

Making Memories in Southern California

Santa Barbara—The American Riviera

Some of my most memorable times as a child were spent in the sunshine state of California. Over half of my extended family is sprinkled throughout the Southern and Northern regions. My grandparents lived in Sherman Oaks, and there was not a year that slipped by that my sister and I did not make a summer trip out to be spoiled and pampered for two full weeks.

We would visit the famous theme parks that were in full swing, eat at the “hip” Hollywood restaurants and, last but not least, retreat to their backyard pool for countless hours of fun. I can still hear my dear grandmother harping on us for being careless with the amount of sunscreen we required on our then young and flawless skin.

No longer a spring chicken, nor wrinkle free, I recently had the opportunity to take a trip back to Southern California and revisit the haunts of my childhood. The trip was bittersweet, as my grandparents are now gone. I continue to miss the closeness we shared and wish deeply that they were still alive to see how their granddaughter and great granddaughter are living their lives.

It had been over ten years since I visited the sprawling canyons of California but the moment I stepped out of the sliding doors at LAX International Airport I had a flashback of my sister and I arriving three decades

earlier, my grandparents greeting us with open arms in the warm Pacific-smelling air. The aroma of the air has not changed but I discovered that much of the city certainly has. This trip would prove to continue to be a touchstone to my past while adding delightful new destinations to my sunny Southern California experience.

My first visit down memory lane was The Farmers Market at Third & Fairfax in the heart of Los Angeles. I was so thankful that the old clock tower landmark was still standing so I could get my bearings around the market. I was delighted to find that my favorite pizza stand, Patsy’s which dates back to 1949, was still there and still serving their mouthwatering pizza. I also tracked down my favorite 57 year-old sugar stand, Littlejohn’s House of Toffee, to pack up a box of the marshmallow caramels of my childhood. There was never a trip to the market that my Grandma wouldn’t send me home without a box of these scrumptious treats. With so many old favorites still standing, it was simply mind boggling to see the extensive re-modeling and shopping additions that have taken place at the Market. It now boasts over 70 shops and counting; a roster of annual events, including Mardi Gras, Summer

Music and the Fall Festival; and has been transformed into a true shopping mecca.

As delightful as it was to visit th places from my past, this trip was not just about the food and the nostalgia. I wanted to experience, as an adult, one of the most breathtaking areas of our country - Santa Barbara. There is a reason why this region calls itself the “American Riviera.” I spent a day in downtown Santa Barbara and then a full day in the wine country. Santa Barbara has so much to offer its visitors - countless exquisite restaurants, quaint unique shops and a variety of cultural venues including historic sites, museums, galleries and performing arts. One day is really not enough, but I was able to get a taste of why so many people travel to this area over and over again without tiring of it.

I was also not disappointed with the tasting of the wines in Los Olivos and the Santa Ynez Valley. This is just one pocket of wineries in the Santa Barbara wine country, which is divided into six geographic areas and was the setting for the movie, *Sideways*. Each route takes about half a day to complete, so I would suggest spending a long weekend in these lush surroundings for an absolutely decadent vacation.

After a fabulous day of wine sipping, I rested my head at the Royal Scandinavian Inn in Solvang, conveniently located in close proximity to the vineyards. This Danish town is a fun stop for traditional foods, architecture and more than 200 European-style shops and bakeries. It is also the home of the Hans Christian Anderson Museum.

My trip would not have been complete without visiting the world-renowned J. Paul Getty Museum. I remember to this day when they were breaking ground on this amazing project and my grandparents promised to take us there once it was completed. Unfortunately they were not well enough to make that happen, but I felt their presence as I walked through the grounds of The Getty. Exploring this

magnificent museum is a full day excursion. The breathtaking view of the city from every angle of the museum was an unexpected bonus.

Before I jumped on the red-eye home, I ended my trip down memory lane at my Grandpa and Grandma’s favorite restaurant, El Cholo. This classic eatery, located on Western Avenue in Los Angeles, has been serving Mexican food since 1923. A dinner at El Cholo always made my grandmother happy and it was one of the last outings she requested before becoming too weak to enjoy dining out. She would always split a margarita with my grandfather and order up her specialty omelet. It was surreal sitting in this restaurant after all these years, enjoying the world’s best nachos and feeling as if time had stood still.

Revisiting the dreamy destinations of childhood memories can be risky, but for me, traveling back to California was very special. My Grandpa Harry and Grandma Ruthie’s spirits were with me every step of the way. I look forward to taking my daughter Breanna to this area some day and showing her all the wonderful places that still make her Mom feel like a kid, while embracing all that is new and perhaps making some of our own happy memories together.

Web Sites

- www.santabarbaraCA.com
- www.farmersmarketla.com
- www.santabarbara.com/winecountry
- www.losolivoswines.com
- www.royalscandinavianinn.com
- www.getty.edu
- www.elcholo.com/elcholola/



Wine Country



The Streets of Solvang