

REV UP THE ROMANCE → 10 inspired ways to celebrate your love

# diablo

The Magazine of the East Bay

## AT HOME WITH NATURE

Pro tips for bringing the outside in

## FUN ON TAP

Breweries join together for a weeklong suds fest

# ADVENTURE

Three perfect road trips after sheltering in place

# AWAITS

FEBRUARY 2021 \$4.95



WWW.DIABLOMAG.COM





**3 PERFECT**

# ROAD



**WITH STUNNING SCENERY AND HEART-PUMPING ADVENTURES THROUGHOUT OUR REGION, THE EAST BAY IS A GREAT POINT OF DEPARTURE FOR MANY DRIVABLE GETAWAYS. AND THESE DAYS, A WELL-CHOSEN ROAD TRIP IS NOT ONLY A SAFE, SOCIALLY**





# TRIPS

**DISTANCED WAY TO TRAVEL, BUT IT ALSO ALLOWS FOR SERENDIPITOUS DISCOVERIES ALONG THE WAY. HERE, *DIABLO* EXPLORES THREE DESTINATIONS THAT ARE WELL WORTH VISITING IN ANY SEASON, BUT HAVE EXTRA SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS THIS TIME OF YEAR: YOSEMITE, NEVADA CITY, AND SANTA CRUZ.**





The laid-back beach town of **Santa Cruz** is blessed with a surreally beautiful location on the northern edge of Monterey Bay. It's known for its world-class surfing—and the town's board-toting, suntanned, and super-fit denizens seem to be everywhere you look. But take a longer look at this charming spot, and you'll find there's a lot more to it than catching waves. In fact, consider a visit during the less crowded winter months, when you can enjoy a wealth of recreational activities—and even observe extraordinary wildlife migrations.

Santa Cruz is an easy, roughly 75-mile drive from the East Bay, making it a very doable day trip or weekend getaway. It's also a great place to explore by bicycle, so bring bikes with you, if you can, along with any requisite watersports gear like surfboards and wetsuits (you can also arrange all manner of gear rentals once you're there).

With 29 miles of coastline, Santa Cruz is all about sun and surf, with the focal points being **Main Beach** and **Cowell Beach**. From Main Beach, you can access the famed **Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk**, an old-timey amusement park whose Giant Dipper roller coaster is a local landmark. The smaller Cowell Beach, popular with volleyball players, is frequently used for surfing lessons, so expect to see newbies out here learning the ropes.

More experienced surfers gather at one of Santa Cruz's 11 surf breaks, most notably **Steamer Lane**, accessible from West Cliff Drive. This is an iconic locale for several reasons; not only is the **Surfing Museum** housed inside a lighthouse building, but it's also where legendary surfer (and longtime Santa Cruz resident) Jack O'Neill is said to have developed the modern wetsuit.





### → ANIMAL ATTRACTIONS

The fall and winter months are peak time for wildlife sightings in Santa Cruz, and many visitors plan their trips to coincide with the seasonal migration of thousands of monarch butterflies. The orange-and-black beauties start arriving in mid-October and are around until mid-February or so, making their temporary home in the eucalyptus trees of **Natural Bridges State Beach**. Tourists can take a self-guided tour along the park's **Monarch Grove Trail** and see these butterflies before they depart for their inland breeding grounds.

Santa Cruz also has premium viewing of another wildlife wonder: the almost year-round migration of several whale species through the Monterey Bay. From mid-December through mid-February, some 20,000 gray whales pass by Santa Cruz as they head south to the Baja Peninsula. Then, from mid-February through April, they pass by again as they migrate north to the Bering Sea, a round-trip journey of more than 10,000 miles. At other times of the year, humpback whales can be sighted here. A number of local operators, such as **Santa Cruz Whale Watching**, offer boat tours to give visitors close-up views of these magnificent creatures. For an extra-special experience, consider a sunset cruise with **Chardonnay Sailing Charters**, where you can sip wine while watching whales cavort in the water.

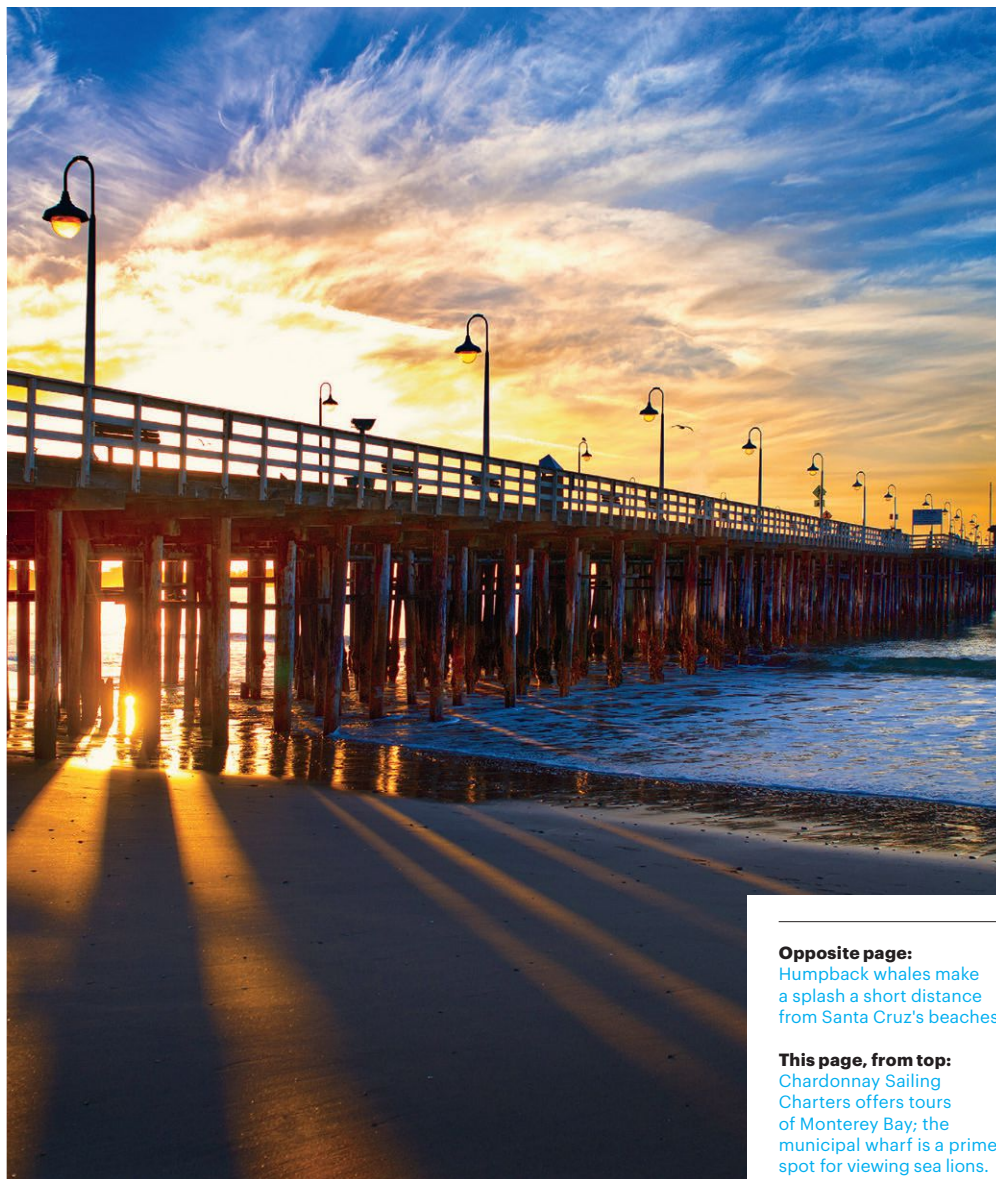
Finally, no Santa Cruz getaway is complete without an encounter with sea lions. For the most reliable viewings, head to the main wharf, where these remarkable marine mammals can be found lounging on its crossbeams, soaking up the sun and barking noisily.

### → CREATURE COMFORTS

The action in Santa Cruz is essentially all outside; this is not the place to come if you're looking for, say, Michelin-starred restaurants. But there are lots of great options for wining and dining, and there are even a few top-notch purveyors of picnic provisions.

For killer views and a satisfying meal, don't miss the chance to dine at one of the seafood restaurants—such as **FireFish Grill**—that line the admittedly touristy wharf. Another good bet is **Jack's Patio**, a popular eatery located at the **Dream Inn Santa**

**Cruz**, a retro-cool hotel right on Cowell Beach that makes a great base for a weekend (or longer) stay. At **Jack's** (named after favorite son Jack O'Neill, naturally), typically you can dine on tasty California-style dishes while listening to live music on weekend evenings. And be sure to drop by the **Picnic Basket**, a popular joint on Beach Street for delicious sandwiches to go. It's the ideal place to order a picnic lunch for a day of exploring Santa Cruz's natural treasures—or to grab some take-out treats for your return drive back home. ■



**Opposite page:**  
Humpback whales make a splash a short distance from Santa Cruz's beaches.

**This page, from top:**  
Chardonnay Sailing Charters offers tours of Monterey Bay; the municipal wharf is a prime spot for viewing sea lions.