

9 Secret Destinations in California

Headed to the Golden Coast? You'll no doubt be looking to take advantage of the gorgeous weather, perhaps by hitting the beach or touring the world-famous wineries. But if you're up for trying something a little different, these hidden gems will be right up your alley. Here are 9 secret destinations in California that are slightly off the beaten path.

1) Glass Beach at Fort Bragg



Who knew tons of garbage could create something so beautiful? Fort Bragg's glass beach was formed after years of dumping old bottles, windowpanes and even automobiles into the ocean. Believe it or not, it was legal to dump your junk here until 1967. In the years since, the multi-colored glass has slowly been crushed and worn down by the waves, forming a shimmering, rainbow-esque shoreline. It's probably not somewhere you'll want to sunbathe, but the opportunities for unique photos are endless. Visitors are welcome to look and touch, but are asked not to take home the small, smooth pieces of glass.

2) Step Back in Time in Placerville



History buffs will love the allure of historic Placerville, a community that got its start in the gold rush days. The city has many historic credits to its name, including serving as a site along the early mail system, the Pony Express. Placerville used to have quite the dubious reputation; it was known by some as 'Hangtown' because of the numerous outlaws who were hanged there. In fact, visitors can still see the large wooden platform once used for public hangings. Eerie!

3) Hidden Staircases at Franceschi Park



Nestled along the Santa Barbara Riviera is a four-mile hiking trail that leads to Franceschi Park. The 15-acre park is named after Francesco Franceschi, a well-known botanist and horticulturist credited with bringing many drought-tolerant plants to the area. You'll spot many of these unique plants along the trail, which is made up of a series of hidden stairways zig-zagging through the gardens. Also on the trail, you'll spot historic fountains, Indian paths and beautiful hillside homes that make up "America's Riviera."

4) Greystone Mansion in Beverly Hills



Though it's been featured in several popular films like *There Will Be Blood* and *The Big Lebowski*, the historic Greystone mansion is tucked away in the hills and often overlooked by travelers. The spectacular mansion and the lush, landscaped gardens were commissioned by the Doheny family in the 1920's. The estate cost \$3 million to build, an amount which was almost unheard of at the time. Just a few short months after the family moved in, the head of the household, Ned Doheny Jr., was found shot to death inside, the apparent victim of a murder-suicide involving a personal friend. The property's lavish gardens are open for the public to tour during normal visiting hours, and guests can view the mansion's interior by registering for a pre-scheduled tour given once a month from December through April.

5) Sea Cave at Avila Beach



The sea cave at Avila Beach in San Luis Obispo are a picturesque destination even many locals are unaware of. A short hiking trail off the main paved road will lead you to the cave, which affords a sweeping view of the Pacific Ocean. Visitors can hike, fish or climb down the platform cut into the cliffside by the waves. Ambitious travelers may even climb on top of the cave, which will give you an unparalleled 360 degree view of the area. The best part? Because the area isn't

maintained by any one organization, access is completely free—at least for now!

6) Coronado Shores Shipwreck



When the tide goes out, you can just make out its outline protruding among the waves: what's left of the S.S. Monte Carlo, an ill-fated gambling and prostitution ship from the 1930's. On New Year's Day in 1937, the ship broke free from its anchor offshore and drifted onto the coast, where it crumbled and sank. No one claimed the wreckage, though, because once onshore it was highly illegal. During strong tides, beachgoers can spot the ship's jagged edges poking up through the water just offshore from the Coronado Shores condos. Feel like

treasure hunting? Legend has it there may be as much as \$150,000 worth of silver dollar coins remaining in the ship's many slot machines

7) College Cove at Trinidad State Beach



The northernmost section of Humboldt County's Trinidad State Beach is a sandy stretch of arching shoreline known as College Cove. Popular among locals, the cove is mostly sheltered from the wind and great for swimming under mild conditions.

Visit at low tide and take a short hike through the woods to explore the park's warm, rocky tidepools. If you have time, hike the nearby Trinidad Head for spectacular views of the ocean

8) Badwater in Death Valley



Known as "hell on Earth," Death Valley is both the hottest and the lowest geographic spot in North America. Badwater Basin is the lowest of the low ground, and there's not actually much water at all. What was once a shallow lake dried up as a result of the arid climate, leaving behind only a thick crust of salt. During wetter seasons, the site is sometimes fed by a stream from a small spring-fed pool, but the water is too salty to be potable. Hence the name 'Badwater' (ohhhhh!). If you've

never been to Death Valley, it's quite a sight to see; visitors from the Eastern U.S. often comment that they feel like they're "on another planet."

9) Sunken City in San Pedro



This abandoned part of San Pedro literally fell into the ocean as a result of a landslide. Sunken City is no longer home to any humans, just the ruins of roads, houses, pipes and broken infrastructure. Budding street artists may find the area inspirational; every inch of the rubble is covered in colorful graffiti, making it an ultra-cool photo op. Word to the wise—this destination is for visitors with a rebellious side. Signs lining the property warn trespassers to keep out, so enter at your own risk.

And if you do, wear resilient shoes. You'll be stepping over jagged rocks and will need to do a bit of climbing