2. Play farmer for the day
Don't let the name scare you off. The Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems at the UC Santa Cruz campus is lightning bolts of fun. The country's best sustainable farmers come here to train, but you don't have to quit your day job to wander the field and gardens. Grab a brochure for a self-guided tour of the edible paradise. Directions at casfs.ucsc.edu

3. Pull over and eat
At the Truck Stop, chef Fran Grayson cranks out soulful, street food–inspired dishes from her shiny 1976 Chevy catering truck. You won't want to miss her Venezuelan arepas, stuffed with eggs, ham, and cheese, much of it sourced from nearby farms. $; 831/627-7361 for location schedule.

4. Your new summer staple
The Penny Ice Creamery does a killer float. It's one scoop of basil ice cream—made with fresh herbs from Route 1 Farms down the road—and one tall glass of blackberry soda. Watch the former drop into the latter and smile as the slippery, fizzy goodness unfolds. $; 913 Cedar St.; 831/204-2523.

5. The hits keep coming
The Picnic Basket serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner, with most ingredients—yep!—sourced locally. That can mean chicken from Fogline Farm seasoned with house-cured onions tucked between two slices of sourdough from the Companion Bakeshop. They call it a chicken salad sandwich. We call it the new Santa Cruz. $; 125 Beach St.; 831/427-9946.

Getting there
Santa Cruz is about 30 miles south of San Jose on State 17.