

HER FAMILY / HIS™ Reviewing Family Entertainment



Bonding With Your Family at Pismo Beach!

HERS

“California Dreaming” is a lyric that The Mamas and The Papas got right. There is a quality to the California lifestyle that isn’t replicated anywhere else on the globe. Fortunately, some California beach communities have managed to avoid gentrification and remained bastions of what is “cool” and “real” in this all too plugged in age of technology. Without a doubt, one of the best communities for the laid-back lifestyle is Pismo Beach - a beacon of California-style sanity in the central coast.

As a mother with three sons and a husband, Pismo Beach is an obligatory annual road trip. I look forward to breakfast at The Old Cinnamon Roll, lunch lined up for an unmistakable bowl of Pismo Beach Clam Chowder at The Splash and dinner at our favorite steak house, McClintock’s on the I-101. While the men in my family enjoy the culinary experience, it doesn’t hold a candle to the real draw of Pismo for them - the Dunes.

After a quick splash of coffee and a warm cinnamon roll, the family heads for the closest “Dune Buggy” rental shop, drives across the wave-packed sand and jumps into the latest-greatest thrill riding machine streaking off into the phenomenon of the Great California Sand Dunes for a full day of adventure.

As a mother who refuses to join in this adventure, I have a full day of beach bliss beginning with digging for clams, then splashing on sun screen, laying out a comfortable blanket and pillow, catching some much-needed natural tanning and cracking open a new book that will be my companion for the day.

On this particular day, the breeze was blowing enough to keep any sunbather cool and the book was as smooth as a refreshing glass of lemonade - a perfect compliment to this iconic location.

“One Sunday Morning” is Amy Ephron’s 6th novel. I chose her book because it was compact and looked like no more than a day’s read so it seemed like a perfect choice for the beach. To my surprise, I was drawn into her masterful social mystery of women in 1926 and their world of prohibition, social revolution and global escapades. Through Ms. Ephron’s minimalist writing, I found myself visualizing the world of Paris both as it is now and as it was then. Many of the restaurants and cabarets that come to life in the book are still operating today, and I knew them intimately from my years of living in France. The book took me into as much of a unique ambiance as the dunes took my male family. I found myself thinking about the female social realities of today and how little they had changed over the past century. To my surprise, this little book captured my imagination and transported me through every well-chosen phrase and word to a world that quickly became a friend. What could be better than a beautiful beach, a day of solitude and a great book? That is the best of California Dreamin’.

The day ended at McClintock’s with the best steaks, beans and potatoes money can buy. Pismo Beach provided all of us the promise of this unique lifestyle born and bred in California. The boys slept all the way home full of visions of conquering the Dunes, my husband bonded a memory with sons, and I have a new book as a favorite companion. Isn’t this living the dream?

HIS

Okay men - here’s a tip for something extraordinary and interactive to do with your kids when the “same old same old” just won’t cut it. This month’s strongly suggested activity addresses the “alpha male” and/or “female” in all of us. Without reservation, ATV-ing (All-Terrain Vehicles) at Oceano Dunes (formerly Pismo Dunes) is one of the flat out funnest sports (if this isn’t a sport, it should be!) I’ve ever tried - unexpected and surprising to me since I’m essentially what the moniker-mongers call a “metro-man” - a nice way to say urban softy.

The nearly 3-hour northerly drive from Los Angeles up Highway 101 (arguably one of America’s most scenic and serene drives) to Pismo Beach on the central coast is pleasurable in and of itself. This dune destination doesn’t fail to deliver for an outrageously beautiful and challenging experience once you’re out on the sands. If your kids (and your canned car nerves) can wait out the ride, the payoff is more than worth it.

The Oceano Dunes is situated within the 15,000-acre Guadalupe-Nipomo Dunes complex and is touted as the “finest, most extensive coastal dunes” defying extinction today. What’s so amazing about this whole experience is the fact that you can pay \$5 at the park’s entrance and drive your vehicle directly onto the edge of the beach that meets shoreline. Forget guardrails, barriers, median strips or dividers - with just a quick westward jerk of the steering wheel, you might drive directly into Davy Jones’ Locker!

I teased my wife with my nervous twitch - this time the kids will definitely sit up and notice the ocean view.

Unless you and your kids have tried this before, I wouldn’t recommend ATV-ing for kids not well accomplished on a bicycle. Many of the required skills to handle an ATV are the same. Once my 16 year-old (not an overly athletic teenager) picked up on the basics, he didn’t have any problems driving across the dunes. He still doesn’t drive a car, so he didn’t have any car driving savvy to lean on. I saw a large number of both boys AND girls (somewhere in the age range of 8 - 14 years old) on ATVs letting it all rip.

Compared to the high fun-factor of riding an ATV across the sands, renting an ATV is relatively inexpensive. I rented 2 adult size ATVs for 2 solid hours of riding each. With training, helmets, the gas, gear (goggles are a must!) and tax, the experience cost about \$150 total.

Now let’s be clear - there is an element of danger involved with this mechanically driven diversion. You MUST exercise common sense. Just as you wouldn’t cross the street on a bike without looking both ways, crisscrossing the dunes is no different. Sand dunes are tricky because its sand is always shifting and the topography of today’s dunes will differ from tomorrow’s. Some of the dunes can precipitously drop off 40 - 80 feet, so you must be cautious when driving over the top of a dune when not knowing where its backside leads you.

If you and your children are even moderately coordinated yet wildly adventurous, this ATV-ing adventure is for you. My wife chickened out, so this adventure turned into a guy thing. Afterwards, vacuuming the sand from your car’s carpet will remind you of a fantastic day at the beach!