

805 LIVING

AUGUST 2009



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Kids
COVER TO COVER

By Mallory McCreary

Experience "glamping" (i.e. glam camping) at El Capitan Canyon north of Santa Barbara (below); the Ferris wheel (right) lights up the sky every night on the Santa Monica Pier (which turns 100 this September!); San Luis Obispo's Apple Farm Inn (bottom right) is a charming country-style getaway.



UNDER THE STARS IN STYLE

Camping at El Capitan Canyon resort, 20 miles north of downtown Santa Barbara, isn't exactly roughing it. Choose from well-appointed cabins or heavy canvas tents with wooden floors for unique back-to-nature getaways (many are grouped together, perfect for family reunions). El Capitan offers the fun of camping (roaring fire pits, no TVs, eating alfresco) without many of the headaches (the never-ending supply of gear, no running water or toilets). Both tents (from \$155) and cabins (\$225 to \$750) have electricity and sumptuous beds. Though it may feel like the height of luxury, it's still camping—you *will* see bugs. Cabins have small kitchenettes (fridge, microwave, coffee maker) and bathrooms (some with deep soaking tubs); while tent dwellers use communal bathrooms.

Complimentary beach cruiser bicycles and a handy on-site grill/convenience store mean the kids can roam free while parents

rediscover the blissful art of doing nothing—or enjoy signature massage treatments in a tent overlooking the burbling creek.

The beach is a 15-minute walk away; on-site hiking trails, a swimming pool, and a summer-long Saturday-night outdoor concert series mean there's always something to do. There's property-wide Wi-Fi if you must bring your laptop, but try leaving the modern world behind as you wake up to birdsongs and fall asleep to the sounds of chirping crickets and wind whistling through the sycamore trees.

End the night by cooking dinner over a campfire (burgers, hot dogs, chicken, and tri-tip are sold at the store along with side dishes and necessary utensils) and watching the burning embers float up to a starry sky. As night falls and an orange and yellow glow emanates from the tents nearby, you'll feel a new kind of peace that says "vacation." 805-685-3887; www.elcapitanacanyon.com

SEASIDE THRILLS

Santa Monica's "Sun, Sea, Save" promotion offers a third night free at a range of accommodations (including Casa Del Mar, Fairmont Miramar Hotel & Bungalows, Shutters on the Beach, Viceroy, and others; prices vary; through December 31). Free passes to area attractions in celebration of the Santa Monica Pier's 100th anniversary on September 9 are also part of the package: Enjoy a free ride on the carousel and Ferris wheel, free bike rental, and free fare card on the Big Blue Bus, plus 25 free things to do in Santa Monica. 800-544-1319; www.santamonica.com

Everybody Loves a Drive-In

Families of four can enjoy tickets to the Charles Paddock Zoo in Atascadero, boxed lunches, a movie at the Sunset Drive-In in San Luis Obispo, popcorn and candy for the movie, and a two-night stay at Apple Farm Inn in SLO (\$299 weekdays; \$399 weekends; through December 23) with the "Drive In, Drive Out Family Package." The country Victorian-style inn and motel has a heated pool and hot tub, and kids eat breakfast free with an adult entrée purchase.

Stay on August 14, 21, or 28 and enjoy campfires, s'more cookies, and family-friendly storytelling from entertainer Kirk Henning. 800-255-2040; www.applefarm.com





Clockwise from top: Unspoiled stretches of sea, sand, mountains, and sky are what the Channel Islands are all about; adventure awaits aboard Truth Aquatics' three vessels: *Vision*, *Conception*, and *Truth*; elephant seals make a ruckus on land and in the water—just don't get too close.

Back to Nature, Sea Style

Take your budding naturalists, sea captains, and teens who just like the great outdoors on a Truth Aquatics multi-day adventure cruise (from \$363 per adult, \$272 per child) to the Channel Islands. Highlights from a recent three-day trip aboard the 65-foot *Truth* included snorkeling in kelp forests, kayaking, hikes led by a volunteer naturalist, and an awe-inspiring trip inside Painted Cave on Santa Cruz Island (the world's longest sea cave; so named because fresh water trickling down through the rocks brings to light colorful minerals). The crew is knowledgeable, professional, and fun and do their best to accommodate everyone's needs and desires, so be sure to tell them what experiences are most important to you. Meals and snacks are delicious, plentiful, (and included!) and the galley cook somehow manages to take into account everyone's different dietary requirements to produce impressive multi-course meals in a kitchen smaller than most hall closets.

For three-day trips, guests board the night before in Santa Barbara Harbor and fall asleep as the ship gently sways in dock. The ship departs at 4 a.m. (both to ensure a smoother channel crossing and so you arrive in time for a full day of adventure). On my trip, I woke around 6:30 to the smell of bacon frying and the sounds of delighted passengers' squeals—we were surrounded by blue whales spouting, breaching, and showing off their flukes.

Guests sleep in comfortable single or double berths equipped with reading lights and privacy curtains, but these are close quarters (which just adds to the spirit of adventure). You may want to bring an eye mask to block out cabin lights and earplugs to dampen your neighbor's snoring; and it's a good idea to pack lightly since stowage room is sparse. But for the sights—animal, vegetable, mineral—you'll see and the memories you'll make, these are small concessions indeed. 805-962-1127; www.truthaquatics.com

HOT TIP

Power up the RV or dust off that tent and search for camping sites at www.camp-california.com, where you can search by location or special event (state fairs, music festivals). Area campgrounds Flying Flags RV Resort in Buellton (877-783-5247; www.flyingflags.com) and Pismo Coast Village RV Resort in Pismo Beach (888-782-3224; www.pismo coastvillage.com) both recently completed renovations. ■