

TRAVEL+ LEISURE

Uncover California's Best-Kept Secrets: 10 Hidden Destinations

There's something for nature lovers, wine drinkers, adventure seekers, and everyone in between.

By [Chelsea Lowe](#) | Updated on November 13, 2025



Credit: benedek/Getty Images

The challenge of understanding California and all it has to offer travelers is that it is a behemoth in size—at nearly 156,000 square miles—and somewhat shrouded in stereotype. There are beautiful beaches, sure, and Los Angeles and San Francisco are iconic cities within its bounds, but so much of California's beauty goes unseen if you don't leave those urban centers.

I didn't think so at the time, but I was fortunate to grow up in the Central Valley of California; it may not have been a hub of opportunity, but it was an unbeatable location from which to explore the state. Combine that with two parents who have never blinked an eye at a long drive, and the result is me, a kid-turned-adult who will buckle up for just about any road trip to a new-to-me corner of California.

If you're looking to lift the veil on the Golden State, here are 10 underrated destinations in California, as recommended by a devoted resident explorer. Keep in mind that getting there is half the fun.

Laguna Beach and Dana Point



Credit: TraceRouda/Getty Images

For a luxe yet relaxed stay, check into [The Ranch at Laguna Beach](#). Set in Aliso Canyon, this upscale hideaway is hard to leave. And you don't have to, if you choose, as there are great on-site eats, a spectacular nine-hole golf course that meanders into the canyon, and a lovely path down to the beach — only 350 yards away. Take [the tour](#) to see how the resort grows great produce for its signature restaurant, Harvest. Next time I'm in town, I've got my eyes on a stay at [Montage Laguna Beach](#).