

By Torgny Lilja

Burn Calories Not Money

How to Stay in Great Shape in Santa Barbara

Palm tree lined beaches and Spanish-inspired architecture contribute to make Santa Barbara one of the most beautiful cities in the world.

However, it is also a place where others might judge you by the look.

“That’s why you can see people exercising everywhere,” said Marcos Lazaro, who runs his own small business in Santa Barbara.

More important is that exercising make you feel better, sleep better and do a better job. With lots of fast food options along the highway, it is important to get out of the car and burn some unnecessary calories now and then. However, exercising could be more expensive than many burger meals together.

But it doesn't need to be in that way. In most cities there is a lot you can do to improve your fitness at a low cost, and Santa Barbara is no exception. You don't need more equipment than a pair of sneakers, a t-shirt and a pair of shorts, while you still can have a great experience.

Beaches

The Santa Barbara coastline offers several exotic beaches and nice trails for walking, jogging, biking, rollerblading and skateboarding.

East Beach at East Cabrillo Boulevard is normally the first seashore tourists come across when visiting Santa Barbara. Not far from the water, there is a concrete sidewalk along the coastline.

"I like to go rollerblading on the beach," said Saralisa Manson, who works as a hair stylist in Santa Barbara. "You can go all the way from City College down to the duck pond."

On East Beach, visitors have the opportunity to play beach volleyball at many courts or watch any of the top-notch volleyball tournaments arranged each year. There are parking lots for a low fee not far away, and you can park your car for free at Shoreline Drive or some of the cross streets.

Butterfly beach at Coast Village Road is a long sandy beach with palm trees. It is not as crowded as East Beach and for that reason popular among many local residents. Because the beach faces west, you have a marvelous view of the city during sunset. However, at daytime there are limited parking possibilities nearby.

Parks

There are also several thickly wooded parks, where it is pleasant to stroll around and listen to birds or a portable music player. Just be careful not to walk alone late at night.

Alameda Park at Santa Barbara Street is a family oriented recreational area not far from downtown. It is one of the city's oldest parks and the place for many celebrations, like Summer Solstice. The commons offers green lawns for outdoor sports like Frisbee as well as picnic tables among rare trees. Alameda Park also hosts the community-built Kid's World play structure with opportunities for the youngest to crawl and climb. There is a small theater stage for children, as well. It is normally not hard to find a parking place on the streets nearby.

Alice Keck Park Memorial Gardens at Micheltorena Street, opposite Alameda Park, have a man-made pond with wild ducks, ornamental coy fish and small turtles. The park, which only consists of drought-tolerant plants, is full of colorful flowers in springtime. Feel free to take a brochure and a fact sheet from a box and read about all the species. Because of many good-looking motifs, this park is said to be popular among photographers.

The Franceschi Park at Franceschi Road, east of El Encanto Hotel in the hills of Santa Barbara, is best suited for strolls or picnics. If you walk here from downtown, the distance is about two miles and the elevation ascent is 320 feet. The park, named after a famous Italian horticulturist who lived here long ago, has windy pathways and a rare collection of plants. From here, there is a magnificent view over the town, the coastline and the Channel Islands. Nearby, there is a parking lot for car drivers.

Gyms

If you still need to exercise with an instructor, Santa Barbara has a lot of gyms. Unfortunately, most of them are rather expensive, and you normally have to sign up for a long-term membership.

One of the most popular training centers here is **Spectrum**, which has one club downtown and one uptown. Other popular gyms are **24 Hour Fitness**, **Goleta Valley Athletic Club**, **Cathedral Oaks Athletic Club** and **State Street Boxing Club**.

However, there are also low-budget alternatives that are both fun and instructive. If you have enrolled at **UCSB** or **City College**, you could exercise for an affordable sum in addition to the tuition fee.

“I go to the City College gym,” said Miguel Arana, who was born in Peru. “It costs \$10 each semester. I do the Aerobic Super Circuit for one hour.” It includes treadmills, biking, lifts for arms, legs, back, and ups, Arana said.

College gyms tend to be crowded, though, and students could have to wait in line for their turn at each training machine. However, there is still another affordable option not far from downtown. At **Multicultural Arts Center** on Gutierrez St., Daniel Yoshimi, with the nickname Prof. Chin, teaches *Capoeira* to devoted pupils of all ages.

Capoeira, which has its origin in Brazil, could be described as a blend of martial arts, dance, musical instruments and song. It integrates mental as well as physical coordination. The sport has its origin in a 19th century subculture, when runaway slaves living in the mountains used this technique as a self-defense against former slave-owners.

“It's a beautiful form of art,” said Mike Gray, who is half Brazilian.

Gray has gone in for Capoeira for seven years now. He is one of Prof. Chin's pupils at Multicultural Arts Center. This night, Gray was a bit late to class, bringing a surfing board that he left outside the door.

“I come here to practice Portuguese and sing Brazilian songs,” he said.

Wherever Gray goes, he finds a place where he can exercise Capoeira, he said. Even in France, he found people practicing the same sport, he said. Capoeira is not hard to do, but you need to practice to get skilled at it.

“There’s definitely a learning curve,” Gray said catching his breath during the training session.

Outside, the street was completely dark, while thousands of cicadas sang in the distance, accompanying the sound of traditional Capoeira instruments.