

# San Luis Obispo

## Racing through 72 Hours in the SLO Lane

By Kathy Chin Leong



Photo: San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce

**Although San Luis Obispo thrives on its SLO acronym, there's no such thing as slowing to a crawl in this college town with fashionable inns, budget-friendly shopping, gourmet dining and outdoor adventure. We take on you on a three-day sprint to this coastal city hugged by the Santa Maria Mountain Range that boasts over 300 days of sunshine annually.**

### Day One—Morning

Your drive from the SF Bay Area will take three to four hours. Upon arrival, check into Petit Soleil, a bed and breakfast with daily rates of \$179-\$299. Accented with French antiques, each of the 15 rooms will make fans of all-things-European feel right at home.

A complimentary piping hot breakfast is served in the dining room along with a wine hour that includes local and French wine with homemade appetizers. Located on the edge of the downtown shopping enclave, the B&B is five blocks away from the city core.

### Brunch

The action happens not in the front but in the back patio of Novo Restaurant and Lounge. This iconic restaurant with global eats is where every SLO resident has to come and nosh on its famous Sunday brunch at least once in their lives. Overlooking a creek, Novo is abuzz with activity every day and reservations are advised.

### Shopping

In 1772, Spaniards came to downtown SLO and established Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa which is still operating as a parish church. Surrounding the mission is a restored downtown. Many of the brick buildings have been rescued and transformed into small shops with men's and women's fashions, art, jewelry, and even pet clothing.

### Afternoon

Need a coffee break? Seems that every street features a gourmet, eco-friendly roastery and finding just one to try may be daunting. Many swear by Scout Coffee, an independent roaster on the side street called Garden.

On the outskirts of town is Coastal Peaks, another bustling java joint that specializes in pour-over coffee. The favorite of this writer is the Garden Island blend from Hawaii featuring smooth flavor with no acidity.

### Dinner

Tonight hit up Thomas Hill Organic Kitchen. This upstairs eatery has already garnered a reputation for clever cocktails and stand out farm-to-table cuisine. The simple and tasteful decor will ease you into your first night as you dine on entrees starring local grass fed beef and free range chicken.

### Day Two—Morning

After your power breakfast at Petit Soleil, it's hike time. This is "The Thing To Do" in San Luis Obispo. Nearby is the Lemon Grove loop trail, only 1.5 miles long. Another relatively easy one is the Johnson Ranch Trail at 3.7 miles.

Many are devoted to Montana de Oro State Park for its panoramic sea-to-sky views. Go early for a good parking spot. The hikes are relatively easy for adults and children, and they feature above-ocean vistas of dramatic waves and jagged cliffs.

In the mood for beach time? Consider Pismo State Beach and try your hand at clam digging. You need a salt water fishing license and can only keep up to ten clams per day.

And for a beach that delivers a different treat, head to the Oceano Dunes State Vehicular Recreation Area. It may be the only place in the state where you can legally drive your car onto the sand next to the water.

### Lunch

Next, casual bites can be purchased at SLO Provisions. House-roasted rotisserie chicken and meats, and tasty sandwiches are excellent savory selections after a walk or hike. The red-and-white farmhouse chic decor is welcoming, and the ordering method is no-nonsense.

### Afternoon

If you are just too beat after your lunch, the folks at East Well Being can pick you up in their open air vehicle resembling part scooter, part van. This is just one of the quirky benefits you get when you sign up for a massage, acupuncture, or facial treatment here in this Asian-inspired day spa.

### Dinner

Well, well, well. After all that pampering you may feel a bit guilty, but it's dinnertime at the Ciopinot Seafood Grille where oysters reign. Anyone who comes has to order these glistening, meaty fruits of the sea. This is not a college hangout, for the fare is pricey but worth it.



Photo: Kathy Chin Leong

### Day Three—Morning

Visit the California Polytechnic State University San Luis Obispo campus. Cal Poly, all of 6,000 acres, is full of open space, traditional college classroom buildings and a high-tech performing arts center.

The area is so large, it can be overwhelming. So, if you can, go online in advance. Sign up for a college tour to get a true feel for the campus. If anything, walk the campus just to feel young again.

### Lunch

The Vegetable Butcher Culture Kitchen may sound like a vegetarian-only dining spot but it's not. The large eatery features local meats and sustainable seafood and regional fruits and veggies.

### Afternoon

Did you know that SLO features a thriving wine region? Wine tasting in the Edna Valley is an adventure of the taste buds. And while each vintage is decidedly different, every tasting room reveals its own personality and backstory. Chamisal Vineyards touts itself as the first vineyard planted in

the Edna Valley and features tasting patios in back and front of the barn which is also a tasting room. Meanwhile, Tolosa Winery features a modern tasting counter and a voluminous clubroom for its members which faces its vineyards.

Other wineries in the SLO area include Claiborne & Churchill which has erected the state's first straw bale winery. Over at Biddle Ranch Vineyard, guests can try flights of pinot, sparkling or white wines.

Today, switch to the renovated Granada Hotel and Bistro, a boutique hotel with a full-service restaurant. Located in the center of downtown, you are adjacent to loads of stores so you can shop and drop your

bags

in your room and then fly out for more retail therapy.

If you are visiting on a Thursday, you must peruse the 6 p.m. Farmers' Market that occurs downtown every week. This one is world renowned, and you can purchase fresh fruits and veggies to bring home on your last night in SLO.

### Dinner

Tired of running around? Your last meal is at your hotel. Chefs at Granada Bistro work the kitchen producing tummy-warming New American entrees in small plate and large plate portions.

The end of your 72 hours is up and you will probably go home with several bottles of wine in your trunk in addition to suitcases full of new clothes and trinkets for your home. You probably have pairs of dusty hiking boots lying in the floor of the back seat. But hey, you can't say we didn't warn you!

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