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## Avila Beach: Perfect playground for your next couples getaway

Cary Ordway  
Special To The Desert Sun  
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About halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco - and about halfway between a wilderness beach and the frenetic shores of, say, Orange County - you'll find an idyllic little stretch of sand that's certainly worth a stop next time you're driving Highway 101. Tucked just around the bend from Pismo Beach is Avila Beach, a small but popular area ideal for your next couples getaway.

Not that children would be unwelcome: Avila is a playground for all ages. But the new Avila Village Inn has now brought this destination up a notch or two for those seeking a special romantic beach getaway. Just opened in January, the inn has pulled out all the stops to attract couples who want to pamper themselves as much as enjoy the natural beauties of the Central California coastline.

About 7 miles north of Pismo Beach, the sign directs Highway 101 travelers to Avila Beach by way of a winding road that follows San Luis Creek down into a wooded ravine. About a mile before you get to the beach is Avila Village, a new development with condos, a few shops and, adjacent to the creek, the Avila Village Inn.

### Wooded setting

While not actually on the beach, the inn's wooded setting gives the property a quiet, reclusive feel. The developers of the new hotel use the word "refined" to describe the many details and amenities that have been built into the 30 guest rooms. And our impression was that, indeed, this is one of those inns where you enjoy tasting the luxurious accommodations as much as experiencing each and other natural surroundings.

Managed by the Pacifica Hotel Company, the Avila Beach Inn is owned by a Ventura-based builder of luxury homes and it's obvious that this new property has incorporated many of the design features now seen in newer upscale homes. Wet bars, granite countertops and fireplaces are in each room, and marble is used extensively throughout the shower and bathroom area. We especially enjoyed the private spa waiting for us on our creek-side balcony.

If you're so inclined, each room or suite has its own DVD player and guests are encouraged to check out free DVD's from the front desk. Those who are a little more active will welcome the fitness center that is just across the parking lot from the inn - perfect for working off those snacks, pastries and treats that are provided guests in both a welcoming basket and a breakfast basket the next day.

### Sense of privilege

Other details like tasteful art, mission-style furniture and a grand, sweeping staircase in the lobby area all add up to a sense of privilege, which, of course, is what it's all about when you spend significant money to enjoy quality time with your loved one. In this case, you'll spend between \$169 and \$229, depending on whether you come during the higher-priced weekend days.

A couple of minutes down the road from the inn is Avila Beach, a half-mile long beach area

A larger, b

**WHERE:** Avila Beach is about 200 miles north of Los Angeles and just north of Pismo Beach.

**WHAT:** Avila Beach is an alternative to more expansive beaches and has a quieter, more exclusive feel. Only a few hotels are in the immediate area, although many more are located in nearby Pismo Beach.

**WHEN:** The area has a moderate climate year-round. Summer can be hot at times, but is generally temperate. Winter is on the cool side.

**WHY:** Scenic, charming and seemingly remote, yet only a few miles from shopping and restaurants in nearby cities. Ideal for a romantic getaway.

**HOW:** For more information on the Avila Village Inn, call the hotel at (805) 627-1810 or visit [www.avilavillageinn.com](http://www.avilavillageinn.com). The hotel is offering a special Valentine's Day package for stays between Feb. 10 and Feb. 15: two nights in a spa room for two, breakfast each morning and a massage for two. Cost: \$525.

For more information on the Pismo Beach area, go to [www.classicalcalifornia.com](http://www.classicalcalifornia.com).

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that is growing in popularity because of its more exclusive, almost Mediterranean feel. A few older hotels are situated near the beach, adjacent to some shops that are sprinkled throughout the tiny "downtown" area.

Altogether there are three piers in Avila Beach, two of them public. It's fun to walk out to the end of the pier, where we enjoyed watching the surfers and dockside anglers while also taking in the spectacular views of the shoreline. During our week-day visit in January, we saw just a few visitors frolicking on the wide beach. Most people visiting seemed to be either couples, or college students from Cal Poly in nearby San Luis Obispo.

From what we could see, Avila is perfect for getting away from people, although one suspects that might change on weekends and during summer months. Even with unseasonably balmy 75-degree weather, we felt like we'd stumbled across a small, little-known beach village somewhere in the Mediterranean. Only about 400 people live in Avila Beach full-time.

A larger, busier beach is just south of Avila at Pismo Beach. The views from Pismo Beach are spectacular, and this horseshoe-shaped beach seems to stretch for miles and miles.

### Plenty to do

It's readily apparent that this isn't the kind of beach where all you do is sit and soak up the sun: ATV and bike rentals are popular, as are sea kayaking and surfing. You can ride horses here or golf - this area is a favorite with retirees who make sure those golf courses get good and used - while fishing from the Pismo Pier also is popular.

Just up from the pier is the downtown area, much bigger than the Avila Beach shopping area, where you can find a collection of shops and a choice of restaurants.

Driving around Pismo we discovered several beach access points, each with its own set of breathtaking views. These are great places to view the power of nature; during our visit, the surf along Pismo was pounding so hard it seemed as loud as a freight train.

San Luis Obispo is actually the hub for this area, a diverse region that includes not only the beach communities and the city, but also more than 100 wineries within reasonable driving distance.

But then again, many visitors to the Central California coast are content to keep a low profile, perhaps traveling as far as the beach and a good dinner before returning to a cozy fireplace and soft music. Those are the visitors, no doubt, who will find Avila Beach and the new Avila Village Inn, especially rewarding.

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