



The 10 Most Beautiful Towns in California

When thinking of [California](#), many visitors are familiar with cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego. The Golden State is also home to many picturesque small towns and villages that will inspire every visitor. We've put together a list of some of the loveliest places to be found in California, from coastal charmers to mountain beauties.



Avalon | Courtesy of Catalina Island Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Bureau

Avalon

Located on Catalina Island, which has a rich history that dates back thousands of years, [Avalon](#) will remind people of the Mediterranean with its lush vegetation, hillside homes, and beautiful, clear waters. The only incorporated city on the island, [George Shatto](#) was the first person who began



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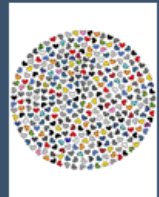


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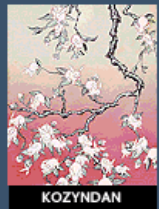
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developing this lovely community into a resort town. More than a million people visit Avalon each year for its outdoor activities, small shops and art galleries on palm-lined streets, delectable eateries with incredible views of the water, and much more. Featuring a temperate climate year round, it is a great place to explore any time of the year.

[Avalon, CA, USA](#)



Beautiful architecture in Carmel-by-the-Sea | © Brandon/Flickr

Carmel-by-the-Sea

[Carmel-by-the-Sea](#), also known simply as Carmel, is a European-style village on the Monterey Peninsula popular with tourists. Because of its size, it is a great area to explore by foot whether to hike down to the white, soft sandy beach or stroll along the streets to marvel at the charming architecture, boutiques, or delicious eateries. A must-visit for any Carmel guest is the [San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo Mission](#) — founded in 1771 by Father Junipero Serra — a compound comprised of a basilica church, several small museums, and beautiful grounds. Home to many creative types over the years, the village also hosts many festivals throughout the year, including



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the [Carmel Bach Festival](#).

Carmel-by-the-Sea, CA, USA



California Theatre in Dunsmuir | © mbtrama/Flickr

Dunsmuir

A historic railroad town in Northern California, [Dunsmuir](#) — named after Alexander Dunsmuir, a coal baron from British Columbia — is a serene mountain retreat known for its peaceful ambiance. Its location makes it a prime destination for outdoor lovers as there are so many adventures waiting to be explored from fishing to hiking to mountain climbing. For visitors who would rather take in the scenic beauty from a distance, the Downtown Historic District, with buildings dating back to the early 20th century, is a lovely place to wander and discover boutiques and tasty treats. If visiting during the summer, be sure to visit the city's [Botanical Gardens](#) for a colorful display of flora.

[Dunsmuir, CA, USA](#)



1898 building by architect T.J. Frost on Main Street in Ferndale | © Ellin Beltz/WikiCommons

Ferndale

A charming Victorian village nestled in between two redwood forests, visiting [Ferndale](#) is like taking a step back in time. A dairy and agriculture community, the town blossomed in the late 19th century and is as charming today as it was back then. Take a leisurely walk along Main Street, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, to absorb the beauty of the colorful Victorian buildings that now house a variety of art galleries, specialty shops, and mouthwatering eateries. For those wanting

to explore nature, visit the nearby — a five-mile drive — [Lost Coast](#), a stunning section of coastline that has been left the way nature intended, or [Russ Park](#), a closed canopy Sitka Spruce forest that acts as a bird sanctuary.

[Ferndale, CA, USA](#)



Julian | © Adbar/WikiCommons

Julian

Founded after the Civil War by those seeking fortunes, [Julian](#) is a historic mining-town nestled in the Cuyamaca Mountains among oak and pine forests in Southern California. Today, the town is known for its historic sites and apple orchards, which produce sweet varieties that are in turn created into mouthwatering pies, ciders, and other sweet delights. From specialty stores to art galleries to historical museums to outdoor adventures, it is a town with something for everyone. To learn more about the history of Julian, stop by the Julian Chamber of Commerce to pick up a History Hunt card, which will guide you to various places, including the [Pioneer Cemetery](#) and Julian Jail, where you can search for answers to questions all the while learning more about this charming town.

[Julian, CA, USA](#)



Top of Broad Street in Nevada City | Courtesy of Nevada City Chamber of Commerce

Nevada City

A California gold rush town located in the Sierra Nevada Mountains' western foothills, [Nevada City](#), a historical landmark, is an idyllic town brimming with charm. Proud of their history, locals have been very careful to preserve the century-old, Victorian buildings for visitors and future generations. Park the car, walk around the narrow streets to see the beautiful buildings up close and discover art, handmade jewelry, clothes, books and tantalizing cuisine. Many events take place throughout the year as well, including the [Nevada City Bicycle Classic](#), [First Friday Art Walks](#), and Victorian Christmas. Nevada City is also a popular destination for those seeking a base from which to explore the great outdoors.

[Nevada City, CA, USA](#)



Ojai Visitor Center | © David McSpadden/Flickr

Ojai

Located 90 miles north of Los Angeles, [Ojai](#) is the perfect spot to escape the hectic city life and enjoy a relaxing retreat. Settled in the 1800s, the town features wonderful Spanish Mission Revival architecture — as seen in the Arcade Plaza, which is filled with shops, restaurants, and art — with scenic backgrounds provided by the Los Padres National Forest and Topa Topa Mountains. An artsy town, the area is brimming with galleries and other arts and culture venues, including the Ojai Valley Museum and [Ojai Art Center](#), along with other must-visit destinations, such as Libbey Park, which hosts the famous [Ojai Music Festival](#) each year, and the area's stunning vineyards.

[Ojai, CA, USA](#)



St. Helena's Main Street Shopping District | © Bob McClenahan/Courtesy of St. Helena Chamber of Commerce

St. Helena

Known as Napa Valley's Main Street, [St. Helena](#) is a charming town surrounded by beautiful, hilly vineyards. Known as a wine lover's paradise since the area produces numerous wines, it is also a culinary mecca, home of the [Culinary Institute of America](#). The town features a historic, picturesque downtown with lovely architectural gems housing a variety of boutiques, galleries, and dining establishments sure to impress anyone. The terrain around St. Helena also offers a plethora of activities from hiking to biking making it an ideal destination for outdoor enthusiasts as well.

[St. Helena, CA, USA](#)



One of four windmills in Solvang | Courtesy of SolvangUSA.com

Solvang

[Solvang](#) is a scenic Danish community found in the heart of Santa Barbara's wine country. Located in the Santa Ynez Valley, this cultural gem, which means 'sunny field' in Danish, was settled in 1911 and boasts delightful architecture, including the [Bethania Lutheran Church](#), which resembles churches found in rural Denmark, flower-lined streets, plus four windmills. Visit the [Elverhøj Museum of History and Art](#) and Hans Christian Andersen Museum for more insight on the history of this quaint village or search through the more than 150 shops for unique gifts and tasty authentic treats. Solvang is also home to several restaurants, wine tasting rooms, plus the historic [Old Mission San Inés](#).

[Solvang, CA, USA](#)



Sonoma | Courtesy of Sonoma County Tourism

Sonoma

Another wine country gem, [Sonoma](#) is a pretty town planned around a central plaza and surrounded by rolling hills lined with [vineyards](#) — it is known as the birthplace of California's wine industry. Home to the last Spanish mission in California, Mission San Francisco Solano, built in 1824, which is now part of the [Sonoma State Historic Park](#), the town is another great place to discover California's past. Other areas of interest include the aforementioned plaza, which is home to many unique shops, fine-dining establishments, casual eateries, and incredible art, and the area's famed wineries. Either way, there is something of interest for everyone from history buffs to wine lovers.

[Sonoma, CA, USA](#)

Marcelina Morfin

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