

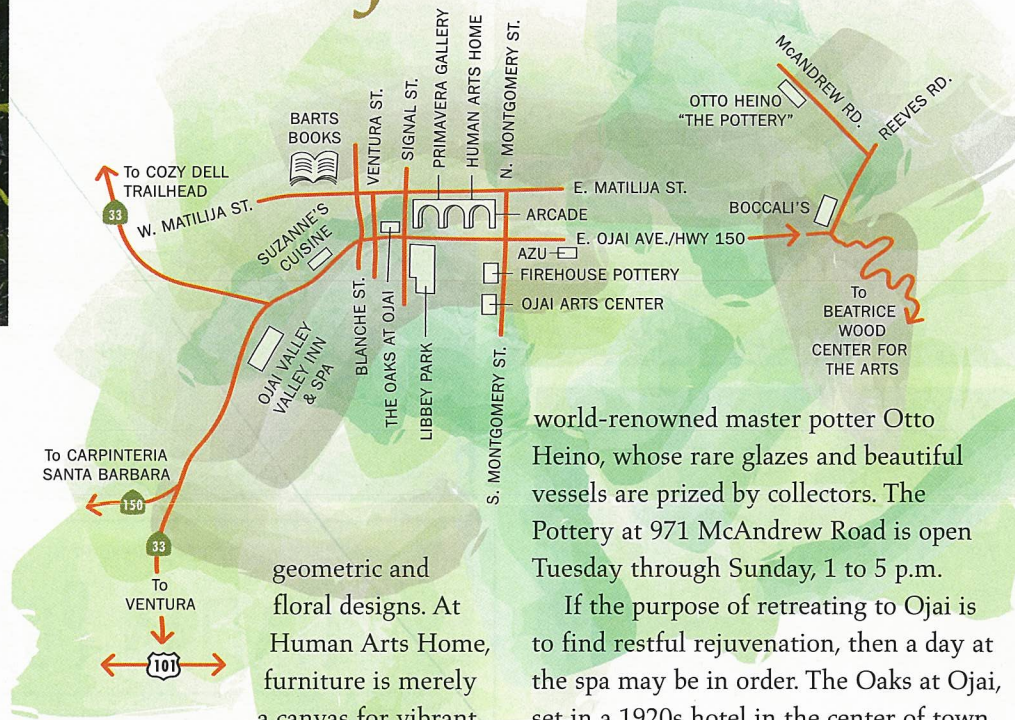


# Over the Mountains to Ojai

BY CLAUDIA ARMANN

TUCKED INTO a splendid mountain valley east of Carpinteria, Ojai's natural beauty is complemented by the creativity and enterprise of its residents. The town's allure depends on the visitor's definition of pleasure. Come to be pampered at one of the ultra-indulgent spas, where a river-rock massage or an aromatherapy body wrap will send tension on a holiday. If art and culture bring fulfillment, then Ojai's galleries and summer events alone are worth the trip. For the outdoor enthusiast, a challenging hike on a sage-scented trail rewards with views of the quaint town's magical setting among citrus orchards and its "pink moment," when the setting sun adorns the mountains with a luminous pink glow.

An hour's drive from Santa Barbara, the town center is easily explored with a short walk. Start at the arcade of galleries and boutiques across from Libbey Park. Window shopping won't suffice, as the vivid art, furniture and fashions arrayed in the windows draw passersby inside for closer inspection. Primavera Gallery displays an amazing collection of sculpture, jewelry, paintings and blown-glass chandeliers that are hand-painted in dazzling



geometric and floral designs. At Human Arts Home, furniture is merely a canvas for vibrant works of art.

Do venture off the main avenue and check out the side streets. In particular, stroll down S. Montgomery Street, where Firehouse Pottery & Gallery and Ojai Arts Center offer art classes for the creatively inclined. If browsing used bookstores is a favorite pastime, do not miss Bart's Books with a style all its own at 302 W. Matilija Street.

The home of famed ceramist Beatrice Wood is a few miles outside of town, at 8560 Ojai-Santa Paula Road, but worth the visit to see her ceramic art, known for its beautifully lustrous and colorful glazes. Beatrice Wood Center for the Arts is open Friday, Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. In the same neighborhood, you'll find the showplace of work by

world-renowned master potter Otto Heino, whose rare glazes and beautiful vessels are prized by collectors. The Pottery at 971 McAndrew Road is open Tuesday through Sunday, 1 to 5 p.m.

If the purpose of retreating to Ojai is to find restful rejuvenation, then a day at the spa may be in order. The Oaks at Ojai, set in a 1920s hotel in the center of town, is known for its intimacy and focus on fitness. Yoga, hiking and exercise classes are paired with 1000-calories-a-day cuisine for those seeking good health. But pampering is not spared, and everything from a eucalyptus steam room to private massage rooms is available.

At Ojai Valley Inn and Spa, guests in cozy white robes drift blissfully between private massage rooms and the outdoor pool. Signs declaring the spa a "cell-free zone" are prominently posted. And who would waste time chattering when services include facials, mud treatments and body wraps? The more active set can join a tai chi class or learn Japanese bookmaking or wreath making at the adjacent art studio. The day package includes a massage, facial, mud treatment and use of the



pool and fitness center. With so many possibilities in Ojai, a day may just not be long enough. ✨

*Claudia Armann, a freelance writer, was a research editor for Islands and AQUA magazines..*

## Things to Do

**HIKE:** More than a dozen trails lead into the national forest and wildlands surrounding Ojai. A favorite destination is **Cozy Dell** where wildflowers, valley views and a cool creek are within two miles of the trailhead. From the Vons shopping center on Ojai Avenue, head north on Highway 33 for about three miles, looking for the parking turnout on the left and the trailhead on the right. Oak woodlands and Ventura River are the draw at the **Ventura River Preserve**, a 1,600-acre property acquired by Ojai Valley Land Conservancy, where you are welcome to bring your pooch along. Hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians can enjoy 12 miles of trails that start at Rice Road, between Lomita and El Roblar avenues.

**DINE OUT:** The valley's agricultural bounty is featured at several restaurants. For a casual Italian meal, sit under the umbrellas at **Boccali's**, where oranges for fresh juice and tomatoes for pizza are grown at the restaurant's ranch, 3277 East Ojai Avenue, (805) 646-6116. At **Suzanne's Cuisine**, 502 West Ojai Avenue, indulge in fresh-baked bread, seafood and hearty soups and salads while enjoying a view of the walled garden, (805) 640-1961. Local produce is transformed into delicious fare at **Azu**, 457 East Ojai Avenue, where tapas, drinks and fun are offered in equal measure. Located in the heart of town, its European atmosphere adds to the enjoyment, (805) 640-7987.

**EVENTS:** The outdoor amphitheater at Libbey Park is the setting for the stellar **Ojai Music Festival** scheduled for June 8-11. For festival program, call (805) 646-2094. *Taming of the Shrew* and *A Winter's Tale* are on the lineup for the annual **Shakespeare Festival** scheduled from July 14-August 5. For tickets, call (805) 646-9455.

For more information, visit [www.ojaichamber.org](http://www.ojaichamber.org).



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