AS PRESCRIBED:
SANTA CRUZ

The birthplace of CrossFit is packed with a lot of outdoor fun and a full dose of oddities, and hippies. Lots of hippies.

BY ANDRÉA MARIA CECIL
Welcome to weird.

That’s how Santa Cruz, California, is known. For more than a decade, the sleepy Northern California beach town of 63,000 has used the same branding campaign to encompass its idiosyncrasies: “Keep Santa Cruz Weird.”

The city is a mere 30 miles south of Silicon Valley, home to the likes of Apple, eBay, Facebook, Google, Intel, Netflix and Tesla. But it couldn’t be more different.

As the San Jose Mercury-News once described, Santa Cruz’s branding “seems like a diagnosis more than anything else.”

Hippies, drum circles, a man walking around town in pink women’s clothing—it’s weird, all right. But Santa Cruz is more than its eccentricity. It teems with life: from outdoor activities among the towering Redwoods, along perfectly carved cliffs and on the Pacific Ocean’s pristine beaches to homegrown eateries offering fresh, local fare. Plus, it offers CrossFit athletes something other cities can’t: insight into the methodology’s history.

Outside the Box

You might be surprised to know that the city considered CrossFit’s motherland is home to only five affiliates. It won’t take you long to get all those drop-ins done. And when you do, Santa Cruz will be waiting. When it comes to being outside, you can make your own fun no matter where you decide to hang out.

Life’s a Beach

Cowell Beach

Also known simply as Cowell’s, this beach is west of the Municipal Wharf in Santa Cruz. The Santa Cruz Dream Inn sits on its shores, and you can spot the pier jutting out into the Santa Cruz Harbor. There are sand volleyball courts and, of course, surfing. The famous surf spot Steamer Lane is situated between Cowell’s and Point Santa Cruz. If you’re a surfing rookie, plenty of schools can be found in the area. Among them is Richard Schmidt Surf School, which has been around since 1978. You can also rent kayaks or paddle boards nearby.

ITS BEACH

This south-facing beach is below the bluff on the west side of Point Santa Cruz. Both the beach and the interior park allow leashed dogs anytime and off-leash dogs after 4 p.m. During low tides, visitors can explore a rock arch at the north end of the beach. Check out the Santa Cruz Surfing Museum while you’re there.

Hiking, Biking and Sucking Wind

WILDER RANCH STATE PARK

This state park was home to an 1800s-era dairy ranch. It boasts of 35 miles of trail you can bike or hike into the Santa Cruz Mountains or along the coastal bluffs. A hike down the Old Cove Landing Trail to the Ohlone Bluff Trail will lead you to Fern Grotto Beach, where you’ll see such wildlife as dolphins, seals and whales. If you prefer a more leisurely pace, you can have a picnic at the cultural preserve, explore historic buildings, and visit the horses, chickens and goats.

POGONIP

Only 10 minutes from downtown Santa Cruz, these 640 acres includes 8 miles of trail through redwood trees, oak woodland and coastal terrace prairie. The trail connects Henry Cowell Redwoods State Park, Pogonip and the University of California-Santa Cruz campus. If you don’t have a bike, rent one from Another Bike Shop or Epicenter Cycling.

For more information, visit Cityofsantacruz.com.
DELAQUEGA DISC GOLF COURSE
This world-renowned 27-hole disc-golf course sits on the hills of Delaveaga Park above Santa Cruz. The park is said to have one of the original long disc-golf courses, with some holes more than 500 feet long. If disc golf isn’t your bag, the park also offers traditional golf, an archery range, ball fields and picnic areas.
850 Branciforte Drive
CityofSantacruz.com

Catch the Game
All your options are “over the hill,” as the locals say. It’ll require at least a 45-minute drive over the infamously windy—and sometimes treacherous—Highway 17 unless you take the more scenic Highway 9.

MLB: San Francisco Giants
NBA: Golden State Warriors
NFL: San Francisco 49ers and Oakland Raiders
NHL: San Jose Sharks

Paleo Provisions and Then Some
The question of where to acquire rations in their purest form is always top of mind for CrossFitters, most of whom live hungry. Here are some options.

NEW LEAF
Seven of these stores can be found in the Northern California area. Founder Scott Roseman began with a co-operative and turned it into a community grocery store in the early 1980s. Think of it as a smaller, more local Whole Foods.
Downtown Santa Cruz: 1134 Pacific Ave.
Westside Santa Cruz: 1101 Fair Ave.
Newleaf.com

STAFF OF LIFE
There’s only one Staff of Life, and once you go in, you’ll see why. This self-described “natural foods supermarket” has been a Santa Cruz staple for more than 40 years. Started in 1969, it grew from a small, natural-foods bakery into what it is today.
1266 Soquel Ave.
Staffoflifemarket.com

EL SALCHICHERO
Into meat? Then this charcuterie is the place for you. Apple-cider bacon, bacon jam, Boston butt roast, duck legs, filet mignon, fresh ham, lard, prosciutto—and more. This six-year-old shop prides itself on only using pasture-raised animals from a select group of local farmers.
402 Ingalls St.
Elsachichero.com

COMPANION BAKE SHOP
If foraging for bread is more your jam, then this gem is a must. It’s run by a self-taught baker who holds a degree in agriculture and fruit sciences. It’s offerings include rosemary sourdough, cinnamon raisin mini-loaf, baguettes, cookies, shortbread, biscotti, cakes, brownies, macaroons, croissants, tea cakes, scones and galettes. The joint’s also outfitted with a coffee-and-espresso bar for your caffeine-fueled pleasure.
2341 Mission St
Companionbakeshop.com

WHOLE FOODS
Nestled in Santa Cruz’s midtown neighborhood, this Whole Foods store offers what many of its cohorts do: a healthy selection of organic and natural products, as well as prepared food when you need to eat quickly or on the go.
911 Soquel Ave.
Wholefoodsmarket.com

CUT OUT THE MIDDLE MAN
Downtown farmers’ market: 1:30-5:30 p.m. in the fall and winter, and 1:30-6:30 p.m. beginning April 6, every Wednesday, year round, Cedar and Lincoln Streets.
Westside farmers’ market: 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday morning, year round, Western Drive and Mission Street.
Live Oak farmers’ market: 9 a.m.-1 p.m. Sunday, year round, 15th Avenue and East Cliff Drive.
Santacruzfarmersmarket.org
The Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk is the oldest amusement park still operating in California.
More Eating

The town might be small, but it certainly has no shortage of eateries. Good food is easy to find in Santa Cruz.

AQUARIUS RESTAURANT
Located inside the Santa Cruz Dream Inn hotel that sits right on the beach, Aquarius offers waterfront views that are hard to beat. It boasts of seafood from the Monterey Bay Marine Sanctuary and meat and produce from small, local organic farmers.

BANTAM
This cozy spot on the Westside has brunch and dinner menus that change daily based on seasonal availability. The offerings are succinct, one might say, but everything is made from scratch—that includes the buttermilk biscuit, wood-oven meatballs and 10 pizza varieties.

burger
In the mood for a burger dressed any way you like? How about a burger at burger.? “The Dude,” “the Chuck Norris” and “the Johnny Cash” are just a few of its 22 burger offerings. Also on the menu: “The Dude,” “the Chuck Norris” and “the Johnny Cash” are just a few of its 22 burger offerings. Also on the menu:

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ENGFER PIZZA WORKS
Handmade dough, original-recipe sauces, homemade desserts and, of course, checkers, chess, backgammon and ping-pong. Choose from the shop’s pre-planned options or build your own pie. Engfer’s has a small-but-decent beer selection with six brews on tap, ranging from oatmeal stout to hefeweizen.

Engferpizzaworks.com

HARBOR CAFÉ
For half a decade, this has been the brunch spot of choice for many locals. The ample patio area is lively and welcomes dogs, even offering a special dog menu that includes lamb jerky treats and peanut-butter cookies. And with breakfast served from 8 a.m. until 2 p.m., you can enjoy a few happy hours the night before and make it in on time for the Mexican Armada omelet.

LAILI
This fine dining restaurant describes its fare as “rich Mediterranean flavors with a unique Afghan twist.” Laili is right in downtown Santa Cruz and offers outdoor seating in a lux patio filled with green foliage, umbrellas and heat lamps for those chilly NorCal evenings.

101 Cooper St.
Lailirestaurant.com

POINT MARKET AND CAFÉ
This hole-in-the-wall is a perfect blend of local convenience store and food stand. Known for its “bombs” breakfast burritos, as Northern Californians say, this joint sits right next to Pleasure Point Park. It’s only a block away from the ocean.

29040 E. Cliff Drive
Point Market and Café on Facebook

RISTORANTE AVANTI
Open for lunch, dinner and dessert, this place offers Italian-inspired cuisine in a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere. Ristorante Avanti has also been known to make a mean cocktail and offer an OK beer selection, though it isn’t expansive.

1917 Mission St.
Ristoranteavanti.com

SOIF
This one’s for the wine enthusiasts: an intimate eatery that prides itself on offering wines that are a challenge to find—limited and handmade. And, of course, perfectly pairing the vintage with items on the menu. Soif also offers wine flights of local pinot noirs, Italian exotics and a so-called “Guilty Pleasure Flight.” The menu is simple, printed on a single page including the likes of steamed manila clams, cider-braised pork belly and cornmeal buttermilk cake.

105 Walnut Ave.
Sofwine.com

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105 Walnut Ave.
Sofwine.com

CROW’S NEST
An ocean view and live entertainment. Crow’s Nest has most of the typical offerings when it comes to libations, with a great view alongside the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor. Happy hour is 3:30-6 p.m. weekdays and all night Wednesday.

2218 E. Cliff Drive
Crowsnest-santacruz.com

LÚPULO CRAFT BEER HOUSE
Lúpulo—it’s Spanish for the word “hops.” And this cozy joint ain’t short of any. Part craft-beer restaurant, part tasting room and part bottle shop, this place offers 16 taps and a 7-p.m. Trivia Night the third Monday of the month.

233 Cathcart St.
Lupulos.com

SANTA CRUZ: Surfing, mountain biking or hiking with breathtaking backdrops.
That fighter was Garth Taylor, today one of the most decorated Americans in Brazilian jiu-jitsu. Taylor has won or medaled in both national and international competitions and at every belt level at the world championship. He also competed in the invitation-only Abu Dhabi Combat Club World Championships. Taylor is co-owner and head jiu-jitsu instructor at Kaijin. Drop in for a lesson or two. Taylor is a great teacher who uses CrossFit movements as analogies for jiu-jitsu training.

403 Swift St., Suite D
Kaijinmma.com

CROSSFIT RANCH
Better known to most as The Ranch in Aromas, this affiliate is only open when it needs to be. So check CrossFit.com for seminars scheduled there to get a taste of history—the rusty hopper, the dusty hill. The site was host to the 2007, 2008 and 2009 CrossFit Games, as well as to the opening events of the 2016 Reebok CrossFit Games. Be aware this is private property and still owned by the family of Dave Castro, Director of the CrossFit Games and Co-director of Training. We wouldn’t recommend stopping by unannounced and milling about.

275 Dunbarton Road, Aromas, California, 95004.

About the Author: Andréa Maria Cecil is assistant managing editor and head writer of the CrossFit Journal.