



## Travel Guide: Santa Barbara, California



**Santa Barbara** is the perfect little weekend getaway from our place in LA. We made the trip earlier this summer because one of our favourite bands – **Of Monsters and Men** were playing a show at **The Santa Barbara Bowl**. So we packed up our car and our bikes and decided to make a weekend out of it! **Getting There** – Paul and I drove from Los Angeles which can take anywhere from 2-3 hours depending on traffic. If you're leaving from LA, you want to get out of the city before 3 PM or wait until after 7 PM because traffic can be oh-so-brutal. To avoid this altogether, you can take the **Surfliner** train that goes right into the heart of Santa Barbara.

**Where To Stay** – **Hotel Indigo Santa Barbara** is a charming little boutique hotel with small, modern, European-style rooms in the heart of **The Funk Zone**. You are a 5-minute walk to the ocean, art galleries, wineries and all the shops on State Street. If you want to park your car and bike around all weekend, this is a great spot. The drawbacks here are that the small rooms and the fact that it is close to the train tracks and construction. However, if you're on a budget and looking for a prime location – Hotel Indigo would be a choice spot. Keep in mind that 'budget' in Santa Barbara can be \$250+ a night.



If you're seeking luxury, I would choose **The Four Seasons Santa Barbara**. This is one of my all-time favourite Four Seasons properties. Rooms range from \$600-800 a night and this former Biltmore Hotel has a huge swimming pool + beach club near the ocean. If you can't afford to stay here, go for brunch or drinks on their oceanfront patio. For mid-range, check out **The Canary Hotel** by Kimpton. I haven't stayed there, but I hear really good things.

**Hit the Market** – As soon as we dropped our bags at our hotel, we hopped on our bikes and headed to **The Santa Barbara Public Market** to stock up on fruit, snacks and lunch! I opted for a homemade pasta dish **Eat Love Pasta** and Paul went for a Philly Cheesesteak from **Belcampo Meat Co**. It's always lovely to visit with each of the local purveyors and try a few new things.

**Thirsty?** Put on your walking shoes and hit **The Urban Wine Trail**, a self-guided network of tasting rooms in Downtown Santa Barbara. Grab a map from your concierge and taste a few of the finest wines made in Santa Barbara County. Most of the outlets are within walking or biking distance from each other and range from \$5-15.

**Go for a Fancy Dinner** – One of the best meals in Santa Barbara was at **The Lark**, a small plates restaurant specializing artisanal, local and seasonal ingredients. DO make a reservation because this place was booked wall-to-wall when we showed up on the weekend. It seems to attract a mix of visitors and locals, which is always a good sign!

I definitely recommend trying the **Grilled Hanger Steak** with charred broccoli, **The Pineapple & Habenero Octopus** and the **Crispy Brussels Sprouts**. We loved all of our dishes and the complexity of flavors in each beautifully presented dish.

**Ice Cream for Dessert** – After dinner, we drove over to **McConnell's Ice Cream** on State Street and joined the line-up that was going out the door. This is by far one of my favorite ice cream makers of all-time, that I've started buying their pints at my local Whole Foods. My go-to flavor is definitely **Eureka Lemon & Marionberries**. The perfectly tart ice cream pairs so well with the sweet berries.



**So why is McConnell's the best?** They've perfect their recipe over the years, make everything from scratch, use grass-grazed milk & cream with no fillers, additives or preservatives and you can seriously TASTE the difference. I've never had a creamier and more pure tasting ice cream in my life. Try it for yourself and you'll understand the line-ups!

**For Sunday Brunch** – A local favorite is **Jeannine's Restaurant and Bakery**. There's a convenient location in Downtown Santa Barbara on Figueroa street and one uptown on State Street (where we went). Do order the **Lobster Benedict** with big meaty chunks of lobster sautéed in butter sauce, served with oven-roasted potatoes and a side of fruit. The format is quick serve, where you order at the counter and take a number at a table and our food did take awhile, but it was worth the wait.

**Go Shopping** – If you're staying Downtown, you won't be able to miss all the fabulous shops on **State Street**. I could easily spend a day walking up and down the street here, but had a bit of restraint here. You'll find your typical chains mixed in with local stores. Do check out **La Arcada** plaza for a few gems. **The Santa Barbara Museum of Art** also has a cute little gift shop with lots of unique finds.

**Spa it Out** – If you have an extra afternoon or evening to unplug and truly relax, check out **Salt Cave Santa Barbara**. It's a subterranean salt cave where you can meditate and breathe deeply and take in the healing effects 200 million year-old Himalayan sea salt. You can take a stretch, yoga or Tai Chi class or simply book in for a nap session for \$25.

**See a Concert!** Check the local concert listings at the wonderful **Santa Barbara Bowl** and see if your favorite band might be playing. There's not a bad seat in the house, it seats about 4500 people and the acoustics are on point. At the top of the theatre you can take in views of the city and ocean, there's also great food and beer. I would actually recommend grabbing dinner here before the show (bring cash). We also rode our bikes to the concert to avoid traffic and used their free bike valet service.



**Visit the Mission** – If you do one major tourist attraction, I would check out **Old Mission Santa Barbara** which has been standing at this exact location since 1786. Take the **self-guided tour** (\$8) and learn about the history of Santa Barbara, the influence of this mission and see the stunning architecture.

**You CANNOT Miss This** – Our last stop before our drive home is at Julia Child's favorite Mexican taco stand, **La Super-Rica Taqueria**. Yes it lives up to all the hype. The tacos are good, but the standouts here for us was a **Creamy Tamale** filled with squash and the **Chorizo Cheese Dip** – a sort of fondue that comes with a bunch of tortillas. I would bypass the tacos if possible and try everything else on the menu. We love the **Chilaquilles** as well.

All in all, we had a great trip to Santa Barbara and I am sure there is so much more for us to explore on a future trip.