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Destination Third Thursday: Visit Camarillo

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posted 11/22/2016 by [Gohar Manukyan](#)

True to the fashion of its town’s horse-breeding founder, the Visit Camarillo team practically stampeded through Visit California headquarters this past Thursday to showcase its “gateway to the Central Coast.”

An hour north of Los Angeles, the origins of the town of Camarillo can essentially be traced back to one man: Adolfo Camarillo. The rancher/philanthropist owned much of the land that would become the town and introduced the world to a number of new things – such as the lima bean and the Camarillo White Horse – in the years that followed.

But his biggest contribution was Camarillo itself, the sun-soaked agricultural hub where the street signs bear the image of the line of horses bred by its founder. Known commonly for its extensive shopping experience – with more than 160 premium outlet shops – the Ventura County community is home to so much more.

Officially incorporated in 1964, Camarillo is represented often by a symbol of a pinwheel, and for good reason: The town’s 65,000 residents enjoy more than 300 days of sunshine per year – a climate that lends itself to a robust sports culture. As such, the region is a hotbed of activity for baseball, soccer, tennis, BMX and more, with 27 parks spanning 300 acres.

The weather also creates a nearly unparalleled agricultural setting, and the local culinary scene really takes advantage of the farm-to-restaurant offerings from surrounding growers. The local Adolfo Camarillo High School features one of the state’s top agriculture education programs.

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Weddings are also a major draw for the town, which boasts 33 unique venues, including barnyard, vineyard, garden and country club options. Because the area basks in 52 sunny weeks per year, destination wedding tourism is a year-round industry for Camarillo.

The town is also home to attractions almost impossible to find anywhere else – especially for history and science buffs.

In addition to six wineries, 11 hotels and four golf sanctuaries, Camarillo is home to the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology Museum, which serves as a research museum dedicated to wild bird conservation with one of the largest collections of rare bird eggs in the world. Similarly, the town's Commemorative Air Force Museum is home to extremely rare World War II and Vietnam War relics, all of which are fully restored and ready to take to the air at any time.

And they do: Wings Over Camarillo, one of Camarillo's biggest annuals events, features flyovers from the historic aircraft, instantly transporting spectators back to a different era. It is just one of a number of events throughout the year, including the Camarillo Fiesta, Casa Pacifica Food & Wine Fest, Adolfo's Birthday Party and Christmas at the Ranch.

All told, Visit Camarillo put on a definitively memorable presentation that clearly illustrated that in its relatively short history, Camarillo has grown into a place with so many more amenities than meet the eye. It may just be the Central Coast's best-kept secret.

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