

# SANTA BARBARA

THE AMERICAN RIVIERA®

CONFERENCE + VISITORS BUREAU + FILM COMMISSION

## **ROADFOOD 101: SANTA BARBARA'S CACHE OF CULINARY TREASURES INDULGES FOODIES WITH A PASSION FOR REGIONAL PRODUCTS/CUISINE**

*Get Off Grid and On Grill with World Famous Santa Maria BBQ, Fresh Catch  
and Scandinavian Sweets*

Every region has its stash of great roadside eateries, places locals haunt and tourists hanker for. These sleeves-up, non-franchised, no-reservations outposts are driven by cooks, bakers and pit-masters who are true Americana folk artists, preserving regional cuisine infused with a dash of local color. In Santa Barbara, the area's rich and diverse agricultural and culinary roots run deep – as does the devotion of local chefs helming the stoves. Fork in hand, a regional romp delivers a delicious slice of locally-farmed foods crafted into seasonal dishes and regional specialties that define Santa Barbara cuisine. From the wonderful winter haul of spiny lobster to traditional Santa Maria-style barbeque and the sinful sweets of Solvang, the area is bursting with truly local bounty. Get off the beaten path and savor the flavors with a tasty trek from valley to sea.

### **FIRE IT UP! (The Grill Deal)**

Lip smackin' barbeque is a mainstay in Santa Maria, harkening back to the days of the vaqueros celebrating the close of a long and laborious cattle round up. Today, traditional Santa Maria-style barbeque, the "Number One Food Experience Not to be Missed in California" (according to the *California Sate Visitors Guide*), requires less toil. Tie up the car and mosey into a bevy of street barbecue stops along Broadway in Santa Maria for a sumptuous feast of barbequed top sirloin, fresh salsa, pinto beans (a small pink bean grown exclusively in the Santa Maria Valley), toasted French bread and green salad.

Kick things up a notch with a visit to Guadalupe, just west of Santa Maria. A popular spot for cowboys and farmers since 1958, **Far Western Tavern** is *the* stop for all things meat. This legendary eatery was born during the California Rancho Era of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and continues the legacy today with the true taste of Santa Maria-style barbeque. Visitors can dive into the famous Bulls Eye Steak, a rib eye cut rubbed with robust seasonings of garlic, pepper and salt over an open pit barbeque of sizzling native red oak delivering a hearty, smoky flavor. Owned by the Minetti family, this outpost set in the former Palace Hotel (1912) cooks all of its beef this way, with traditional sides of slow-cooked pinto beans and all the trimmings.

A hit on Food Network's "BBQ with Bobby Flay," the Tavern boasts a long wooden saloon bar appropriately adorned with mounts of elk, moose and authentic cowhide curtains and door coverings. Red velour wallpaper and vintage ranch photos round out the experience. **Tip:** The Tavern's proprietary Zinfandel is the local juice of choice. Home Chefs can bring the flavors of the Far Western home via [www.susieqbrand.com](http://www.susieqbrand.com). [www.farwesterntavern.com](http://www.farwesterntavern.com), 805.543.2211.

Head 12 miles south of Santa Maria to reach a true throwback to California's "Wild West" – the **Hitching Post of Casmalia**. Set on a dusty two-lane street in a town of 200, this restaurant is the definition of "outback," drawing crowds from afar to its rustic red barn façade for world-class barbeque. Santa Barbara County Historical Landmark #37, the Hitching Post stakes a claim to fame for the first oakwood barbeque and specializes in U.S.D.A. Prime beef barbeque with all the fixin's. Hot, red scrub oak and secret seasonings make this restaurant a belly up for beef-lovers; chicken, ribs, quail and seafood round out the menu.

Owned by the Ostini family (brother Frank Ostini owns Hitching Post II in Buellton, a popular *Sideways* stop), this quirky time warp was a hotel/restaurant since the 1920s. When the Ostini's got behind the pit in 1952, just one menu selection was offered: an 18 oz. steak (top sirloin, New York, T-bone or filet mignon), fries, shrimp cocktail, tossed green salad, ice cream and dessert for \$3.75. Today, the weather-beaten walls of the 100-year old building are crammed with foodies seeking Old West hospitality and killer barbeque. **Tip:** Match the meal with a Hitching Post Highliner Pinot Noir, worth the trek alone. [www.hitchingpost1.com](http://www.hitchingpost1.com), 805.937.6151.

Savvy travelers know street food is one of the best ways to dip into a destination and Santa Ynez is one stop well worth scouting. Deep in Santa Barbara's wine country on the corner of Highway 246 and Edison Street is a gas station with a hot story. **The Corner Station & BBQ** fuels up every weekend with an open-air pit of hot red oak turning out down-and-dirty traditional tri-tip sandwiches and baby back ribs, dry rubbed and delicious. Ranchers, resident Chumash Indians and requisite bikers make the pilgrimage to this spot, cashing in on a perfectly 'cued sandwich, chips and soda for just \$7.00. **Tip:** El Rancho Market on Highway 246 is the spot for great local edibles including Mississippi caviar (a unique bean and avocado dip), freshly made salad dressings, dips, local lavender products and olive oils, and their bbq is burning daily. 805.688.4223.

For biker-meets-barbeque and sundry wild things (a.k.a. venison, rabbit, buffalo...and the occasional kangaroo, bear and zebra), **Cold Spring Tavern** is the stop, particularly on Sundays. Hidden deep in an oak-shrouded canyon off Highway 154 en route to Santa Barbara, this 1876 stage coach stop is now a magical lamp-lit restaurant and saloon, housing such relics as the Ojai Jail, Road Gang House for Chinese laborers and rest stop rooms for the weary en route to San Francisco. For a scene right out of

*Gunsmoke*, grab a table in the main dining room for late lunch and watch the characters roll in. The tavern offers multiple dining rooms with creaky wooden floors, fireplaces and an original Log Cabin Bar. Next door, the saloon and alfresco bandstand blend bikers and live bands for a rousing weekend.

Two signature dishes deliver the real deal: Cold Spring's wild game black bean chili with venison, rabbit and buffalo simmered with black beans and the ½ lb. charbroiled buffalo burger. Venison lovers can also cash in on a barbequed venison sausage burger or wonderful breakfast venison sausage patty served with eggs. **Tip:** Locals lust for the alfresco barbeque tri tip sandwiches (\$7.00) served on Sundays. [www.coldspringtavern.com](http://www.coldspringtavern.com), 805.967.0066.

### **SOUL FOOD**

For foodies who relish off-the-beaten-track adventures, be it the twisting curves leading to Spain's famed El Bulli or that perfect bird's nest soup tucked deep in the thicket of Thailand, the "world famous Jamala Burger" fits the bill. The road is worth the reward, locals say, for this high-octane 1/3 lb., 90% fat-free lean ground beef burger stacked with fresh vine-ripened vegetables and **Jalama Burgers'** secret sauce served on an expertly grilled sesame seed bun (\$5.25). Dripping with perfection, cheese, grilled onions and jalapenos are extra.

Sandwiched between Point Arguello and Point Conception, Jalama Beach is a step back in time and getting there is time well spent. The 28 mile drive kicks off Highway 101 near Buellton on Highway 1. The initial 14 miles leading to this outback beach awash with driftwood and surfers is easy to negotiate; the last 14 miles are a study in the California Rancho Era with grazing cattle, rolling hills graced with great oak forests and narrow, twisting turns punctuated with an occasional red tail hawk – so picturesque, the road is frequently used as a backdrop for car commercials. The burger shack is located in a county park dedicated to campers; walls are smattered with crusty photos of wrecked ships, fish catches and old world mementos. The Eittrheim family has worked the grills since 1978, when mother Kathy invented the signature secret sauce. Today, son Steve keeps things buzzing. **Tip:** The proprietary Jalama Red, a seamless blend of pinot noir, cabernet franc and merlot, is a perfect foil to these famous burgers. [www.jalamabeach.com](http://www.jalamabeach.com), 805.736.5027.

The farm working community surrounding Guadalupe has spawned a cache of authentic Mexican establishments serving everything from homemade mole to tripe and tacos every which way. One stand out is **Nardo's**, a true hole-in-the-wall specializing in a *la minute* chile rellanos. Tradition takes time and diners can expect a good 45-minute wait as chef Lupe Baro turns out her signature dish. A bright red sign signals the entrance to this tiny outpost, draped in a creamy yellow with four booths and a six-seat counter. Owned by the Baro family since 1985, Nardo's rellanos are the Friday special (\$7.25), crafted from enormous local Anaheim chiles bursting with Jack and cheddar cheeses. One rellano practically

takes the plate so save room for the chips, made to order from fresh homemade corn tortillas. **Tip:** Sunday's special – *real* chicken mole – can't be beat. 805.343.2588.

Seeking a perfect union of fire and rock? Hightail it to American Flatbread's weekend restaurant – **Hearth in the Cottonwoods**. Here, owner Clark Staub and artisan bakers cull local organic and sustainably grown ingredients (within a 300 mile radius) including the water and wood source to turn out a selection of stunning pizzas from a primitive 900-degree wood-fired oven. Utilizing local rocks and clay, the oven is the pride of Staub, who hand-crafted it with the help of local masons. On weekends, the bakery's stone hearth lends a cozy atmosphere to the bustling restaurant which has become a hot spot for local vintners given its Los Alamos location. Fresh yet funky, the interior is home grown with tables hewn from local recycled barnwood, wine barrel stools, a mirror-backed bar and old fashioned wood paneling from nearby Lompoc Penitentiary. More than 85 local wines are offered with 15 by the glass, as well as a few salads and specials, determined by the local produce in season.

Originating in Vermont and distributed nationally, American Flatbread has revolutionized the concept of pizza with such local hits as Punctuated Equilibrium – a blend of kalamata olives, sweet peppers, feta cheese, rosemary and mozzarella – or the Central Coast Sausage bubbling with naturally raised pork in a house-made nitrate-free maple and fennel sausage, sun-dried tomatoes, onions, mushrooms and herbs. Cheese lovers can dive into the Cheese and Herb, a rich blend of whole milk mozzarella, three sisters raw milk serena and Italian grana padano with garlic oil and herbs. Prices range from \$7.00 - \$9.50 for a 10-inch single pizza. **Tip:** The Flatbread Red, a proprietary pinot noir, is crafted by local wine guru Jim Clendenen of Au Bon Climat. Down the street, Heaven & Earth serves Clendenen Family Wines and sparkly Cold Heaven viognier. [www.foodremembers.com](http://www.foodremembers.com), 805.344.4400.

### **SUGAR RUSH**

For the *ne plus* ultra of all things Scandinavian – and a quick sugar fix – slither into Solvang, the “Danish Capital of America.” This vibrant enclave just 45 minutes north of Santa Barbara rolls out traditional fare with definite down-home charm. Top picks include **Ingeborgs Chocolates**, a must-do for chocoholics, drawing on recipes nearly 100 years old. The ethereal chocolate covered marzipan with apricot jam or soft nougat (filbert paste) filling are sure to flip the sugar switch, as are the famous orange sticks covered in dark chocolate – a perfect road-trip nosh. Owner Bent Pedersen is always on hand for an informal tour of the assembly line, a rush right out of “I Love Lucy”!

Down the Street on Copenhagen Drive, **The Solvang Restaurant** steps up with traditional aebleskivers, a wonderful breakfast dish of pancake balls with raspberry jam dusted with powdered sugar ordered up at the street front window. **Olsen's Danish Village Bakery** is the stop for serious almond custard kringles, seven sister butter rings and apple strudel. The fresh breads – especially the whole grain pumpernickel –

are standouts. Owner Bent Olsen, a fourth generation masterbaker, is a study in Old World gentility. Grab a coffee and seat along busy Mission Drive for a slice of Scandinavia, up close and personal. **Tip:** For the real deal, visit during the annual Winterfest Celebration (November/December) when treats hit full tilt. [www.solvangusa.com](http://www.solvangusa.com), 800.468.6765.

### **SHORE THING**

What was once one of Julia Child's favorite stops for stellar seafood is just short of a "dive" at the end of Stearns Wharf – **Santa Barbara Shellfish Company**. For a serious crustacean fix with world-class views of Santa Barbara Harbor and the Channel Islands park it here. In 1979, this 450+ sq. ft. shack was a buying station for local lobster and abalone. It later evolved into a no-frills stop for super fresh shellfish. Tanks line the entrance wall with lobster and crab vying for attention. Inside, 25 bar seats serve up seasonal spiny lobster tacos (Oct. – Mar.) with a creamy salsa (\$13.95), local peel-and-eat ridgeback shrimp, steamed rock crab and killer lobster bisque. **Tip:** Order from the outside window and grab a picnic table at the end of the pier where sea life hits high tide. [www.sbshellfishco.com](http://www.sbshellfishco.com), 805.966.6676.

Every port of call has that bustling bar where salt-of-the-sea fishermen mix with sailors and tourists scouting for a seat overlooking the sea. In Santa Barbara, that scene since 1987 is **Brophy Brothers**. Known as the highest grossing revenue restaurant per square foot in the county, this little Nantucket-style goldmine also serves one of the top cioppinos (\$11.50) in town. Pair it with the local Kalyra sauvignon blanc and the world turns. Baked clams, a version of clams casino, is also a hit as are the oyster shooters shucked into a shot glass with tomato juice, freshly grated horseradish and optional vodka floater. **Tip:** Forgo the wait for a table and opt for a bar seat for the ultimate Santa Barbara scene and don't save room for dessert, it doesn't exist. 805.966.4418.

Cash in on a retro refuel with a perch overlooking Santa Barbara's famed West Beach at **Sambo's on the Beach**. Yes, this is the original and last standing Sambo's (of 1,114 nationwide), founded in 1957 by Sam Battistone, Sr., and Newell Bohnett (hence Sam-Bo). Snag an outside table and settle in for big, fluffy stacks of real buttermilk or blueberry pancakes made from scratch, sure-fire java and views matching the French Riviera. This local's haunt is now owned by Sam's grandson, Chad Stevens, who has tweaked the milestone greasy spoon into a healthy stop with such additions as turkey sausage, California benedict with spinach and avocado and fresh salmon egg-white omelets. Plan to share as the portions are bountiful and fairly priced. Lines start forming around 9:00 a.m. so plan ahead. **Tip:** Put your name in and take a beach stroll, a great way to kick off the day. [www.sambosrestaurant.com](http://www.sambosrestaurant.com), 805.965.3269.