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Pismo Beach Named America's Best Small Beach Town of 2026 by Travel + Leisure

The Central Coast destination tops the national list, cited for its classic waterfront, new luxury resort, and expanded Amtrak service

[August 19, 2026 – Pismo Beach, CA] — Pismo Beach has been named America's Best Small Beach Town of 2026 by Travel + Leisure, earning the top spot in the publication's annual America's Best Small Towns awards. The honor caps a standout year for the Central Coast destination, which has now claimed three major national titles in 2026.

Now in its third year, the America's Best Small Towns program highlights communities with small populations but big appeal. Travel + Leisure's editors pointed to Pismo Beach's nostalgic waterfront, lined with taffy shops, laid-back surf shacks, and old-school charm, while noting that recent developments give travelers more reasons than ever to visit. Among them: a new luxury resort and a Grover Beach Amtrak service along iconic Highway 1, midway between San Francisco and Los Angeles.

The Travel + Leisure award builds on a series of national wins earlier this year. In April, Pismo Beach was voted the #1 Best Small Coastal Town in the USA TODAY 10Best Readers' Choice Awards for the second consecutive year, becoming the first back-to-back champion since the ranking began. In June, it added the title of #1 Best Beach in California from the same program.

"We've been fortunate to earn a lot of recognition this year, but what stays with me is why people keep coming back. They're not just stopping for a beach day. They're booking the extra night, catching the sunset from the pier, and waking up to the coast the next morning," said Gordon Jackson, Executive Director of the Pismo Beach Conference and Visitors Bureau. "That's the Pismo Beach we're proud of, and it's a credit to the businesses and community members who make those stays worth extending."

The awards arrive as travelers increasingly prioritize domestic getaways, with small towns playing a growing role in how Americans explore the country.

About the City of Pismo Beach

Located on California's iconic Highway 1, halfway between Los Angeles and San Francisco, Pismo Beach offers a balance of adventure and relaxation. Visitors can surf, kayak, clam, hike coastal bluffs, explore nearby wine country, and catch the sunset from the pier. With its laid-back vibe, walkable downtown, and natural beauty, Pismo Beach delivers the Classic California coastal experience. Follow along on Instagram and Facebook: @PismoBeachCA and facebook.com/PismoBeachCa, or visit https://experiencepismobeach.com/.

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