

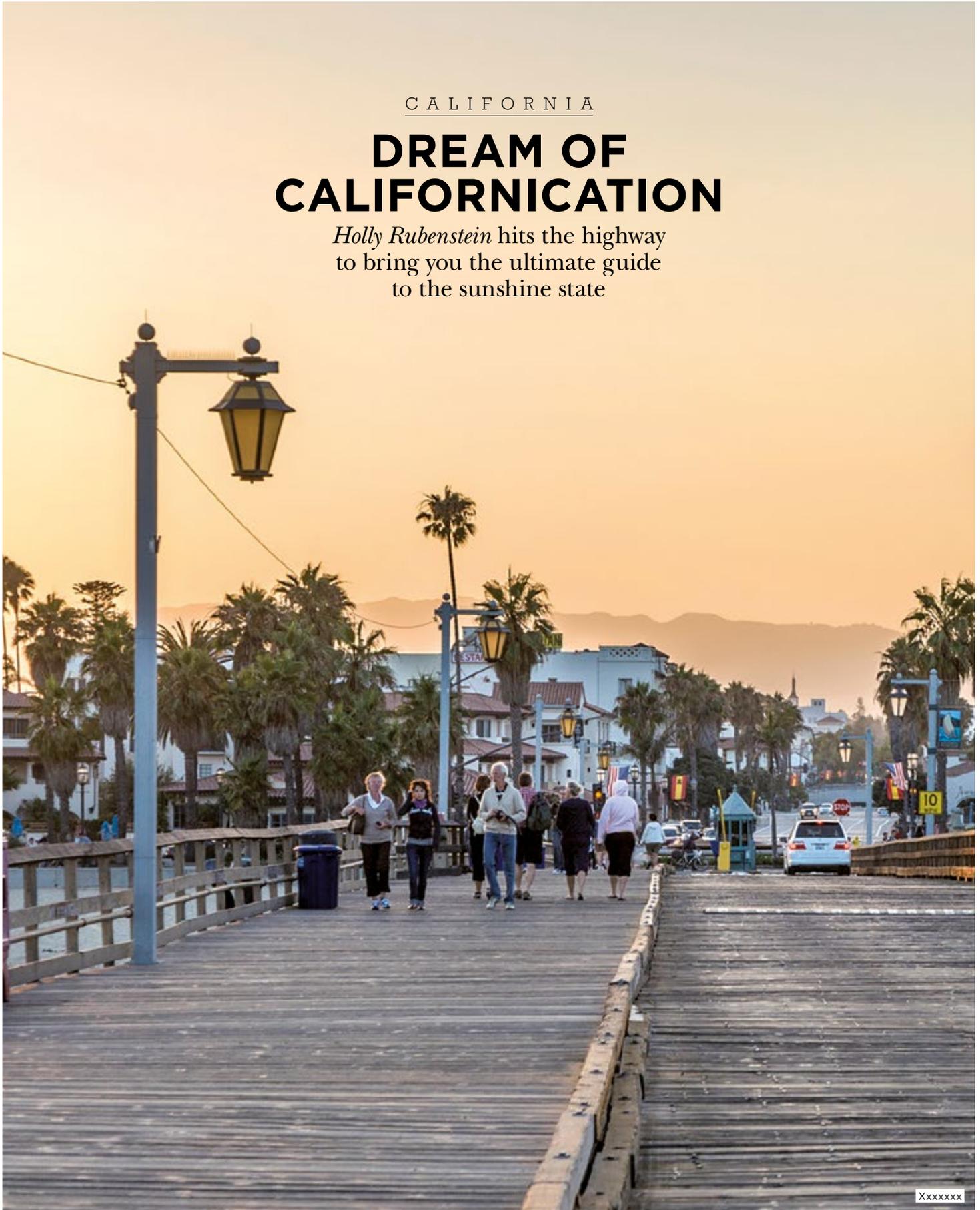
EAT
DRINK
ESCAPE

FOOD & TRAVEL

CALIFORNIA

DREAM OF CALIFORNICATION

Holly Rubenstein hits the highway to bring you the ultimate guide to the sunshine state



PHOTOS: GETTY IMAGES

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LA's reputation precedes itself

SLICE OF LA LIFE

The City of Angels has it all, and then some. It may be a place of excess, but LA basks in a sense of luxury, and heightened experiences are as easy to come by as the cosmetic enhancements of its residents.

Beverly Hills, and its recognisable zip code 90210, is the ideal base for an indulgent Californian adventure, with the elegant Peninsula Hotel at its epicentre.

An A-list favourite, its spacious, pastel-toned, French country chic rooms are famed for their sumptuous beds and personally monogrammed pillowcases. Fancy a Biologique facial with placenta serum? Head to the world-class spa – a destination in itself. The rooftop pool, lined with royal blue parasols, harks back to the Hollywood of yesteryear. With big dogs of the entertainment industry taking serious-looking meetings in its poolside cabanas, it's a prime spot for people watching.

Beverly Hills' pristine avenues lead to some of the city's top retail and dining spots. Glitzy Rodeo Drive, with its famed designer stores, is just a 12-minute walk away, but this is LA after all, so the hotel's chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce is on hand to lighten the load.

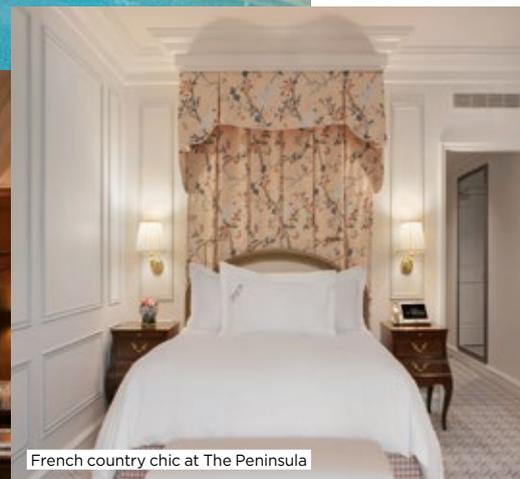
For a spot of beach chic, Santa Monica is a must – away from the Hills, its palm-lined stretches of golden sand make for an alternative city. Wander the waterfront, past the original Muscle Beach, where locals practise acro-yoga. Watch the sun set behind the technicolour lights of Santa Monica pier, with its slowly-turning Ferris wheel, from the haven of another LA landmark – Shutters on the Beach. This creamy clapboard hotel is home to 1 Pico, a fine dining restaurant with Cali-style local food like pan-roasted dayboat scallops and California sea bass, accompanied by a gentle Pacific breeze. ■



Sunbathe in elegance at The Peninsula Beverly Hills



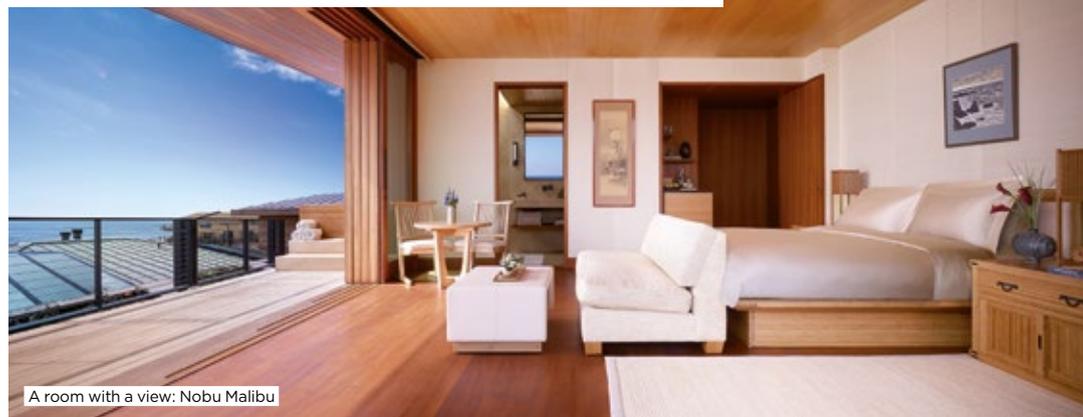
Don't miss cocktails in The Peninsula The Club Bar



French country chic at The Peninsula

MINIBREAK IN MALIBU

Take a leaf from Hollywood's A-list and head to the beaches of Malibu for a sun-soaked weekend getaway. The ultra-exclusive Nobu Ryokan Hotel is the ultimate surfside base. A 16-bedroom Japanese beach house, it has waterfront rooms looking onto expansive views of the Pacific and the romantic California coastline, with dolphins regularly swimming past. Nobu restaurant, a Hollywood hotspot for Japanese cuisine, is right next door, along with Soho House's Little Beach House. Nearby Malibu Village is home to an array of pretty individual boutique shops along with top designer names. Stroll down Malibu Pier to watch surfers bobbing in the ocean, ready to catch a perfect wave towards the iconic Surfrider Beach.



A room with a view: Nobu Malibu



Santa Barbara, America's Riviera



The much-anticipated Rosewood Miramar Beach is now open



Live like a Hollywood glamourpuss at Rosewood Miramar Beach

RIVIERA REVIVAL

Golden palm-fringed beaches, celebrated vineyards and gleaming Spanish colonial architecture are just some of the reasons why Santa Barbara and neighbouring town Montecito have long drawn Hollywood's glamorous set, who call it America's Riviera. Its proximity to Los Angeles – just 100 miles north – along the scenic Pacific Highway Route One makes it an even more appealing prospect.

For locals it's been a tough few years. Natural disasters have caused widespread devastation. Yet the region's biggest revitalisation project has raised it back from the ashes, and while its heritage has been preserved and embraced in the process, a renewed sense of excitement is felt too – nowhere more so than at the Rosewood Miramar Beach, one of the most anticipated new openings on the west coast in years. Framed by the verdant Santa Ynez mountains, it's pretty as a postcard – a luxury oceanfront resort based around a spectacular country house, all white clapboard, abundant blooms and manicured lawns stretching straight to the beach.

Overlooking the turquoise and white pin-striped parasols dotted along the sand is Caruso's beachfront restaurant, a glamorous Italian fine dining spot, with a smart dress code and a seriously sophisticated wine list. While the old school are wholeheartedly embraced in this new hotspot, the resort also contains Gwyneth Paltrow's wellness store, Goop, and an outcrop of Malibu Farm, the uber-cool, farm-to-fork eatery whose original home is on Malibu Pier. Without a doubt, this hot newbie already feels like a classic.

Up the road, old meets new once more at San Ysidro Ranch. The 500 sprawling acres of lush gardens, with cottages discreetly hidden among the trees, are steeped in Hollywood history. It's where JFK and Jackie O honeymooned, Laurence Olivier and Vivienne Leigh married, and Winston Churchill and Audrey Hepburn holidayed. Its restaurant, The Stonehouse, is an institution beloved by celebrities and locals for generations. With immaculately presented fresh ingredients, it serves fine dining on a terrace beneath the stars.

While last year's mudslides unfortunately meant the ranch's cottages had to undergo extensive renovation, they've now reopened and are sparkling with their fresh lick of paint. And though its famous gardens were also flattened, 18 months on they are resplendent once again. The lemon trees, jasmine, orange blossom and roses greet guests with a heady scent. The scorched land has been quenched by heavier rainfall than usual this year and the gardeners say they've never seen growth like it. It's another welcome sign of new beginnings for an all-time classic.



California's eat-your-heart-out sunsets



Try sundowners at the beach club



SECRET SAN FRANCISCO

There's a simple formula to a perfectly lovely city break in San Francisco. First, a drive over the Golden Gate bridge and a breezy bay cruise beneath it, perhaps stopping at the imposing island prison of Alcatraz. Then an ice cream at Pier 39, where chubby sea lions bark and jostle comedically, lounging in heaped piles on the dock. Finally, drive up the city's notoriously steep hills to see the Painted Ladies, the much-photographed row of ascending Victorian houses in pretty pastel shades, backed by the modern city skyline.

The sea fog blows in frequently and unexpectedly, enshrouding the city in a mysterious veil. Beneath, there are secrets to uncover. One of these is The Battery. Housed in a former sweet factory and founded by the tech couple behind the social media platform Bebo (remember Bebo?!), it's a super-hip members' club, with a decadent spa, spacious garden terrace, and exclusive special events with A-list music and comedy performances. The best part? Upstairs is a handful of suites, each oozing personality and style, with warm exposed brickwork, timber beams, caramel leather, gleaming marble and splashes of colourful, humorous artwork. Hotel guests are considered resident members, with access to all the club's facilities.

A short walk away is the Oakland Bay Bridge. Overshadowed by the Golden Gate in the day, this bridge takes centre stage at night, an unlikely canvas for the Bay Lights, a remarkable light sculpture that illuminates 25,000 vertiginous bulbs, rippling up and down and reflecting in the bay like jewels in ink.

And there are more artistic gems to uncover, here on the waterfront. Perched at the end of a land spit in the marina, The Wave Organ, designed by sculptor George Gonzalez and artist Peter Richards, is a musical instrument that is actually played by the San Francisco Bay itself. As the tide changes, so do its sounds, at times a haunting wail, and at others a gentle hum.

A lifetime could be spent uncovering the city's culinary secrets. But a good place to start is Z & Y Bistro, a tiny Asian fusion spot, in the heart of Chinatown. Its menu focusses primarily on syrupy yakitori skewers with a surprising number of frog-based options – but the star is an explosive bowl of sweet and spicy tender beef in flaming chilli oil.



DESTINATION DRINKING

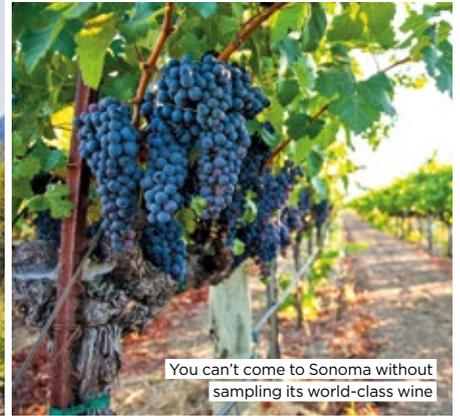
For killer cocktails and far-stretching views over the hills to the bay, try Charmaine's Rooftop Bar & Lounge at the top of the Instagrammable San Francisco Proper Hotel. Perched over Market Street, with a huge wraparound terrace and sizzling firepits, it's the perfect spot from which to watch the sunset.

DAY TRIP

Take the scenic ferry ride across the bay to the picturesque seaside village of Sausalito. Colourful houses spill down the lush green hills to the waterfront, which is dotted with crab shacks, ice cream parlours and quirky galleries. For delicious seafood, with views towards the city skyline, try Salito's Crab House.



Hop between Napa Valley's vineyards



You can't come to Sonoma without sampling its world-class wine

SWEET SONOMA

Just 45 minutes' drive north from San Francisco, the rolling vineyards of California's world-renowned wine country begin to appear. For wine lovers looking for something more casual and down to earth than glossy Napa Valley, neighbouring Sonoma County, wedged between two dramatic mountain ranges, has in recent years established itself as an equally formidable wine and gastronomic destination.

The Farmhouse Inn, in the lush Russian River Valley, is the perfect spot to end a busy day of wine tasting, just a few minutes' drive from hundreds of vineyards. Here, an 1873 weatherboard farmhouse and surrounding outbuildings are home to 18 boutique rooms. They come with the warmth and generous hospitality of a family-run bed and breakfast (personal touches include welcome messages on your chalk board and hot-from-the-oven cookies before bed), along with a pervading sense of luxury, matched in its sensational spa and Michelin-starred restaurant. Dishes are super-fresh, with ingredients grown steps from the kitchen, and much of the wine list from nearby vineyards. Look out for its signature dish, 'Rabbit Rabbit Rabbit' (yep, rabbit prepared three ways).

A short drive leads to nearby Healdsburg, a must-see while staying in the area. Once a farm town, it has evolved into one of Sonoma's most sophisticated spots, with its pretty town plaza packed with award-winning restaurants and wine-tasting rooms, alongside smart boutiques and antique shops. Family-run Valette is at the forefront of the culinary scene, offering scrumptious farm-to-fork dishes with a fine dining twist (and dishing out piles of emergency sandwiches to refugees from last month's fires.) Go with the 'trust me' tasting menu – and don't miss their legendary scallop en croûte. ■

THREE VINEYARDS TO TRY:

Sonoma's Russian River Valley is home to about 100 wineries and produces some of the best Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in the world. Three places to try are:

The 50-acre, family-owned Schug Winery estate – known for its silky Pinot Noir and its series of underground tasting caves. schugwinery.com

The MacRostie Winery is frequently named the best winery in Sonoma, with views stretching to the Mayacamas Mountains. macrostiewinery.com

Beautiful gardens and a sumptuous snack menu make Lynmar Estate Winery the ideal spot to while away an afternoon. lynmarestate.com



The Farmhouse Inn manages to feel both homely and luxurious



Soothingly simple interiors at The Farmhouse Inn



Don't miss the hotel's Michelin-starred restaurant