



A TASTE OF THE FUNK ZONE

Going carless in Santa Barbara doesn't mean limiting your culinary explorations

BY MICHELE STUEVEN

Much like Cannery Row in Monterey, Santa Barbara was once a booming fish processing center with big bustling warehouses between the beach and the train tracks. With a major train stop right there, it was the perfect hub for exporting the bounty of seafood delights that the Channel Islands had to

offer. It was a thriving, gritty and industrial fishing district. Large-scale processing took place there until the business moved out of town in the late '80s and early '90s, leaving behind an industrial ghost town.

For the past 20 years, the neighborhood on the wrong side of the tracks of tony Santa Barbara became neglected after the fish processing moved out of town. Because the

area was affordable, artists slowly started renting out spaces for their studios and created murals and street art, which brought new interest in the area, attracting funky new wine-tasting rooms and restaurants. The area was revitalized and christened the Funk Zone around 2013.

The roughly 12-square-block area includes galleries, restaurants, shops, distilleries and wine tasting rooms that are all within walking distance of each other and the beach. It's a perfect carefree and car-free excursion from Los Angeles.

A regular one-way coach fare on the Amtrak Surfliner from downtown L.A.'s Union Station costs \$25 to \$54, and the trip takes two hours. The nonprofit Santa Barbara Car Free has teamed up with Amtrak to offer visitors exclusive discounts to multiple attractions around town.

To participate, visitors simply show their train tickets (paper, e-ticket or mobile device) and receive perks at participating attractions, restaurants and hotels. If you book train tickets through Santa Barbara Car Free's website, you can save up to 20

percent on fares. Amtrak's Pacific Surfliner offers six train rides per day to Santa Barbara along the coast from points south, including Los Angeles.

The Amtrak Pacific Surfliner is offering special savings on midweek train travel through June 27. For a limited time, passengers who travel midweek, from Monday through Thursday, can purchase one full-fare adult ticket and book an additional ticket on the same reservation at a 50 percent discount. Visit pacificsurfliner.com/save to view complete details on the Midweek Getaway Discount.

Once you disembark at the charming old Santa Barbara train station, which dates back to 1905, hotels are within walking distance.

The beachfront Harbor View Inn has expanded its existing 115-room inventory to add 34 brand-new guest rooms in its separate three-story north wing, which opened in October. The new building reflects Spanish Revival architecture. Rooms feature modern Spanish Colonial furnishings emphasized by tall ceilings, white



Loquita



Tyger Tyger

» 9) plaster and sun-bleached walnut wood.

If you have more expensive taste, the stunning and newly renovated historic Santa Barbara's Hotel Californian is a stylish resort one block from the station; it features Spanish Colonial Revival architecture and a modern Moorish vibe. Paying homage to a 1925 hotel formerly on the site, this lower State Street destination near Santa Barbara's waterfront has been meticulously curated by Los Angeles developer Michael Rosenfeld and features paseos, gardens, fountains and open plazas.

Although it was heavily damaged in an earthquake in the early days, the Californian's original façade was incorporated into the new 121-room hotel, which includes a rooftop pool deck overlooking the coastline, together with the Moroccan-inspired luxury Spa Majorelle, a fashion boutique, Presidential Suite and two dining options.

Blackbird, Hotel Californian's signature dinner restaurant, features Mediterranean fare from Santa Barbara-sourced seafood and produce prepared by former French Laundry chef Alexander La Motte. The Goat Tree is a family-friendly cafe that's great for breakfast and lunch. For a gut-filling deal at \$9, try the chia seed custard made with coconut milk, toasted seeds (including caraway) and fruit.

And it's just strolling deals from there on out. All within walking distance from the beach, the Funk Zone reaches up to Highway 101 between State Street and Santa Barbara Street.

Another delicious and affordable breakfast option is the Helena Avenue Bakery, which shares space with the Santa Barbara Wine Collective (more on the Urban Wine Trail later). All the bread, biscuits and baked goods are made on-site. Expansive windows provide a glimpse of chefs, overseen by Bryan Foehl, as they hand-shape baguettes, breads and pastries. Chef Bridget Bottoms oversees the takeout picnic counter if you want to grab something



to go to eat at the beach.

For breakfast, try the \$10 Green Eggs and Ham, made with fried egg, Black Forest ham, pepper jack cheese and green harissa sauce on a house-made buttermilk biscuit. The \$8 peanut and cashew butter toast comes with banana and rosemary, and the glazed blueberry lemon scones are light and pillowy. One will last you until lunchtime.

Lunch at the Lucky Penny is just around the block. It's hard to miss the small stand-alone eatery in the heart of the Funk Zone, its exterior covered with 164,456 real copper pennies. Lucky Penny specializes in wood-fired pizza, salads and sandwiches. Try the Milpas pizza, topped with fingerling potatoes, Mexican chorizo, sunny-side-up egg, spicy tomatillo marinara, cotija cheese and cilantro, in the inviting, bougainvillea-draped courtyard.

The \$13 California style muffuletta is more inside than outside, stuffed with salami, mortadella, olive tapenade, provolone, pepperoncini and mixed greens, served hot



Tyger Tyger

piadina style between thin sheets of Helena Avenue Bakery bread.

The newest addition to the Zone is Tyger Tyger. Located inside a dynamic 1,900-square-foot marketplace, the Thai-Vietnamese restaurant is helmed by Santa Barbara native Daniel Palaima and is inspired by Thai and Vietnamese street food carts.

You can see it from every corner of the Zone, festooned with hundreds of illuminated pink lanterns on the interior and exterior ceilings, which extend from the south façade and wrap around to the east patio. Large windows allow all-day sunshine into the airy room. Window frames and counters are crafted from natural teak. Adding further dimension are whimsical wallpaper treatments, including a canary-themed ceiling.

Palaima's menu is addictive and itself worth the trip to Santa Barbara. The crispy rice salad is divine, made with seared albacore, avocado, red onion, peanuts, coconut, cabbage, lime and cilantro; it pairs perfectly

with one of the local IPAs. Equally delightful and filling is the Northern Thai curried pork *khao soi*, a slurpable bowl of egg noodles, fermented mustard greens, red onion, peanuts and a hint of spice from house-made chili oil.

Two other funky offerings inside the marketplace are Monkeyshine, an exotic soft-serve ice cream counter featuring frozen treats flavored with Asian spices and ingredients (such as green tea, toasted rice, Thai chili chocolate, ginger and black sesame), and Dart Coffee, a coffee counter and local specialty roaster that uses fair-trade organic beans from small-lot indigenous farmers.

Grab a coffee and enjoy it in the garden of the Funk Zone Farm across the street, in the shade of the big green house. The urban farm provides the neighborhood restaurants with produce such as arugula, baby turnips and radishes and serves as a serene place for the community to meet.

One of the oldest establishments in the Funk Zone, across the street from Tyger Tyger, and another great option if you're looking for something to go for a picnic on the beach is Metropulos Fine Foods Merchant, a traditional Italian deli.

After a nice walk on the beach or stroll on the pier (or a nap), head over for tapas and a Costa Blanca cocktail at Loquita (a Spanish colloquial term for a wild and fun-loving young girl), which opened in fall 2016. Loquita is a love letter to the Spanish origins and history of Santa Barbara.

Executive chef Peter Lee (a veteran of J el Robuchon in Las Vegas) created the menu with input from celebrated Spanish chef Perfecto Roche, presenting authentic Spanish paella, charcuterie and cheeses, locally sourced seafood and meat dishes. The restaurant also features Poquita, a tapas bar serving *pintxos* and tapas. Try the *croquetas de pollo*, a delicate cheese-filled free-range chicken fritter, draped in *jam n ibérico*, and the liquid Manzanillo olives.

For a traditional Santa Barbara

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» **10** | dinner experience reminiscent of the days when Maddy's Tavern opened its doors to travelers on the old stagecoach route, the Lark is the epicenter of the Funk Zone and a fond reminder of the area's original hippie days.

A major driver in the reinvention of the neighborhood was Sherry Villanueva, whose company of investors, Acme Hospitality, sparked the birth of the Funk Zone when it opened the Lark in 2013, followed by Les Marchands, Loquita, Helena Avenue Bakery, Santa Barbara Wine Collective and Tyger Tyger.

The Lark's stunning rustic design of a historic fish market building connects past and future, paying homage to California train travel using found vintage objects and blending them with modern, urban and industrial materials, to spectacular effect. The restaurant is named after the sleek overnight Pullman train of the Southern Pacific Railroad that serviced Santa Barbara from 1910 to 1968.

Start the evening with marinated burrata with Ojai pixie tangerines and Castelvetro olive tapenade, Marcona almonds and fennel pollen crostini — you'll never be able to go back to the heirloom tomato version again. Move on to the rabbit and pork belly rilletes with pickled blueberries, honey roasted hazelnuts and warm lavender focaccia from the Helena Avenue Bakery next door.

The Urban Wine Trail

Dotted throughout the Funk Zone and available on foot is the Urban Wine Trail, more than 20 tasting rooms representing Santa Barbara wines at a fraction of the cost of anything you'll find in Santa Ynez or downtown Santa Barbara.

Pali Wines and the Santa Barbara Wine

Collective offer \$15 wine flights. Stumble into Kunin Wines for a \$12 pinot noir flight that includes three tastes from Babcock, Hillard Bruce and Fiddlehead wineries in the local Santa Rita Hills or an \$8 international flight of Vignetti del Sole pinot grigio, Caccia al Peiano red blend from Tuscany and a Solar Forum red blend from the Valle de Guadalupe.

At the end of the night, if you're feeling a little tiki, drop in for a nightcap at the Test Pilot. The friendly bar draws inspiration from Don the Beachcomber (the 1930s creator of tiki), its location near Stearns Wharf and the history of Prohibition-era rum and whiskey smuggling in the Channel Islands

More information:

Hotel Californian, 36 State St., Santa Barbara; (805) 882-0100, thehotelcalifornian.com.

Harbor View Inn, 28 W. Cabrillo Blvd., Santa Barbara; (805) 963-0780, harbor-viewinnSB.com.

The Lucky Penny, 127 Anacapa St., Santa Barbara; (805) 284-0358, luckypennysb.com.

Loquita, 202 State St., Santa Barbara; (805) 880-3380, loquitasb.com.

The Lark, 131 Anacapa St., Santa Barbara; (805) 284-0370, thelarksb.com.

Goat Tree, 36 State St., Santa Barbara; (805) 882-0100, thehotelcalifornian.com/santa_barbara_restaurants/.

Tyger Tyger, 121 Yanonali St., Santa Barbara; (805) 880-4227, tygertygersb.com.

Blackbird, 36 State St., Santa Barbara; (805) 882-0100, thehotelcalifornian.com/santa_barbara_restaurants/.

Test Pilot, 211 Helena Ave., Santa Barbara; (805) 845-2518, testpilotcocktails.com.

Helena Avenue Bakery, 131 Anacapa St., Santa Barbara; (805) 880-3383, helenaavenuebakery.com.