

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

Relaxed and scenic

By Kristianne Huntsberger

● “In the bright day of / San Luis Obispo the / mtns. of hope rise / up treed, green, sweet,” wrote Beat poet Jack Kerouac in an unfinished poem in the 1950s. The verdant San Luis Obispo area continues to spark inspiration among residents and visitors.

The sunny, fertile region on California’s Central Coast was once home to the Chumash people, followed by Spanish missionaries and settlers, before it became part of the United States. Today, San Luis Obispo’s famously walkable downtown district is full of music, art and culinary delights, while nearby beaches and the coastal Santa Lucia Range boast majestic outdoor adventures.



Main attractions

Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa:

Tour the grounds and museum of the mission, founded in 1772 by Spanish missionaries.

Morro Bay: The bay offers the chance to try stellar seafood at waterfront restaurants while enjoying views of iconic Morro Rock, a 576-foot volcanic plug.

Wine-tasting: In the San Luis Obispo County city of Paso Robles, sample wines at Riboli Family Winery’s new facility, and take a behind-the-scenes tour of the tunnels of human-made caves at Justin Vineyards & Winery.

Lesser-known favorites

Poly Canyon: Hike the 6.9-mile loop through the canyon, which is home to the 9-acre Cal Poly

College of Architecture & Environmental Design’s outdoor Experimental Practices Laboratory. Stroll through domed and cantilevered structures, some of which seem to have come straight from science fiction stories.

What’s in a name?

San Luis Obispo County has long fostered an easygoing attitude. Its nickname “SLO Cal” represents the slow pace locals live by and invite visitors to enjoy.

For nature lovers

Visit **Pismo State Beach**, where between November and February, monarch butterflies stop at the eucalyptus groves near the sea during their migration. Or go to the **Piedras Blancas Elephant**

Clockwise from top: Morro Rock, a volcanic rock formation in Morro Bay; Hearst Castle, former home of William Randolph Hearst; monarch butterflies at Pismo State Beach.

Seal Rookery to witness the 900- to 5,000-pound mammals.

Outdoor recreation

Bishop Peak Trail in San Luis Obispo is a 3.5-mile, 950-foot-elevation hike, rewarded with sweeping views across downtown and the surrounding area.

For history buffs

Take a trip up Highway 1 to San Simeon to see the **Hearst Castle**. The mansion was once home to

newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst, whose private zoo is the reason you might still spot exotic animals on the grounds. ✕

Kristianne Huntsberger grew up in San Luis Obispo County. For more information on the area, visit slocal.com.

Alaska Airlines (alaskaair.com) provides regular service to San Luis Obispo (SBP) from Seattle (SEA).

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