

# A Meeting Planner's Paradise

Merryl Brown Events designed this swanky soirée at Santa Barbara Polo + Racquet Club

WHY MEET IN SANTA BARBARA? The reasons are as endless as the sparkling blue Pacific that stretches to meet a bright, cloudless sky. But first on the list is that old real estate adage of “location, location, location.” This picture-perfect spot, known as The American Riviera®, is as happily located as you can get—nestled on the Central Coast of California, Santa Barbara basks in a mild Mediterranean climate with about 300 days of sunshine a year.

And the off-season? There is none. Average daytime temperatures range from the mid-60s to mid-70s°F (18–24°C) along the coast all year long, and evening temperatures are refreshingly cool—just right for a light jacket or sweater. Meetings and events go smoothly when attendees and guests can count on soaking up the balmy Santa Barbara **climate** every day.

They can also soak up world-class **scenery**—think swaying palm trees lining

pristine beaches with the Santa Ynez Mountains providing a majestic backdrop. Add the Channel Islands just off the coast and Los Padres National Forest in the backyard, and it's easy to see why the area is a meeting planner's paradise—there is truly something here for everyone. The city's manageable size—just 43 square miles—means more time to explore.

The stunning setting includes a unique east-west coastline (the only one between

Alaska and Cape Horn) with south-facing **beaches** and almost 100 miles of sweeping shoreline. Whether you're looking for a hang-ten surfing spot (try a fun group lesson) or a sunset stroll (the ultimate wedding photo opportunity), you'll find the perfect sandy stretch here.

**Water sports** make a splash as both team-building experiences and spare-time activities. Choose from stand-up paddle boarding, surfing, kiteboarding, windsurfing,



PHOTO: COURTESY OF BOB PERRY, CONDOR EXPRESS

whale-watching cruises, scuba diving, kayaking, sailing, fishing trips out of Santa Barbara Harbor, tidepooling and just plain ol' frolicking in the waves. Explore the Channel Islands with direct service from Santa Barbara Harbor's SEA Landing.

Back on land, **outdoor sports** enthusiasts get in the action with seven 18-hole championship golf courses, tennis, miles of hiking trails of all levels, horseback riding, biking along well-marked bike paths or on mountain trails, in-line skating, rock climbing, hang-gliding and skydiving. Join in or set up a beach volleyball game or take in an exciting polo match at Santa Barbara Polo & Racquet Club, one of the oldest clubs in the nation, from early May through October. If your guests still have unspent energy, schedule a

backcountry jeep tour or nature tour at Cachuma Lake.

Along with its natural beauty, Santa Barbara is known for its distinctive architectural identity. Signature Spanish Revival **architecture**—creamy stucco buildings with graceful arches, wrought-iron details, colorful tilework and red-tile roofs—creates a strong sense of place, which goes hand in hand with the area's well-respected **history**. Take the Red Tile Walking Tour to peek at landmarks such as Santa Barbara County Courthouse, a 1929 Spanish-Moorish masterpiece, and the much-photographed "Queen of the Missions," founded in 1786. Then step back in time at Santa Barbara Historical Museum, which offers an overview of local history and cultural influences.

Beyond the eye-catching bougainvillea-draped courtyards and buildings, Santa Barbara has **substance**, with a vibrant **arts and culture** scene that thrives with abundant community support. Your group can feast their eyes on outstanding collections at Santa Barbara Museum of Art and browse dozens of local art galleries. Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History is a treasure trove of permanent and changing exhibits, and on the waterfront, Santa Barbara Maritime Museum celebrates the town's historic connection to the sea. Santa Barbara has its own ballet company, opera and symphony performing at historic theaters such as The Granada, Lobero and Arlington. Or let the good times roll al fresco at Santa Barbara Bowl—an intimate amphitheater under the stars.

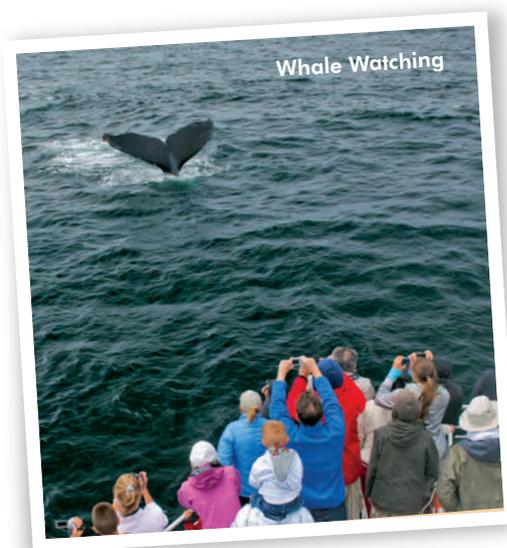
When your group gets hungry and thirsty, it's good to know you're in foodie heaven. From ethnic cafés and beachfront bistros to world-class wineries and fine-dining restaurants, **cuisine** is an important ingredient in Santa Barbara life. The focus is on fresh seasonal ingredients, from just-picked produce to fresh-off-the-boat seafood. In October, dig into a month-long celebration of cuisine, libations and culture at [epicure.sb](http://epicure.sb). Insider tip for creative team-building: tours and wine-blending classes at renowned wineries in Santa Barbara County wine country or in downtown Santa Barbara on the Urban Wine Trail.

An array of **stays** from luxe lodging overlooking the ocean to chic downtown

boutique hotels makes planning easy. Whether you're after popular hotel brands, sprawling resorts with pampering spas, large banquet facilities or intimate meeting rooms, you'll find it here.

And it's a cinch to **get here**...Visitors may arrive on scenic Highway 1 (101), daily stops on Amtrak trains or via air service to the brand-new LEED-certified Santa Barbara Airport (SBA) terminal or Los Angeles International Airport (LAX). Once your guests are here, it couldn't be easier to get around—eco-friendly hybrid buses and battery-electric trolleys zip between cafés, boutiques, open-air malls and galleries, historic sites, and the beaches and harbor. Or put on walking shoes and stroll the 11-block pedestrian-friendly downtown.

The RSVP will be "yes" when your event, meeting or conference venue is Santa Barbara. It's a planner's paradise, with a certain caché of Santa Barbara **style**. Your guests will be inspired by the inviting, unique blend of relaxed vibe, sophisticated up-to-the-minute tastes and sky-high standards, minus the



stuffiness. And it's a breeze (ocean, of course) to organize a successful event or meeting. Relax and contact Santa Barbara Conference & Visitors Bureau + Film Commission to help with all aspects of your event, from group transportation, activities and tours to incentive gifts, party rentals, private dining, referrals for professional service providers, hospitality services and much more.

[SantaBarbaraCA.com](http://SantaBarbaraCA.com). ✨

—Nancy Ransohoff