

One of the most beautiful cities in California is Santa Barbara, some 90 miles up the coast highway from Los Angeles. For decades, it has been primary or secondary home to celebrities, including Oprah Winfrey, Rob Lowe, Michael Douglas and others.

Surrounded by the Santa Ynez mountains, residents enjoy year-round weather similar to Capri, Sorrento and Monte Carlo. The Mediterranean look is emphasized by red-tile roofs of both modest and super-million-dollar hillside estates.

Its coastal location gives Santa Barbara restaurants the daily opportunity to serve fresh-caught seafood, including oysters, clams, crabs, lobsters, prawns and many species of game fish. As at Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco, many of the best seafood restaurants in Santa Barbara are concentrated on a long seaside pier, called Stearns Wharf. Here are just five we reluctantly list as the best, although many locals and vacationers may disagree vehemently.



- . The Harbor Restaurant on the wharf gives diners great seafood, as well as an almost 360-degree view of the beach and oceanside. Dining by candlelight adds to the romantic atmosphere. Longboard's Grill is a less formal cafe upstairs from the Harbor Restaurant, and with lower prices has become a favorite of local business people, parents and kids.
2. The obviously-named Santa Barbara Shellfish Company serves all kinds of raw, boiled, broiled, fried and otherwise tastily prepared clams, oysters, spiny lobsters and other delicacies just minutes after they're plucked from the ocean.
3. The strangely-spelled FisHouse is a branch of the S.B. Shellfish Company, and is located in town several blocks from the wharf area. The offerings are more varied, including all kinds of creative fish dishes. It has a more formal atmosphere than wharf eateries, and higher prices.
4. Trattoria Vittoria is one of many Italian and Mediterranean-style restaurants in Santa Barbara, and knowing people consider this one the best. Just try to find a table on a Friday, Saturday or Sunday night. It is famed for its frisee salad with grilled shrimp and artichoke, as well as many exotic fresh-caught salmon and grouper dishes.
5. Where else would a fish-eating Santa Barbara feline go than to the Hungry Cat? Many locals consider this the very best in town, although on the night we were there, we saw only one real cat near the premises. Everything is cooked on an open-fire stove in front of hungry patrons,

and is served steaming fresh right off the grill. Prices are a bit higher at the Cat than other local restaurants, but for a fun and delicious evening out, it's well worth it.