



{due west}  
TRAVEL & WELLNESS

SANTA CRUZ GETAWAY  
**beyond the boardwalk**

words by SHARON MCDONNELL





If all you know of Santa Cruz is the boardwalk, it's time to refresh your notion of this beach town and veer off the tourist track. With a bookstore that also houses a natural wine bar and a high-end Thai restaurant, as well as a flower shop that doubles as a café and chocolate bar, the area hosts an array of multi-tasking hybrids. Why limit yourself to just one thing? And if your visit coincides, as mine did, with UC Santa Cruz's Monster Festival—where scholars explore cultural and literary monsters from Greek mythology to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*—all the better. Thanks to its free talks, readings and an exhibit of women comic book artists at the Museum of Art and History, I came back marvelously informed. Santa Cruz 2.0 is wonderfully whimsical and weird.

## WHERE TO EAT

Craving books and a bite? **Bad Animal** is the place to go if you have an appetite for fiction, poetry, philosophy, rare books or the occult. "It's one of our best-selling sections—Santa Cruz has a lot of people interested in this stuff," says bookseller Nick Pillsbury. It's also the place for superb Thai food from a chef with a pedigree from Michelin-starred Manresa in Los Gatos, a wine list that roams the globe from Slovenia to the former Soviet Republic of Georgia and a soundtrack from the 1960s and '70s. Restaurant-in-residence **Hanoloh's** chef Lalita Kaewsawang has wowed guests since late 2022 with Thai specialties like shrimp red curry with pineapple and apple.

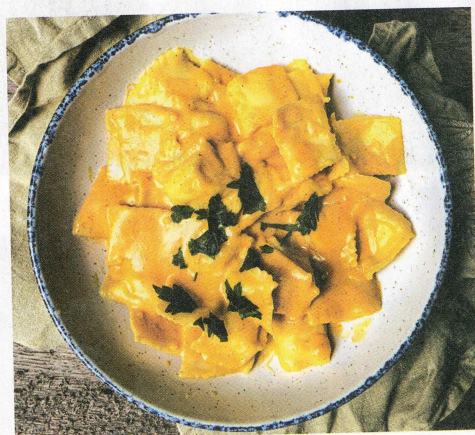
A block away on Cedar Street, you'll find charming **Gabriella**, an Italian-inflected, European-style restaurant. Delighting diners since 1992, it sources its food from organic farms like Live Earth, Dirty Girl and Rodoni. Owner Paul Cocking always sits at the

same table, pours wine and chats with guests. Butternut squash ravioli—embellished with sliced apples, goat cheese and pumpkin seeds in sage with brown butter and honey truffle oil—were so perfectly creamy, crunchy and sweet that I've tried to replicate the dish at home. Another enticing choice is **Copal** for Oaxaca Mexican food, which serves four different types of mole and mixes up mezcal-based cocktails.

For a laid-back town, Santa Cruz has an astounding variety of places to get caffeinated. At florist **Flower Bar**, pick out bouquets while sipping on lavender and rose lattes made with Ritual coffee. Its other offerings include Feve artisan chocolates, pastrami sandwiches and wine. Roaster **11th Hour Coffee** sells plants, food and coffee equipment in a roomy café with wood-slab tabletops. It also has a cocktail bar and hosts pop-ups for fried chicken, dumplings and ramen. Its large, umbrella-shaded patio



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Other spots to grab a cup of joe include **Cat & Cloud**, a coffee roaster with pink-and-teal décor. Owned by award-winning baristas, it's grown to three locations in the city, plus one in nearby Aptos. Santa Cruz serves as home base for **Verve Coffee Roasters**, which also has a popular Palo Alto location. **Midtown Surf Shop & Coffee Bar** serves cups of Verve to those seeking surfboards and swimsuits.

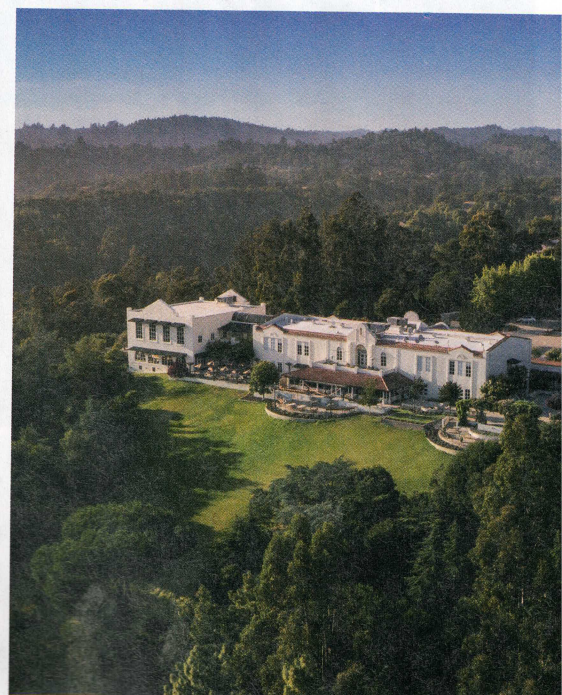
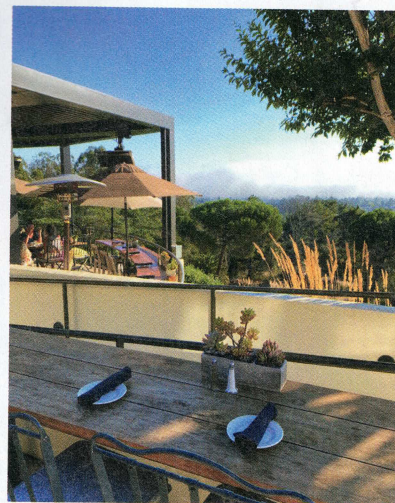
#### WHAT TO DO

Buzzing with caffeine? Walk it off along **West Cliff Drive**, a beautiful place to bike or stroll. Its scenic promenade above the bay and boardwalk includes tributes to surfers and ocean-lovers, along with the **Surfing Museum** in a brick lighthouse. Pick up a set of wheels from Santa Cruz BCycle, a new e-bike sharing program with stations scattered throughout the city and the UC Santa Cruz cam-

pus. Architecture buffs will enjoy a stroll along a two-block stretch of Walnut Avenue, with its most Victorian houses from the late 1800s to early 1900s, and Ocean View Avenue for its Victorian mansions. Keep an eye out for 20 conservation-themed murals around the city, created for the Sea Walls: Artists for Oceans project in 2021. If you feel the pull of nature, **Wilder Ranch State Park**, four miles north of downtown Santa Cruz on Highway 1, offers 34 miles of hiking, biking and horse trails through oak-leaf meadows and redwood ravine.

Beloved annual festivals include **Sailboat Races** on Wednesday nights from March to October, the **Open Studios Art Tour** in October, which features over 300 artists county-wide, the **Glass and Ocean Art Festival** in November and the **Clam Chowder Cook-Off** in late February, starring both amateur and professional chefs.






## WHERE TO STAY

When you're ready to call it a night, check out **West Cliff Inn**, a white 1877 Victorian offering panoramic views of Monterey Bay from half of its 10 rooms, as well as porches with rocking chairs. Breakfasts may feature an artichoke, spinach and feta frittata, while the civilized custom of afternoon wine and cheese is observed in its seafoam-painted parlor. My cheerful yellow room, its bay window overlooking the sea, featured framed watercolors of shells and coral, and a marble-floored bathroom with a spa tub.

**The sprawling Chaminade Resort & Spa** boasts

**hilltop views overlooking redwood and eucalyptus forests and 156 rooms in orange-roofed Spanish Colonial-style villas. Guests enjoy access to two outdoor hot tubs and pools (all with majestic wooded views), plus tennis and pickleball courts, a spa, Himalayan salt sauna and three miles of hiking trails. The View restaurant serves multi-course dinners with local wine pairings April through October and hosts live music six nights a week.**

Marriott's **Hotel Paradox**, a contemporary-style, 170-room hotel just a 10-minute walk from downtown, emerged from a renovation in October with a forest theme. With a toppled tree trunk for a front desk, the lobby features gnarled benches hand-crafted from entire teak tree roots and 11 tree trunks. Savor honey from the hotel's rooftop beehives at **Solaire Restaurant + Bar**, where tastings and talks are offered by Santa Cruz Bee Company.

"Normal is just a setting on the dryer," a thought-provoking sign on my floor proclaimed—a fitting motto for a trip to delightfully offbeat Santa Cruz. 

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