

PROFILE SERIES

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KEYS TO THE COUNTY OF ○ ○ ○

San Luis Obispo

CA

Acclaimed author Dan Buettner traveled the world for five years in search of the happiest places on Earth. Buettner compiled the research in his latest book, *Thrive*, published by National Geographic last fall. Where's the happiest place in North America? San Luis Obispo, California, where people live, work, and play in one of the most pristine environments on the planet.

Buettner wasn't the first to discover "SLO," as the locals call it. The native Chumash lived here for thousands of years. Then, in the late 1700s, the Spaniards arrived and established Mission San Luis Obispo and Mission San Miguel. Later, fishing villages

and ports sprang up along the coast, and farms and ranches blanketed the hills and valleys. Tourists ventured here to soak in the myriad hot springs, and artists arrived to capture the exquisite natural setting. Publishing giant William Randolph Hearst built a sprawling mansion at his coastal ranch in San Simeon. Today, Hearst Castle attracts nearly a million visitors annually (see p. 46).

Still, quiet, unassuming SLO County remained relatively unknown until recent years. But thanks to Buettner's research and other press from *The Oprah Show* to *Yahoo! News*, the secret's out. Here's why.

KEYS TO **SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY, CA**

Morro Rock was formed by a long-extinct volcano.

California's Natural Escape

Get away from it all in San Luis Obispo County.

BY CHERYL CRABTREE

San Luis Obispo County retains an old California character that disappeared from many coastal cities decades ago. The county enjoys a perfect position along the coast, midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. It encompasses many diverse towns and vistas, from sandy beaches to tiny, historic villages in the heart of a world-class wine region, minus the crowds. Much of SLO County's vast open space is protected: It includes 11 state parks, the Morro Bay National Estuary, portions of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, and the Los Padres National Forest.

The City of San Luis Obispo (pop. 44,000), a national leader in green and sustainable practices, anchors the county at its geographic

center. This pedestrian- and bike-friendly community was the first in the nation to prohibit smoking in public buildings (drive-through restaurants are also banned). And miles of hiking and biking trails crisscross the hilly greenbelt that encircles the city.

Beauty, Beaches, Bounty

The SLO life includes all the essential elements for happiness. Mild temperatures, numerous microclimates, and mostly sunny days encourage everything to thrive, from people and businesses to luscious produce. Farmers' markets operate daily, and locavore living and farm-to-table dining doesn't get much easier than here.

Next, beaches. SLO County includes more than 100 miles of prime Pacific coastline. Dig for

clams at Pismo Beach, kayak with sea otters in Morro Bay, and watch elephant seals tend their babies near Piedras Blancas. Stroll along the boardwalk above Cambria's Moonstone Beach, surf at Avila Beach, and fish from the pier in Cayucos. Camp near the ocean and bike along the bluffs at San Simeon. SLO is a vast outdoor playground where nature provides unlimited entertainment 24/7.

Brains, too, play an important role in living the SLO life. Nationally ranked California Polytechnic State University prepares thousands of students for scientific and technical careers. The school also stimulates the local arts and culture scene.

But perhaps SLO's greatest asset is its residents. Nearly a quarter of adults work for themselves, and

NINER WINE ESTATES

from the Heart of Paso Robles Wine Country

9

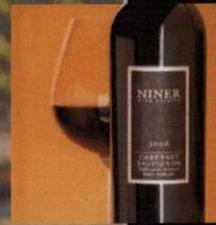
VISION

Founded in 2001 by Richard & Pam Niner, Niner Wine Estates believes that a blend of extraordinary people, vineyards, tools, & ideas is the key to creating world-class wines and providing a one-of-a-kind experience in the heart of Paso Robles wine country.



WINES

2010 Winemaker of the Year Amanda Cramer shepherds estate-grown fruit into wines that express terroir & elegance. Since our founding, the Niner roster of award-winning wines has grown to include Bordeaux, Rhone & Italian varieties, including flagship Bordeaux blend, Fog Catcher.



VISIT

Located along the Paso Robles west side wine corridor, Highway 46 West, our rustically elegant stone barn Hospitality Center is home to a tasting room, generous demonstration kitchen, private CLUB 9 members-only lounge & small demonstration winery.



805.239.2233

Live in a far-off distant land or not planning an excursion to Paso Robles Wine Country any time soon? Visit us online www.ninerwine.com & learn about the Niner family, our wines, estate vineyards, the newly completed modern & environmentally-friendly winery & our ongoing quest to educate fellow enthusiasts about wine & food.

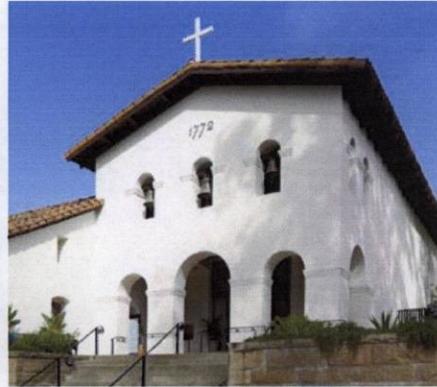
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KEYS TO **SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY, CA**



Sextant Wines tasting room; (right) Mission San Luis Obispo



one-third volunteer in some form. These can-do, get-involved artistic types lure like-minded people such as Lynne Biddinger, founder of 20/20 Creative Group, a brand marketing firm. Biddinger wanted to abandon big-city life, so she conducted a nationwide search of possible places to move. SLO won hands down. "I absolutely loved the sense of community in San Luis Obispo," Biddinger says. "The people here have a certain mind-set — they tend to be open-minded, down-to-earth, welcoming."

All Roads Lead to Happiness

Highway 101 is the county's main artery. It runs from Nipomo in the south along the coast, and then swings inland and over a steep mountain to North County wine country. Here, the acclaimed Paso Robles appellation includes more than 200 wineries — predominantly small, family-owned enterprises where you can often chat with the winemaker.

Allison Dana Addison, a sixth-generation Nipomian, chooses to

stay in her hometown and commute along the 101 to her marketing manager job at Niner Wine Estates in Paso Robles. It's about an hour's drive each way, but she looks forward to it. "It's a beautiful commute — I'm just captivated by the diversity of scenery, from the beaches and over the grade to Santa Margarita and through the back roads of Templeton and Paso Robles wine country," Addison says. "It's fun to come around a bend and see cattle roaming and horses and deer grazing."

Take your pick of many detours just off the 101 to explore SLO's hidden secrets within a 10- or 20-minute drive. In the south, Highway 1 hugs the coast along massive dunes in Nipomo and Oceano before reaching several classic California towns: Grover Beach, Pismo Beach, and Shell Beach. A three-mile stretch to the north winds its way along a creek to picture-perfect Avila Beach and historic Port San Luis. Highway 227 wends its way eastward through the quaint village

of Arroyo Grande and Edna Valley wine country. Los Osos Valley Road cuts through farmland to Montaña de Oro State Park and the Morro Bay National Estuary, plus the laid-back communities of Baywood Park and Los Osos.

Highway 1 merges with the 101 between Shell Beach and the City of San Luis Obispo. From there it returns to the coast, swooping around Cal Poly to Morro Bay (just look for the giant rock in the ocean), then up the coast to San Simeon and Ragged Point. Along the way it passes through the villages of Cayucos, Harmony, and Cambria. Highways 41 and 46 traverse the rolling hills, connecting the coast with Atascadero and Paso Robles.

What does all this spell? Road trip! So bring the family. Bring the pets. Chat with locals and find folks who share your passions. Connect with a SLO'er pace of life that focuses on the basics. Good food, good wine, and good times in the great outdoors — all guaranteed to put a smile on your face.

PHOTOS LEFT: JOHN KENNETH; RIGHT: GREGG ANDERSON

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- May** The Amgen Tour of California, Paso Robles, May 19, amgentourofcalifornia.com
- Paso Robles Wine Festival, May 20-22, pasowine.com
- The Strawberry Festival, May 28-29, arroyograndevillage.org
- Avila Beach Blues Festival, May 29, avilabeachconcerts.com
- June** "The Classic" car show, June 16-19, thepismo-beach-classic.com
- Roll Out the Barrels, Paso Robles, July 23-26, slowine.com
- July** 4th of July, Oceano Dunes SVRA, ohv.parks.ca.gov
- California Mid State Fair, Paso Robles, July 20-31, midstatefair.com
- August** Paso Robles Olive Festival, Aug. 20, pasoroblesolivefestival.com
- Stone Soup Music Faire, Grover Beach, Aug. 27-28, groverbeachchamber.com
- September** San Luis Obispo County Wine Month, sanluisobispo-county.com
- Savor the Central Coast, Santa Margarita, Sept. 20-Oct. 2, savorcentralcoast.com
- Bicycle Rally: Lighthouse Century, Los Osos, Sept. 24, slobc.org
- October** Morro Bay Harbor Festival, Oct. 1-2, mbhf.com
- Colony Days of Atascadero, Oct. 15, colonydays.org
- Pismo Beach Clam Festival, Oct. 15-16, classicalcalifornia.com
- Morro Photo Expo, Oct. 21-23, morrophoto.com
- November** Classic Car Show, Nov. 5, cayucoschamber.com
- Harvest Celebration Weekend, Nov. 4-6, slowine.com
- January** San Luis Obispo County Restaurant Month, sanluisobispo-county.com
- Morro Bay Winter Bird Festival, Jan. 13-16, 2012, morro-bay-bird-festival.org
- San Luis Obispo International Film Festival, March 7-11, 2012, slofilmfest.org

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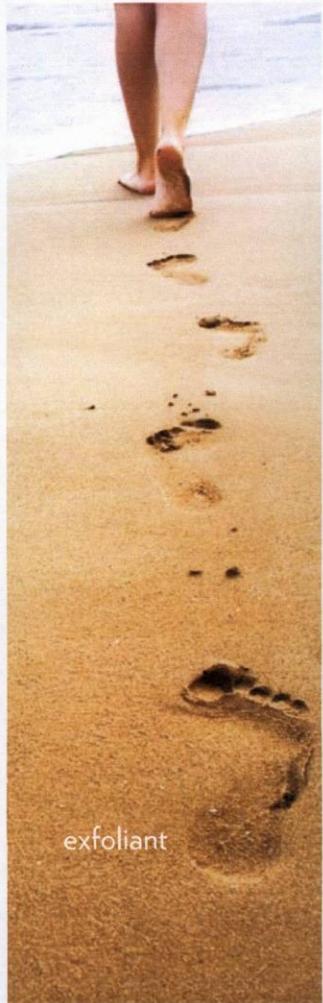
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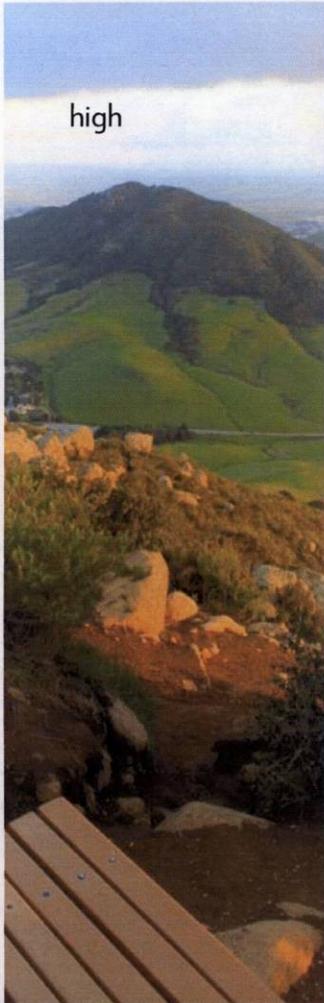
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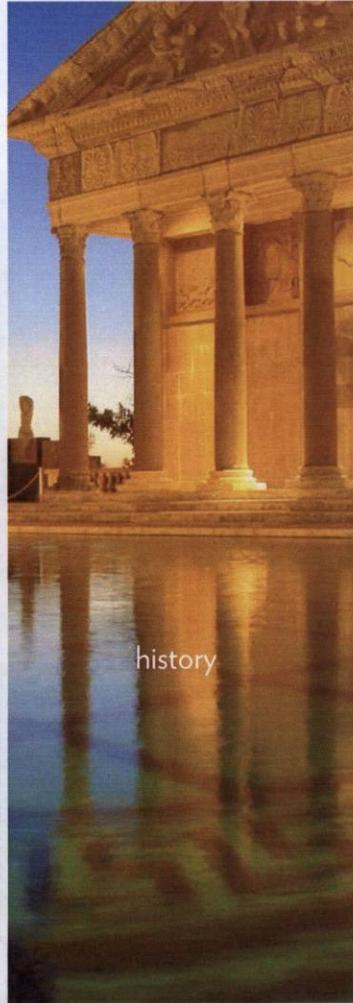
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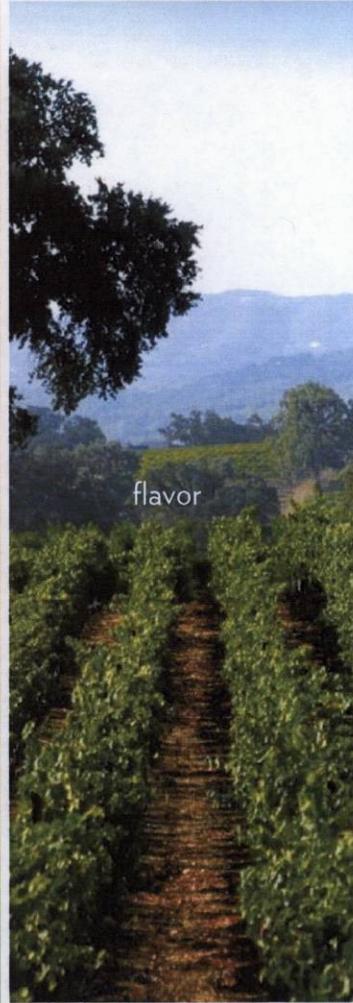
exfoliant



high



history



flavor



discovery

PASO ROBLES

With the historic grassy downtown park, 200-plus wineries, gourmet farm to table cuisine, golf, outdoor family adventures, natural hot springs, and cultural events, Paso Robles is truly Authentic in Every Direction.

PISMO BEACH

Pismo Beach is called classic California for a reason. You can walk the promenade to the pier. Visit a world class wine region just minutes from your hotel room. Eat clam chowder where the locals go. See a real surfer or try to be one yourself. Stay for the sunset. In fact, stay a few days and you'll take home more than great pictures and sand in your shoes.

MORRO BAY

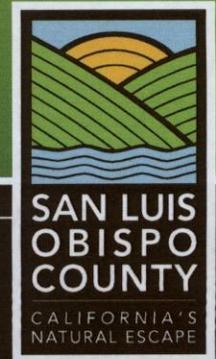
Discover your better nature in this picturesque seaside village along scenic Highway 1. Here you'll discover ocean-side golf, kayaking, sailing, hiking, bird watching, fishing, surfing, biking, horseback riding and miles of unspoiled beaches. Nearby is the world famous Hearst Castle and many outstanding wineries. Mix in our popular shopping districts, enticing restaurants, wonderful accommodations and warm, friendly atmosphere and you have the perfect escape.

SAN LUIS OBISPO

San Luis Obispo has the ability to change those who visit. Explore our vibrant, friendly downtown, where you can shop in the unique boutiques, relax with a creekside meal at one of many eclectic restaurants, enjoy a world-famous Farmer's Market and learn a little something from a visit to San Luis Obispo's historic mission.

WINE COAST COUNTRY

Beach and outdoor activities abound. Quaint towns and historic villages. Dog friendly coves and hidden tide pools. Dozens of shops and hundreds of bistros and waterfront cafes. Daily Farmers' Markets and over 300 wineries. Music Festivals & community events every month. Over 500 choices of hotels, motels, B&B and vacation rentals. Come stay and play, it's only a drive away.



Enjoy the benefits of Mother Nature in California's Natural Escape

San Luis Obispo County is Mother Nature's masterpiece offering a symphony of culinary, viticulture, and agricultural experiences, with a sonata of attractions like Hearst Castle, California Missions, elephant seals, monarch butterflies, artisan shops, strolling downtowns and organic farms, and a concerto of amazing coastal, rural, and mountainous locations boasting beaches, lakes, kayaking, hiking, fishing, cultural events, farm visits and wine tasting that all harmonize beautifully to offer a world-class destination.

Arroyo Grande • Atascadero • Avila Beach • Baywood-Los Osos • California Valley • Cambria • Cayucos • Cholame • Edna Valley • Grover Beach • Halcyon • Harmony • Lake Nacimiento • Morro Bay • Nipomo • Oceano • Paso Robles • Pismo Beach • Pozo • San Luis Obispo • San Miguel • San Simeon • Santa Margarita • Shandon • Templeton



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BEST OF SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

BY TARA TITCOMBE

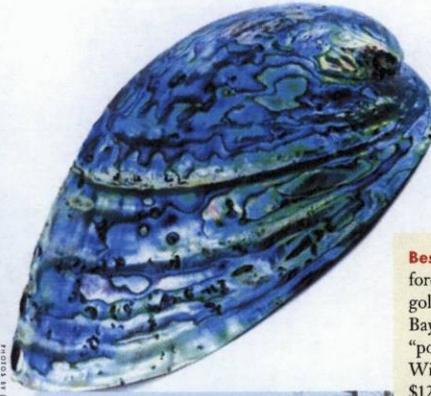


Best Springs There are plenty of reasons Spa magazine named San Luis Obispo's Sycamore Mineral Springs Resort one of the top 10 mineral springs resorts in the world. For starters, the historic spa, established in 1896, sits atop natural mineral springs that fill 20 hot tubs amid more than 100 lush acres — not to mention private balcony hot tubs in the guestrooms. Then there's fresh, wine-country cuisine at The Gardens of Avila Restaurant. And let's not forget complimentary classes in the yoga dome and transformative treatments at the spa, such as the Chardonnay Antioxidant Sugar Scrub. But the main reason is simple — it's as close to paradise as it gets. sycamoremineralsprings.com



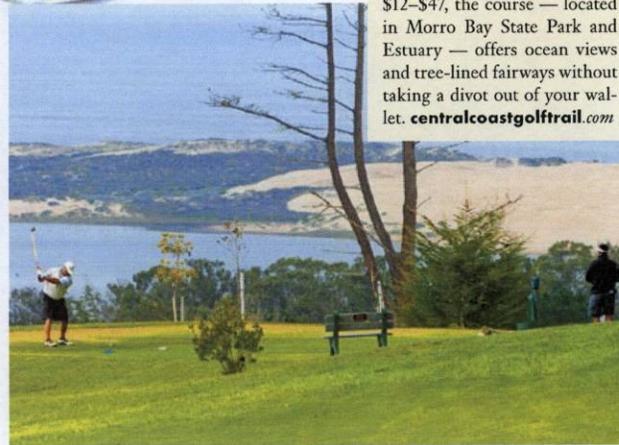
For more of the best in SLO, go to SanLuisObispoCounty.com.

KEYS TO SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY, CA

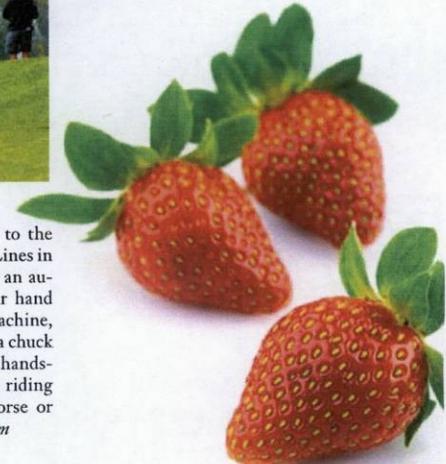


Best Abalone Growing and harvesting one of the rarest types of high-quality abalone, The Abalone Farm in Cayucos is the largest and oldest aquaculture facility of its kind in the country. Every year, the farm harvests 100 tons of Ocean Rose Abalone — large sea snails with a taste similar to lobster. The best part? You can order live abalone or fresh abalone steaks to be shipped directly to you. abalonefarm.com

Best Golf Looking for an affordable 18 holes in legendary golf country? Tee off at Morro Bay Golf Course, known as the "poor man's Pebble Beach." With greens fees ranging \$12-\$47, the course — located in Morro Bay State Park and Estuary — offers ocean views and tree-lined fairways without taking a divot out of your wallet. centralcoastgolftrail.com



Best Produce Home to one of the nation's oldest and largest farmers' markets, San Luis Obispo County wrote the almanac on "fresh and local." You'll find farmers' markets dotting the county every day of the week, so you can score tomatoes on Tuesday and strawberries on Saturday. Several markets feature free entertainment alongside barbecued ribs and just-picked fruits and veggies. sanluisobispo.com



Best Stagecoach Head out to the Wild West at Harris Stage Lines in Paso Robles. Take a ride in an authentic stagecoach, try your hand at the mechanical roping machine, and grab lunch served from a chuck wagon. For an even more hands-on experience, sign up for riding or driving lessons. Your horse or theirs! harrisstage.com



Discover the natural wonders of Morro Bay at morrobay.org.

Lay of the Land



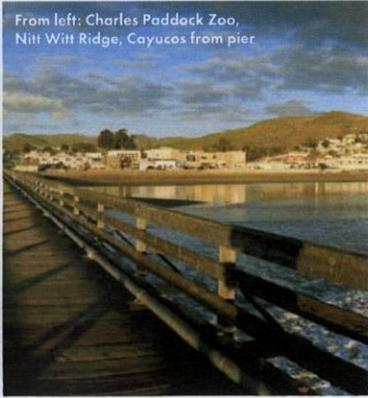
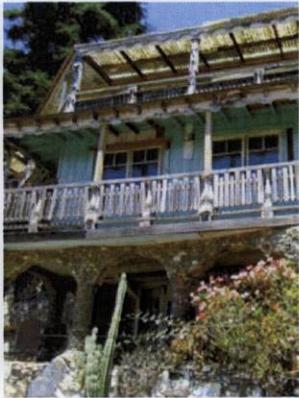
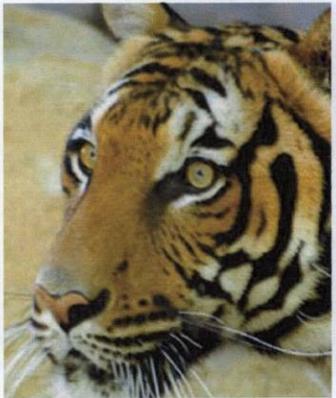
When planning your trip to San Luis Obispo County, be sure to allow time to visit all of its interesting towns, each with its own vibe and personality. Let's hit the road! BY WAYNETTE GOODSON AND TARA TITCOMBE

Arroyo Grande
This fertile valley is a major agricultural hub.
Must-see The Historic Village, chock-full of museums, circa-1800s buildings, restaurants, antiques stores, and specialty shops.
Must-do Walk across the historic Swinging Bridge, the only one of its kind in California. It's 171 feet long and about four stories high.
Best-kept Secret Doc Burnstein's Ice Cream Lab. Fun flavor: the Elvis Special, banana with peanut-butter swirl.

Atascadero
Farther inland, this city is known for its rolling hills, artists' enclaves, and jewel of a lake park.
Must-see Charles Paddock Zoo, a small, family zoo with about 100 animals, from barnyard to exotic.

Must-do Walk around Atascadero Lake Park and feed the ducks, swans, and geese.
Best-kept Secret The recently improved Chalk Mountain Golf Course. Lots of challenging holes for the low greens fee of \$20.
Avila Beach
A mellow mix of wine and waves. Surfers and sunsets, a beachfront promenade, and a down-to-earth vibe from friendly residents.
Must-see The fresh, local produce at Avila Fish and Farmers Market, featuring 40 vendors.
Must-do Take a 3.5-mile guided hike to the historic Point San Luis Lighthouse.
Best-kept Secret The seafood market at the end of the circa-1873 Harford Pier, one of the few left in the state that you can drive on.

Cambria
Where SLO locals go for day trips and where tourists enjoy shopping for unique art and antiques.
Must-do Observe a glass blower at work in the tiny town of Harmony (population: 18).
Must-see A historic landmark, Nitt Witt Ridge is a folk-art castle made of shells, car rims, mismatched tiles, appliance parts, and beer cans, mostly Busch.
Best-kept Secret The Shrimp Crostini at Moonstone Beach Bar & Grill. Succulent shrimp sautéed in walnut-pesto cream.
Cayucos
With a name that's Spanish for "canoe," this old-timey town attracts visitors to its white sandy beach, free public fishing pier, and historic saloon.



From left: Charles Paddock Zoo, Nitt Witt Ridge, Cayucos from pier



To learn more about the regions of San Luis Obispo County, go to WineCoastCountry.com.

KEYS TO **SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY, CA**

Must-see Grab your binocs and spot playful sea otters at Estero Bluffs State Park.
Must-do Collect sea glass while strolling the beach from Cayucos to Morro Bay.
Best-kept Secret Homemade sea-salt cookies from The Brown Butter Cookie Company.

City of San Luis Obispo

This historic mission town does everything outside, from the riverbanks downtown to the trails of Bishop Peak.

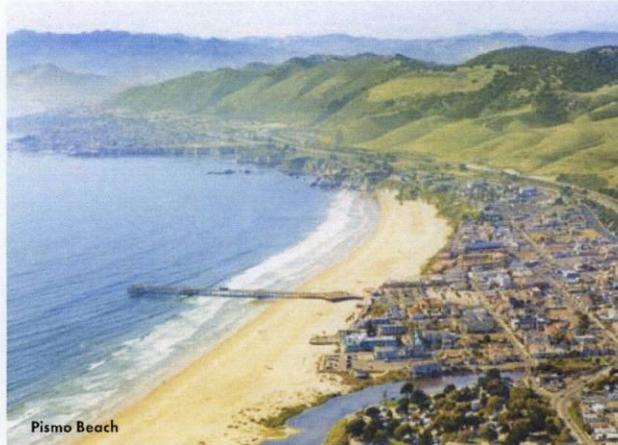
Must-see Mission Plaza, the heart of downtown, featuring an amphitheater, arbor patio area, and historic Murray Adobe.

Must-do Follow the smell of barbecued tri-tip to the Thursday Night farmers' market.

Best-kept Secret Bubblegum Alley. Since the 1960s, folks have plastered gum along a 15-foot-high, 70-foot-long alley, with an entrance on Higuera Street.

Edna Valley

The valley's cool ocean breezes and rich volcanic soil create perfect



Pismo Beach

conditions for grape-growing.
Must-see Old Edna Townsite. Two acres of restored 1800s buildings, including an antique store, a tasting room, and an art gallery.
Must-do Sip your way through 17 tasting rooms specializing in chardonnay, pinot noir, and Rhone varietals.
Best-kept Secret Bike through Corbett Canyon, along Tiffany Ranch Road to Orcutt Road, for panoramic valley views.

Grover Beach

This undiscovered beach town is the entrance to Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area, affording two must-dos:
Must-do Horseback ride along the beach.
Must-do Rent an off-road vehicle and explore the dunes, or just drive along the coast.
Best-kept Secret The Sizzlin' Summer Concert Series and Farmers Market at Ramona Garden Park.

Los Osos/Baywood Park

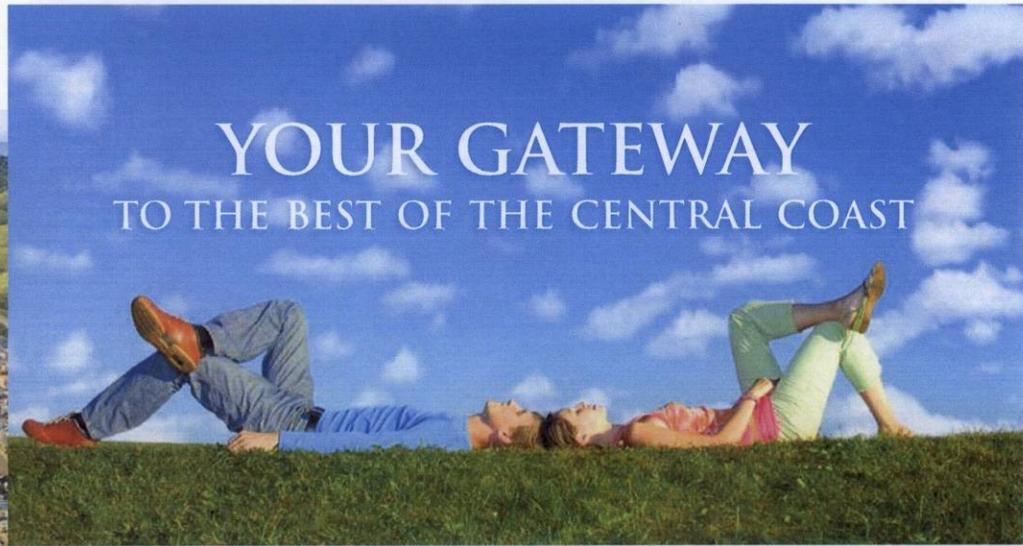
"The Great Outdoors" abounds in Los Osos/Baywood Park's plentiful beaches, forests, nurseries, nature preserves, and parks.
Must-see Monarch butterflies cluster in the eucalyptus of Sweet Springs Nature Preserve from late October to March.
Must-do Kayak along Baywood Park's aptly named "back bay" flanking the Morro Bay.
Best-kept Secret More than 200



Monarch Dunes in Nipomo



Explore Pismo Beach, your wine and waves destination, at classicalcalifornia.com.



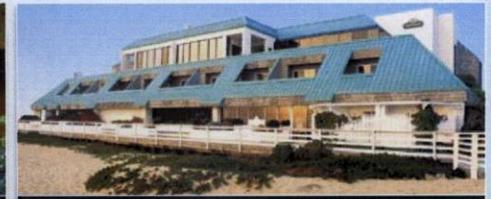
YOUR GATEWAY
TO THE BEST OF THE CENTRAL COAST

San Luis Obispo Named "Happiest Place in the Nation"

BY NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PUBLICATION TITLED THRIVE BY DAN BUETTNER



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The landmark clock tower in downtown Paso Robles, home to a bevy of wine bars and tasting rooms.

species of plants and 110 types of birds reside in the 90-acre El Moro Elfin Forest.

Morro Bay

Kayaking. Coastal beauty. Miles of beaches. Fishing boats. Morro Bay is where you can discover your inner nature.

Must-see World-famous Morro Rock. Called "the Gibraltar of the Pacific," this state landmark rises 576 feet.

Must-do Take a boat into the bay via the Morro Bay National Estuary, a wonderland of wildlife.

Best-kept Secret The fantastic views from the Museum of Natural History, high atop a bluff within Morro Bay State Park.

Nipomo

A seductive combination of lush orchards and rolling sand dunes.

Must-see The 13-room Dana Adobe built in 1840 by Captain William Goodwin Dana.

Must-do Stroll the boardwalk across Oso Flaco Lake, part of an 18,000-acre National Natural Landmark.

Best-kept Secret The new Challenge Course at Monarch Dunes, a unique collection of 12 par-3 holes suitable for veterans and newbies.

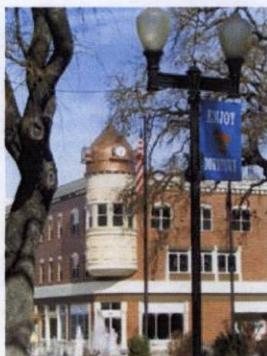
Paso Robles

One of California's most exciting and fastest-growing wine regions, with about 200 wineries.

Must-see The historic downtown filled with boutiques, tasting rooms, art galleries, restaurants, and a children's museum.

Must-do Soak in the natural hot springs at River Oaks Hot Springs Spa or Franklin Hotsprings.

Best-kept Secret Not only is the weather perfect for people, olives love it, too. Plan an olive-oil tasting at We Olive or Pasolivo.



Pismo Beach

A classic California town with white sandy beaches, spectacular sunsets, and a historic pier adjacent to a lively boardwalk.

Must-see Pismo Pier and all the surfing and fishing action.

Must-do Dig for clams at Pismo Beach State Park, where the largest colony of monarch butterflies in the U.S. flocks in winter months.

Best-kept Secret The Chowder Bowl at The Splash Cafe. (Or dig your way through a bucket of fresh shellfish at the Cracked Crab.)

Oceano

Defined by some of the most extensive coastal dunes in the state.

Must-see Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA), the only place in the state where you can drive on the beach.

Must-do Head to Steve's ATV Rentals to pick up your ride. Then let 'er rip on the dunes.

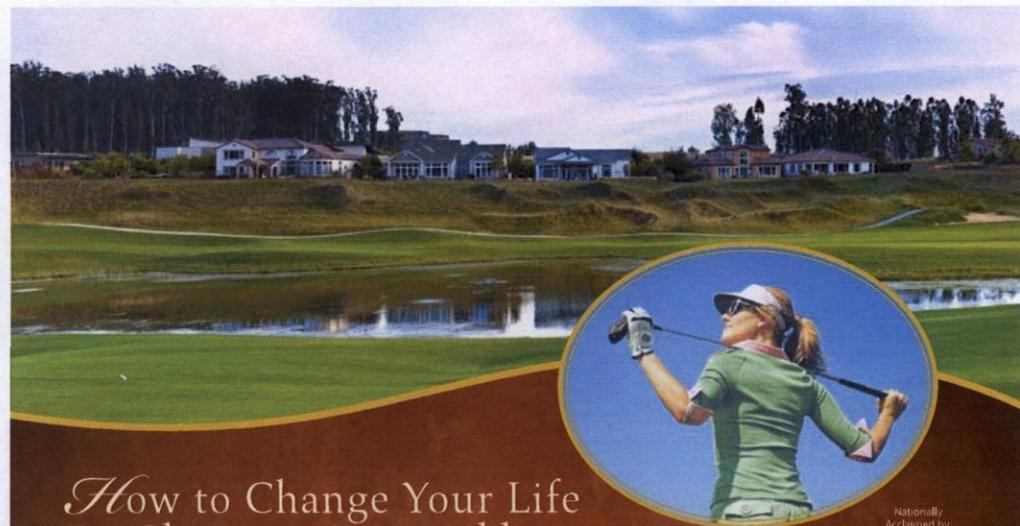
Best-Kept Secret The jalapeño margaritas at Old Juan's Cantina.

San Simeon/Ragged Point

San Simeon is the gateway town to Hearst Castle. Just north, Ragged Point is the southern end of Big Sur. **Must-see** Zebras wandering the Hearst Ranch off Highway 1.

Must-do Tour the historic Piedras Blancas Light Station, in operation for over a century.

Best-kept Secret Super-sized sandwiches at Sebastian's General Store and Cafe, circa 1852.



How to Change Your Life By Changing Your Address.

Resort amenities, championship golf, fitness and fantastic architecture designed to fit your lifestyle. Sound appealing?

Located on California's Central Coast just minutes south of San Luis Obispo, lies the Old Course at Monarch Dunes. This award winning links-style golf course is further complemented by the addition of the new, nationally acclaimed 12 hole Challenge Course. Designed by Pascuzzo and Pate, these courses will test your skills and tempt your senses.

Trilogy at Monarch Dunes is the perfect location for your home on the fabled Central Coast. Stunning home designs include Shea Green Certified™ features and are available with solar power, saving you up to 60% on energy costs. The Monarch Club at Trilogy was awarded the Gold Nugget Grand Award for Best Public or Private Club and offers a true resort experience.

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KEYS TO **SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY, CA**

Growing SLO

Discover the six industry clusters taking root in San Luis Obispo County.

BY CHERYL CRABTREE

The rolling vineyards of Niner Wine Estates

San Luis Obispo County: Locals sometimes call it "SLO." But there's certainly nothing "slow" about the economy. While the main drivers are California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly), the wine industry, and of course tourism, there are other clusters of opportunity bubbling up like the next new blend of Bordeaux.

Take "Uniquely SLO," a tourism cluster that combines wine and agriculture with recreation and accommodations. No doubt, agriculture is the area's economic

foundation. But today, farmers and ranchers are engaging in agrotourism, and cottage industries and specialty products are emerging, from avocado soap to olive-oil lotion.

San Diegans Ruth Mercurio and her husband Frank became partners with the founders of We Olive, Gary and Dee Dee Brown, in 1997. They set up corporate offices near the popular flagship store in downtown Paso Robles, started expanding, and today they have about ten shops throughout the state.

"People are so friendly and

down-to-earth here," Ruth says. "There are a lot of food-centric businesses, and I love the creativity. There's no pretentiousness here; what you see is what you get." And one of those things is delicious olives. "We have strong relationships with SLO County growers, and it's been fun to see them grow as we grow," she says.

"Uniquely SLO" is just one of six economic areas identified by the Economic Vitality Corporation of San Luis Obispo County (EVC), a nonprofit established in 1994 to help start and expand businesses. Last year, the EVC spearheaded

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Both tourists and locals enjoy strolling Mission Plaza in downtown San Luis Obispo.

KEYS TO SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY, CA

medical care.” The county already has a wellness center and is starting to develop an extensive wellness network and health-education programs.

Innovation Meets Industry

In recent years, SLO County has quietly become a hub for world-class businesses in the technology and specialized manufacturing fields. Examples include Trust Automation Inc. (intelligent motion control and systems engineering); AeroMech Engineering Inc. (unmanned aircraft systems); Next Intent (Mars Exploration Rover components); and Specialty Silicone Fabricators (medical products and devices).

While these companies boast customers worldwide, they choose SLO as their base. Why? The sunny climate, the strategic location

between San Francisco and LA, and a world-class university, Cal Poly, producing engineers with an interest in applied research. Plus, the University of California, Santa Barbara — a major research university — and Vandenberg Air Force Base are just a short drive south.

Another little-known tech fact: North America’s greatest convergence of fiber-optic communication cables lies in SLO County. Cities such as Grover Beach and Morro Bay provide direct fiber-optics connectivity to Pacific Rim countries. “This community is a hub for global communications,” Manchak says. “A signal between Silicon Valley and Asia must come through here, so communications that begin or end here arrive faster. We’re talking milliseconds, but that’s very important for the future of high-speed computing and Internet communications.”

The tech industry has also influenced existing businesses, which adapt to the new opportunities. Mark Tognazzini, a Morro Bay native, has fished for 40 years and owned his own boat since 1981. When he’s not pursuing salmon, Tognazzini offers up his boat, the *Bonnie Marietta*, for scientific research support services. “You have to be diversified and change with the times and work your boat as much as you can,” he says.

Tourism and Wine

Given the spectacular natural setting and major attractions such as the historic missions and Hearst Castle, it’s no surprise that tourism generates about \$1.6 billion annually. “SLO County is perceived as a great value, family- and pet-friendly, and not crowded,” Manchak says. “There’s a lot of opportunity for the tourism industry.”

The county’s wine and wine-

grape industry — the state’s third-largest after Napa and Sonoma counties — accounts for \$1.8 billion a year. Christopher Taranto, communications manager of the Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance, attributes this to the high quality of wines and grapes, and the people behind them. “The

Paso Robles experience defines how wine enthusiasts perceive California wine country, where the winemakers themselves are often in the tasting rooms showcasing their wines,” Taranto says. “It’s a tight-knit industry where many vintners and growers rely on their neighbors for support

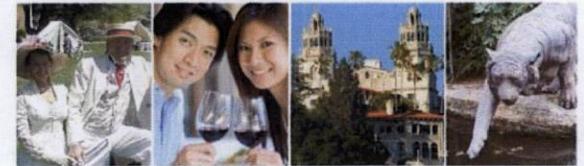
a public/private partnership that organized more than 100 leaders from major business sectors. Their goal? To craft a strategy for economic vitality and community well-being.

Besides “Uniquely SLO,” the EVC team identified five other clusters of opportunity, many with sustainable practices: “Building Design and Construction,”

“Knowledge and Innovation Services,” “Specialized Manufacturing,” “Green Energy,” and “Health Services.”

The latter comprises four hospitals — “probably more per capita than almost anywhere in the nation,” according to Michael Manchak, EVC president and CEO. “There’s a high level of expertise here and specialty areas of

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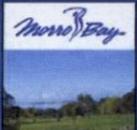


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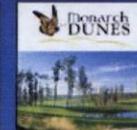
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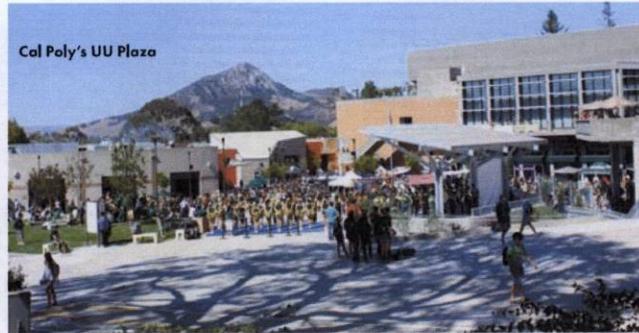
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and success, so you find a vibrant community spirit."

Many of these characteristics apply to Edna Valley and Arroyo Grande Valley, renowned American Viticulture Areas (AVAs) in south SLO County. Their small size affords unique opportunities for casual wine-touring experiences. "The variety of unique growing conditions and the personalities behind the wines are what make the SLO wine region so special," says Becky Gray, executive director of the SLO Vintners Association, which also represents vineyards in Santa Margarita Ranch, Avila Valley, and other coastal regions in the county. "Wines of mostly small-lot productions are what you'll encounter in our tasting rooms."

Cal Poly Connections

Nationally ranked Cal Poly boosts the SLO economy in myriad ways. Programs emphasize practical experience — their motto is "Learn by Doing" — to prepare students for careers in science and technology. The university's enrollment totals about 19,000, and most students attend classes at the sprawling 1,300-acre main campus just northeast of downtown.

According to a 2006–2007 Cal Poly Orfalea College of Business study, the university's annual economic impact on the City and County of San Luis Obispo exceeds \$1.2 billion — more than 12 percent of the county's entire

\$9.9 billion GDP. Many graduates choose to stay here, and their hands-on approach encourages entrepreneurship and innovation.

Relocation Magnet

In all its economic pursuits, SLO County is committed to a sustainable future. It may soon become a green energy production leader, with large-scale proposals in the works to channel waves, tides, wind, and sun into accessible power sources. The county belongs to the Green Coast Innovation Zone, a new partnership with neighboring counties that aims to reinvent the regional economy using new energy technology and green building practices.

With support from the EVC and partnerships that promise to become models for economic development, SLO County continues to attract new businesses. Michael Gunther moved his business-consulting firm, Collaboration, here from Atlanta in 2003 after considering cities from Seattle to San Diego. "This is such a great place to start a business," says Gunther, who's also the chairman of the SLO Chamber of Commerce's board of directors. "The chamber and the EVC helped out, and within six months we were up and running. There's such a great entrepreneurial environment, and people here are so creative, open, and welcoming." Yet another example of how SLO is speeding down the highway of economic stability.

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HISTORY

BY LAURA HOXWORTH



More Than a Landmark: Hearst Castle's Tribute to Opulence

A wide expanse of clear blue water stretches more than 100 feet in front of you, shimmering in the sun. Around the pool's edges, smooth marble colonnades frame mountain views and 17th-century Italian sculptures. And that's just the Neptune Pool. The indoor Roman Pool features floor-to-ceiling mosaic tiles, flanked by eight marble statues of gods and goddesses.

At Hearst Castle, just when you think you've found the height of extravagance, you'll find something that tops it. Originally owned by publishing tycoon William Randolph Hearst, the sprawling estate took him and famed architect Julia Morgan almost three decades to build, from 1919 to 1947. Today it's one of the top attractions on California's Central Coast.

As you stroll through a handful of the estate's 165 rooms, you'll spot artistic treasures such as Neptune brandishing a triton in a 17th-century piece by French artist Simon Vouet. This painting is one of hundreds scattered throughout the estate, remnants of Hearst's passion for art.

But don't be fooled: Despite the artifacts, the castle is anything but stuffy. In its 1930s heyday, lavish parties entertained elite guests. From Charlie Chaplin to Winston Churchill to Hearst's famous mistress, Marion Davies, anyone who was anyone sipped champagne at Hearst Castle.

Outside, seaside vistas and orange trees await you in the ever-blooming gardens, where the soft chirping of birds and colorful bursts of tulips and poppies counter the opulence of the Mediterranean Revival architecture. Note the absence of skyscrapers and smog — halfway between LA and San Francisco, the castle is isolated on a tranquil patch of undeveloped countryside.

Stretched across 127 acres, Hearst Castle is simply impossible to cover in one visit — good thing there are six tours. Plan ahead for The Evening Tour. Held at Christmas, it's the only one that shows the castle at night. Plus, docents in period dress give you an enchanting look at Hearst Castle as it was in the gilded era. For more information, visit hearstcastle.org.

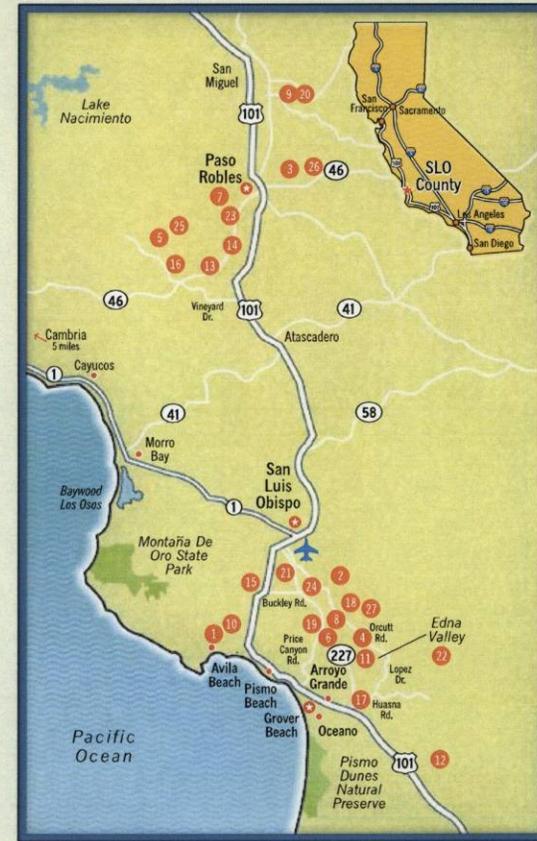
LEFT: COURTESY OF HEARST CASTLE; MIDDLE: COURTESY OF HEARST CASTLE; RIGHT: COURTESY OF HEARST CASTLE



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