

DON'T BE A TOURIST
MINI GUIDE TO

California



A MESSY NESSY MINI GUIDE



DON'T BE A TOURIST

THE ROAD TRIP

CALIFORNIA

COPYRIGHT

All rights reserved.

No part of this e-guide may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in articles.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Please contact:

contact@messynessychic.com

MESSYNESSYCHIC.COM

COPYRIGHT © 2020 13 THINGS LTD.

Table of contents

1

FROM VEGAS TO YOSEMITE

2

SAN FRANCISCO AND NEARBY DETOURS

3

CALIFORNIA'S GOLD COAST

4

OJAI

5

LOS ANGELES

6

L.A TO THE MOJAVE DESERT

7

PALM SPRINGS

8

SALTON SEA

9

JOSHUA TREE

10

ROUTE 66



“California is where you get to start over”.

– Tracy Chevalier

If you've got two weeks to hit the open road, leave the planning to Messy Nessy. We're looping around California, stopping at the quirkiest roadside oddities, surreal sights and nostalgic hidden gems. This guide starts on the border at Vegas and ends on Route 66, but you could use our [handy road map](#) and skip to where you need to be.

Safe travels friend...

Pit Stop in Las Vegas



Las Vegas of course isn't technically in California, but it's right on the border, and it's often a much cheaper option than flying into one of the main airports in California.

Hunter S. Thompson's stomping ground is the perfect place to start off your Californian road trip - plunge into the neon lights of **Las Vegas Boulevard** at night, wander in awe through the heaving casinos and take in all of the sparkling sights.

A good chunk of Las Vegas' visitors never actually leave the strip, but if you want to see the old Vegas; the vintage Vegas you've seen in the movies, you're not going to find it anywhere near the gargantuan HD televisions or gleaming gambling temples of the strip- at least not on "the strip" as we know it today..



VINTAGE VEGAS

Discover vintage Vegas at the [Neon Museum](#), which is more like a dusty boneyard filled with the tangling giant neon signs, retired from the casinos that were reduced to dust as bigger and brighter casinos took over the Vegas skyline. The museum team has some pretty fascinating information and Vegas secrets to share.

Did you hear the one about the Stardust Hotel? In 1952, cocktail hour at this legendary hotel, demolished in 2007, was offered with a side of atomic bomb testing. Tourists gathered on the roof to watch atomic blasts taking place at the Nevada test site with martinis in hand. The futurist font on the original Stardust sign, which you can see in the museum, became known as the "Atomic" font. [Make sure to book in advance!](#)

*(770 Las Vegas Boulevard North, Las Vegas, NV 89101; +1 702-387-6366;
Mon-Thur 9.30am - 11pm & Fri-Sun 9.30am-12am)*



FINDING THE FORGOTTEN STRIP

Take some time to walk down **Fremont Street**.

It's the original Vegas "strip", where the first hotel in Las Vegas was built and if you've watched any movie or television shows from the 1970s set in Vegas, this street might look more familiar. The old Vegas is still very much alive (and flashing) in what is now considered as "downtown".

Today it's covered with a roof (also neon, naturally), a feature that makes everything brighter at night. It's certainly a welcome refuge from the harsh heat of the day.

EATING & DRINKING

Before you begin your road trip, stop by the Willy Wonka factory of car-snacks at the **Beef Jerky Store**. You don't have to be a huge fan of beef to enjoy yourself in this store, although they probably do have every flavour and brand of Beef Jerky that exists.

*(112 N 3rd St, Las Vegas, NV 89101; +1 702-388-0073;
Mon-Sat 9.30am-6pm & Sun 9.30am-5pm)*

Get some drinks at an iconic American kitsch cocktail bar called **Frankie's Tiki Room**.

*(1712 W Charleston Blvd, Las Vegas, NV 89102,
USA; +1 702-385-3110; open 24/7)*

WHERE TO STAY

If you're planning to stay the night, book a room at **Artisan Hotel Boutique** – one of the quirkier Vegas hotels and off the strip.

(1501 W Sahara Ave, Las Vegas, NV 89102, USA; +1 702-214-4000)

From Vegas to Yosemite



DEATH VALLEY

Begin your drive through the Mars-like landscape to the **Death Valley** from Las Vegas. Turn down a dirt path to a ghost town called **Rhyolite**, a deserted mining town where nothing but the skeletons of a few buildings survive from the once bustling main street.

Stop by **Devil's Hole**, which is home to the tiny little pupfish - one of the rarest species of fish in the world - and if you happen to be visiting during one of the rare occasions when it's raining, you might just be able to go [kayaking in the former Lake Manly](#).



BISHOP

Emerging from Death Valley, head towards the quaint small town called Bishop.

Cool off in the pool at the **Bishop Village Motel**, an old-fashioned American motel. Nothing fancy, but it's lost in time in this little town at the edge of the desert.

(286 W Elm St, Bishop, CA 93514; +1 888-668-5546)

Fuel up on American comfort food at **Jack's**.

(437 N Main St, Bishop, CA 93514; +1 760-872-7971; open everyday 6.30am-9pm)

Mingle with the locals at their dive bar **Rusty's Saloon**.

(112 N Main St, Bishop, CA 93514; +1 760-873-9066; open everyday 9am-2am)



ALIEN BEACH

Make your way down to California's answer to the French Alps, **Mammoth Lakes** and settle into the charming town of **Lee Vining**. The town overlooks the surreal **Mono Lake**, a large and shallow saline soda basin (which is essentially a "dying lake" – depending on how you look at it) and check into the cutest motel in town - **El Mono Motel**.

(Highway 395 at 3rd Street, Lee Vining, California 93541; +1 760-647-6310)

Stock up on food for a picnic dinner at the beach and find a spot at **Mono Lake Beach** where you'll discover the tufas a.k.a. "alien towers" of rock formed by underground rivers that carried calcium into the lake from the bottom and bubbled up to the surface, creating these other-worldly formations. You'll enjoy a magnificent sunset and swimming is possible here so don't be afraid to take a quick dip.



SECRET HOT SPRINGS

At first light the following day, head out to find the little-known hot springs of **Hot Creek** by turning off the highway down **this unmarked road**.

The bubbling volcanic turquoise pools here were once popular in the 1970s, when dozens of families would gather to soak in the mixed hot thermal and cold creek water. Then health & safety laws came into play and the area was fenced off and dotted with danger signs.

Tread carefully – some pools really are too hot to handle – and leave the kids out on this adventure, but today, these turquoise springs are completely deserted and a truly surreal sight to see.



GHOST TOWN ADVENTURES

Next, set your GPS for the unforgettable ghost town of **Bodie**.

The historic gold mining town which boomed through the late 1800s became completely deserted by the 1950s. At its peak, 65 saloons lined Main Street in Bodie and prostitution murders, shootouts and stagecoach holdups were a part of daily life. It's probably one of the most unique ghost towns in the world, isolated in a desert mountain range of Mono County, California, preserved in an arresting state of decay but truly frozen in time, with interiors still stocked with goods and personal belongings left behind.

It's a little bit like Disneyland for urban decay buffs, a playground for ghost town enthusiasts. At its peak it was home to 7,000 people and had over 2000 buildings but even after two devastating fires, there is still an impressive amount of buildings and houses that remain standing, fully intact.

CAMPING LIKE WES ANDERSON IN YOSEMITE

Hop back in the car, direction: Yosemite National Park, with its ancient giant sequoias, deep valleys, waterfalls, grand meadows – a vast wilderness to behold.

Note: Check the [route ahead of time](#). Depending on the time of year, road closures can change your travel time from 2 to 6 hours.

[Half Dome Village](#) is a charming campground that has been welcoming travellers to Yosemite National Park with its picturesque tented accommodation and cinematic backdrops since 1899.

The campsite was set up by a pair of schoolteachers a year before the first automobile had even driven through Yosemite Valley. Still today, it has the same rustic wooden cabins, the 1914 entrance sign (with a new name as it was formerly called Camp Curry), the old registration office built in 1904 and dance hall built in 1913, which has now been adapted as a slightly more luxurious lodging option called the Stoneman House.

At an elevation of over 4,000 feet, with seriously spectacular views of the grandeur of Glacier Point, there are cabins with private baths, wood cabins with shared bath houses, canvas tents and motel rooms. Oh, and deer can be seen grazing throughout the camp grounds.

Booking is recommended well in advance for the high season (like a year in advance). [Browse the website here for more information.](#)

There are also several other highly Wes Anderson-esque lodging options including The Majestic Yosemite Hotel, Big Trees Lodge, the White Wolf Lodge, Tuolumne Meadows and the Glacier Point Ski Hut. [More information on these hotels here.](#)



Half Dome Village



WHAT'S LEFT OF THE GOLD RUSH TOWNS

On your way out of Yosemite, stop in a semi-ghost town called **Coulterville**. It's eerily devoid of people but comfortingly, it still has a beating heart. Help ensure this historic little town stays afloat and make it part of your road trip.

Settled in 1850 with a current population of 201, Coulterville is sorta what **Bodie** could have been if it had survived. Coulterville has streams which still produce gold to this day, but it feels like this town is hanging on tight for survival.

At the bottom of the main street there's a little western **museum** founded by local residents, mostly third and fourth generation descendents of the original miners that settled in the area. The museum offers a glimpse into the life and times of early California, from the 1800s through to the boom days of the 1849 gold rush.

(10301 CA-49, Coulterville, CA 95311; +1 209-878-3015; Thurs-Sun 10am-4pm)

San Francisco

THE SAN FRANCISCO ANTIQUÉ PLAYGROUND

Musée Mécanique is no stuffy “museum” with security checks and rules about walking in an orderly fashion. It’s an antique games arcade with no rules, it’s free entry and exists purely to put the biggest smile on the face of your inner child. The games aren’t in glass cases or behind red ropes...

Every single machine in here (there must be hundreds) is all yours for just 25 cents! And I’m not talking machines that you have to handle gently. Shake, swerve and push those buttons to your heart’s content! There are all sorts of nostalgic contraptions sourced from all over the world, including music boxes, coin-operated fortune tellers, Mutoscopes, video games, love testers, player pianos, peep shows, photo booths, dioramas and more.

Don’t miss the most nostalgic hour you can possibly spend in San Francisco at this little non-museum museum.

*(Pier 45, Fishermans Wharf, San Francisco, CA 94133; +1 415-346-2000;
open everyday 10am-8pm)*



Musée mécanique

HANGING WITH THE BEATNIKS

For San Francisco, the cradle of the **Beatnik movement** – or at least, its caffeine source – was the **Caffe Trieste**. High on a hilltop in Little Italy, Caffe Trieste was founded in 1956 by Italian immigrant Giovanni Giotta, or “Papa Gianni,” as customers called him. It was California’s very first coffee house, and actually introduced the Cappuccino to the West.

Initially, it was a little outpost for homesick Italians to gather and reminisce over bottles of chianti. Little did the late Papa Gianni know that his humble café would become the stomping ground for some of the 21st century’s greatest creatives – namely, the Beatniks.

It was (and still is) conveniently up the street from **City Lights Bookstore**, whose founder, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, made a national scandal when he published Allen Ginsberg’s poem “Howl” in 1955. Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, Michael McClure, and Bob Dylan were all regular fixtures of the blossoming beatnik scene there.

Trieste was also a stone’s throw away from **Vesuvio Café**, the bar where, before the end of his short life, Jack Kerouac once stayed a little too late into the night and missed an important rendez-vous down the coast – blowing his last chance to meet his own hero, Henry Miller.

The neighbourhood had become a part of a vibrant, bohemian trifecta. For the cherry on top of a beatnik San Francisco tour, take a look around **The Beat Museum**.



SWIMMING WITH THE GHOSTS AT THE SPECTACULAR SUTRO BATHS

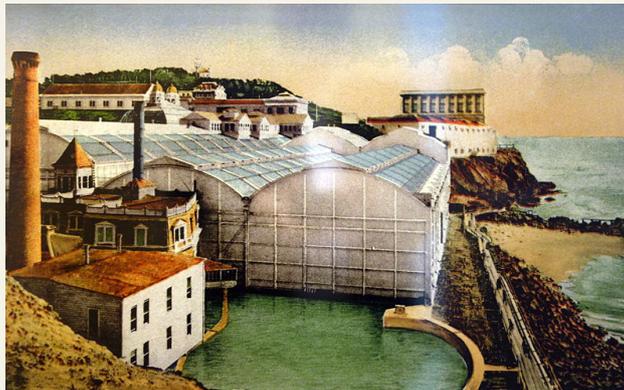
Once the world's largest indoor swimming complexes once sat on the rocky edge of San Francisco, the **Sutro Baths** is now a haunting ruin.

Water parks used to be a lot different before the days of chlorine pools, lifeguards, and road trips. Oddly, the grand baths also housed a museum of sorts featuring taxidermied animals, exotic plants, and other specimens of natural history. An amphitheater was also added for talent competitions, concerts, and other shows.

The Great Depression affected attendance, and reduction in public transit to the Baths further reduced the number of visitors. By the mid-1960s the pools had closed and were slated for demolition. In 1966, while the Sutro Baths were in the process of being demolished, the structure mysteriously caught fire in what was later determined to be arson. The developers of the site, who had intended to build high-rise apartments on the location, claimed their insurance money and left the ruins.

The National Parks Service purchased the remnants of the Sutro Baths in 1973 as part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, and are open for visitors to explore. The contours of the building are still visible, as well as the remains of the deep diving pool. There are also magnificent views and powerful waves (so be careful). Take a picnic with you, watch the sunset, and explore the nearby scenery too.

(1004 Point Lobos Ave, San Francisco, CA 94121)



EATING & DRINKING

Halu is a family run Japanese restaurant that serves the best ramen in town - the yakitori skewers are pretty tasty too. They don't take any reservations so sometimes you'll have to wait for a table but it's definitely worth it (there's a reason for the queues). The inside is full of personality. It's filled with 60s memorabilia and even the music is on theme. You can tell that the owners are crazy about the Beatles.

*(312 8th Ave, San Francisco, CA 94118; +1 415-221-9165;
Tues-Sat 5pm-10pm)*

The Tonga Room & Hurricane Bar: the 73 year-old Tiki Bar hiding in the basement of the Fairmont Hotel. The lava-rock walls remain cluttered with the same totem poles, Tiki statues, and suspended canoes as they did in the swinging 60s when Tiki was all the rage. Every half-hour or so, the lights dim and a faux hurricane — complete with thunder sounds and water falling around the lagoon's periphery — make guests feel as if they're sailing away to an island paradise mid-storm. Be warned that there's often a long wait to get inside, so you'll have to hustle yourself down the basement as soon as the clock strikes five.

*(950 Mason St, San Francisco, CA 94108; +1 415-772-5278;
Wed, Thurs & Sun 5pm-11.30pm, Fri & Sat 5pm-12.30am)*



Food Truck Party takes place every Friday night (5pm-10pm) during the summer months on the waterfront at the **Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture**. There are over thirty food vendors serving a range of fingerlicking food from Chinese dishes to handmade pasta and there's also live music, because it wouldn't be a party without music right? And craft cocktails! There are sheltered lounge spaces and communal fire pits where you can get cosy and make friends with your neighbours while eating your treats. Entry is free, but if you're feeling extra special you can buy a VIP ticket for \$25 which includes four generous tasters from different trucks and queue jumping. You can buy these tickets [online](#) or at the Information Booth.

(Fort Mason Center for Arts & Culture, 2 Marina Blvd Building C, Room 260, San Francisco, CA 94123; +1 415-339-5888; [Offthegrid.com](#); check website for upcoming dates)

The Ferry Building, which is one of the most iconic buildings in the city, is home to a tremendous market that could even give the French marché a run for their money. The vendors also have lots of information about their produce up their sleeves if you ask. Don't forget to step outside the back part of the building to experience the scenic views of the Bay.

(Tues and Thurs 10am-2pm, Sat 8am-2pm)

Universal Café serves seasonal North-Californian food in the Mission District, a hipster hub, with lots of restaurants and concept stores.

(2814 19th St, San Francisco, CA 94110; +1 415-821-4608; check website for opening hours)

Loló is a fun Jaliscan-Californian inspired restaurant that serves scrumptious tacos. You'll be surrounded by bright Mexican colours and ever changing whimsical decor made with recycled materials such as clothes, candy boxes, paper boats and more.

(974 Valencia St, San Francisco, CA 94110; +1 415-643-5656; check website for opening hours)

Trou Normand is for all the meat lovers out there. At Trou Normand, there is house-made charcuterie and salumi with up to 40 different varieties. On top of that, the drinks are carefully chosen from artisan makers and small batch producers. The restaurant is set in an Art Deco high-rise building and the interior is like a high end American diner cum French brasserie with nude paintings on the walls and marble surfaces that line the tables and bar.

(140 New Montgomery St, San Francisco, CA 94105; +1 415-975-0876; open everyday 3pm-11pm apart from Sun)

WINE WEEKEND IN NAPPA VALLEY



St. Helena is the heart of the Napa Valley. It's a charming, highly instagrammable town with plenty of wine tasting spots, elegant restaurants, art galleries and cute shops. Start your wine discovery at the hard-to-find and secretive **Newton Vineyard** and nurse your hangover at **Archetype** for brunch.

There are accommodation options for a range of budgets within walking distance to downtown St. Helena:

EL BONITA MOTEL

A homely and cosy motel which was once a religious retreat and an art deco motel in the 1950s.

(2197 195 Main St, St Helena, CA 94574; +1 707-963-3216)

INN ST. HELENA

A delightful, stylish and charming boutique B&B with delicious home cooked breakfasts.

(1515 Main Street, Saint Helena, CA 94574; +1 707-963-3003)

LAS ALCOBAS ST. HELENA

A luxurious 4-star hotel set in a Georgian-style farmhouse with iconic vineyard views.

(1915 Main St, St Helena, CA 94574; +1 707-963-7000)

If you'd like an even more affordable option you can make fort at the **Chablis Inn**, which is a 25 minute drive away from St. Helena but close to other amenities. *(3360 Solano Ave, Napa, CA 94558; +1 707-257-1944).*

If you're searching for something a little more bohemian, **this historic art studio** turned Airbnb might be the place for you. The iconic rock band **The Grateful Dead** stayed and played on the property in the 1970s.

DAY TRIP TO **BOLINAS**



A 45 minutes drive outside of San Francisco you can find the charming small town that is **Bolinas**, which is home to surfers and poets in the Marin County.

Bolinas Beach is the main beach in town and it's great for surfing.

There's also the delightful **Bolinas Museum**, where you can browse local art and find free cultural events. Eat at the cute **Coast Café** on the terrace next to the museum among the friendly residents.

California's Gold Coast



BIG SUR

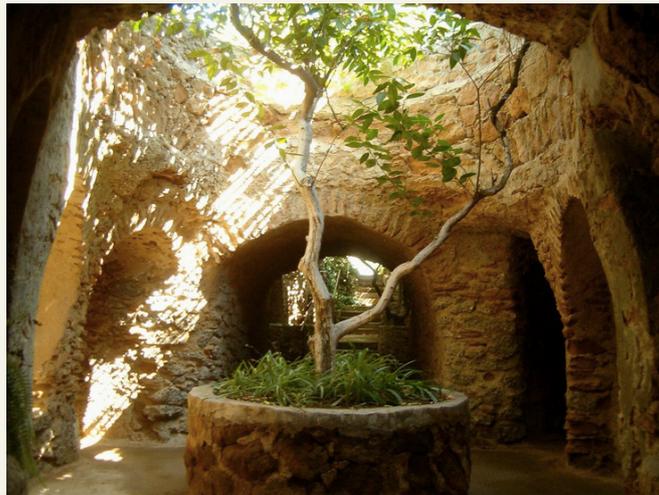
After your extended stay in San Francisco, set your course for **Carmel-by-the-Sea**, a small beach town known for its fairytale cottages.

There are many nice places to stay such as [Green Lantern](#) and [Hotel Carmel](#) but be sure to book ahead of time because this is a small and popular town.

Drive down the Big Sur while looking out for the seals and whales until you reach the spectacularly extravagant [Hearst Castle](#). They said it was where California met the world. Where Egyptian antiquities mingled with cast sculptures by Bernini, and the gaze of medieval eyes met those of Hollywood's elite. There are many tours to choose from, such as the Grand Rooms Tour and Hearst and Hollywood Tour, and they all include tickets for the shuttle bus up to the castle. Once you arrive at the visitor centre, you'll board [the Hearst Castle](#) bus all the way up to the top of the Enchanted Hill.

(750 Hearst Castle Rd, San Simeon, CA 93452; open everyday 8am-4pm)

A CENTURY OLD SUBTERRANEAN **GARDEN**



Fresno tends to be one of those cities that people are 'just passing through' on their way to see something else. But pass through too quickly and you'll miss out on a little secret subterranean paradise.

More of an underground mansion, the **Forestiere Gardens** are a man-made creation of sprawling subterranean passageways, courtyards and living quarters built by a single man. With just a wheelbarrow, a pick and a shovel, a Sicilian farmer built nearly 100 rooms, passageways and courtyards with circular holes above to allow a variety of plants and fruit-bearing trees to take root in large planters and protrude through the openings at ground level.

He carved out bedrooms, a kitchen, bathing area, living room and even his own personal chapel. The farmer had no formal education in architecture or engineering and yet, his arches, vaults and stone-built walls mimicked the sophisticated building techniques of the Ancient Romans. Today, the farmer's descendants run a small operation under the Forestiere Historical Center, that opens up the extraordinary home to the public and offers guided tours as well as special extended sessions at sunset.

(5021 W Shaw Ave, Fresno, CA 93722; +1 559-271-0734; Wed-Sat 10am-4pm)



THE KITCHIEST HOTEL IN THE WORLD

At the **Madonna Inn**, your inner-Liberace can run free. The landmark hotel situated on California's central coast was first built as just a 12-room motel in 1958 by Alex Madonna, a self-made contractor who designed the inn on the back of a napkin. Today it boasts 110 rooms and sits on approximately 2,200 acres. Like an Ali Baba cave of kitsch, each room has its own unique theme and design. All the rooms are quadruple the size of any normal hotel room you've ever seen and some guests stay at the Madonna for a week, changing rooms every night. The first guest to pull a "Goldilocks" and sleep in all 110 rooms did so in 1977. It took her seven years.

(100 Madonna Rd, San Luis Obispo, CA 93405; +1 805-543-3000)

THE LAST STAGECOAST TAVERN OF THE WILD WILD WEST

Cold Spring Tavern. It isn't your average bandit's watering hole.

In roughly 150 years, it's housed everything from a baby leopard named Ricky, to a Frenchman's failed ballet school, and it's one of the last surviving stops of California's perilous stagecoach days. To get there, your car will have to hug miles of winding road off the highway 154, and plummet 400 ft. below one of California's deadliest bridges, but the pilgrimage is worth it. There are few signs indicating that you're on the right path, but eventually you'll reach the emerald ravine where the tavern awaits.

Alternatively, you can look for the chimney smoke, and listen for the bubbling of the nearby (cold) spring. On the menu you can find a burger with real buffalo meat, ribs, pulled-pork and beef dip sandwiches, and a grilled cheese with onion jelly for vegetarians. There used to be a burger made with Black Bear meat (a retired manager swears it was humanely raised for eating, and not poached). Today, Winnie the Pooh is off the menu, but still on the walls.

*(5995 Stagecoach Rd, Santa Barbara, CA 93105; +1 805-967-0066;
Mon-Fri 11am-9pm & Sat-Saun 8am-9pm)*

Have a drink at the iconic **San Ysidro Ranch Hotel**, where the Kennedys spent their honeymoon. The beautiful garden is also the place where Vivien Leigh and Sir Laurence Olivier exchanged vows. If you can swing for a fancy meal, there are two options: the **Stonehouse** set in a 19th-century citrus packing house with an idyllic ocean view and the more relaxed **Plow & Angel** where you must try the famous mac 'n cheese and ribs under stained-glass windows.

(1399, 900 San Ysidro Ln, Montecito, CA 93108; +1 805-565-1700)



The Cold Spring Tavern

Ojai



John Lennon and Yoko Ono used to escape to **Ojai** when life became too much for them and the valley has long been a refuge for reclusive artists. The small city has been extolled as the Shangri-La of North America. The population is under 8,000 and chains and franchises are outlawed in this town, so “shop local” is the reality here.

EATING & DRINKING

Farmer and the Cook: Every Sunday through the summer, they light their outdoor wood-burning pizza oven and everyone sits at tables outside on the patio for the live music at 6:30pm.

*(339 W El Roblar Dr, Ojai, CA 93023; +1 805-640-9608;
open everyday 8am-8.30pm)*

If you're looking for a place with good conversation, **Chief's Peak** is the beer and wine bar located at Ojai Rancho Inn. The friendly bartender is always playing his vinyls, and there's free pretzels and great wine.

(615 W Ojai Ave, Ojai, CA 93023; +1 805-646-1434; Mon-Sun 4pm-10pm)

Just another example of Ojai's small-town charm – visit Christopher at the **Deer Lodge**, where he works at the bar and occasionally plays live music with his band. Deer Lodge offers the atmosphere of a real hunting lair with its big stone hearths and leather upholstery. It is nestled off the road just as you are heading up into the hills surrounding Ojai.

*(2261 Maricopa Hwy, Ojai, CA 93023; +1 805-646-4256;
Mon-Thur 12pm-10pm, Fri-Sat 10.30am-1am, Sun 10.30am-10pm)*

SEEING AND DOING

The famous potter Beatrice Wood, a close friend of Marcel Duchamp, resided in Ojai, and [her studio](#) is still on view to the public at particular times for viewings.

(8585 Ojai Rd, Ojai, CA 93023; +1 805-646-3381; Fri-Sun 11am-5pm)

[Bart's Books](#) is the largest independently owned and operated outdoor book shop in the United States. The sun spangled mini-courtyards arranged in a tangled maze will suck you in for hours just browsing the books, which range from obscure to contemporary.

(302 W Matilija St, Ojai, CA 93023; +1 805-646-3755; open everyday 9.30am-6pm)

One simply cannot pass through Ojai without sampling the extensive network of hiking trails that weave up and around the valley. We would recommend [Matilija Canyon Trail](#), [Tar and Sespe Creeks](#), or [Horn Canyon Trail](#) for something a bit shorter. And if just being in Ojai hasn't already made you "chill" enough, make sure to take a wander around the 32 acres of gardens up on Meditation Mount.

Play farmer for a day and get lost in the fields and vineyards of Ojai. The town literally smells of orange blossoms since the entire valley is surrounded by orange groves and Ojai pixie tangerines are a local specialty. Don't forget to visit the [Ojai Olive Oil Company](#). The farmers offer a free tour and tasting every Wednesday and Saturday. Lavender is another wonderful local crop and you can even visit one of the local lavender farms. Pick up more of these local goods at the [weekly farmer's market](#) and catch the local bluegrass band while you're there.



SHOPPING

Check out **Rains**, the Old Fashioned department store that hasn't changed for half a century, where you can buy anything from cowboy jeans to greeting cards and soap.

*(218 E Ojai Ave, Ojai, CA 93023; +1 805-646-1441;
Mon-Sat 9.30am-6pm & Sun 9.30am-5pm).*

Fig is everything the modern hippie needs to adorn his or her home and garden stylishly, of course "with a focus on local, handmade, and fair trade goods."

*(327 E Ojai Ave, Ojai, CA 93023; +1 805-646-6561;
Mon-Thur & Sun 10am-5pm, Fri-Sat 10am-6pm)*

Located by the road in the town, is the converted "Wes Anderson" gas station. At **Summer Camp**, you'll be filling up your trunk rather than your tank, because here you'll find a hoard of charming handcrafted pieces to decorate your pad and curious vintage items you won't be able to resist.

*(1020 W Ojai Ave, Ojai, CA 93023; +1 805-861-7109;
Tues-Sat 11am-5pm & Sun 12am-4pm)*



WHERE TO STAY

For a quirky vibe, head straight over to the [Capri Hotel](#).

This roadside motel is something straight out of your quintessential vision of the American West. The hotel manager, Christopher, is truly a hoot, like a character plucked from a Roald Dahl book. The Capri is the perfect mixture of kitschy and chic, and it truly looks like a hold-out from the 1960s.

(1180 E Ojai Ave, Ojai, CA 93023; +1 805-646-4305)

Los Angeles



VENICE BEACH

Once upon a time in America, they attempted to rebuild the canals of Venice (and the man behind it all was named Mr. Abbot Kinney).

Before 1929, the entire area between Abbot Kinney, Pacific and Venice Boulevard was known for its beautifully lit waterways with gondolas brought in from Venice Italy and arched bridges drew widespread publicity.

Take the **back route** via the canals to get to Venice Beach and learn about how it got its name...

Venice became known as the “Coney Island of the Pacific,” with ornate Venetian-style businesses along its banks and a full-sized amusement pier. But then came the automobile culture and by the 1930s, these canals were an outdated attraction and most were filled in to make roads.

By 1940, the remaining canals had fallen into disrepair and the sidewalks were condemned by the city. In the 1990s, after more than half a century of neglect, California’s Venice finally found its renaissance. Today, these fully renovated canals and charming waterside homes have become some of the most desirable (and expensive) real estate in the city. It’s the perfect spot of imaginary house hunting. You can easily eat up an entire afternoon weaving your way through the canals, picking out your dream house.

Head to Abbot Kinney Boulevard of Venice for some retail therapy and get into that “beach bum chic” Venice vibe at [Tumbleweed & Dandelion](#) where you might imagine all the sun-bleached Californians come to decorate their surf shacks.

*(1502 Abbot Kinney Blvd, Venice, CA 90291; +1 310-450-4310;
Sun-Wed 11am-6pm, Thu-Sat 11am-7pm)*

Explore the back alleys and side streets of Abbot Kinney, which hide all kinds of creative studios and retails gems, such as [Nick Fouquet’s](#) hat shop.

(853 Lincoln Blvd, Venice, CA 90291; +1 310-310-2315; Mon-Sat 12pm-7pm)

Once you get to the beach, head over to the skate park to see some talented locals doing their thing. For the ultimate sunset and apéro over Venice Beach, try the rooftop bar at [Hotel Erwin](#).

*(1697 Pacific Ave, Venice, CA 90291; +1 310-452-1111;
Mon-Thu 12pm-10pm, Fri 12pm-12am, Sun 10am-10pm)*





HANGING OUT WITH THE HOLLYWOOD STARS

If any of Johnny Depp's characters went clothes shopping, whether it be the sea-faring Jack Sparrow, the cravat-wearing Mad Hatter, the 1930s bank-robbing John Dillinger, or Roux and his band of river gypsies from *Chocolat*, **Mister Freedom** would probably be the place you'd find them digging through the rails. In fact, this is probably why Mr. Depp is a patron of the shop himself. It's very much like a movie set of its own, with 3200 square feet of space on the ground floor alone dedicated to various concept islands with themes such as 'tropical colonial' and 'depression era work-wear'. The 1930s brick building in Los Angeles houses an incredible inventory of vintage clothing dating as far back as the 1850s as well as rare textiles, books and antique props.

*(7161 Beverly Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90036; +1 323-653-2014;
open everyday 11am-6pm)*

Feel like a Hollywood star and eat breakfast at the glamorous **Beverly Hills Hotel** whose regular guests have included Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor, Frank Sinatra and more.

The piece de resistance is the art-deco **Polo Lounge** with its candy striped ceiling and pretty patio. It's the perfect breakfast spot, although you can eat there all day and even have some afternoon tea. While you marvel at the historic restaurant, you'll be serenaded by a live pianist who also plays jazz during Sunday brunch. Next door is the tiny 1950s diner of the stars where Guns N' Roses were signed. At the **Fountain Coffee Room** counter you can eat breakfast and milkshakes all day.

Get a drink on the terrace looking over the garden at **Bar Nineteen12**, where there's an ice cream sundae named after Marilyn Monroe who was a regular at this spot.

(9641 Sunset Boulevard, Beverly Hills, CA 90210; +1 310-276-2251)

Take a Hollywood Studio Tour at **Warner Bros. Studios**. You can choose from the Studio Tour, Classics Tour, and the Deluxe Tour. All the tours are different as they're dependant on the current sets and on what's being filmed at the time of your visit.

*(3400 Warner Blvd, Burbank, CA 91505; +1 818-977-8687;
Mon-Sun 8.30am-3.30pm)*





THE REMAINS OF A HOLLYWOOD PLAYGROUND WIPED OFF THE MAP

Surfridge, once developed as “an isolated playground for the wealthy” was one of the most coveted neighborhoods in Los Angeles. Today, it has been wiped off the map following a [bumpy history concerning airplanes.](#)

The old street lights strangely still light up each night, but the residents they once shined for are long gone. Like a post-apocalyptic experiment, behind a barbed-wire fence, weeds are thriving through the cracks, overtaking the streets still lined with their iconic Hollywood palm trees à la Beverly Hills along the sidewalks. What’s left of demolished property walls can be found hidden behind thick bushes and disconnected power lines lie in the sun like scorched black worms.

The area is not completely abandoned however, as it’s now a federally protected habitat for the endangered El Segundo blue butterfly. The species is now flourishing thanks to the 200-acre butterfly preserve and more than 125,000 new butterflies take flight each summer. Managed by the city of Los Angeles, the area has been reintroduced to its native buckwheat plant, where the El Segundo butterflies feed and lay their eggs.



EATING AND DRINKING AROUND LA

The **Brentwood Country Mart** will make you feel like you're in a little village. Here you can find picture perfect shops selling jewellery, homewares, books, chocolate and cheese – but make sure to get your tacos on at Frida Tacos.

(225 26th Street Santa Monica, CA 90402; +1 310-458-6682)

For the best sandwiches in LA, go out of your way to find the legendary **Johnnie's Pastrami**.

*(4017 Sepulveda Blvd, Culver City, CA 90230; +1 310-397-6654;
Mon-Wed 10am-11pm, Thu-Sat 10am-3.30am, Sun 10am-1am)*

Cliff's Edge is the perfect place for a brunch or a romantic date in the evening. Walk through the decorative middle-eastern style grand entrance and take a seat on the colourful cushions among the lush greenery and giant tree in the romantic patio.

*(3626 Sunset Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90026; +1 323-666-6116;
check website for opening details)*

Have lunch at rustic and historic French-American restaurant, **République**. Complete with the Parisian-style metro sign on the exposed bricks of the Spanish-style construction built for Charlie Chaplin as a business investment.

*(624 South La Brea Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90036; +1 310-362-6115;
Sun-Wed 8am-3pm & 5.30pm-10pm, Thu-Sat 8am-3pm & 5.30pm-11pm)*

If you've had one too many cocktails and decadent food, have a little detox at **Sqirl**. At this popular healthy hipster café you'll find exotic sounding food such as Kokuho Rose rice with lacto-fermented hot sauce, Midnight Moon and fiddlehead. There is usually a line, but it's worth the wait.

*(720 N Virgil Ave #4, Los Angeles, CA 90029; +1 323-284-8147;
Mon-Fri 6.30am-4pm, Sat-Sun 8am-4pm)*

Taste the American cuisine and exotic cocktails at **Laurel Hardware** in Beverly Hills, hidden behind the facade of a retro electric and plumbing shop.

*(7984 Santa Monica Blvd, West Hollywood, CA 90046; +1 323-656-6070;
check website for opening hours)*

Taverna Tony: Take a drive out to Malibu to try this little Greek family favourite. You'll get generous portions and easygoing vibes with live music and the occasional belly dancer. You might even spot a Kardashian!

*(23410 Civic Center Way, Malibu, CA 90265; +1 310-317-9667;
Sun-Thu 11am-10.30pm, Fri-Sat 11am-2am)*



L.A BOOGIE NIGHTS

Davey Wayne's is a rad little retro bar that transports you back to 1970s Los Angeles. First thing to know, the door to Davey Wayne's is actually refrigerator, but this is hardly the coolest thing about the joint.

There are no "guest lists" at Davey Wayne, and patrons come from all walks of life, ranging from bearded biker dudes and Hawaiian shirt-wearing voice-over artists to short-short clad little hipsters and young professionals. Part speakeasy, part house party (if this was the house party from the Boogie Nights movie- minus the porn) Davey Wayne's is decked out in all things kitsch, from the groovy wallpapers and polyester sofas inside to the airstream trailer converted to an outdoor patio bar decorated with string lights.

There's a grill next to the airstreamer where delicious fresh tacos, hot dogs, chicken wings and sliders are fired up. The Sno-Kones may or may not contain a good serving of Bourbon whisky and the DJ wails out some fantastically nostalgic tunes.

*(1611 N El Centro Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90028; +1 323-962-3804;
Mon-Fri 5pm-2am, Sat-Sun 2pm-2am)*

There's only one "old-school" skating rink left in the city of angels. A 1950s roller skating rink still going strong, **Moonlight Rollerway** has got to be the ultimate time-travelling date night. Whether you're out with the girls or coupling up, this kitschy throwback to the staple of American youth has everything you need to roll back the years and have a good time...

*(5110 San Fernando Rd, Glendale, CA 91204; +1 818-241-3630;
check website for opening hours)*

LA's oldest running bowling alley is still open for business to take a trip down memory lane. When **Highland Park Bowl** first opened 89 years ago in the midst of the prohibition, bowling was its side business while booze was its big business.

There was a pharmacy out front, a doctor's office upstairs where they would write you a prescription for an alcoholic remedy and conveniently, a bar in the back to fill your prescription where there also happened to be a bowling alley.

When the LA-based designers 1933 Group stepped in to restore this sleeping beauty, she had been used mainly for restoration by previous owners and the bowling lanes looked as if they hadn't been used since the sixties. The vintage machines were repurposed along with a fair amount of other forgotten "junk" left behind on the premises, including bar stools, unopened whiskey bottles, and old bowling league pennants. They even dusted off the bowling pins found behind the machines, sawed off their tops and turned them into bar lamps.

*(5621 N Figueroa St, Los Angeles, CA 90042; +1 323-257-2695;
Mon-Fri 5pm-2am, Sat-Sun 11am-2am)*

L.A to the Mojave Desert



You can check into this motel California
but you can never leave

Check into [Hicksville Pines Bud & Breakfast](#) in Idyllwild.

First things first, it's definitely worth mentioning that Dita Von Teese designed her very own room (and bathroom) at the motel. There's a haunted house room, ideal for acting out your favourite scenes from Psycho as well as a Twin Peaks inspired room. And do you remember those kitschy heart-shaped tubs from the [old Poconos](#) resorts? Yup, Hicksville has one in their Honeymoon suite. And let's not forget "Room 420", I'm sure you can imagine what the inspiration was there.

(23481 CA-243, Idyllwild, CA 92549; +1 310-584-1086)

Palm Springs



Pink Satin Romance at Elvis and Priscilla's Honeymoon Hideaway

Elvis Presley's former home, the mid-century house at 1350 Ladera Circle in Palm Springs - is a mandatory visit when passing through Palm Springs.

You can bounce on Elvis' pink satin marital bed or even sleep in the damn thing if you so desire. You can even pose for photos inside his honeymoon tub.

In May 1967, Elvis returned from Las Vegas on Frank Sinatra's borrowed private jet with his new bride Priscilla in tow. The King of Rock'n'Roll carried her up the steps of the house serenading her with his hit, "Hawaiian Wedding Song". It was in this house, in this pink canopy bed that their first daughter Lisa was conceived.

Despite the change of hands and its current "for sale" status, the house is still open to the public, functioning like a museum of sorts, as it has been since its 1990s restoration and remaining very much a "time capsule" of Elvis and Priscilla's honeymoon period. Special events are held each year to celebrate the marriage of Elvis and Priscilla, as well as Elvis' birthday and passing. Daily tours of the property take visitors on the couple's escape route used to elope without the world's press crashing their wedding.

*(1350 Ladera Circle, Palm Springs CA 92262; +1 760-322-1192;
buy tickets and see upcoming events on the website)*

There other fine examples of Modernist architecture in the area which you can visit too. You can learn about funky 60s Californian architecture on the [Palm Springs Art Museum website](#). Just driving around the residential neighbourhoods will give you some pretty good examples as well.

[Frey House II](#), which was incredibly built around a boulder, is named after the architect Albert Frey. It took him 5 years to choose the spot, 1 year to measure the movement of the sun with a 10-foot pole, and when he built the house, it was at the highest elevation of any home in the city.

(686 Palisades Dr, Palm Springs, CA 92262; book online)





WHERE TO STAY

Ace Hotel: The hotel is set in a mid-century modernist building and there's a 50s style roadside diner called **King's Highway.**

There's also a spa and two giant pools – which will be a godsend if you're passing through in the summer.

(701 E Palm Canyon Dr, Palm Springs, CA 92264; +1 760-325-9900)

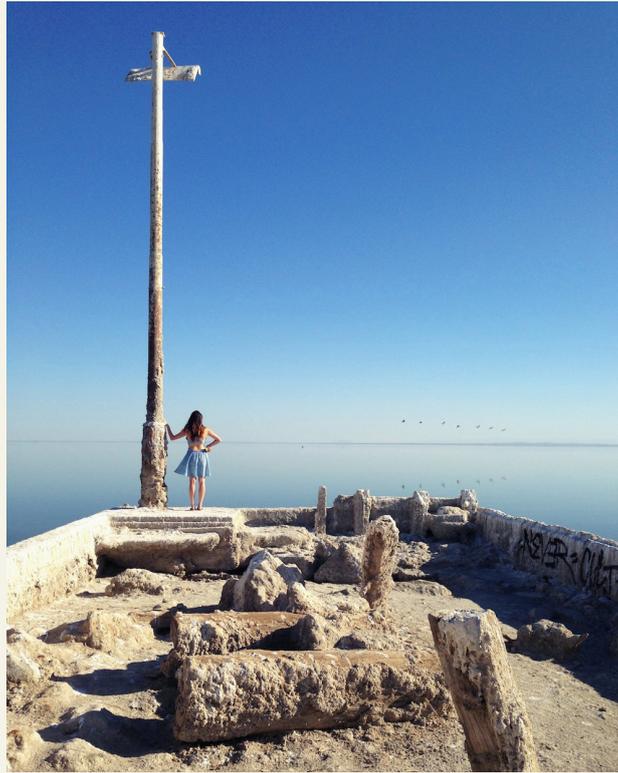
In keeping with the Palm Springs theme, some other mid-century hotels we recommend are **Orbit In Hotel** and **The Saguaro.**

Surreal tourism of the Salton Sea



**Sixty miles from the fresh golf courses
and glitzy hotels of Palm Springs,
there's a forgotten place.**

Roads lead to nowhere, signs point to nothingness and the houses
are home to no one.



The apocalypse certainly did come early for the **Salton Sea**, although it's eerily beautiful and absolutely surreal if you can get past the lingering stench of the place, which is unfortunately now one of its most infamous attributes.

Conceived as a resort paradise in the 60s and 70s for boaters, water skiers and vacationers, the Salton Seaside was once called the next palm springs, hailed as the American Riviera and a "miracle in the desert". Vacation homes popped up like cactus blossoms, holidaymakers flooded the beaches and yacht clubs served martinis with views of the sunset.

Disaster struck in the 1970s, when masses of fish suddenly died and floated to the surface. What was killing the thousands of fish was quickly identified as agricultural run off from local farms into the Salton Sea. The lake didn't have enough drainage (this was after all, how the body of water was formed) and had no ecosystem to refresh itself. The toxic gas killed millions of fish, even up to 7 million at one time. Then the birds that ate the fish also got sick. Residents could smell and taste the gas in the air. Decades after being abandoned, the effects of water, sun and salt, are clear. The most 'apocalyptic' part of Salton Sea is probably [Bombay Beach](#) on the eastern shore, a little ways after you pass the [World Famous International Banana Museum](#).



After a somber but surreal tour of the Salton Sea, you'll probably need something a little more cheerful...so it's pretty handy that one of the most whimsical places on earth is just down the road.

If you're a seeker of the off-beat and the off-grid, you've probably come across [Salvation Mountain](#) on your internet or real-life travels.

This ravishing burst of colour, a monument to hope, love and joy in the Colorado desert outside Niland, California, was built by one man called Leonard Knight over three decades, piece by piece.

This place is nothing short of magical. Wandering through its passageways, nooks and looking up at its immense size, you feel a bit like Dorothy might have when she found Oz.

(Beal Rd, Calipatria, CA 92233; open everyday 6.30am-6.30pm)

Slab City



**Slab City is no city,
at least not as we know it.**

There are no buildings here, only outdated tin can RVs, make-shift shacks and various inexplicable structures. There is no electricity, no running water, no sewers nor toilets. This is a place where misfits of traditional society have come to escape. There are no rules here. Nothing is expected or particularly comprehensible.

Slab City takes its name from the concrete slabs that remain from the abandoned World War II Marine barracks of Camp Dunlap, which stood here before it. After the army left, nobody claimed the land and in 1965, the squatters began moving in, drawn to the uncontrolled site for various reasons; some out of necessity to escape urban poverty and others as a choice to live off the grid and be left alone.

THE ROCK AND ROLL CLUB OF THE DESERT VAGABONDS

Once you come across [The Range](#) you'll discover that Slab City isn't all about being lonely and withdrawn from life... In the most isolated, remote and unexpected of places, a rather menacing metal bull's head and his scorpion buddy indicate that you've arrived at the outsider city's open-air music hall. Complete with stage, make-shift twinkle lights, amplifiers, speakers, tattered couches and discarded cafeteria chairs for seating, The Range is the coolest spot in "town".

Then again, it's the only spot in town, but somehow has the promise of a better time than at any bar you could find in the big bad city. For fifteen years, every Saturday night at sunset, The Range has lit up its twinkle lights crafted out of discarded buckets and attracted locals and visitors alike for an evening of live music under the desert stars.

(887 Beal Rd, Niland, California 92257; check website for openings)

Sleep nearby at [Brawley Inn](#) in Brawley.

(575 W Main St, Brawley, CA 92227, USA; +1 760-344-1199)

Joshua Tree



Book yourself a trailer at the [Hicksville Trailer Palace](#) which you'll find in a secret location in Joshua Tree. Hicksville has nine themed trailers, a swimming pool, communal BBQ area and endless kitschy amenities to make your American road trip stop a total blast.

Rest assured there will also be some interesting fellow guests at Hicksville to get to know around the pool with a beer in hand and the jukebox wailing the rad house radio tunes late into the night. After filling yourself up with a tasty BBQ, head for the roof deck to do some serious star-gazing.

The closest town to Hicksville is Yucca Valley. Don't miss [Route 62 Art and Antiques](#) on the 29 Palms Highway and the quirky roadside architecture of [Route 62...](#)

Nearby, there is also the very eerie **Pioneertown**, built in the 1940s as an old Western motion picture where actors and crews could also live during filming. Movies haven't been shot there and the wind whistles eerily around this strange fake frontier town.

Mingle with the local bikers at the famous [Pappy & Harriet's Pioneertown Palace](#). Here you'll find moreish barbeque food, live music and a good boogie. This place has featured in many western films and is always buzzing. Make sure to book in advance for tickets and to reserve if you're going to eat there.

*(53688 Pioneertown Rd, Pioneertown, CA 92268; +1 760-365-5956;
Thur-Sun 11am-9.30pm, Mon 5pm-9.30pm)*



Cruising for roadside relics on Route 66



You won't be able to drive for more than ten minutes at a time without your car wheels screeching to a halt at the sight of some crumbling roadside structure calling out to be discovered...

Pass through the sleepy but not entirely defunct Route 66 town of **Needles**, California, where there are several abandoned motels in a row dotting the roadside.

Roy's Motel and Café first opened in Amboy, California in 1938 as a gas and service station along the legendary main street of America, U.S. Highway 66. In the 1940s, Roy Crowl expanded the business to include a café, an auto repair garage and motel, operating 24 hours a day – seven days a week. Roy's was always busy, cashing in on a postwar business boom as families re-discovered the joys of motor travel following the automobile industry's wartime rut.

Then in 1972, the Interstate 40 opened in California and quite literally meant the overnight loss of business and ultimate downfall for Roy's. Today, despite decades of decline and failed reboots for the Route 66 landmark, Roy's is very much just as it was, preserved in a mid-century time warp.

(87520 National Trails Hwy, Amboy, CA 92304; +1 760-733-1066)





It's time for us to say goodbye as we leave
you on the majestic roads of Route 66.

Don't forget your road map.