

The Best of California

by Harry Bosch, Mark Hiss, Erika Lenkert & Matthew Richard Poole

In my early 20s, I took the requisite college student's pilgrimage to Europe, exploring its finer train stations and sleeping on the premier park benches from London to Istanbul. I was relatively anonymous—just another tanned and skinny, blond and blue-eyed American with a backpack. That is, until I crossed into the former Eastern Bloc.

The reaction there was dramatic, almost palpable. Like Moses parting the sea, I wandered the crowded streets of Prague and citizens would stop, stare, and step aside as if I bore a scarlet letter "A" across my chest. It wasn't until a man with faltering English approached me that I discovered the reason for my newfound celebrity status.

"Eh, you. Where you from? No, no. Let me guess." He stepped back and gave a cursory examination, followed by a pregnant pause. "Ah. I've got it! California! You're from California, no?" His eyes gleamed as I told him that, yes, he was quite correct. "Wonderful! Wonderful!" A dozen or so pilsners later with my loquacious new friend, and it all became clear to me: To him, I was a celebrity—a rich, convertible-driving surfer who spent most his days lazing on the beach, fending off hordes of buxom blondes while arguing with his agent via cellphone. The myth is complete, I thought. I *am* the Beach Boys. I *am* *Baywatch*. Status by association. The tentacles of Hollywood have 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 mystique of sun-drenched California, of movie 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 the movie industry is selling.

Of course, the allure is understandable. It *is* warm and sunny most days 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, *does* exist, and it's not hard to find.

But there's more—a lot more—to California that isn't scripted, sanitized, and squeezed through a cathode-ray tube to the world's millions of mesmerized masses. Beyond the Hollywood glitter is a wondrously diverse state that, if it ever seceded from the Union, would be one of the most productive, powerful nations in the world. We've got it all: misty redwood forests, an exceptionally verdant Central Valley teeming with agriculture, the mighty Sierra Nevada Mountain Range, eerily fascinating deserts, a host of world-renowned cities and, of course, hundreds of miles of stunning coastline.

And despite the endemic crime, pollution, traffic, and bowel-shaking earthquakes for which California is famous, we're still the golden child of the United States, America's spoiled rich kid, either loved or loathed by everyone else. (Neighboring Oregon, for example, sells lots of license-plate rims that proudly state, "I hate California.") Truth be told, however, we don't care what anyone thinks of us. 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, we can't guarantee that you'll bump into Arnold Schwarzenegger or learn to surf, but if you have a little time, a little money, and an adventurous spirit, then Harry, Mark, Erika, 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—simply because no other place on earth has so much to offer.

—Matthew Richard Poole

1 The Best of Natural California

• **Redwood National & State Parks:**

Acres of inconceivably massive redwood trees, up to 350 feet tall, tower over thick, lush, oversized ferns, mosses, and wild orchids in the old-growth forests along the Northern California coast. Walking through these groves is an unforgettably humbling, serene experience. See “Redwood National & State Parks” in chapter 8.

• **Lake Tahoe:**

One of the world's most magnificent bodies of fresh water, sparkling Lake Tahoe contains close to 40 trillion gallons—enough to cover the entire state of California to a depth of 14½ inches. See “Lake Tahoe” in chapter 9.

• **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 of the 10 tallest waterfalls on earth, the largest granite monolith anywhere, and some of the world's largest trees, Yosemite is one of the most superlative natural places on the planet. See “Yosemite National Park” in chapter 10.

• **Big Sur:**

Sloping redwood forests and towering cliffs pounded by the Pacific create one of the world's most dramatic coastal panoramas. See “The Big Sur Coast” in chapter 12.

• **Point Reyes National Seashore:**

This extraordinarily scenic stretch of coast and wetlands is one of the state's

best bird-watching spots for waterfowl, shorebirds, songbirds, osprey, and red-shouldered hawks. You might even catch a glimpse of a whale from the Point Reyes Lighthouse. See “Point Reyes National Seashore” in chapter 8.

• **Mount Shasta:**

The mighty volcano Mount Shasta, a solitary tower of rock and snow, rises thousands of feet above the valley floor. If you're in good shape, it makes for an exhilarating climb as well. See “Mount Shasta & the Cascades” in chapter 9.

• **Channel Islands National Park:**

This is California in its most virginal state. 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 and their sea-lion cousins sunbathing on cove beaches. See “Channel Islands National Park” in chapter 13.

• **Joshua Tree National Park:**

You'll find awesome rock formations; groves of flowering cacti and gnarly, eerily beautiful Joshua trees; ancient Native American petroglyphs; and shifting sand dunes in this desert wonderland. If you choose to camp here, you'll sleep under a brilliant night sky. See “Joshua Tree National Park” in chapter 16.

- **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 16.

- **Torrey Pines State Reserve:** On a cliff above the Pacific Ocean, this state park is set aside for the most rare pine trees in North America. The reserve has short trails that immerse hikers into a delicate and beautiful coastal environment. See chapter 17.

2 The Best Beaches

- **Sonoma Coast State Beaches:** Stretching 10 miles from Bodega Bay to Jenner, these beaches draw more than 300 bird species. Look for osprey from December to September, seal pups from March to June, and gray whales from December to April. See “Along the Sonoma Coast” in chapter 8.
- **Santa Cruz’s Beaches:** Santa Cruz has 29 miles of beaches, varied enough to please 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 12.
- **Pismo Beach:** Pismo’s 23-mile stretch of prime beachfront has been an annual destination for generations of California families. Fishing, shopping, surfing, and renting dune buggies are just a few of the many outdoor activities here. Even dogs are welcome to play on the beach. See “Pismo Beach” in chapter 13.
- **Santa Barbara’s East Beach:** This wide swath of white sand hosts beach umbrellas, sandcastle builders, and

volleyball games. On Sundays, local artists display their wares beneath the palm trees. See “Santa Barbara” in chapter 13.

- **Malibu’s Legendary Beaches:** Zuma and Surfrider beaches inspired the 1960s surf music that embodies the Southern California coast 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. The beach hosts some of the state’s best sunbathing and allows you to stroll in front of the Malibu Colony, a star-studded enclave of multimillion-dollar homes. See “L.A.’s Beaches & Coastal Attractions” in chapter 14.
- **La Jolla’s Beaches:** “La Jolla” may be misspelled Spanish for “the jewel,” but *this* is no mistake: The bluff-lined beaches here are among the state’s most beautiful. 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, sunbathing, and kayaking; while the Cove is a top snorkeling spot—and the best place to spot the electric-orange California state fish, the garibaldi. See “Beaches” in chapter 17.

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 *almost* justify the astronomical greens fees. See “Pebble Beach & the 17-Mile Drive” in chapter 12.

- **Poppy Hills** (Pebble Beach): *Golf Digest* has called this Robert Trent Jones, Jr.–designed course one of the world’s top-20 greens. Cutting through the pines of Del Monte Forest, it’s maintained in state-of-the-art condition. Unlike some of its competitors, it’s rarely crowded. See “Pebble Beach & the 17-Mile Drive” in chapter 12.
- **PGA West TPC Stadium Course** (La Quinta): The par-3 17th hole has a tiny island 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 16.

- **Torrey Pines Golf Course** (La Jolla): Two 18-hole championship courses overlook the ocean and provide players with plenty of challenges. In February, the Buick Invitational Tournament takes place here. The rest of the year, these popular municipal courses are open to everybody. See “Outdoor Pursuits” in chapter 17.

4 The Best Californian Travel Experiences

- **Hot-Air Ballooning over Napa Valley:** Sure, you have to rise at dawn to do it, but drifting over the Napa Valley’s vineyards in a balloon is the best way to view the verdant, undulating hills, meticulously striped with vines and bordered by mountains. Flights run 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 7.
- **Wine Tasting in Napa or Sonoma:** You don’t have to be a connoisseur to appreciate a day or two on the wine trail. All you need is a decadent streak and a designated driver. Sniff and sip at a few wineries, take in the bucolic views, and see why this region is not only one of the country’s hottest destinations, but also a place to sample some of the world’s best wines right at the source. See chapter 7.
- **Rafting Scenic Northern California Rivers:** You can white-water raft through thrilling cascades of raging Class IV waters or float tranquilly

under blue skies, through deep forests, past all sorts of wildlife. Depending on the river and the time of year, some trips are okay for children over age 6. See chapters 9, 10, and 11.

- **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 have the chance to sluice for some real gold. See p. 345.
- **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 spot emerging from his or her star wagon. See “Exploring the City” in chapter 14.
- **Visiting Venice Beach’s Ocean Front Walk:** You haven’t visited L.A. properly until you’ve rented some skates in Venice and taken in the human carnival around you. Nosh on a Jody Maroni’s haute dog; buy some cheap sunglasses, silver jewelry, or ethnic garb, and relish the wide

beach, blue sea, and performers along the boardwalk. See “L.A.’s Top Attractions” in chapter 14.

- **Flying a World War II Fighter Aircraft:** Don your parachute, strap yourself into the 600-horsepower fighter aircraft, and prepare to blow your mind as you (yes, *you*) perform aerobatic maneuvers—loops, rolls, and lazy-8s—high above the Carlsbad coastline, accompanied (but not driven) by a pilot from Biplane, Air

Combat & Warbird Adventures (☎ 800/SKY-LOOP). It’s an experience you’ll never forget. See p. 622.

- **Explore Wreck Alley** (San Diego): Five drowned vessels sit on the sea floor, 2 miles off Mission Beach, providing certified divers the chance to investigate an exciting nautical graveyard, which includes a 366-foot Canadian destroyer, the *Yukon* (intentionally sunk in 2000). See “Outdoor Pursuits” in chapter 17.

5 The Best of Small-Town California

- **St. Helena:** In the heart of the Napa Valley, St. Helena is known for its Main Street. In a horse and buggy, Robert Louis Stevenson and his bride once made their way down this thoroughfare lined with Victorian homes. The Painted Ladies remain, but now they’re stores for designer clothing, hardware, bath products, you name it. Come for the old-time, tranquil mood and the food. See “Napa Valley” in chapter 7.
- **Mendocino:** An artists’ colony with a New England flavor, Mendocino served as the backdrop for *Murder, She Wrote*. On the cliffs above the Pacific Ocean, it’s filled with small art galleries, general stores, weathered wooden houses, and organically inclined restaurants. See “Mendocino” in chapter 8.
- **Arcata:** If you’re losing faith in America, restore it by spending a few days in this Northern California coastal town. Arcata has it all: its own redwood forest and bird marsh, a charming town square, great family-owned restaurants, even its own minor-league baseball team, which draws the whole town together on many an afternoon. See “Eureka & Environs” in chapter 8.
- **Nevada City:** The entire 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 the multigabled Victorian frame houses of the Old West. Relics of the Donner Party are on display at the 1861 Firehouse No. 1. See “The Gold Country” in chapter 11.

- **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 12.
- **Ojai:** When filmmakers needed a Shangri-La for the movie *Lost Horizon*, they drove to Ojai Valley, with its unspoiled eucalyptus groves and small ranches nestled in soft, green hills. Ojai is the amiable 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 13.
- **Santa Catalina Island:** A day trip to the small town of Catalina makes for a most indulgent day: Take a scenic boat ride, shop, snorkel and dive, golf, hike, lick ice cream, get a sunburn, and barhop sans fear of a DUI.

Tip: The helicopter taxi is cheaper than you'd expect. See "Santa Catalina Island" in chapter 15.

- **Julian:** This old mining town in the Cuyamaca Mountains near San Diego has long been known for its apple harvest, its apple pies, and its charming bed-and-breakfasts. Forest fires in October 2003 shook Julian

and the surrounding communities, but from a touring standpoint, most of the area is back to normal. There's plenty of pioneer legacy 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 17.

6 The Best Family Vacation Experiences

- **San Francisco:** The City by the Bay will please every member of the family. If you're traveling with kids, 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 more. See chapter 5.
- **Lake Tahoe:** Lake Tahoe has fun activities galore for families: skiing, snowboarding, hiking, tobogganing, swimming, fishing, boating, water-skiing, mountain biking, etc. The possibilities seem endless. See "Lake Tahoe" in chapter 9.
- **Yosemite National Park:** Camping or sleeping in a cabin in Yosemite is one of California's premier attractions for families. Sites lie scattered over 17 campgrounds, surrounded by the rugged Sierra Nevadas. During the day, families can pack their schedule with hiking, bicycling, white-water rafting, scaling snowy peaks, and more. See "Yosemite National Park" in chapter 10.
- **Santa Cruz:** This funky bayside town has everything you need for an ideal family vacation: surfing, sea kayaking, hiking, fishing, and shopping. And those fantastic beaches and the legendary amusement park on the

boardwalk will please travelers of all ages. See "Santa Cruz" in chapter 12.

- **Disneyland Resort:** The "Happiest Place on Earth" is enhanced by its sister theme park, **Disney's 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 juggernaut, you won't walk away disappointed. Get a FASTPASS to skip those long lines! See "The Disneyland Resort" in chapter 15.
- **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 Monkey Trails and Forest Tails (the most elaborate enclosure it has ever created), and it's one of only four zoos in the U.S. with 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 penchant for drenching visitors. See "The Three Major Animal Parks" in chapter 17.

7 The Best Architectural Landmarks

- **The Golden Gate Bridge** (San Francisco): More tomato red than golden,

the famous bridge remains the cheery hallmark of the San Francisco skyline.

It's also an excellent expanse to walk. See "The Top Attractions" in chapter 5.

- **California State Capitol** (Sacramento): The Golden State's dazzling white capitol was built in 1869 and renovated in 1976. Its dome, which looks like a Faberge egg from inside, and original statuary along its eaves remain, and antiques from the original offices furnish its historic rooms. The collection of California governors' portraits is strangely compelling. See "Sacramento" in chapter 11.
- **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 12.
- **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 unbridled wealth and power. See "San Simeon: Hearst Castle" in chapter 13.
- **Walt Disney Concert Hall:** You would have to fly to Spain to see

Frank Gehry's other architectural masterpiece, and this one is sufficiently awe-inspiring. And the dramatically curvaceous stainless-steel exterior houses one of the most acoustically perfect concert halls in the world. See p. 527.

- **The Gamble House** (Pasadena): The Smithsonian Institution calls this Pasadena landmark, built in 1908, "one of the most important houses in the United States." Architects Charles and Henry Greene created a masterpiece of the Japanese-influenced Arts and Crafts movement. Visitors can tour the spectacular interior—designed by the Greenses down to the last piece of teak furniture and coordinating Tiffany lamps, and executed with impeccable craftsmanship. See p. 540.
- **Balboa Park** (San Diego): The Spanish Revival-style buildings along El Prado were built as temporary structures for the Panama-California Exposition (1915–16). The ornately decorated and imposing facades create a sort of romantic fantasia amid the beautifully landscaped mesas and canyons that constitute one of the country's finest city parks, home to many of the city's top museums. See "Exploring the Area" in chapter 17.

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 nearly two dozen locomotives and railroad cars, among other attractions. See p. 330.
- **J. Paul Getty Museum at the Getty Center** (Los Angeles): Designed by Richard Meier and completed in

1997 to the tune of \$1 billion, the Getty Center is a striking, starkly futuristic architectural landmark, with panoramic views of the city and ocean. The building itself is enough reason to visit, but so is the permanent collection, the crown jewel of which is Van Gogh's "Irises," which the museum paid \$53.9 million to acquire. See p. 519.

- **Petersen Automotive Museum** (Los Angeles): This museum is a natural

for Los Angeles, a city whose personality and history is so entwined with the popularity of the automobile. 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. 530.

- **The Museums of Balboa Park** (San Diego): Balboa's museums afford a

variety of cultural experiences in a relaxed, verdant setting. 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 p. 713.

9 The Best Luxury Hotels & Resorts

- **The Ritz-Carlton** (☎ 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 amid blooming rose bushes. See p. 94.
- **Calistoga Ranch** (☎ 707/254-2800): Napa Valley's latest upscale hotel blows away the competition, with individual luxury cabins stocked with every imaginable luxury. In a secluded canyon, it's where nature meets nurture with a fabulous pool, spa, gym, and guest-only restaurant overlooking a lake. See p. 178.
- **Château du Sureau** (Oakhurst; ☎ 559/683-6860): Close to Yosemite, the Château du Sureau and Erna's Elderberry House restaurant stand out for their subtle European attention to quality and detail. Furnishings are exquisite in the individually decorated rooms, and the cuisine is worthy of the stars. See p. 289.
- **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, the splendors of Pebble Beach will amuse you. See p. 384.

- **Post Ranch Inn** (Big Sur; ☎ 800/527-2200): Twelve-hundred feet above the sea, 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. 398.
- **Four Seasons Resort Santa Barbara Biltmore** (Santa Barbara; ☎ 800/819-5053): Open since 1927, this Four Seasons operation (often known as "the Biltmore," on the grounds of the historic Biltmore Hotel), has palm-studded formal gardens and a prime beachfront location along "America's Riviera." Meander through the elegant Spanish-Moorish arcades and walkways, accented by exquisite Mexican tile, and then play croquet on manicured lawns, or relax at the Coral Casino Beach and Cabana Club. The rooms are the epitome of refined luxury. See p. 441.
- **Shutters on the Beach** (Santa Monica; ☎ 800/334-9000) and **Casa del Mar** (Santa Monica; ☎ 800/898-6999): If an oceanfront room at either of these hotels doesn't put a

spring in your love life, 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. 479 and 478.

- **Beverly Hills Hotel and Bungalows** (Beverly Hills; ☎ 800/283-8885): A deep dent in your credit card is a small price to pay for the chance to take afternoon tea next to Ozzy Osbourne in the Polo Lounge, swim laps in the same pool Katharine Hepburn once dove into fully clothed, and eat pancakes in the fabled Fountain Coffee Shop. See p. 483.
- **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 set amid gardens and 24 "private" swimming pools. The lounge and library in the original hacienda remain unaltered, hearkening back to the days when Clark Gable, Greta Garbo, and other celebrities escaped to the seclusion of La Quinta. See p. 647.

- **The Lodge at Torrey Pines** (La Jolla; ☎ 800/656-0087): 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. Valentien restaurant. See p. 690.

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. 211.
- **Albion River Inn** (Albion; ☎ 800/479-7944): One of the best rooms-with-a-view on the coast, the Albion River Inn is on a cliff overlooking a rugged stretch of 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. 219.
- **River Ranch Lodge** (Lake Tahoe; ☎ 800/535-9900): Alongside the Truckee River, the River Ranch has long been one of our favorite

affordable inns around 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. 260.

- **Evergreen Lodge** (Yosemite; ☎ 800/935-6343): Scattered through a grove of towering pines near the entrance to Yosemite, Evergreen's rustic cabins, with a beautiful old bar and restaurant, afford 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. 285.
- **The Mosaic** (Beverly Hills; ☎ 800/463-4466): This Beverly Hills boutique is an ideal blend of art, luxury, service, location, and value. Huge

rainforest showerheads, Frette linens, Bulgari bath products, Wolfgang Puck refreshments, and piles of pillows will leave you wondering if you checked in at the pearly gates. See p. 486.

- **Casa Malibu** (Malibu; ☎ 800/831-0858): This beachfront motel will fool you from the front; its humble entrance on the Pacific Coast Highway belies the quiet, restful haven within. Bougainvillea vines festoon the rooftops and balconies of the motel's 21 rooms around a courtyard garden. Many rooms have private decks above the sand, and one suite was reportedly Lana Turner's favorite. See p. 482.
- **Olallieberry Inn** (Cambria; ☎ 888/927-3222): This 1873 Greek Revival house, furnished in a floral-and-lace Victorian style, is an ideal 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. 412.

- **Casa Cody** (Palm Springs; ☎ 800/231-2639): You'll feel more like a houseguest than a client at this 1920s Spanish-style *casa* 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. 645.
- **La Pensione Hotel** (San Diego; ☎ 800/232-4683): In Little Italy, on the fringe of downtown San Diego, this find feels like a small, modern European hotel, with tidy lodgings at bargain prices. Great dining options abound in the surrounding blocks, and you'll be perfectly situated to explore the rest of the city and region by car. The immediate neighborhood is filled with art galleries and some of the city's most dashing new architecture. See p. 682.

11 The Best Places to Stay with the Kids

- **KOA Camping Kabins** (Point Arena; ☎ 800/562-4188): Once you see the adorable log cabins at this KOA campground, you'll have to admit that this is one cool way to spend the weekend on the coast. Primitive 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. 213.
- **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. Visitors can ride a 100-year-old stagecoach, visit a blacksmith shop, and view lots of

mining artifacts. And these reasonably priced Victorian hotels dish up a great buffet breakfast. Cars are barred from the dusty main street. See p. 352.

- **Camping at Yosemite's Tuolumne Meadows** (☎ 800/436-7275): At an elevation of 8,600 feet, this is the largest alpine meadow in the High Sierra and a gateway to the "high country;" it's especially memorable in late spring, when it's carpeted with wildflowers. Park authorities run the large campground and a full-scale naturalist program, but hardcore adventurers can backpack into the wilderness. See p. 301.
- **Disneyland Resort Hotels** (Anaheim; ☎ 714/956-MICKEY): The Holy Grail of Disney lovers has

always been the “Official Hotel of the Magic Kingdom,” the original **Disneyland Hotel** (p. 605). The newer **Paradise Pier Hotel** (p. 605) and **Grand Californian** (p. 604) are also an easy monorail or tram ride to Disneyland’s gates (the Grand Californian opens directly into California Adventure). See p. 604.

- **Marriott’s Desert Springs Spa & Resort** (Palm Desert; ☎ 800/331-3112): In the spirit of Disney-esque resorts, this oasis welcomes guests with a “rainforest” lobby featuring tropical birds and gondolas that ferry guests to their rooms. Once settled,

kids will revel in the lagoonlike pools and play areas (with supervised children’s programs). And grown-ups can luxuriate on the golf course, tennis court, or in the 30,000-square-foot day spa. See p. 647.

- **Crystal Pier Hotel** (San Diego; ☎ 800/748-5894): On 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. 686.

12 The Best Restaurants

- **San Francisco’s Finest:** In this town, it’s sacrilege to *attempt* naming the “top” restaurant. For a perfect combo of food and atmosphere, though, we count on **Campton Place** (☎ 415/955-5555; p. 99), **Restaurant Gary Danko** (☎ 415/749-2060; p. 110), and **Zuni Café** (☎ 415/552-2522; p. 114).
- **Chez Panisse** (Berkeley; ☎ 510/548-5525): This is the domain of Alice Waters, “the queen of California cuisine.” Originally inspired by the Mediterranean, her kitchen has found its own style, and her food captivates the senses as well as the imagination. Chez Panisse’s delicacies include dishes such as grilled fish wrapped in fig leaves with red-wine sauce, and Seckel pears poached in red wine with burnt caramel. See p. 146.
- **Bistro Don Giovanni** (Napa; ☎ 707/224-3300): In this large, cheery Napa Valley dining room you can get an incredible Italian meal without a reservation. Just drop in and wait at the bar for a seat. See p. 183.
- **Terra** (Napa; ☎ 707/963-8931): One of the best choices in the state,

this small restaurant affords its patrons intimacy, outstanding food by Hiro Sone (one of California’s best chefs), great wine, heavenly desserts, and complete freedom from pretense. See p. 183.

- **Restaurant 301** (Eureka; ☎ 800/404-1390): A recipient of *Wine Spectator’s* Grand Award, Mark Carter is passionate about food and wine, and it shows: His 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 the five-course fixed-price dinner menu; Carter pairs each course with an excellent wine, available by the glass, or as part of a wine flight. See p. 230.
- **Erna’s Elderberry House** (Oakhurst; ☎ 559/683-6800): Erna’s shines like a beacon across the culinary wasteland around Yosemite. The six-course menu, which changes nightly, is an ideal blend of Continental and Californian cuisine. Portions are bountiful, and the European ambience is elegant. See p. 289.

- **bouchon** (Santa Barbara; ☎ 805/730-1160): With an intriguing seasonal menu derived from Santa Barbara County's wine country, this intimate restaurant (whose name means "wine cork") is 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. 443.
- **The Hump** (Santa Monica; ☎ 310/313-0977): The chefs here are deadly serious about their sushi. Flown in daily from Tokyo's Tsukiji and Fukuoka fish markets in oxygen-filled containers, it's so fresh a sign at the entrance warns the faint-of-heart that the meat's still moving. See p. 498.
- **Koi** (West Hollywood; ☎ 310/659-9449): One of L.A.'s hottest restaurants has A-list celebrities arriving nightly for addictive dishes such as baked crab rolls with edible rice paper. Koi is a killer combo of good feng shui and superb Asian fusion cuisine. See p. 507.
- **Bertrand at Mister A's** (San Diego; ☎ 619/239-1377): With the city's most delectable views, this longtime San Diego institution was reborn in 2000 after a reported \$1-million makeover. The owners molded a very old-school, vaguely campy space into an elegant, bright, sophisticated dining destination with excellent American-Mediterranean fare. See p. 697.

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 storefronts. Stop by anytime to peruse the exceptional, abundant selection of gourmet shops and restaurants, or join the locals during open-air market days—Tuesday and Thursday—to feast on the freshest vegetables, fruits, and prepared foods from beloved restaurants. See "The Top Attractions" in chapter 5.
- **A Decadent Meal in the Wine Country:** As a setting, the Wine Country is a better backdrop for indulgent dining than any other place 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. Diners with deep pockets must reserve an evening meal at **The French Laundry** in St. Helena (☎ 707/944-2380); see p. 182. More moderately priced memories can be made at aforementioned **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. See "Point Reyes National Seashore" in chapter 8.
- **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 16.

14 The Best of the Performing Arts & Special Events

- **The San Francisco Opera** (☎ 415/864-3330): 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. 135.
- **The San Francisco Symphony** (☎ 415/864-6000): The symphony is such a hot ticket, it's hard to get a seat in advance. If your concierge doesn't have any tricks up his or her sleeve, you can always try to buy tickets at the door, and someone is usually attempting to sell theirs at the last second. See p. 136.
- **The American Conservatory Theater** (San Francisco; ☎ 415/749-2ACT): The A.C.T. is one of the nation's leading regional theaters. It has been called the American equivalent of the British National Theatre, the Berliner Ensemble, and the Comédie Française in Paris. See p. 135.
- **The Monterey Jazz Festival** (☎ 831/373-3366): When the third weekend of September rolls around, the Monterey Fairgrounds draws jazz fans from around the world. The 3-day festival (which usually sells out a month in advance) is known for the sweetest jazz west of the Mississippi. See "Calendar of Events" in chapter 2.
- **The Hollywood Bowl** (Los Angeles; ☎ 323/850-2000): 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. 569.
- **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 15.
- **The Old Globe** (San Diego; ☎ 619/239-2255): This Tony Award-winning, three-theater complex, fashioned after Shakespeare's original stage, celebrated its 70th anniversary in 2005. It has launched Broadway hits such as *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, *The Full Monty*, and *Into the Woods*, and has billed such notable performers as John Goodman, Hal Holbrook, and Ellen Burstyn. In 2004, the theater revived its outdoor summer Shakespeare Festival, featuring three of the Bard's plays in nightly rotation. See p. 726.