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Day Trippin'

By Fran Miller



Hotel Paradox patio Photos provided

If the mention of Santa Cruz conjures Beach Boys' tunes and old-school boardwalk roller coasters, it might be time to re-explore our seaside neighbor. Sure, 'Surf City' (just a 1.5-hour drive south, if the traffic gods are smiling) is all about the beach, but a weekend visit can entail so much more. A hip hotel, fine dining, shopping, and basketball, for instance, create the perfect recipe for a rejuvenating getaway. Stay. Hotel Paradox (a Marriott Autograph Collection Hotel) sits inland on Ocean Avenue and is centrally located to every stop throughout this ideal weekend. Park the car, forget about it, and make sure you've got your walking shoes. This cozy retreat, infused with natural elements that reflect its beach and forest surroundings, once served as UC Santa Cruz's overflow dorms, and students were likely sparring for rights to fifth floor, horizon-facing digs. Comfy rooms feature reclaimed wood paneling, river rock shower floors, and eco-friendly bath products.

Central areas are whimsically adorned with artwork by a rotating cast of local artisans. A giant felled eucalyptus tree serves as the check-in desk. Borrow a beach cruiser from the in-house fleet, or rent an electric Blix bike or an inboard electric skateboard to cruise the downtown corridor. A large, central pool and hot tub area is enhanced with overhead twinkle lights, a fire pit (grab a s'mores package from in-house restaurant Solaire and roast away), and rentable cabanas. In any season, Hotel Paradox is fun, festive, and family friendly.

Dine. Solaire is a winning option for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Make sure to meet resident bartender John Dunleavy, aka 'Rainbow,' a local idol known for his personable demeanor. For something off-property, head to Soif Restaurant and Wine Bar on Walnut, off of Pacific, a favorite destination for fans of great wine and seasonal fare. An intimate dining room with open kitchen sits adjacent to the small wine retail shop lined with unique and exclusive labels, many of limited production and handmade following organic and biodynamic practices. An emphasis is placed on local producers, as well as Italian and French varietals - many of which are featured on the by-the-glass restaurant menu. Order a half glass of each in order to try several. It's fun to sip and compare. Find one you love, and make a post-dinner purchase. (For those who prefer a martini to a merlot, Soif also serves classic and modern cocktail creations.)

Chef Tom McNary takes pride in presenting a menu that highlights the finest local, seasonal, and organic products. His regularly changing menu features minimally manipulated dishes that allow the fresh ingredients to shine, such as a Fogline Farms roasted chicken with lemon and garlic, served with a farmers' market slaw and roasted potatoes, or a salad of 'caught-that-day' crab and winter citrus. Regulars are rarely presented with the same menu twice.

Do. Downtown Santa Cruz is home to one of retail's greatest shopping and dining streets - Pacific Avenue. From the inspiring, independent Bookshop Santa Cruz, to the requisite surf shops, to at least three comfort shoe specific boutiques (Santa Cruz residents are serious about their shoes), Pacific Avenue has got it all. Don't miss Vibes' Up, just around the corner on Front Street for a true Santa Cruz shopping experience; products here promise to increase good vibes and re-harmonize mind and body.

Can't get your hands on Golden State Warriors tickets? The Santa Cruz Warriors are the next best thing - and in some ways, even better. This Golden State Warriors NBA G League 'developmental' team features NBA-level talent playing not in a 20,000 seat arena, but in the intimate 2,500 seat Kaiser Permanente Arena, where fans sit within reach of the action and pay a fraction of the price of GSW tickets. (The season runs through March 23.)

And if the siren song of the waves beckons, by all means, head to the Boardwalk. But with so much to see and do in Santa Cruz, the iconic destination is relegated to just another stop along the way.



Santa Cruz Warrior mascot Mav'Riks

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[back](#)

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