

The Best of California

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California's 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, 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, Harry and I will help guide you through one of the most fulfilling vacations of your life. The four 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 largest of all living things, the *Sequoia sempervirens*. Within the old-growth forests that line the northern California coast are acres and acres of unbelievably massive and majestic redwood trees, all of which shade a thick, lush canopy of huge ferns, mosses, and wild orchids. 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. 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. 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. See “The Big Sur Coast” in chapter 11.
- **The Elkhorn Slough Safari:** When you’re sick of schlepping your way through Monterey, take a 20-minute drive north and embark on a safe, friendly voyage best described as stepping into the pages of *National Geographic*. The up-close views of “rafts” of otters, harbor seals, and hundreds of bird species are priceless. See “Monterey” 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.

- **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. See “Joshua Tree National Park” in chapter 15.
- **Torrey Pines State Reserve:** Poised on a majestic cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, this state park is set aside for the rarest pine tree in North America. The reserve has short trails that immerse hikers into a delicate and beautiful coastal environment. See chapter 16.

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. See “Point Reyes National Seashore” 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 Main Beach, complete with summer lifeguards and golden-oldie tunes drifting over the sand. See “Santa Cruz” in chapter 11.
- **Santa Barbara’s East Beach:** This wide swath of white sand hosts beach umbrellas, sand-castle builders, and volleyball games. On Sundays local artists display their wares beneath the elegant palm trees. See “Santa Barbara” in chapter 12.
- **Malibu’s Legendary Beaches:** Zuma and Surfrider beaches served as inspiration for the 1960s surf music that embodies the Southern California beach experience. Surfrider, just up from Malibu Pier, is home to L.A.’s best waves. Zuma is loaded with amenities, including snack bars, restrooms, and jungle gyms. In addition to some of the state’s best sunbathing, you can walk in front of the Malibu Colony, a star-studded enclave of multimillion-dollar

homes. See “L.A.’s Beaches & Coastal Attractions” in chapter 13.

- **La Jolla’s Beaches:** Roughly translated, *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 and 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 the Del Monte Forest justify astronomical greens fees. 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 18-hole championship courses overlook the ocean and provide players with plenty of challenge. In February the Buick Invitational Tournament is held here. The rest of the year, these popular 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. You can book a trip through your hotel or with **Bonaventura Balloon Company** (☎ 800/FLY-NAPA) or **Adventures Aloft** (☎ 800/944-4408). See “Hot-Air Ballooning over the Valley” 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. Depending on the river and the time of year, some trips

are okay for children over age 6. See chapters 7 and 8.

- **Exploring a Real Gold Mine:** Don your hardhat, “tag in,” board the mine shuttle, and experience what it’s like to be a gold miner. The **Sutter Gold Mine** tour company (☎ 866/762-2837) takes you deep into a mine that’s loaded with gold deposits. You’ll get an opportunity to sluice for some real gold. See “A Modern Gold Mine Tour” in chapter 10.
- **Taking a Studio Tour:** Studio tours are an opportunity to see the actual stage sets for shows such as *ER* and *The West Wing*, 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 Beach'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.
- **Flying a World War II Fighter Aircraft:** Don your parachute, strap yourself into the 600-horsepower fighter aircraft, and prepare to have your mind blown as you (yes, you) perform aerobatic maneuvers—loops, rolls, lazy-8s—high above the Carlsbad coastline. It's an experience you'll never forget. See p. 620.
- **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, and why they're clustered here. See "En Route to the Palm Springs Resorts" in chapter 15.
- **Explore Wreck Alley** (San Diego): Five drowned vessels sit on the sea floor, 2 miles off Mission Beach, providing a chance for certified divers to investigate an exciting nautical graveyard that includes a 366-foot Canadian destroyer, the *Yukon* (intentionally sunk in 2000). See "Outdoor Pursuits" in chapter 16.

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 once 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 fever. Settled in 1849, it offers fine dining and shopping and a stock of Victorian frame houses. 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 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.
- **Santa Catalina Island:** Taking a day trip to the small town of Catalina makes for a most adventurous day: a scenic boat ride, shopping, snorkeling and diving,

golfing, hiking, ice cream, sunburns, and DUI-free barhopping.

Tip: The helicopter taxi is cheaper than you'd expect. See "Santa Catalina" in chapter 14.

- **Julian:** This old mining town in the Cuyamaca Mountains near San Diego has long been known for its wildflower fields, the apple harvest, and charming bed-and-breakfasts. Julian and the

surrounding communities were shaken by forest fires in October 2003, but—from a touring standpoint—most of the community is back to normal. There's plenty of pioneer history here, including a local-history museum, an 1888 schoolhouse, and mining demonstrations. See "Julian: Gold, Apple Pies & a Slice of Small-Town California" in chapter 16.

6 The Best Family Vacation Experiences

- **San Francisco:** The City by the Bay is filled with pleasures for every family member. Ride the cable cars that "climb halfway to the stars," visit the Exploratorium, the Metreon, 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 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, 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 cabins are perfect for families. See "Big Bear Lake & Lake Arrowhead" in chapter 14.
- **Disneyland:** The "Happiest Place on Earth" is 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 secrets of this pop-culture icon, you won't walk away disappointed. Get a FAST-PASS 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 naturalistic habitats such as Tiger River and Polar Bear Plunge, and 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 freely over a 1,800-acre spread. And SeaWorld, with its water-themed rides, flashy animal shows, and detailed

exhibits, is an aquatic wonderland of pirouetting dolphins and 4-ton killer whales with a fetish for drenching 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 Carson Mansion** (Eureka): This house is a flamboyant Victorian—and one of the state’s most photographed Queen Anne-style structures. It was built in 1885. See “Eureka & Environs” in chapter 7.
- **California State Capitol** (Sacramento): Built in 1869 and renovated in 1976, the dazzling white capitol has the original statuary restored along its eaves, historical rooms furnished with antiques from the original offices, a strangely interesting collection of portraits of California governors (don’t miss Jerry Brown’s), and a dome that from the inside looks like a Faberge egg. See “Sacramento” in chapter 10.
- **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. See “Carmel-by-the-Sea” in chapter 11.
- **Hearst Castle** (San Simeon): This 165-room estate of publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst is one of the last great estates of America’s Gilded Age. It’s an astounding, over-the-top monument to wealth and power. See “San Simeon: Hearst Castle” in chapter 12.
- **Walt Disney Concert Hall**: Simply amazing. You would have to fly to Spain to see Frank O. Gehry’s other architectural masterpiece. The dramatically curvaceous stainless-steel exterior houses one of the most acoustically perfect concert halls in the world. See p. 524.
- **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 originally 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 have a special magic, creating a romantic fantasia abounding with Mediterranean flourishes. The buildings also house many of San Diego’s best museums. See “Exploring the Area” in chapter 16.

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. See p. 324.
- **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 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. 517.
- **Museum of the American West** (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 glimmering vault of ornate frontier firearms. See p. 526.
- **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. 526.
- **The Museums of Balboa Park** (San Diego): In a relaxed, verdant setting, these venues offer a variety of cultural experiences. My favorites include 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. Check in at the House of Hospitality for a map and "Passport to Balboa Park," a low-cost combination pass to 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. 86.
- **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. 177.
- **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, it attracts such clients as megabuck novelist Danielle Steele. See p. 178.

- **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. See p. 291.
- **Casa Palmero Resort** (Pebble Beach; ☎ 800/654-9300): A small, ultraluxury 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 to amuse you. See p. 380.
- **Post Ranch Inn** (Big Sur; ☎ 800/527-2200): Perched 1,200 feet above the Pacific, the elevated wood-and-glass guest cottages at this romantic cliff-side retreat give guests the illusion that they're living at cloud level. See p. 394.
- **Shutters on the Beach** (Santa Monica; ☎ 800/334-9000) and **Casa del Mar** (Santa Monica; ☎ 800/898-6999): If an ocean-front room at either of these 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 rich friend's contemporary-chic beach house, while glamorous Casa del

Mar is an impeccably restored Deco-era delight. See p. 474 and p. 473.

- **Beverly Hills Hotel and Bungalows** (Beverly Hills; ☎ 800/283-8885): It's well worth the heavy hit to your credit card for the opportunity to take afternoon tea in the famous Polo Lounge next to Ozzy Osbourne, swim laps in the same pool Katharine Hepburn once dove into fully clothed, and eat pancakes in the fabled Fountain Coffee Shop. See p. 479.
- **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 in the midst of some of the desert's best golf courses. Spanish-style cottages are surrounded by a gardenlike setting and 24 "private" swimming pools. The lounge and library in the 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. 648.
- **The Lodge at Torrey Pines** (La Jolla; ☎ 858/777-6690): You don't need to know much about Craftsman-style architecture to appreciate the taste and artistry that went into creating this luxury resort. The lodge sits next to the Torrey Pines Golf Course, and you can enjoy a fireplace in your room, sunset ocean views from your balcony, and superb meals at the hotel's A.R. Valentine restaurant. See p. 692.

10 The Best Affordable Small Hotels & Inns

- **St. Orres** (Gualala; ☎ 707/884-3303): Designed in a Russian style—complete with two Kremlesque 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. 212.

- **Albion River Inn** (Albion; ☎ 800/479-7944): One of the best rooms-with-a-view on the coast, the Albion River Inn is 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. 220.
- **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, and a restaurant serving wood-oven-roasted Montana elk loin and other hearty dishes. See p. 262.
- **Evergreen Lodge** (Yosemite; ☎ 800/935-6343): Scattered throughout a wooded grove of towering pines near the entrance to Yosemite are 18 rustic cabins, a beautiful old bar and restaurant, and easy access to dozens of outdoor adventures. Enjoy a pitcher of beer and a game of Ping-Pong on the patio, or sit around the campfire telling stories and roasting marshmallows—it's all part of the Evergreen experience. See p. 287.
- **The Mosaic** (Beverly Hills; ☎ 800/463-4466): This Beverly Hills boutique is a perfect blend of art, luxury, service, location, and value. Huge rainforest showerheads, Frette linens, Bvlgari bath products, Wolfgang Puck refreshments, and piles of pillows add up to hotel heaven. See p. 482.
- **Casa Malibu** (Malibu; ☎ 800/831-0858): This beachfront motel will fool you from the front. Its cheesy 1970s entrance on Pacific Coast Highway belies the quiet, restful charm within. Around the courtyard garden are 21 rooms, many with private decks above the sands. Rooftops and balconies are festooned with bougainvillea vines. There's easy beach access, and a suite that was Lana Turner's favorite. See p. 478.
- **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 provide everything from directions to Moonstone Beach to restaurant recommendations—and a scrumptious breakfast in the morning. See p. 406.
- **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 a couple of blocks from the heart of the action. See p. 646.
- **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 art galleries and some of the city's most dashing new architecture. See p. 684.

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, a fabulous breakfast is included. See p. 235.
- **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. 215.
- **City Hotel and Fallon Hotel** (Columbia; ☎ 800/532-1479): Some parents may roll their eyes at this preserved Gold Rush town, but it's rather remarkable, with rides on a 100-year-old stagecoach, a blacksmith shop, and lots of relics from mining. And these reasonably priced Victorian hotels dish up a great buffet breakfast. Cars are barred from the dusty main street. See p. 347.
- **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. 591.
- **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. 602) and newcomers **Paradise Pier Hotel** (p. 602) and the **Grand Californian** (p. 601). 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.
- **Marriott's Desert Springs Spa & Resort** (Palm Desert; ☎ 800/331-3112): In the spirit of Disneyesque resorts, this oasis welcomes with a whimsical lobby “rainforest” 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. 638.
- **Crystal Pier Hotel** (San Diego; ☎ 800/748-5894): Occupying a historic pier that extends into the Pacific Ocean, this property affords guests the experience of sleeping *over* the ocean in a cottage. Ideal for beach-loving families, who can enjoy the sound of waves or head out for boardwalk action; beach gear is available for rental. See p. 689.

12 The Best Restaurants

- **San Francisco's Finest:** We can't choose! It's practically sacrilege to even attempt to name the "top" restaurant. But for a perfect combo of food and atmosphere, we count on **Boulevard** (☎ 415/543-6084; p. 96), **Restaurant Gary Danko** (☎ 415/749-2060; p. 102), and **Zuni Café** (☎ 415/552-2522; p. 106).
- **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. 142.
- **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. See p. 183.
- **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 vegetables served are picked fresh from the hotel's organic gardens. Indulge in their prix-fixe five-course dinner menu, where each course is paired with a recommended wine by the glass (Mark is a Grand Award recipient from *Wine Spectator* magazine). See p. 232.
- **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. See p. 291.
- **bouchon santa barbara** (Santa Barbara; ☎ 805/730-1160): With an always-intriguing seasonal menu derived from Santa Barbara County's wine country, this intimate restaurant (whose name means "wine cork") lies hidden behind a shrubbery 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. 437.
- **The Hump** (Santa Monica; ☎ 310/313-0977): The chefs here are deadly serious about their sushi. Flown in daily from Tokyo's Tsukijii and Fukuoka fish markets in oxygen-filled containers, it's so fresh that there's a sign at the entrance warning the faint-of-heart that the meat's still moving. See p. 494.
- **Koi Restaurant** (West Hollywood; ☎ 310/659-9449): The hottest new restaurant in L.A. has the A-list celebrities arriving here nightly to nosh on addictive dishes such as baked crab rolls with edible rice paper. A killer combination of soothing feng shui ambience and superb Asian fusion cuisine. See p. 519.
- **Laurel** (San Diego; ☎ 619/239-2222): The polished service and elegant setting at this restaurant near Balboa Park are urbane and discriminating. The food is prepared with inventive flair and the

Rhône-heavy wine list soars, making Laurel a rewarding splurge for a special occasion. See p. 701.

- **George's at the Cove/George's Ocean Terrace** (La Jolla; ☎ 858/454-4244): Tasty smoked chicken-broccoli-black-bean soup is an enduring dish; it's on the menu at

the fancy downstairs dining room *and* the breezy upstairs cafe. The two share an *aah*-inspiring ocean view. The downstairs kitchen turns up the finesse factor for inventive and formal California cuisine, while the cafe offers crowd-pleasing versions. See p. 707.

13 The Best Culinary Experiences

- **Grazing at San Francisco's Farmers Market:** In 2003 San Francisco's favorite outdoor culinary fair moved to the Ferry Building Marketplace 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 Thursday—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); see p. 182. More moderately priced memories can be made at **Bistro Jeanty** (☎ 707/944-0103; p. 183) and **Terra** (☎ 707/963-8931; p. 183).
- **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, 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 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. 573.
- **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 year. 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. 132.
- **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. See p. 132.
- **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 people-powered vehicles trudge over land, sand, mud, and water. The competition draws more than 10,000 spectators. 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. See p. 565.
- **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 Old Globe (San Diego):** This Tony Award-winning theater, fashioned after Shakespeare's original stage, produced recent stage hits *The Full Monty* and the revival of *Damn Yankees* before they hit Broadway, and has billed such notable performers as John Goodman, Hal Holbrook, and Ellen Burstyn. The outdoor Shakespeare each summer is often a winner. See p. 732.