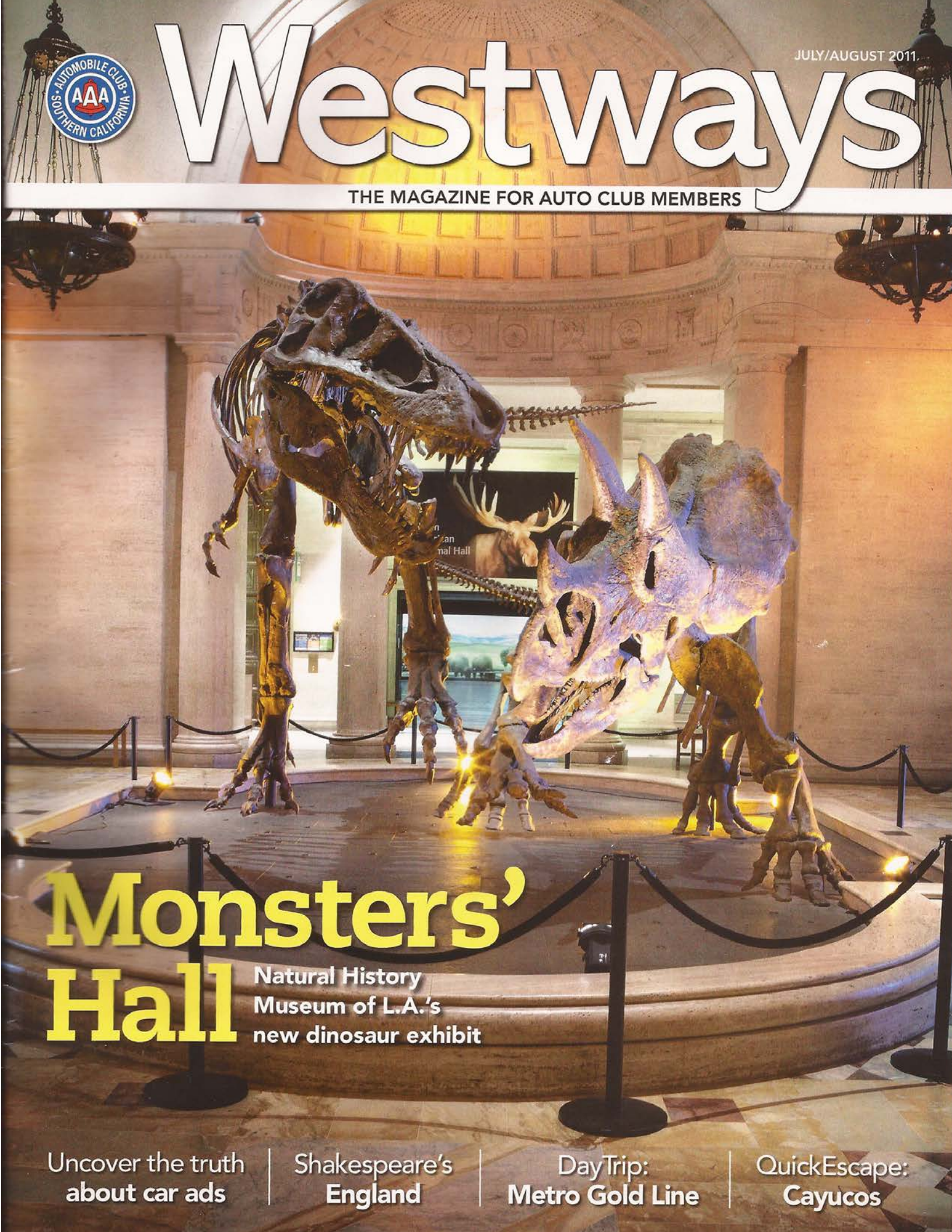




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Westways

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Sea Biscuits

On the San Luis Obispo County coast, Cayucos proffers a retro vibe—and cookies

BY STARSHINE ROSHELL

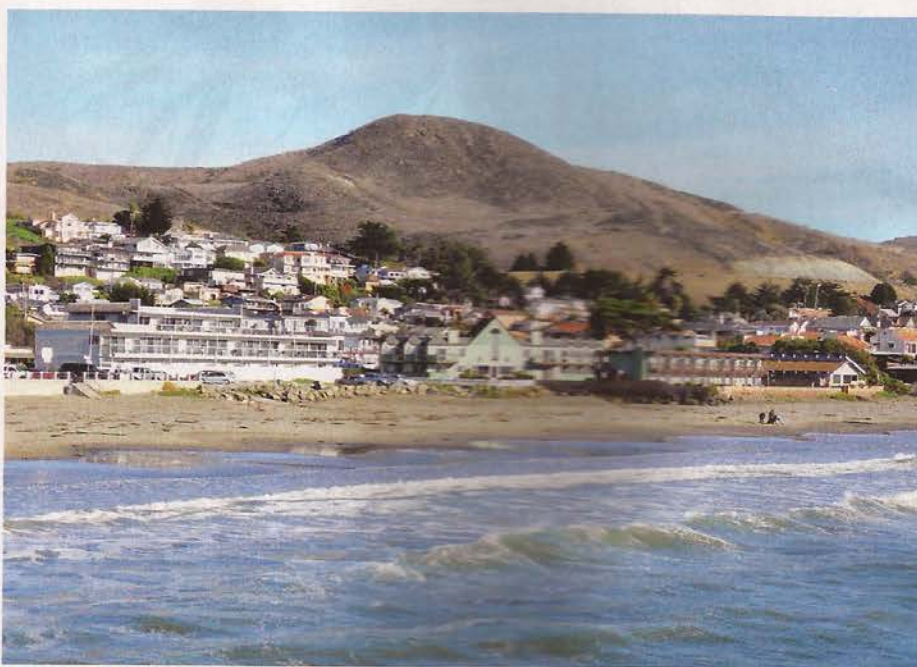
At once salty and sweet, Cayucos is more charming than a town of 3½ square miles has a right to be. Note the winsome, weathered pier. The eclectic mix of surf shops and antiques stores. The annual festival celebrating sea glass and the traditional January 1 Polar Bear Dip, which sends hundreds of people rushing into the frigid Pacific, squealing and squirming before turning heel and scrambling for their towels and hoodies back on shore.

But the sleepy Central Coast hamlet is darn cute without being precious any time of year.

Considering all that it offers, it's embarrassing to admit what I like best about Cayucos: the cookies.

I found the Brown Butter Cookie Company during a summer getaway with my family. Housed in a red barn at the edge of town, the bakery peddles shortbread-style cookies bound with brown butter, hand-rolled into dainty nuggets, and sprinkled with sea salt for a moist, chewy confection that has me salivating even as I type this.

After stepping inside the cavernous kitchen to sample original, cocoa, and espresso varieties right off the baking tray, my husband, John, and our sons Stone, 10, and Dash, 3, watched a happy klatch of aproned ladies forming balls of dough for subsequent batches. They roll about 12,000 cookies each week and ship them all over the country.



(Clockwise from top) In Cayucos, a Central Coast beach town, orders from around the country keep workers busy at the Brown Butter Cookie Company.

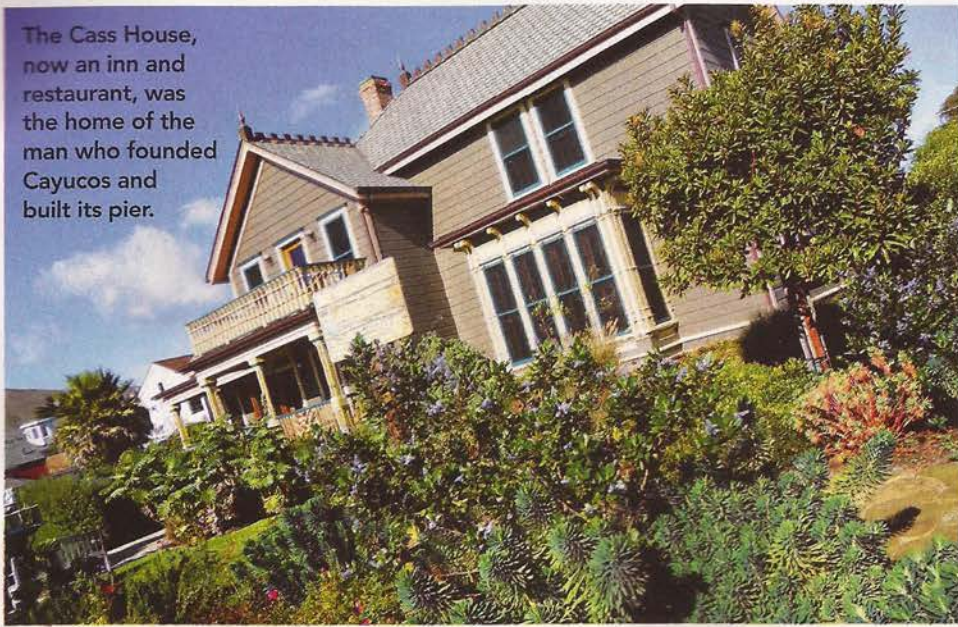


Getting There

>>> Located on State Route 1 just before it narrows down to a two-lane highway, Cayucos is 219 miles north of downtown Los Angeles. Exit US Highway 101 in San Luis Obispo and head north on SR 1 or approach from the east via SR 41 and head north on SR 1 in Morro Bay.

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: STARSHINE ROSHELL (2); SARAH O'ROURKE

The Cass House, now an inn and restaurant, was the home of the man who founded Cayucos and built its pier.



Even the name Cayucos sounds like “cookies”—if you pronounce it while in a cookie-induced stupor, which I sometimes am. But in fact, the name (pronounced kuh-YOO-kus) comes from the Chumash word for kayak, referring to the small canoes used by Aleuts to hunt sea otters here in the mid-1800s.

Part of San Luis Obispo County, the area was settled in 1867 by Captain James Cass, who was hauling lumber up the coast in a covered wagon when he fell in love with the spot. Seeing its potential as a shipping port, Cass built the pier, originally known as Cass Landing, and lived in a stately Victorian that’s recently been restored as an inn and restaurant.

The town honors its history. The words CAYUCOS, CA: THE TOWN THAT TIME FORGOT are painted on a barrel outside the Old Cayucos Tavern & Cardroom. We felt that way while strolling through the neighborhood. English gardens introduce modest Victorian and Cape Cod-style homes. A mural on the hardware store depicts the village’s gone-but-not-forgotten blacksmith. The old-school Cayucos Barber Shop displays a 5-foot model of a wooden clipper ship in its window; when we entered, shop owner Diane Gillett told us her grandfather spent five years building it from hand-cut pieces.

“His wife was kind of grumpy,” she said, with a chuckle, “so when he retired, he needed something to keep him busy.”

Cayucos is slow enough that our kids could dash across the main drag without much worrying their mom and dad. Where were they headed? The beachside Cayucos Skate Park, where sidewalk surfers were catching air on a community-built half-pipe.

A marine layer blankets the beaches in the midsummer, and when those overcast days call for comfort food, Cayucos answers with a resounding “Chowder!” We had ours in a sour-dough bowl on the ocean-view deck at lively Schooners Wharf Restaurant. After a colossal tuna melt, calamari strips, and a phenomenal Hearst Ranch Burger, we shuffled out onto the pier to gaze back at the town, its pretty pastel homes perched in the hills like multicolored shingles on a pitched roof.

Mesmerized by a pod of wet-suited campers taking turns leaping from the wooden pier into the water below, Dash accidentally dropped his treasured Matchbox truck into the inky drink . . . and watched it sink. He was inconsolable about the loss until Cayucos’ charms finally—mercifully—mollified the memory. But it wasn’t the scenery, or the history, that soothed him.

It was a cookie. **W**

DO Experience traditional *sopas*, dancers, and a parade during the 87th annual **Portuguese Celebration** on July 23 and 24, at the Veterans Memorial Building at the foot of the pier. Browse treasure-packed antiques shops, like **Remember When Antiques** (805-995-1232), and then, September 3–5, visit the **Peddler’s Faire** flea market, an offering of jewelry, food, and crafts on Ocean Avenue.

STAY Enjoy ocean-view balconies and whirlpool tubs at the AAA Four Diamond **Cayucos Sunset Inn Bed and Breakfast** (877-805-1076; cayucosunsetinn.com; rates begin at \$159), or surround yourself in local history at the **Cass House Inn and Restaurant** (805-995-3669; casshouseinn.com; rates start at \$165), which, it’s worth mentioning, is *right next door* to the cookie place. Both inns include a full breakfast.

EAT Grab legendary smoked fish tacos from **Ruddell’s Smokehouse** (805-995-5028; smokerjim.com), chow down at family-friendly **Schooners Wharf Restaurant** (805-995-3883; schoonerswharf.com), or savor gourmet cuisine in the pretty brick garden of **Hoppe’s Bistro and Wine Shop** (805-995-1006; hoppelbistro.com). Whatever you do, don’t forget dessert at the **Brown Butter Cookie Company** (805-995-2076; brownbuttercookies.com)—and buy some for the road.

A free San Luis Obispo County Cities map is available at your local AAA branch. For free TourBook information and TripTik routings, visit a branch or go to AAA.com/travel.