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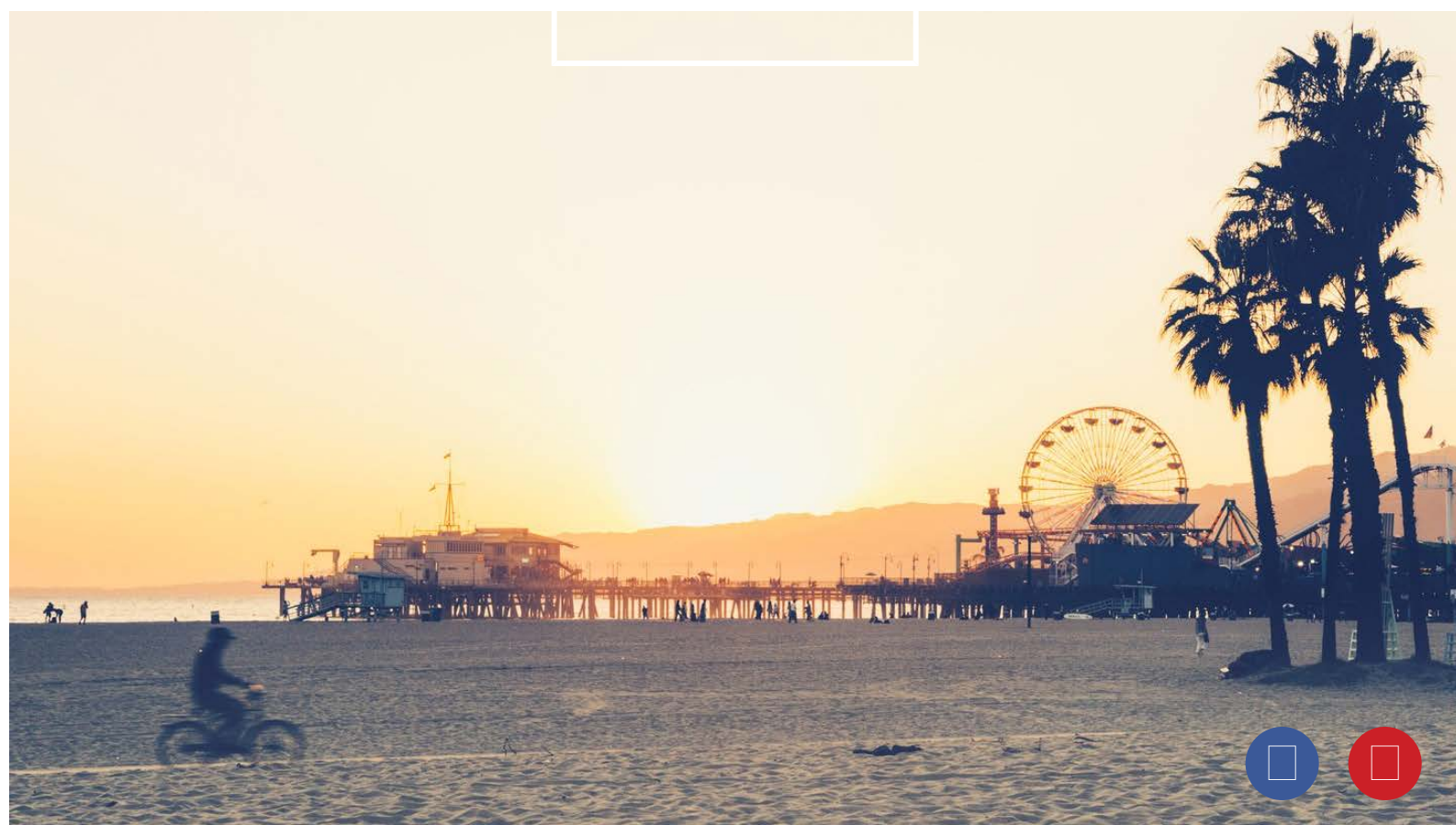
8 Epic California Road Trip Stops



by Paul Rubio
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Unless time is no object, don't expect to cover the entirety of [Cali](#) in a single [road trip](#) (the state spans 163,696 square miles, after all). A better bet is to map out key routes with stops along the Golden State's 900-mile coastline, and head inland for the best [national parks](#) and the wonders of wine country. Here, eight places to consider hitting up on your West Coast road trip, from gallery going in swanky Monterey to vineyard hopping in Sonoma.





1/8 Santa Monica

Kick off your road trip by mixing California seaside charm with the buzz of neighboring [Los Angeles](#) in this palm tree-speckled city. Santa Monica promises endless sunshine (averaging 340 sunny days per year), direct access to 3.5 miles of beach, brilliant surf, and one of the most rewarding sections of the 500+ mile Pacific Coast Highway (the drive to Malibu will never get old). After a stay at the chic resort [Shutters on the Beach](#)—make sure to hit up the [best of LA's restaurant scene](#) while you're there—hit the road. Your first pit stop? An oceanside table at [Nobu Malibu](#).

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2/8 Palm Springs

After its beaches, Southern California is perhaps best known for its diverse desert landscapes (not to mention some of America’s best stargazing). To see it from above, climb aboard Palm Springs Aerial Tramway, the world's largest rotating tramcar, and climb 8,516 feet up the vertical cliffs of Chino Canyon (at the top lies the snow-

covered Mt. San Jacinto Wilderness State Park). Later, drive an hour east to Joshua Tree National Park and you'll feel like you've arrived in The Land Before Time: each hairpin turn reveals clusters of spiky, Joshua trees and 100-million-year-old boulders. Pro-tip: bring a picnic lunch to graze on at one of the many stopping points. Stay at the [Avalon Hotel and Bungalows](#) (formerly the Viceroy Palm Springs), which is a time capsule of Hollywood Regency design and features lovely courtyards, sculpted gardens, and swimming pools.

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3/8 **Santa Barbara**

Stroll Summerland beach (some 100 miles north of Santa Monica) where you'll watch prized polo horses getting their daily exercise, or lounge among the palm trees on the popular, family-friendly East Beach, one of the several un-tamed beaches defining this city-by-the-sea. Tour the c. 1786 Mission Santa Barbara, the city's

principal cultural and historical landmark or simply cruise through patches of Mission-style architecture. Afterwards, park the car and explore the region's burgeoning wine country with [Cloud Climbers Jeep Tours](#) as your designated driver (they'll take you to four local wineries in an open-ai red jeep). Later kick back at the oceanfront [Belmond El Encanto](#), where guest rooms are outfitted with Earth-toned furnishings, private fireplaces, and heated stone floors.

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4/8 **Big Sur**

Sadly, the collapse of Pfeiffer Canyon Bridge on Highway 1 earlier this year means the most extraordinary stretch of the Pacific Coast Highway is off limits until fall 2017— at the earliest. As a result, road trippers will have to re-route inland to US-101 N to cross from central coastal California into northern coastal California. Those

keen on still including this fabled region of colossal waves, dramatic cliffs, and arboreal giants should expect long detours, delays and limited services (basically, we don't recommend it). Thankfully Big Sur's ultimate hotel for coastal romance—the adults-only [Post Ranch Inn](#)—has reopened, albeit in a reduced capacity, and can be reached via helicopter from Monterey with Del Monte Aviation (and you can park your car for free at the terminal).

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5/8 Carmel-by-the-Sea

This small beachfront city is dotted with European-style cottages, housing art galleries and specialty boutiques, and serves as the perfect starting point to explore greater Monterey County (who hasn't binged on Big Little Lies at this point?). Head south to Point Lobos State Nature Reserve and spot jellyfish, seals and gray whales

skirting past the rocky coastline. If you're traveling with kids, stop at Monterey Bay Aquarium, one of the world's best and a leader in global marine conservation. Or you can sample wines from regional wineries at the many boutique tasting rooms in downtown Carmel-by-the-Sea, or just buy a bottle, grab a blanket, head to the beach (don't worry, it's legal here). Retreat to [L'Auberge Carmel](#), an intimate stucco inn, built in 1929 and now run by Relais & Chateaux, with a beautiful central courtyard that feels straight out of rural [France](#).

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6/8 Yosemite National Park

No West Coast road trip is complete without a look at North America’s highest waterfall, [Yosemite Falls](#). Take the requisite selfie in front of the 3000-foot tall granite monolith, El Capitan and then drive up to Glacier Point for dramatic panoramas of the park’s famous granite crest peak, Half-Dome. (It’s worth noting

that you'll have to drive back down to get food.) Unpack at [The Majestic Yosemite Hotel](#) (formerly Ahwahnee Hotel), the first-ever luxury hotel in America's national parklands (it opened in 1927).

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7/8 Napa County

This region merits its own week-long road trip, but for quick immersion into the best of [Napa](#) wine country, tour the caves and fuel up on sparkling wine at Schramsberg Vineyards (the official bubbles of the White House). Then spend an afternoon indulging in wine, cheese, and homemade chocolate truffles at the c.1903

European-style historic stone winery, [The Hess Collection](#). You can also browse Donald Hess' world class private collection of modern art. If you're feeling panglossian after all that wine and cheese, get reacquainted with nature and feast on three-Michelin starred cuisine at Meadowood in St. Helena. The luxurious cottages dot a private, 250-forested acre estate that also includes numerous walking trails, a golf course, and internationally renowned [The Restaurant at Meadowood](#).

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8/8 Sonoma County

Don't overlook Napa's sister county, a region rich in mom-and-pop establishments, artisanal wineries, towering Redwood trees, and charming small towns. Start in the northwest of the Russian River Valley, near Healdsburg, with a three-mile vineyard hike at [Jordan Winery](#) (it ends with a picnic under the trees). Don't forget to save

room for a 5-course meal on the terrace at [Rodney Strong Vineyards](#). Or drive to Armstrong Redwoods State Reserve for a hike and then spend an afternoon at [The Barlow](#), an adaptive reuse of a large-scale apple cannery plant filled with craft breweries, distilleries, food producers, and art galleries (for dinner, we love [Zazu](#), the beloved restaurant of celebrity chefs Duskie Estes and John Stewart). Stay at the five-room, Japanese-influenced micro-hotel, [Single Thread](#), which sits above Sonoma's much-hyped Single Thread restaurant in Healdsburg.

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