

# Ventura

BY SHARAE L KOLBERG ♦ PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHUCK GRAHAM

About 70 miles up the coast from downtown Los Angeles and easily accessible by car or train, Ventura has spectacular sunsets, great surfing and hiking, vintage and trendy shops, and a vibrant arts and music scene. The Ventura Harbor, home to the Channel Islands National Park Visitors Center, is a gateway to exploring the islands' exceptional biodiversity. Downtown Main Street is closed to car traffic through 2024, and this summer the usually laid-back beach town will host the summer X Games finals for the second year in a row, with tens of thousands of extreme-sports fans expected to take in the events at the Ventura County Fairgrounds from June 27 to 30.



**1** Pasta for breakfast? Yes, please! **Immigrant Son Caffé** uses Italian recipes passed down from father to son. Start your day with a flight of bacon, followed by breakfast lasagna or Cousin Michael's Morning Carbonara, which is served in a bread bowl made with flour imported from Italy. 543 E. Main Street.

**2** Stroll through the 107-acre **Ventura Botanical Gardens**, whose 3.5 miles of (at times steep) walkways wind through 5 Mediterranean climate zones. It features a 130-tree olive grove, old-growth eucalyptus trees, rare and endangered plants, and art sculptures. Take in views of the Channel Islands, the coastline, and, on a clear day, Topatopa Peak in Ojai. Adults, \$7. 567 Poli Street.

**3** Stop for an authentic Mexican lunch at **Beach House Tacos** (668 Harbor Boulevard) on the Ventura Pier. Dig into a Marilu taco (pictured) while gazing out at the Pacific Ocean. Kids can burn off energy at the adjacent **Ventura Promenade Beach Playground**.



SCAN ME for a TripTik route to explore these places.



**4** Grab your bike (or rent one from **Wheel Fun Rentals**, 850 Harbor Boulevard, pictured) and set out on the **Ventura Promenade**. Take this beachside path west about half a mile to **Surfers Point**, or head east for a 2.5-mile round-trip excursion to **San Buenaventura State Beach**.

**5** Head to **Rocks & Drums** (14 S. California Street; pictured) downtown for a swanky happy hour. The crystal chandeliers, velvet couches, and brass accents are the perfect setting for sipping one of the bar's captivating cocktails. A block west, you'll find the contemporary, neon-lit **Strange Beast**, which serves Japanese tapas, cocktails, and sake.

**6** Learn about the area's rich history via a self-guided tour of the **Mission Basilica San Buenaventura**, founded in 1782 by Junipero Serra. The grounds include a museum (featuring displays of Chumash artifacts and Mission-era items), the Mission Basilica Church, and a Vatican-licensed marble cast of Michelangelo's *Pietà*. Adults, \$5. 211 E. Main Street.

**7** Wander over to **Bellringer Brew Co.** (472 E. Main Street) for locally sourced comfort food and award-winning beers. Around the corner is **Model Citizen** (pictured; reviewed on page 58), downtown's newest dining addition. You'll find



twists on classic cocktails and coastal dishes made with regional ingredients.

**8** Catch acts ranging from Henry Rollins to Parliament-Funkadelic at the new **Ventura Music Hall**. Dine on barbecue at the on-site restaurant, Ruff House BBQ, and grab a drink at one of several bars located throughout the venue. 1888 E. Thompson Boulevard.

Free Ventura County Cities maps are available at your Auto Club branch.

Be sure to designate a driver if you plan to drink alcohol.