



5-DAY ITINERARY

SANTA CRUZ
COUNTY

C A L I F O R N I A

Day One

MORNING

Start your morning at **Walnut Avenue Café** in Downtown Santa Cruz. This legendary spot attracts locals and visitors where the service is friendly and quick and a sunny sidewalk patio is an ideal place for your pup at this pet-friendly eatery. An expansive menu includes scrambles, hotcakes, burgers and salads.

Walk off your breakfast with a **walking tour of historic downtown**. Start where you are, on Walnut Avenue and admire the designs of bygone years. The homes on Walnut Avenue represent some of the finest examples

of Stick-Eastlake, Colonial Revival, Italianate, and Queen Anne-style architecture in town. [Free walking tour maps are downloadable from the City of Santa Cruz's website.](#) Other walking tours guide you around downtown itself, Beach Hill, Mission Hill, and Cowell Lime Works.

Visit **Bookshop Santa Cruz**, established in 1966 and a beloved independent seller of used and new books, gifts and other reading material. **Pacific Trading Co.** offers sustainable fashion, shoes, handbags and more. And **Botanic and Luxe, Stripe, Berdels, Dell Williams, Artisans and Agency, Sock Shop & Shoe Company**, and **O'Neill Surf Shop** are a handful of other local shops popular with locals and visitors.

AFTERNOON

Drive scenic **West Cliff Drive** and stop at various lookout points to enjoy the scenic view. This three-and-a-half-mile scenic path overlooks the bay and is popular for jogs, bike rides and romantic strolls. Be sure to check out the surfer statue, dedicated to surfers everywhere. Along the route, you'll find the **Santa Cruz Surfing Museum**, housed inside the Mark Abbott Memorial Lighthouse. The museum houses over 120 years of surfing history and inside you can get a glimpse of the first men to surf on the mainland United States as well as one of the first wet suits ever made. Santa Cruz is the birthplace of mainland surfing in the United States, and part of the local culture. View a plaque outside the museum, gifted to the City



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of Santa Cruz by the descendants of Hawaiian royalty who first brought surfing to Santa Cruz in 1885. Adjacent to the museum is Steamer Lane, one of the best places to surf in the U.S. View a free demonstration of California's official sport, as local, seasoned surfers test their mettle against the waves.

At the end of West Cliff Drive, **Natural Bridges State Beach** is an ideal place for tidepool exploration. Bring your binoculars for seasonal visits to Natural Bridges State Park, California's only state park butterfly preserve. Each fall marks the return of thousands of monarch butterflies that spend their winters in a protected grove inside the park.

For more wildlife viewing, stop at the **Seymour Marine Discovery Center**, a kid-friendly working marine laboratory operated by UC Santa Cruz. Complete with touch tanks, views of the Monterey Bay, interactive exhibits and more, it's just about the only place in town where you can pet a shark!

Head back down West Cliff Drive toward the Santa Cruz Wharf. Take a breezy stroll to the very end. The wharf stretches a half-mile into the Monterey Bay and provides 360-de-

gree views of the ocean. This structure, more than a century old is lined with shops, restaurants, and fishermen hoping to snag the catch of the day. Watch the ocean waters for whales, dolphins, otters and views of Monterey at the other end of the bay. Something else to watch for: lumbering sea lions lazing on the wharf's pilings down below, suddenly acquiring a ballerina's grace the moment they hit the water.

Across from the wharf on Beach Street, **The Picnic Basket** has an array of healthy, farm-to-table menu items ideal for noshing on-site, or taking food to go for an impromptu picnic on Main Beach, across the street.

Nearby, the legendary **Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk** boasts two National Historic Landmarks: the Giant Dipper, a vintage wooden roller coaster that celebrates 100 years in 2024, and the Looft Carousel, featuring seventy-three hand-carved horses which prance proudly to the music from two beautiful antiques, the park's original 342-pipe Ruth band organ and a showy Wurlitzer 165 band organ. Opt for a self-guided walking tour of the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk's nearly 20 points of interest. Treat yourself to

dessert items that are classic amusement park fare like funnel cakes, soft-serve ice cream, cotton candy, and salt water taffy.

EVENING

Continue the Hawaiian spirit at **Hula's Island Grill and Tiki Room**, where fresh seafood is creatively presented in island style. Add a flaming tiki drink and combine it with kitschy Hawaiiana décor (look for the velvet Elvis painting), and you'll find yourself at Hula's: Downtown Santa Cruz's own slice of the islands!

Basketball fans can watch the **Santa Cruz Warriors** play in a beach area arena during the season. The best players outside of the NBA sweep the court against other G-League development teams from throughout the country. Enjoy a local beer or a glass of local wine as you take in the excitement of live basketball. Pro-tip: if the "Sea Dubs" score 100 points or more, fans are treated to a free ice cream cone at **The Penny Ice Creamery**, an artisan scoop shop where ice cream is made from scratch using ingredients from local farms!

OVERNIGHT IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY





Day Two

MORNING

Explore mid-county and start with breakfast at **The Farm Bakery + Café**. Here, hearty breakfast burritos, salmon toast with avocado, an array of quiches, and creative coffee drinks adorn the menu in this off-the-beaten path spot.

Continue on Highway 1 south to **The Forest of Nisene Marks State Park**. This dense, second-and third-growth redwood forest rises from near sea level to steep coastal mountains. Popular with hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians this park is a quiet respite from the bustling nearby highway. Not only is Nisene a place for recreation, but visitors can view lime kilns that were established at the turn of the century, when lime magnate Henry Cowell purchased the lime works and supplied much of San Francisco's need following the 1906 earthquake. Today the kilns are overgrown with moss, weeds and trees, but can still be viewed on some of the trails.

AFTERNOON

After hydrating following your hike, walk to nearby **Aptos Village** a newer community of retail shops and residential buildings. En-

joy a pre-lunch tasting at **Sante Arcangeli** or **Doon to Earth**, two favorite wine tasting rooms in Aptos. Stroll the shops in Aptos Village like **Sock Shop & Shoe Company** and other boutiques.

For a seaside lunch, **Venus Beachside at Rio Del Mar State Beach** where market salads, hearty sandwiches and creative cocktails are served 30 steps to the sand on a flora-and-fauna rich patio. Take a stroll near the water afterward and stop at the **Seacliff State Beach Visitor Center**, where you can learn about the history of the SS Palo Alto, a ship crafted from cement during World War I. You can view the remnants of this prestigious vessel outside the visitor center, where it rests gracefully in the ocean.

EVENING

Bring your beach blankets and settle in at **Manresa State Beach** to watch the sky turn pink, orange, and then fade into night.

End the day at **The Hideout** in Aptos, where a homey atmosphere is emphasized by a cozy front patio and welcoming décor. The large menu offers both hearty and lighter bites.

OVERNIGHT IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Day Three

MORNING

Fans of treasure-hunt shopping will find **Soquel Village's** antique shops ripe for scouring through mid-century modern finds, vintage tea sets and jewelry, Tiffany lamps, and more at places like **Center Street Antiques** and **Trader's Emporium**. Home and garden furniture, gifts and accessories are on display and each unique items has a story.

For brunch, **Pretty Good Advice** just off Soquel Avenue in the village has menu items that are vegetarian, vegan, gluten- and dairy-free and healthy alternatives prepared creatively using fresh produce and ingredients.

AFTERNOON

Take a DIY tour of public murals around town and view colorful and creative designs by local artists. [A digital map will help navigate](#) your way around these artful displays.

Stop in midtown Santa Cruz, adjacent to the Seabright neighborhood. This friendly neighborhood has an abundance of shops like **Home/Work**, **Midtown Surf Café**, **Tomboy** and others that make for a light urban hike. Admire historic homes on Ocean View





Avenue and take in views of the beach and boardwalk at Ocean View Park. Stroll to the corporate headquarters of **Verve Coffee** in the former cannery buildings, where beans are roasted and trainees learn firsthand how to make craft coffee drinks. Around the corner, the **NHS Skateboard Museum** displays over half a century of skateboard decks and artwork, including local artist Jimbo Phillips' "screaming hand," the iconic logo that is synonymous with board riders worldwide.

EVENING

For dinner, **Midway** restaurant is a hyperlocal, California-inspired neighborhood eatery featuring dishes like squash cappelletti with crispy Brussels sprouts, roasted apple, brown butter and sage, chanterelle and ricotta agnolotti, pork belly, chickpea polenta and more. Check out what's happening at **Abbott Square Market**. Supported by the Santa Cruz Museum of Art & History and located at Front and Cooper Streets in the heart of Downtown Santa Cruz, is designed to be the food and cultural center of the town. Home to food vendors and a bar concept called Front & Cooper, Abbott Square hosts a full schedule of entertainment events, including outdoor movies, trivia nights and live music.

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Day Four

MORNING

Pop into **11th Hour Coffee** on Santa Cruz's westside, where small plates and coffee are served side-by-side. Brunch bowls, goat cheese toast and other nibbles provide fuel for your day.

Take a leisurely drive to the San Lorenzo Valley and embark on a nostalgic ride through the redwood trees of the Santa Cruz Mountains aboard a vintage steam locomotive at **Roaring Camp Railroads** in Felton. Admire the old west storefront facades, pan for "gold", enjoy a blacksmith demonstration, and visit an old-timey General Store, complete with "penny" candy.

Follow the foot path to **Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park**, adjacent to Roaring Camp and walk the Redwood Loop Trail, a .8-mile easy stroll alongside heritage trees and surround yourself with the stoic silence of the forest. Want a more hearty hike? Veer right at the Fremont Tree and pick up the Pipeline Trail that bisects Henry Cowell Redwood State Park. Marvel at the view from the observation deck or take a sweet seat at The Overlook, where a bench provides a first-row

seat to faraway vistas of the Monterey Bay beyond the trees. Traveling with a pup? This moderately-challenging route is one of three dog-friendly trails in the park!

AFTERNOON

Grab a Bicycle in Santa Cruz and enjoy a breezy spin around town. This electric bicycle share program is an eco-friendly way to sight-see and explore neighborhoods and eateries.

Have lunch at **Zameen** in **Pleasure Point**. Walk to **East Cliff Drive** and enjoy the sights and sounds of this classic surf community. Watch from a scenic vantage point as advanced surfers ride the waves. Boutiques, coffee shops, consignment stores, surf shops and other businesses dot the neighborhood.

EVENING

See the Monterey Bay aboard a sunset sail on **The Chardonnay**, a 70-foot yacht that offers public sails. Admire sea lions sunning themselves near the wharf and the panoramic view of the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk from a different perspective as you hum along to "yacht rock" classics and enjoy local wine and beer.

After your sail, freshen up and head out to a romantic dinner at legendary **Shadowbrook**





restaurant in **Capitola Village**. Ride a cable car to this former-house-turned landmark eatery on the banks of Soquel Creek. Prime rib, fresh seafood, artichoke soup, and locals wines adorn the menu.

OVERNIGHT IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

Day Five

MORNING

Venture on scenic Highway 1 south to the Mediterranean-inspired seaside town of Capitola. Go where the locals go and enjoy breakfast at **Gayle's Bakery**. In-house, made-from-scratch breads, pastries, savory small plates, fresh juices and coffee drinks can be enjoyed on the indoor patio adjacent to a fireplace to ward off any remnants of fog from the night before. Take a number and take a seat at this beloved local shop.

From Gayle's, walk to **Capitola Village** and window shop in this tiny town. The colorful venetian cottages which line Capitola Beach are the perfect backdrop for a selfie to remember your visit. Take in the sun at a bench along the esplanade and watch the waves lap

along the shore. Admire the views of this adorable town from historic **Depot Hill**.

Browse fresh fruits and vegetables, home-made sauerkraut, pottery, and other local items at a **farmer's market**. More than a place to purchase local produce, farmer's markets in Santa Cruz County are community gathering spaces where news is shared and friendships are formed. Meet the farmers who grow the ingredients found on menus across the region.

AFTERNOON

Take a mini-road trip on Highway 1 to south county's Watsonville and Pajaro Valley.

Enjoy a relaxing afternoon touring **Rancho San Andres Castro Adobe State Historic Property**. Take a 90-minute tour, led by State Park docents who will share the history of the Castro family, and the two-story adobe hacienda built over 170 years ago. Learn about the Vaquero culture and living during the Mexican Rancho Period of California History.

Visit **Gizdich Ranch** and pick your own strawberries, apples, boysenberries and

olallieberries on a seasonal basis. An on-site antique shop and pie shop are popular places to browse. Take home a pie, made fresh on the farm, or a selection of apple juice, jams and apple butter. Or enjoy a slice of pie in the meadow adjacent to the pie shop and breathe in the fresh country air.

EVENING

In a literary mood? Dinner at **Bad Animal Books, Wine, and Food** is where used books meet culinary artists-in-residence. Choose from an array of gently loved books and if you see something you fancy, add it to your bill of fare! Follow up with a short walk to **The Penny Ice Creamery**, where ice cream is made from scratch using ingredients from local farms.

Seek out some live music at a number of venues around town. Have dinner at the iconic **Davenport Roadhouse** and enjoy a glass of wine and roasted Brussels sprouts, one of the specialties as a local band plays nearby. **The Felton Music Hall, Kuumbwa, Rio Theater, Moe's Alley, Catalyst**, and the **Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium** are just a few other local spots that feature ongoing performances.

