



PRESS KIT

Belmond El Encanto introduced by Fiona Sims

OVERVIEW

Long known as a playground for the Hollywood elite, Santa Barbara embodies the Californian dream, with its bucolic valleys swathed in surf mist, pristine ranches and manicured lawns. While the Spanish Old Mission at the top of the town sets the tone with its swaying palms and pink-domed bell towers, Belmond El Encanto increases the allure.

Offering a timeless sense of tranquillity from its vantage point high in the hills, Belmond El Encanto is one of Southern California's most iconic hotels. A landmark since the 1920s, it emerged from a seven-year \$134 million renovation in March 2013 to become Santa Barbara's only Forbes Five-Star resort for three consecutive years (2014-2016).

The resort features 92 luxuriously designed bungalows and suites set in seven acres of lush historic gardens with sweeping views over Santa Barbara and the Pacific Ocean beyond. It features two distinct styles of early Santa Barbara architecture – California Craftsman and Spanish Colonial Revival — their interiors decorated with works of art carefully curated to reflect the Santa Barbara landscape.

British artist Damien Hirst's butterfly-inspired Psalm print hangs over the concierge desk, a nod to the hotel's location on a butterfly migration path, while renowned Californian abstract artist Charles Arnoldi's bold, bright painting, Future, makes a dramatic entrance to The Dining Room.

It is here, in The Dining Room & Terrace, where Executive Chef Johan Denizot offers guests an elegant take on Californian coastal cuisine, served at tables that boast the best views in town.

The French-born chef is most proud of the area's local produce, which includes highlights such as buttery, briny sea urchin, which is unique to Santa Barbara, plus hotel-grown delights such as cheese made from milk produced by Ellie, Belmond El Encanto's very own Holstein cow.

Signature dishes include Santa Barbara spotted prawns crudo with Ojai Pixie segments, local halibut with coastal freckle lettuce and Fresno chillies, and Denizot's popular halibut sashimi.

To match? There are 600 different wines on the well-thought-out wine list, looked after by enthusiastic head sommelier Jeremy Sewell, who offers a number from California's thrilling Central Coast by the glass.

The enchanted setting makes Belmond El Encanto the perfect spot for any special gatherings, most notably weddings. From the wisteria-lined Arbor and Lily Pond, to the elegant ballroom with its exclusive patio, guests can select from the resort's range of signature venues.

Belmond El Encanto also offers a beautiful spa, which draws from the surrounding landscape to create soothing, signature treatments. There are ocean-inspired therapies infused with calming sea elements, such as seaweed.

Guests can also enjoy a range of activities including classes and workshops taught by renowned fitness trainer Nora Tobin and her skilled team, and venture into the nearby town on the resort's complimentary electric bikes.

Music and comedy loving guests should make tracks to the nearby Santa Barbara Bowl, one of the leading entertainment venues on California's coast. The massive outdoor amphitheatre was built in 1936 and now hosts some of the biggest names in the business.

But most guests choose to take their time—simply strolling through the resort's breathtaking gardens or lounging by the zero-edge saline pool, with its complimentary sunglass cleaning and Evian cooling mist service, before hanging out on their very own porch – glass of Californian wine in hand, watching the sun dip below the horizon. Now that's true luxury.

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

Belmond El Encanto originally opened in 1918 and quickly became established as the top Californian retreat for artists, celebrities and business leaders from both East and West Coasts.

In the golden days of Hollywood, movie legends such as Hedy Lamarr, Clark Gable and Carole Lombard motored up from Los Angeles to escape the rigours of stardom and the big city to hang out at the resort.

Belmond reopened the hotel in March 2013 following extensive, meticulous restoration, to recapture that romance and glamour, bringing back to life its original architectural features, and adding modern, luxe touches.

A favourite haunt of, through the ages, Mexicans, Franciscan monks, Chumash Indians, and now Los Angelenos, Santa Barbara is a well-heeled, laid-back, health-conscious kind of town, as visitors discover when they explore its well-kept streets.

The town's larger houses might be hidden behind tall scented hedges, rows of impenetrable trees and impressive gates, but there is a real sense of community, which comes to the fore at the weekly farmers' market, held downtown every Saturday.

Santa Barbara also enjoys being in the spotlight itself - it's a setting for many famous films including *The Graduate*, starring Dustin Hoffman and Anne Bancroft and *It's Complicated*, with Meryl Streep and Alec Baldwin.

For the past 40 years the town has hosted the annual Santa Barbara Writer's Conference, connecting scribes with mentors, agents and editors; with a legacy of American writers attending the event including Fannie Flagg, author of *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Café*, and Pulitzer Prize-winning writer, Jane Smiley. Tickets for this event are available for guests who join Belmond El Encanto's custom writers' retreat program.

Belmond El Encanto invites aspiring writers to book their year-round Creative Writing Retreat package. Budding wordsmiths who dream of creating the next Oscar-winning screenplay, best-selling romantic novel, or science fiction blockbuster can immerse themselves in the world of creative writing at one of Hollywood's favourite haunts, with individual sessions available throughout the year.

The three-day residential courses are hosted by accredited writing professionals from the LA Writers Group, and include a pre-retreat consultation with a mentor to discuss assignments to aid the writing process, 12 hours of private creative writing workshops, as well as accommodation in a luxurious Superior Bungalow Suite, the perfect setting to get creative juices flowing.

EXPERIENCES

Santa Barbara Farmers Market tour

The weekly Santa Barbara Farmers Market is a linchpin of the local way of life. Every Saturday sees people strolling around with baskets bursting with fresh produce. Belmond El Encanto offers guests an insider tour with its Executive Chef Johan Denizot, to meet his favourite vendors and discover some of the market's finest delicacies. There's also an option to turn this bounty into delicious dishes at a cookery class with Chef—and then enjoy them for lunch.

The market, dating from 1983, was one of California's first. It has since become a benchmark for excellence, and many others have opened up since. In California alone there are now an estimated 700, with around 2,200 certified producers.

Local stallholders include pioneers such as Randy Wade, who encourages young farmers to get in on the act. In fact, many of the original growers are still going strong and continue to sell their wares here, offering produce ranging from locally grown heirloom tomatoes to organic walnut oil and orange blossom honey. Live music plays as shoppers wander through the stalls, nibbling on dates and sampling avocado honey, or bigger bites such as chicken tamales and salads.

Creekside Apple Ranch, home of the Solvang Pie Co., specializes in seasonal pies made with locally grown fruit such as peach, and The Fusano Olive Company, which was founded by a southern Italian family back in 1909. Citrus grower Friend's Ranch offers juicy Ojai Pixie tangerines while The Santa Barbara Pistachio Company is known for its hot air-dried organic nuts. Produce arrives from other parts of the state, including dates from the desert, and fruits from the Central Valley. For anyone who misses Saturday, there are many other markets to explore – held in nearby Carpinteria, Montecito, Goleta and Solvang.

Urban Wine Trail

No time to head out of town to the scenic vineyards of the Santa Ynez Valley? Then Belmond El Encanto recommends the Santa Barbara Urban Wine Trail.

Created by a group of like-minded wineries, it now numbers more than two dozen producers, who invite visitors to sip through their range in smart tasting rooms in the Funk Zone, one of downtown Santa Barbara's coolest neighbourhoods. Close to the beach and home to surf shops, breweries, boutiques, galleries and restaurants, the easily walkable trail offers an exceptional opportunity to discover Santa Barbara County's top producers. Highlights include Au Bon Climat, Babcock, Sanford and Grassini Family Vineyards, all favourites of Belmond El Encanto's Sommelier Jeremy Sewell.

Keen to visit vineyards? It's just a 40-minute drive over the San Marcos Pass in the Santa Ynez Mountains to the heart of wine country. Known collectively as California's Central Coast, it is home to many premium winemakers whose wines can be sampled on Belmond El Encanto's 600-bin wine list. Jeremy is available to take guests on a private vineyard tour.

Although less well known than their Napa and Sonoma neighbours further north, Central Coast is consistently turning out great niche wines that have a growing following – thanks, in part, to the buddy movie, Sideways. The surprise 2004 hit saw wine lovers flock here in their thousands to sample its star grape, Pinot Noir. Guests can retrace the hapless friends' steps at Sanford, Fess Parker and Foxen wineries, and hang out in the charming wine town of Los Olivos, taking their pick of more than 20 tasting rooms, among them Stolpman, Qupe and Andrew Murray.

Discover the Sea Caves of Santa Barbara

Just a short cruise away from Santa Barbara's charming town centre is an untamed world of aquatic adventure - the Sea Caves. Belmond El Encanto has launched a unique tour of this geological wonderland, where tides have created dozens of fascinating caverns just waiting to be explored. Intrepid though it sounds, this is a tour for all ages, and for all levels of ability.

The day kicks off at Santa Cruz, the largest of California's eight Channel Islands where guests meet their trained naturalist guide, and are kitted out in diving gear. Then, paddling along by kayak, they explore the evocatively named Elephant's Belly, Cavern Point and Scorpion Rock. The caves fill with seawater and then empty again, in an awe-inspiring spectacle.

Back on dry land, a delicious picnic lunch is served in a suitably picturesque spot. The afternoon is then spent snorkeling through the kelp forests of the Marine Reserve, which is home to seals, bat rays and octopus. Guests can also choose to stay on dry land and take a scenic hike around the island, with highlights that include Cavern Point, with its far-reaching views.

PEOPLE

Shaun O'Bryan, Resort Manager

Tell us about yourself

I grew up in Australia, in a town just south of Sydney. If I wasn't surfing, or being a volunteer lifeguard, I was playing in a professional rugby league team. Then, having studied business and hotel management at university I decided to try out the hotel industry. After a stint as a bellman I fell in love with it. I completed the Ritz-Carlton management training program and started working at one of its properties in California. I spent the next 15 years working out here for the company, until I joined Belmond El Encanto as resort manager in December 2014.

What do you love most about Santa Barbara?

It has everything. You've got the coast, there's great wine country nearby (and I love my wine), and the produce is amazing. There's great biking and hiking, yet I can get my city fix as we're so close to LA. The light is fantastic around here, thanks, in part, to the mountains. Santa Barbara sticks out on a peninsula and has its own microclimate, so you get these ridiculously beautiful sunsets, especially in the winter.

Favourite part of your day?

When I walk around the resort in the early morning. The air is so cool and fresh, and it's very quiet. But I also love the time just before cocktail hour. This is when I can spend a little more time talking to guests.

What drives you?

Creating memorable moments for guests. It could be the simplest thing that makes the difference, but we have fun with it. I'm passionate about motivating my team and helping them to grow and develop.

Has your former career as a professional rugby player helped you to be a better hotelier?

Funnily enough it's my Aussie accent that has helped me more than anything, particularly in problem resolution. People always stop to ask where I come from, and when they find out I'm Australian they relax. They know Aussies don't take things too seriously.

Favourite spot in the hotel?

Sitting on the restaurant terrace on a clear day – it's gorgeous. But what I love best is the architecture, and the settings of the bungalows. It feels so authentic, and each one is uniquely different. And when you combine that with the beautiful outdoor setting, you really do see everyone unwind. I take great satisfaction from walking around the resort and seeing people relax on their patio with a glass of wine.

Insider tips?

McConnell's Fine Ice Creams on State Street – it's been making the best ice cream since 1949. The Santa Barbara Bowl is great too; it's not far from the hotel and it has top rank entertainment.

Jeremy Sewell, Head Sommelier

It was the Californian wine industry that drew Belmond El Encanto's Sommelier Jeremy Sewell to the US West Coast. "There's more wine knowledge out here," he says. Sewell is in charge of the hotel's 600-bin list, which focuses, unsurprisingly, on the region's celebrated vintages, plus gems from all over the vinous globe.

Sewell didn't set out to be a sommelier. He began by working as a waiter in a fine dining restaurant in his native Houston, Texas learning about wine as he went along. "The more I picked up, the more I got into it. On my nights off, I would go to local wine bars to try as many different varieties as I could," he says.

"I think it's really important not to be stuffy about wine. I love to have a laugh with my guests - I like to give wine service a more modern vibe. I think wine should be accessible to everybody - that's the whole point of my job," he says.

Pairing food and wine is one of his favourite tasks. "I just love it when guests tell me it was the perfect match," he says. Part of the opening team starting in March 2013, Sewell has been steadily building up a healthy listing of local wines and there are many to try by the glass.

"What I love about our local wines is that they are thrilling to taste, but not over-the-top ridiculous to buy. You don't have to spend too much for a great bottle of Santa Barbara wine."

Among Sewell's favourite producers are Jalama Canyon Ranch, Foxen Winery and Grassini Family Vineyards. He urges guests to try Santa Barbara's Urban Wine Trail (urbanwinetrailsb.com), plus to visit producers in nearby wine country. "Presqu'ile Winery in Santa Maria is another favourite. They've got this great charcuterie and wine pairing thing going on. But there's so much more to be excited about here."

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY & ENVIRONMENT

Reopened in March 2013 after extensive refurbishment, Belmond El Encanto has been refurbished according to stringent heritage regulations. Construction work included the reuse of salvaged timber and roof tiles, and the installation of energy saving air conditioning systems.

Santa Barbara is facing a severe drought and Belmond El Encanto is an active supporter of water conservation measures. Its seven-acre gardens have been designed around drought-tolerant trees and plants, and strict water usage measures are in place, from using drought-tolerant plants in what was the fountain area, to the drip irrigation system in place throughout the grounds.

The hotel has introduced environmentally friendly transportation initiatives that benefit both the environment and local community, from encouraging guests to consider alternative transportation and enjoy a car-free getaway by promoting the opportunity to travel to Santa Barbara by train, to making electric bicycles available at the hotel for guests to explore everywhere from the Old Mission to the beach.

Belmond El Encanto also has its own working Chef's Garden, which produces leaf vegetables, tomatoes and herbs for the hotel kitchen. The resort's chefs go to the Santa Barbara Farmers Market every week to buy produce and to network with the local vendors and suppliers.