

By Erin Rottman

SAN LUIS OBISPO RAISES THE BAR

There's a green ring surrounding San Luis Obispo, and it's no accident. In 1994, the city officially established a greenbelt to preserve what gives the city a sense of place: its natural landscape. Since then, the city has negotiated agreements with private property owners to secure 7,500 more acres, expanding the greenbelt to 54,000 acres that are now full of hiking and biking trails.

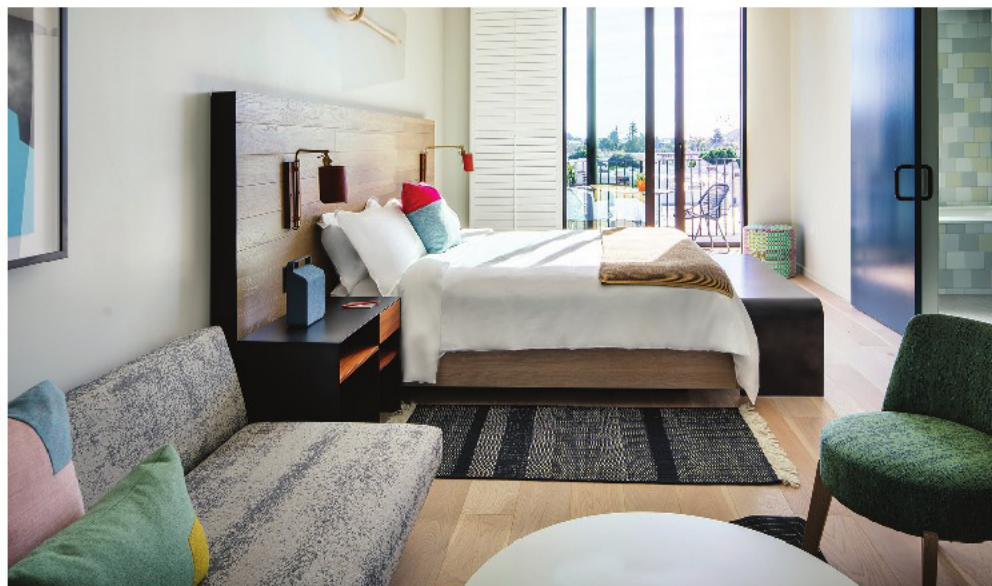
One of the best 360-degree

kind of visitor who wouldn't have considered San Luis Obispo before," says San Luis Obispo tourism manager Molly Cano of the four-month-old downtown hotel.

The hotel has a lively lobby bar with a fireplace and couches, as well as a gym, and an outdoor pool and Jacuzzi. Its Sol Spa has saunas, meditation rooms, and a relaxation room where salt-infused foot soaks help guests wind down before facial and body treatments. The bright

which sells handmade home decor created from vintage finds, as well as chain stores, such as Williams-Sonoma, that serve the city's more than 47,000 residents.

Trendsetting restaurants have opened in town to provide what visitors expect from a wine country destination, and Hotel San Luis Obispo's Ox + Anchor, led by Thomas Keller alum Ryan Fancher, is one of the newest. Its steak and seafood menu includes 10 different cuts of beef as



At Hotel San Luis Obispo (above) bright, modern guest rooms (left) are accented with warm touches like natural wood and hand-woven rugs.

perspectives of the treasured greenbelt, which is roughly comprised of the Morros volcanic peaks, Cuesta Ridge, Irish Hills, and High School Hill, can be seen from the rooftop bar at the new **Hotel San Luis Obispo** (hotel-slo.com; from \$395). Developed by the group that started Hotel Healdsburg, the modern, 78-room Hotel San Luis Obispo introduces an elevated level of luxury to the city, which is anchored by Mission San Luis Obispo de Tolosa and Edna Valley wine country to the south. "This type of property will attract a new

and airy guest rooms are designed with white oak floors, natural-fiber indigo rugs, and colorful paintings of iconic local buildings by Cal Poly San Luis Obispo associate professor of studio art Sara Frantz. Nespresso coffee machines, water jugs that can be refilled at filtered water stations on every floor, and ultra-soft robes add a homey feel.

Located a block from downtown, Hotel San Luis Obispo is ideally situated for exploring the walkable town's mix of independent shops like Brown Butter Cookie Company and Junk Girls,

well as salmon with sage pesto and grilled swordfish with lobster dumpling and soy dashi. Whatever the choice of main course, the baked Alaska makes for a dramatic finish.

San Luis Obispo County Regional Airport now offers daily nonstop service to San Diego on Alaska Airlines, which accommodates one case of checked wine per passenger for free. The Central Coast airport also serves seven other destinations, including Seattle, Denver, and Las Vegas, and plans to introduce service to Portland in June.