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Outdoor recreation in San Luis Obispo

San Luis Obispo is an undiscovered gem for outdoor recreation enthusiasts. Midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco along California's beautiful Central Coast, this is an ideal place for a relaxing but active getaway. The magnificent Santa Lucia mountain range, a pristine coastline and a string of steep volcanic peaks, along with near-perfect year-round weather, make SLO a great spot for hiking, biking, running, golf, kayaking, surfing and rock climbing, to name a few options.

Miles of off-road trails, plus back-country roads that wind through vineyards and farmland, beckon cyclists, hikers and runners of all levels. *Runners World* magazine recently chose San Luis Obispo as one of the country's top vacation spots. On-road bicyclists can take in gorgeous coastal scenery along SLO's back roads and along Highway 1. Off-road, there are trails for those who want to push their limits and for those who prefer to take it easy.

In the greenbelt that surrounds the city, one of the most popular and challenging hiking spots is 1,559-foot Bishop Peak, part of a chain of volcanic peaks (dubbed the Seven Sisters) that leads out to the Pacific Ocean at Morro Bay. Within view of Bishop Peak is 1,292-foot San Luis Mountain, another of the volcanic hills. A trip to the summit of either rewards hikers and rock-climbers with sweeping views.

In Poly Canyon, moderate to difficult mountain trails traverse hillsides dotted with grazing cattle that sometimes share the trail. Irish Hills Natural Reserve is laced with a network of trails that wind their way (steeply at times) through the hills of

Prefumo Canyon. A fairly easy route through Reservoir Canyon Natural Reserve leads to a waterfall that's stunning during winter and spring. Trails up Cuesta Ridge climb steadily before leveling off at the top, where there are unparalleled views of the area.

For those who like to hike, bike or run among wild flowers along eucalyptus-scented trails, Montana de Oro State Park offers several trails. A brisk walk along the Bluff Trail is fine before or after an ocean-front picnic lunch. Coon Creek Trail to Rattlesnake Trail is a moderate route that winds back into the mountains for a gradual climb (about 2 miles) to a mountaintop. A loop of about 6 miles, Oates Peak Trail climbs nearly 1,400 feet for a real workout that yields spectacular vistas.

On the water, kayakers and surfers are seen all along the San Luis Obispo coastline. Morro Bay, Avila Beach and Shell Beach—all within a fifteen minute drive of downtown SLO—are prime spots for taking to the water to view wildlife, including sea and shore birds, seals, otters and migrating gray whales in the distance. Kayaking here varies from the smooth water of Dinosaur Caves in Shell Beach to the downright dangerous coastline at Montana de Oro State Park. The great surfing spots in Pismo Beach, Morro Bay, Cayucos and San Simeon have earned SLO *Surfer Magazine's* nod as one of the country's "ten best surf towns."

Golfers have two courses to choose from in town and a dozen more countywide. Nine or 18 holes, public or private, oceanfront or vineyard-view, the links offer a diversity of experiences and challenges. The fairways are never crowded and the greens fees are downright cheap, making golf in San Luis Obispo a pleasure year-round.

And whatever your sport, San Luis Obispo's outfitters stand ready to supply your every need for equipment, rentals and guided trips. For more information about events, attractions and visitor services in San Luis Obispo, phone the San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce at 805-781-2777 or visit the Chamber's website at

www.visitslo.com.

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