is the **Oakville Grocery Co.** (☎ 707/944-8802), which has a small-town vibe and crowds liable to send any claustrophobe into a rage. You'll find shelves crammed with picnic provisions. See "Gourmet Picnics, Napa-Style" in chapter 6.
- **Tomales Bay Oysters: Johnson's Oyster Farm** (☎ 415/669-1149) sells its farm-fresh oysters—by the dozen or the hundreds—for a fraction of the price you'd pay at a restaurant. Our modus operandi is to 1) buy a couple dozen, 2) head for an empty campsite along the bay, 3) fire up the barbecue pit (don't forget the charcoal), 4) split and 'cue the little guys, 5) slather them in Johnson's special sauce, and then 6) slurp 'em down—yum. See "Point Reyes National Seashore" in chapter 7.
- **Grand Central Market** (Los Angeles; ☎ 213/624-2378): Fresh-produce stands, exotic spice and condiment vendors, butchers and fishmongers, and prepared-food counters create a noisy, fragrant,

vaguely comforting atmosphere in this L.A. mainstay. The gem of the cavernous complex is the fresh juice bar at the southwest corner. A market fixture for many years, it dispenses dozens of varieties from an elaborate system of wall spigots (like an old-fashioned soda fountain), deftly blending unlikely but heavenly combinations. See "Shopping" in chapter 13.

- **Sunday Champagne Brunch Aboard the *Queen Mary*** (Long Beach; ☎ 562/435-3511 or 562/432-6964): This elegant ocean liner was the largest, finest vessel when she was built in 1934, and the grandeur of those Atlantic-crossing days remains. A sumptuous buffet-style feast, accompanied by a harp soloist and ice sculpture, is presented in the wood-furnished, first-class dining room. Walk off your indulgence on the teak decks and through the Art Deco interiors. See p. 551.
- **A Date with the Coachella Valley:** Some 95% of the world's dates are farmed here. While the groves of date palms make evocative scenery, it's their fruit that draws visitors to the National Date Festival in Indio each February. Amid the Arabian Nights Parade and camel races, you can feast on an array of plump Medjool, amber Deglet Noor, caramel-like Halawy, and buttery Empress dates. The rest of the year, date farms and markets sell dates from the season's harvest, as well as date milkshakes, date coconut rolls, and more. See "Sweet Treat of the Desert: The Coachella Valley Date Gardens" in chapter 15.

14 The Best of the Performing Arts & Special Events

- **The San Francisco Opera:** This world-class company performs at the War Memorial Opera House, modeled after the Opéra Garnier

in Paris. The season opens with a gala in September and runs through December. This was the first municipal opera in the

United States, and its productions and members have been acclaimed throughout the world. See p. 130.

- **The American Conservatory Theater** (San Francisco): The A.C.T. is one of the nation's leading regional theaters. It's been called the American equivalent of the British National Theatre, the Berliner Ensemble, and the Comédie Française in Paris. Both classical and experimental works are performed. See p. 130.
- **World Championship Great Arcata to Ferndale Cross-Country Kinetic Sculpture Race** (Arcata; ☎ 800/346-3482): One of California's most bizarre outdoor events, the Kinetic Sculpture Race is a 3-day event every Memorial Day weekend where handmade people-powered vehicles trudge over land, sand, mud, and water. The kooky competition draws more than 10,000 spectators. Pure madness! See "The Avenue of the Giants" in chapter 7.
- **The Monterey Jazz Festival** (☎ 800/307-3378): When the third weekend of September rolls around, the Monterey Fairgrounds hosts this classic, drawing jazz fans from around the world. The 3-day festival (which is usually sold out about a month in advance) is known for presenting the sweetest jazz west of the Mississippi. See "California Calendar of Events" in chapter 2.
- **The Hollywood Bowl** (Los Angeles): This iconic outdoor amphitheater is the summer home of the Los Angeles Philharmonic, a stage for visiting virtuosos—including the occasional pop star—and the setting for splendid fireworks shows throughout the summer. Those lucky enough to obtain box seats can set their own private table. See p. 542.
- **Festival of Arts & Pageant of the Masters** (Laguna Beach): These events draw crowds to the Orange County coast every July and August. Begun in 1932 by a handful of painters, the festival has grown to showcase hundreds of artists. In the evening, crowds marvel at the Pageant of the Masters' *tableaux vivants*, in which costumed townsfolk pose inside a giant frame and depict famous works of art, accompanied by music and narration. See "The Orange Coast" in chapter 14.
- **The Globe Theatres** (San Diego): This Tony Award-winning theater, fashioned after Shakespeare's original stage, produced recent hits *The Full Monty* and the revival of *Damn Yankees* before they hit Broadway, and has featured such notable performers as John Goodman, Hal Holbrook and Ellen Burstyn. The outdoor Shakespeare each summer is often a winner. See p. 697.

15 The Best Websites

- **California National Parks** (www.nps.gov/parklists/ca.html): California has preserved much of its glorious heritage in its parks. The state is home to about two dozen national parks, monuments, seashores, and recreation areas. The National Park Service's index includes detailed information on visiting, camping, getting around, and recommended activities.
- **CitySearch San Francisco** (<http://bayarea.citysearch.com>): The substantial articles and listings cover all of the city's entertainment highlights. The events calendar links to goings-on throughout the Bay Area; the "Visitor" section includes tips on getting around.

- **Ganna Walska Lotusland** (www.lotusland.org): Available spots for the intimate—and intriguing—tours of this extraordinary garden estate in the Santa Barbara hills can be nearly impossible for all but the most diligent advance planners to find. But you can take a detailed virtual tour online and learn all about this garden's unique benefactress, the rare and beautiful cacti and succulents she favored, and the science that helps the many nearly extinct varieties thrive.
- **Los Angeles Magazine** (www.lamag.com): The online edition of *Los Angeles* magazine offers “The Guide,” an oft-updated listing of L.A.'s theater, music scene, museums, and more, as well as an excellent “Dining Out” guide listing hundreds of restaurants organized geographically. Very cool.
- **Disneyland Resort** (www.disneyland.com): Check out the resorts, dining facilities, travel package options, and activities and rides in the Magic Kingdom. Get specific hours and ride closures in advance by selecting the day of your visit; this site is guaranteed to rev up your enthusiasm level.
- **Palm Springs Desert Resorts Convention and Visitors Authority** (www.palmspringsusa.com): If it relates to the Coachella Valley resort cities, you'll find it on this website. Whether you need information on the latest desert recreation trends, answers to FAQs, or links to just about every other desert URL, it's all a mouse-click away. True desert rats can even sign up for their free monthly e-newsletter.
- **San Diego Art + Sol** (www.sandiegoartandsol.com): A cultural campaign guided by the local Convention and Visitors Bureau, the website lists performances and exhibits scheduled for any specific date you are interested in. Plus, the cultural itineraries—covering art and architecture, Latino heritage, the gay and lesbian community, military heritage, and many more—are a great new way to experience this dynamic city. You can also request a hard copy of Art + Sol's bi-annual magazine.