

Behind closed doors: The silent stories of high-end foreclosures

ES(CA)PES!

Fun, sun & romance for a song: 20 bright new California vacations that have it all

Resale chic returns: What to nab now

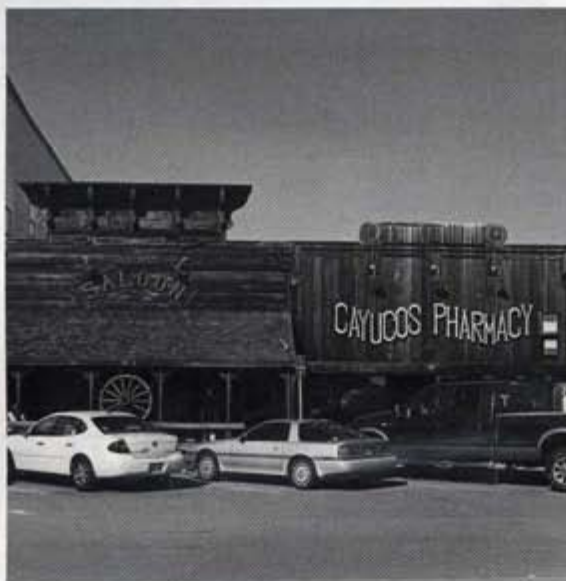
Charles Phan noodles with Chinese

San Francisco





Clockwise from top left: Sunlight pours into a room at the Cass House Inn; the view from a vantage point above the town; relics of Cayucos's Wild West past remain, like the storefronts along main street and the murals inside the Old Cayucos Tavern.



CAYUCOS

Sweet spot

OLD TRIP: SUN AND SURF IN A SALTY DOG OF A TOWN

NEW TRICK: A MEMORABLE NEW INN AND RESTAURANT



With enough surfers and salt-and-pepper-haired Hollywood vets to feel like L.A.—but also enough gourmands and yoga moms to remind you of home—the Central Coast is where well-rounded Californians belong. And if you think you've already covered this stretch (you've knocked back a few at the Old Cayucos Tavern, even bought the Hearst Castle hoodie), a few surprises are in store. The beaches are lightly trod, but the limestone-rich hills to the east have gradually sprouted more than 200 small wineries. Culinary talent seems to have thickened with the vines, and a few up-and-coming chefs are putting places like windblown Cayucos and former cowtown Paso Robles on the map.

STAY AND DINE: An enchanted spell seems to have been cast over the **Cass House Inn** in Cayucos. How else to explain how two young couples have transformed this weathered, 19th-century Victorian across from a surf shop and a gas station into a world-class restaurant? Led by chef Jensen Lorenzen's homegrown instincts, the foursome has created a culinary aesthetic in which pairing starters like a truffle oil-infused oxtail soup with a hearty Stephen Ross pinot seems perfectly unpretentious. The four-course dinner, off a seasonally changing menu, may leave you pleasantly dazed if you keep up with Daniel Green's local wine pairings (and you should). But if you reserve a room, all you

have to do is stumble contentedly upstairs and fall asleep to the sound of the surf. The next evening, make your way 34 miles inland to **Artisan**, the classic-modern bistro in Paso Robles. Comfort foods—like a smoked gouda-and-porter fondue with andouille sausage, and slow-cooked kurobuta pork short ribs over risotto and pea tendrils—make saving room for dessert a real challenge.

TASTE: Locals agree that **RN Estate** should be at the top of any serious wine lover's list. Brittany native Roger Nicolas hand-picks his concentrated Rhône varietals, produces small batches (usually around 200 cases), and keeps all his wine in California, where it sells for \$32–58 a bottle. At nearby

Tablas Creek, tasters get a lesson in limestone-based oenology and a taste of some rare wines, like a surprisingly subtle 90 percent mourvèdre, 10 percent syrah blend. As for other wineries—Denner, Linne Calodo, Justin, L'Aventure—it's impossible to go wrong. Just enjoy the winding backroads and see where your intuition leads.

PLAY: Stop at the **Little Market** to pick up smoky grilled artichokes, some local cheeses, and sea salt-and-brown butter cookies. It all makes for a perfect picnic to take to **Montaña de Oro**, one of California's most stunning coastal parks, about 15 minutes from town. Advanced surfers and wave watchers will find a hollow reef break just

half a mile past the Sandspit Beach exit, at a spot called Hazards (heed the name, beginners!). Since there aren't any signs, park where all the big trucks are—and if glares from the locals make the main wave less appetizing, try the miles of beach break to the north. But you don't need a board to enjoy the 100-foot-high dunes and soul-stirring views.

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