

# Avila Beach

## People and Place

### Location

Avila Beach is located along California's central coast on the north shore of San Luis Obispo Bay in San Luis Obispo County. The community is 195 miles north of Los Angeles and 241 miles south of San Francisco. It covers 1.28 square miles of land. The geographic coordinates of Avila Beach are lat 35°10'48"N, long 120°43'51"W.

### Demographic Profile

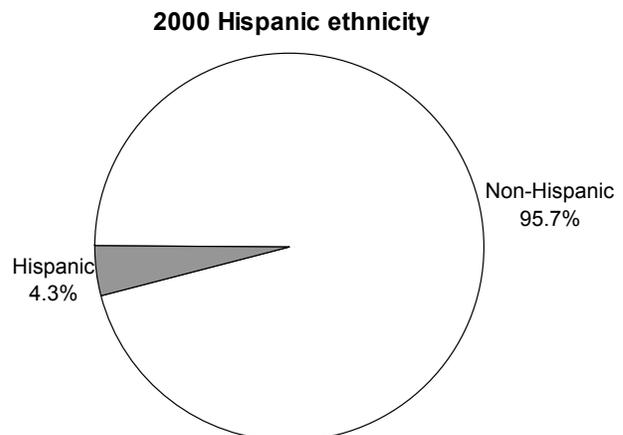
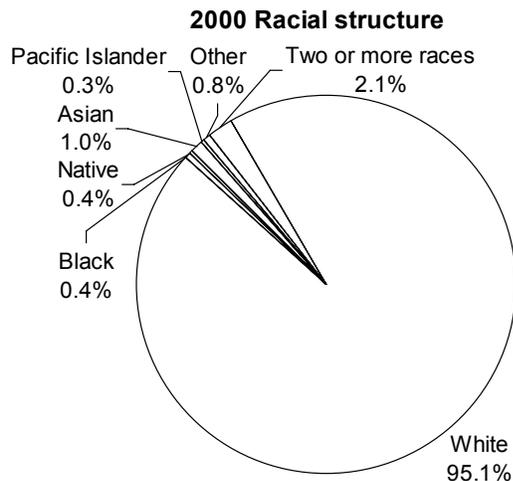
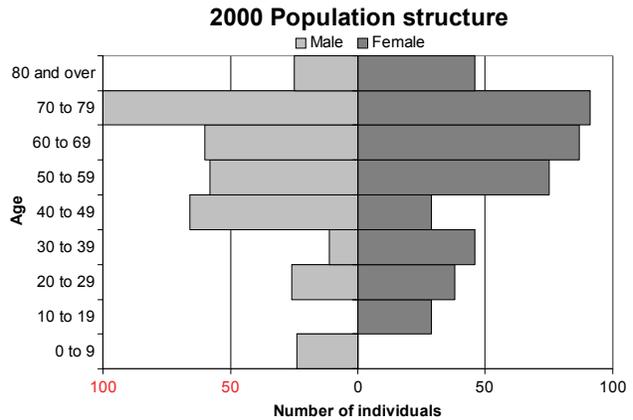
According to the 2000 U.S. Census, the population of Avila Beach was 797. The gender composition was 50.7% female and 49.3% male. The median age of the population in 2000 was 58.9, considerably higher than the national median of 35.3. Nearly half (49.1%) were age 60 or older. Of the population 18 years of age and older, 94.3% had a high school education or higher, 36.0% had a bachelor's degree or higher, and 16.3% had a graduate or professional degree; the national averages were 79.7%, 22.3%, and 7.8% respectively.

The majority of the racial structure of Avila Beach was white (95.1%), followed by people who identified with two or more races (2.1%), Asian (1.0%), individuals who identified with some other race (0.8%), black (0.4%), American Indian and Alaskan Native (0.4%), and Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (0.3%). Ethnicity data indicate 4.3% identified as Hispanic and 5.2% were foreign-born.

In 2000 70% of the population lived in family households.

### History

The community of Avila Beach shares much of its history with the surrounding area in southern San Luis Obispo County. The Chumash Indian occupied the area for centuries. Chumash hunters, fishermen, and foragers utilized the local marine, coastal, and river resources. They regularly transported resources from their offshore islands to the mainland in unique redwood-planked boats known as "tomols." These mariners imported specialized stone blades and drills manufactured on the islands, plus marine resources such as shark, bonito, and halibut. Fishermen used a variety of nets, traps, baskets, hooks, spears, and plant poisons to catch or stun fish and catch seals and sea otters. On the coast they collected abalone and mussels, and the Chumash trade network passed raw



marine materials such as fish, whale bones, and oils to the interior.

Although the Portuguese conquistador Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo first encountered the Chumash in 1542, it was not until 1772 that five Catholic missions were established within the Chumash Nation. After the secularization of the missions in 1833, the Chumash population fell into severe decline. In 1901 the U.S. government allocated 75 acres along Zanja de Cota Creek near Mission Santa Ynez to the surviving Chumash community. Today the Chumashes have their own business council, a thriving bingo operation, and a federal housing program on their small reservation. Approximately 5,000 people now identify themselves as Chumash Indians.<sup>1</sup>

Between 1821 and 1848, California was under the jurisdiction of Mexico after it gained independence from Spain. Land grants were made to settlers in the area until California became a U.S. territory in 1848 and San Luis Obispo became one of California's original 27 counties. Many place names in the area reflect this heritage.<sup>2</sup>

Agriculture and quarrying in the area spurred rapid growth in the late 1800s, facilitated by overland transport options available through the Southern Pacific Railroad. By the 1950s conveyors were installed on the waterfront for unloading sardine boats that accelerated the commercial development of the area's harbors in response to newly discovered fishing grounds offshore.<sup>3</sup>

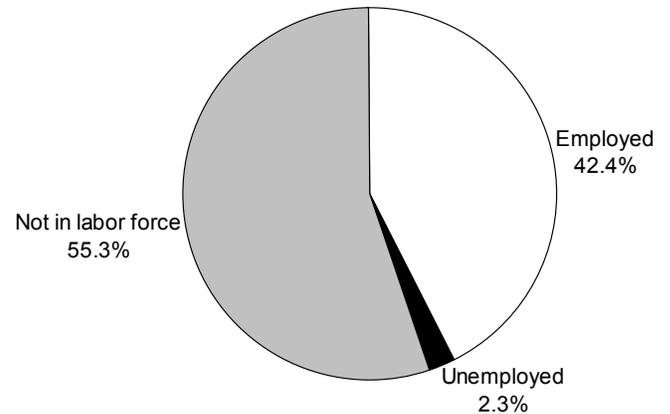
Spaniards and Portuguese made use of the sheltered Avila coastline to replenish freshwater supplies, trade with the Indians, and rest. In 1873 John Harford constructed a wharf in his name to facilitate trading and mail delivery. The area's history as a prime destination for rest and recreation, now the foundation of Avila Beach's economy, began in 1876 when the Marre Hotel was built at Port San Luis. Access to the area expanded dramatically with the railroad in the 1880s. A decade later a federal breakwater was built to provide safer anchorage at the wharf. In 1954 the harbor district for the Port San Luis area was created to maintain aging marine facilities and generate commerce for the region. In 1955 the state legislature granted the district the area's tidelands in trust. Today the state owns the waters out to three miles and manages tideland resources.<sup>4</sup>

## Infrastructure

### Current Economy

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, 42.4% of the potential labor force 16 years of age and older were employed, 2.3% were unemployed, and the unemployment rate was 4.8% (calculated by dividing the unemployed population by the labor force). In addition,

**2000 Employment structure**



55.3% were not in the labor force, considerably higher than the national average of 36.1%. The top employment sectors were arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services (28%), local, state or federal government (25.5%), and education, health, and social services (24.9%). The 2000 U.S. Census reported none of the employed population worked in agriculture, forestry, fishing, or hunting, but this may be inaccurate because many fishermen are self-employed and are underrepresented in the data.

According to the 2000 U.S. Census, Avila Beach's per capita income in 1999 was \$29,033, the median household income was \$39,792, and 8.1% lived below the poverty level. In 2000 there were 554 housing units in Avila Beach, of which 80.9% were occupied and 19.1% were vacant. Of the occupied units, 61.2% were by owner and 38.8% were by renter. More than half (57.5%) of the vacant units were for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use.

### Governance

Avila Beach is unincorporated. It has no governance structure and is under the jurisdiction of San Luis Obispo County. The county levies a 7.25% sales and use tax rate and a 9% transient lodging tax that earned \$4,229,463 for the 2001 fiscal year.<sup>5</sup> See the Governance subsection (page 43) in the Overview section for a more detailed discussion of taxes affecting fishermen and processors in California.

A California Department of Fish and Game Marine Region Field Office and a U.S. Coast Guard station are 23 miles away in Morro Bay. Foster City, approximately 223 miles away, is the nearest city that hosts meetings of the Pacific Fishery Management Council.

## Facilities

Avila Beach is located along California Highway 1, also known as the Pacific Coast Highway. The San Luis Obispo Municipal Airport is 7 miles away and the nearest international airport is in Los Angeles. Avila Beach belongs to the Lucia Mar Unified School District, which has 10 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, 2 comprehensive high schools, 1 continuation high school, and an adult education program. The county administers public safety in Avila Beach. Pacific Gas and Electric supplies electricity to all of San Luis Obispo County. The tourism industry in Avila Beach is well developed, providing several options for accommodations.

A three-pier harbor, two piers of which are open to the public, supports the commercial and recreational fishing industries. A harbor commission of elected officials oversees the marine facilities. Harbor services include a dry dock, fuel and ice, boat repair and supply, and storage for commercial gear at \$30 per month. Boat storage for trailer boats up to 30 feet long and 10 feet wide costs \$50 a month with a three-month minimum. Temporary boat moorage can be rented from a water taxi operator.<sup>6</sup>

## Involvement in West Coast Fisheries

### Commercial Fishing

No seafood processors operated in Avila Beach in 2000. Landings were delivered to Avila Beach by 127 commercially registered vessels, and were made in the following West Coast fisheries (data shown represents landings in metric tons/value of said landings/number of vessels landing): coastal pelagic confidential/confidential/2; crab 37 t/\$127,746/14; groundfish 370 t/\$703,769/88; highly migratory species 6 t/\$12,884/24; salmon 35 t/\$134,357/38; shrimp 15 t/\$30,518/6; and other species 14 t/\$77,510/44.

In 2000 Avila Beach residents owned six commercial vessels, of which two participated in the federally managed groundfish fishery. The number of vessels owned by Avila Beach residents in 2000 that participated in each fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab 0/0/1, groundfish 0/0/NA, highly migratory species NA/0/NA, salmon 0/0/4, shellfish NA/0/NA, and shrimp NA/0/7.<sup>7</sup>

No community members held federal groundfish permits in 2000. The number of Avila Beach residents holding permits in each fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab 0/0/1, groundfish 0/0/6, highly migratory species NA/0/1, salmon 0/0/9, shellfish 0/0/NA, shrimp 0/0/2, and other species 0/0/9.<sup>8</sup>

In 2000 at least 37 commercial fishing permits were registered to Avila Beach residents in 2000. The number of state permits held by Avila Beach residents in each fishery by state (WA/OR/CA) was: crab 0/0/1, groundfish 0/0/7, highly migratory species NA/0/1, salmon 0/0/16, shellfish 0/0/NA, shrimp 0/0/2, and other species 0/0/10.<sup>9</sup>

### Sportfishing

Avila Beach has a 1,685-foot public fishing pier. A number of charter vessels operate out of the community targeting albacore tuna, rock cod, salmon, and other species. Many also offer seasonal whale watching tours. In 2002 at least 12 charter businesses served sport fishermen and tourists in Morro Bay.

There are two license agents selling sportfishing licenses in Avila Beach. In 2000 vendors in San Luis Obispo County sold 43,399 resident sportfishing licenses, 40 nonresident sportfishing licenses, 52 sport salmon punch cards, and 30 abalone report cards.

In the Avila Beach and Morro Bay port group, 12 commercial passenger fishing vessels served 17,759 anglers in 2000. The vessels reported 123,441 landings composed of more than a dozen species. Rockfish (unspecified) and Albacore tuna accounted for 93.9% and 4.6% of the landings respectively.

### Subsistence

Local tribal and nontribal community members may engage in subsistence fishing in the Avila Beach area. However, specific information on subsistence fishing is not discussed in detail in this community profile due to the lack of available data. The California Department of Fish and Game uses the term “recreational” for fishermen who do not earn revenue from their catch, but fish for pleasure or to provide food for personal consumption. Information on subsistence fishing in California is captured to some degree in the sportfishing data.

## Involvement in North Pacific Fisheries

### Commercial Fishing

In 2000 Avila Beach residents had no involvement in North Pacific fisheries.

### Sportfishing

Five Avila Beach residents purchased Alaska sportfishing licenses in 2000.

## Notes

1. Houghton Mifflin Company. No date. Encyclopedia of North American Indians: Chumash. Online at <http://www.rain.org/eagle/chumash1.htm> [accessed 9 February 2007].

2. The County of San Luis Obispo Online. 2005. About the county. Online at [http://www.co.slo.ca.us/SLOCo\\_InterPortal.nsf/SLOCo\\_AboutCounty.htm?OpenPage&charset=windows-1252](http://www.co.slo.ca.us/SLOCo_InterPortal.nsf/SLOCo_AboutCounty.htm?OpenPage&charset=windows-1252) [accessed 9 February 2007].

3. History in San Luis Obispo County. 2004. Timeline. Online at <http://www.historyinslocounty.com/index.htm> [accessed 9 February 2007].

4. Avila Beach History. No date. Port San Luis harbor district. Online at <http://www.portsanluis.com/> [accessed 9 February 2007].

5. State of California. 2004. California Counties transient lodging tax revenue. Online at <http://www.sco.ca.gov/ard/local/locrep/adhoc/county/0001cotranslodgtax.pdf> [accessed 9 February 2007].

6. Port San Luis Harbor District. No date. Harbor services. Online at <http://www.portsanluis.com> [accessed 9 February 2007].

7. NA refers to data that were not available, for example, due to few or no recorded permit numbers, or the partially permitted nature of a fishery in 2000.

8. See note 7.

9. See note 7.