

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



S.B. listed as one of U.S.'s most distinctive destinations

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The city known as the American Riviera can add another accolade to its mantle; it has been named one of America's 12 most distinctive destinations by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The organization founded the Dozen Distinctive Destinations honor in 2000 as part of its efforts to encourage the preservation of local culture and the environment. The designation is intended to be a recommendation for travelers who wish to enjoy culture and historic atmosphere, along with gorgeous weather and adequate entertainment, while on vacation.

The title is bestowed upon a town or city that offers "an authentic visitor experience by combining dynamic downtowns, cultural diversity, attractive architecture, cultural landscapes and a strong commitment to historic preservation and revitalization," according to the organization.

The criteria made Santa Barbara an obvious choice, according to officials with the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

"Since the 1920s, the Santa Barbara community has worked to preserve the city's historic character and regulate development to ensure that its superb quality of life can be enjoyed by locals and visitors for generations to come," said Richard Moe, president.

"Once you have experienced its vitality and extraordinary character, you won't ever want to leave."

The review covers everything from the downtown area to the mountains and beaches.

The judges in their commentary noted the fantastic weather, beautiful beaches and unparalleled scenery that make Santa Barbara a "coastal paradise" and a "Mecca for outdoor pursuits."

They also lauded the unique architectural landscape that makes Santa Barbara so distinctive.

Officials from the organization paid homage to some of the city's 70 landmarks in the downtown area. The County Courthouse wowed the judges with its "Roman triumphal arch, the (Courthouse) Sunken Garden and an 80-foot clock tower." The heritage embodied in Casa de la Guerra fulfilled their search for the city's "rich history."

The commendation took note of the Santa Barbara Mission as well, emphasizing not only the beauty of the architecture but the Native American statues that grace the property.

The judges also recognized the city for creating a downtown atmosphere that is fitting of a big metropolitan area while preserving the small-town culture that makes Santa Barbara 'Santa Barbara.'

Panelists strolling through the likes of Paseo Nuevo and lower State Street praised Santa Barbara's "pedestrian-friendly enclaves, which are filled with quaint cobbled arcades, bubbling fountains, and towering palms." The walkways and shopping centers of Santa Barbara, the report went on to say, make for easy navigation for tourists.

The term quaint, however, disappeared from the visitors' vocabulary when discussing the accommodations and attractions ever-present in the downtown area.

“The city has evolved into a dynamic food center,” the report read, praising the combination of fine dining and local flavor that distinguishes restaurants in Santa Barbara.

“Seasoned chefs create fine cuisine based on local ingredients and partner each meal with world-class wines from the Santa Maria, Santa Ynez and Lompoc Valleys,” the report said.

The wide array of lodging also impressed the judges, who were looking for a city diverse enough to suit any taste and accommodate any budget.

The preservation group was glad to see that the original Motel 6 was still around for those vacationing on a small budget; they also praised the luxurious waterfront resorts along the coastline.

Accessibility was another important criterion for judges. The group pointed out the number of walking and riding tours, which allow visitors a glimpse into Santa Barbara’s soul.

The area’s environmental considerations were also key to its distinctive nature. The organization said that Santa Barbara is the destination for any eco-tourist, citing the nation’s largest fleet of public electric vehicles and bike-friendly riding areas.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a nonprofit membership organization based in Washington, D.C.

It seeks to preserve not only historic landmarks but places of cultural or local importance in hope of encouraging economic development and environmental sustainability.

Santa Barbara is one of the 120 distinctive cities, located in 43 states, that the organization has recognized in the 10 years that the list has been in place.

For a full list of winners, past and present, or more information about the organization, go to www.preservationnation.org/ddd.

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