

# 10 Reasons Santa Barbara is the Perfect Escape From L.A.

Sid Lipsey | June 18, 2015

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*You can love L.A. but cheat on it every now and then with Santa Barbara. (Photo: iStock)*

One thing I learned during my 10 years living in New York City: despite how proud New Yorkers are of their home turf, they can't wait to get out of it when the weekend comes, especially during the spring and summer months. With the likes of Fire Island, the Hamptons, P-Town, and the Jersey Shore, "Escape from New York" is more than a movie: it's a warm-weather motto. During my time there, I learned very quickly that part of loving your city means getting the heck away from it as frequently as possible.

## ***Related: Thursday Night: Santa Barbara, Calif.***

Now that I'm a Los Angeles resident, I'm taking that same mentality out West. As much as I love L.A., it's also great having an escape plan for a weekend getaway. An early favorite so far: Santa Barbara. Before moving to L.A., all I really knew about Santa Barbara was that it was the hometown of my sister's childhood pen pal and the title of a soap opera I didn't watch. But with it being just under a two-hour drive away (or just over two hours, depending on

traffic), Santa Barbara has now emerged as a go-to “Escape from L.A.” spot for me. Here’s why:

### **1. It re-invigorated my love of driving**



*The new experience of driving next to the Pacific Ocean never gets old. (Photo: iStock)*

Leaving New York meant once again being a car owner. And nothing made me love returning to the driver’s seat more than the drive to Santa Barbara along the 101. The towering mountains on your right and the sweeping views of the Pacific on your left seem to scream, “Welcome to California!”

***Related: Road Trip: San Francisco to Santa Barbara – in a Bentley***

### **2. State Street**



*The window shopper/people watchers' paradise: State Street (Photo: iStock)*

The center of downtown Santa Barbara has tons of cute shops, bars and restaurants. While it boasts its fair share of chain clothing stores (Abercrombie & Fitch, Old Navy, etc.) there are also some cool boutiques. Plum Goods touts itself as “a little shop with a big heart,” and features a wide variety of funky trinkets — including art, textiles, glassware toys, and cards. Another must-visit shop on State: Punch Interieurs, which has a ridiculously hip collection of vintage furniture, clothing, and gifts. State Street is the perfect place for a fun and lazy afternoon of window shopping, eating and casual imbibing.

### **3. My dog likes it**



*My dog, a big Kid Rock fan, finally gets her chance to “set up shop at the top of Four Seasons.” (Photo: Tracey Steinberg)*

Chelsea P. Steinberg (a.k.a. “Chelsea the Chihuahua”) isn’t exactly the world’s most enthusiastic traveler, but she has a good time in Santa Barbara. The place is crawling with pet-friendly restaurants, including The Brewhouse, which has a “brew-dog” menu (upon our arrival, Chelsea was served water without even having to order it — a rarity in water-starved Southern California).

The Four Seasons Resort The Biltmore Santa Barbara also allows pets in its sprawling beachside environs. Chelsea especially enjoyed our cottage accommodations: She ran around the room and sniffed it for only 20 minutes before deeming it fit for habitation — a process that usually takes her the better part of an hour.

***WATCH: Chelsea Visits Pasadena For a Spa Weekend***

Another of SB’s famously dog-friendly spots: Arroyo Burro Beach Park, where dogs can roam leash-free in the Pacific Ocean (and enjoy a dog washing station that would make

Chelsea say, “Don’t even think about it.”)

#### 4. The eats



*His and Her cocktails on the patio while waiting for the delicious meal at Scarlett Begonia (don’t worry: the “her” cocktail wasn’t for Chelsea the Chihuahua) (Photo: Sid Lipsey)*

Scarlett Begonia has a beautiful (and, yes, pet-friendly) patio where you can enjoy a fun collection of modern, organic, locally sourced dinner and killer cocktails. The menu changes weekly, but hope that the roasted pecans with brown butter, rosemary, and paprika are on it; they’re an addictive appetizer and go great with the cocktails.

The Wine Cask is a similarly elegant choice for outdoor dining and cocktail-ing. The “filet mignon enchiladas” are not only delicious, but perhaps the greatest three-word combination ever invented.



*The Wine Cask's filet mignon enchiladas have the perfect sidekick in the black bean risotto (Photo: Sid Lipsey)*

## **5. The drinks**



*If you're a wine connoisseur, prepare to spend a few hours at the El Paseo complex. (Photo: Sid Lipsey)*

The Wine Cask is but a portion of the larger El Paseo complex, which houses a number of wine tasting rooms. Going from place to place and indulging in multiple tastings is a popular Santa Barbara pastime.

But as they say, “wine is fine but liquor is quicker.” So if your taste runs to potables stronger than wine, head back to State Street to The Good Lion, which specializes in crafted cocktails made with seasonal ingredients. Two notable mentions: The Night Owl, a perfect after-dinner nightcap; and a fruity tequila drink called “Robb Stark’s Revenge” (probably not the thing to order at a wedding’s open bar).



*The Good Lion's Night Owl is a wonderful nightcap. (Photo: Sid Lipsey)*

#### **6. Random encounters with old friends**

While I waited for the valet to bring around my car at the El Paseo complex, the person waiting ahead of me turned out to be a woman I went to high school with in Virginia. I'm not saying that if you visit Santa Barbara you'll randomly run into someone you last saw thousands of miles away decades earlier. Then again, I can't say that *won't* happen either...

#### **7. Sailboat therapy**

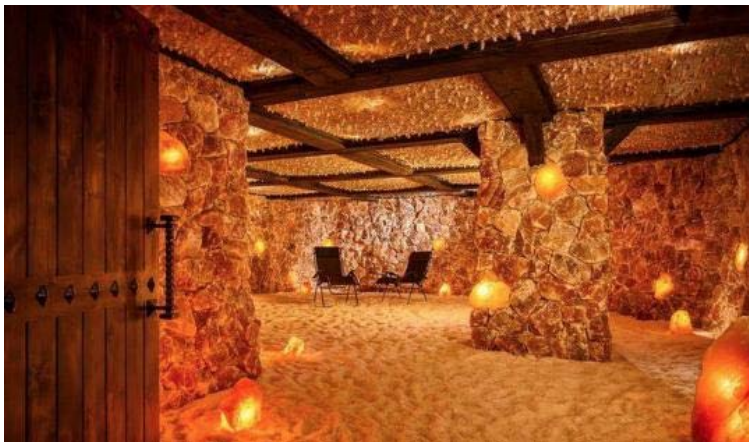




*The Double Dolphin — which, ironically, is how many real dolphins we saw during our tour. (Photo: Facebook/Double Dolphin)*

If the inherently calming effects of being out on the water are what you crave, taking a cruise off the coast of Santa Barbara is a worthwhile pursuit (just try to ignore the distracting offshore oil rigs that dot the horizon). The Santa Barbara Sailing Center offers coastal sightseeing excursions; mine was aboard the Double Dolphin. It's a great vantage point from which to check out the local residents: the sea lions who like to congregate at and around the ocean buoys. Look carefully and you might see a dolphin or two; whale sightings are common as well. Drinks are available on board, but don't share with the sea lions.

## **8. Salt cave therapy**



*The main salt cave at Salt (Photo: Facebook/Salt Cave Santa Barbara)*

“New town, new experiences” is my motto. So during my stay in Santa Barbara, I decided to try something I’d never before experienced: a salt cave session at the aptly-named Salt, a downtown Santa Barbara spa that offers scrubs, massages, and its main attraction — a relaxation session in one of its salt caves, which are comprised of 45 tons of imported 250 million-year-old Himalayan crystal salt. Aficionados of salt caves swear by their relaxing and health benefits.

After taking a seat in one of the zero-gravity chairs in the main salt room, I was treated to quiet but relaxing music. As I was told would happen beforehand, a vent started blowing in barely noticeable micro particles of salt for the benefit of my skin and lungs. It’s a unique and relaxing sensation. I wish I could describe exactly how relaxing, but I fell asleep about 15 minutes in.

## **9. Los Agaves**



*Los Agaves: tasty, affordable and addictive (Photo: Los Agaves)*

I have yet to leave Santa Barbara without swinging by Los Agaves, one of this local institution's two locations. What these restaurants lack in decor they more than make up for in hearty and flavorful Mexican food. Maybe one day I'll follow through on my vow to start a social media campaign to get the owners to bring Los Agaves to Los Angeles.

#### **10. It's a calmed-down version of L.A.**



While far from a secret hideaway, Santa Barbara still manages to evoke an uncrowded, small-town vibe. It gives you all the benefits of L.A. life — perfect weather, stunning beach views and great restaurants. And it adds some unique charms of its own: uncrowded streets, walkability and tolerable traffic. Sure, L.A.'s fine. But we New York transplants are meant to get away from it every now and then just like we did back in NYC. Why else would the sequel to the movie "Escape From New York" be "Escape From L.A."?

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