

ADVENTURE OJAI

CLOUD CLIMBERS JEEP TOURS



72

**BEST OJAI HIKING TRAILS
PERRY'S PICKS**



76

Climb into the real Ojai with Cloud Climbers Jeep Tours

**Story by Misty Volaski
Photos by Logan Hall**

If there's one thing I've learned about Ojai it's that more digging will always uncover more treasure. Between the stunning scenery and the passionate, creative residents, I am continually unearthing fascinating snippets about this vibrant, diverse little pocket of California.

There are plenty of ways to discover Ojai for yourself, and one of the most interesting ways — for locals and visitors alike — is to book a tour through Cloud Climbers Jeep Tours.

Our guide, Greg Bressani, certainly looked the part. A bandanna partially covering his face, he pushed back his broad-brimmed hat and greeted us with friendly handshakes and easy enthusiasm. As he helped us into the back of the four-by-four Jeep and drove toward the East End of Ojai, the reason the company uses the covered but open-air Jeeps became immediately apparent: the fresh air we grew up on seemed sweeter. The sights seemed more alive, interactive somehow. The breeze was invigorating.

Photographer Logan Hall and I smiled at one another. This was going to be another one of our "Wow, we didn't know that!" adventures.

The East End orange groves and yucca



HDR Photo by Logan Hall

parted briefly to allow access to a small road, which wound over a creek and back into the foothills. Soon, olive trees began appearing, and a man in a baseball cap welcomed us to Asquith Ranch, the place where Ojai Olive Oil is made.

As a businessman in the Los Angeles area, Asquith never thought much about olive oil. Sure, he liked it, he admits, but it was never more than a condiment until he decided to retire in Ojai and

discovered several old-looking olive trees on his property. Curious, he investigated, and discovered that they were a Spanish varietal planted in the late 1800s by a group of enterprising farmers. "So that got me interested," Asquith said. That interest quickly turned into a passion for producing unique olive oils, and before he knew it, Asquith had 2,000 trees on the property and "almost more business than

continued on next page



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I could handle. This was supposed to be a retirement hobby – almost too successful!" The grin on his face betrays his words — he loves this stuff.

The knowledge of the property and the fruit (yes, olives are a fruit) is extensive. He tells us about Ojai's unique Mediterranean climate, making it one of very few places on Earth that offers the perfect blend of climate and topography.

He explains the different types of olive he grows —several varieties of Italian, French, Greek and Spanish. Then the tour goes inside to the temperature-controlled barn, with no windows and lots of stainless steel machinery. "That's how we

make the oil," Asquith says, pointing to the machine. "It's an olive mill. Not a press, a mill."

Then he leads us to the best part: the tasting room. Decorated tastefully with shelves of deep blue bottles lining the walls, we see, among others, basil, garlic, and Tuscan (sweet and peppery), and Ladera (smooth, sweet), organic (peppery) and their Signature Blend (sharply peppery), which is made from those Spanish varieties planted so long ago. All are extra-virgin olive oils, and fall well below the accepted 0.8 percent free acidity level to a pure .03 to .05 percent.

"Does it burn in your throat a little?"

asks Asquith's sidekick Alice as I taste the Signature oil. I nod. "That's good. The burning tells you it's good oil, and it's very good for you."

Then we taste the flavored balsamic vinegars. While not made on-site, they are hand-crafted, carefully selected, and shockingly delicious. We especially loved the violet, the pomegranate, and the blackberry ginger — all so surprisingly sweet, they would add an amazing twist to a salad. The traditional style was equally pleasing.

After grabbing up a few bottles of the

continued on page 74

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continued from page 73

multiple award-winning Ojai Olive Oil, along with a few scented soaps and lush face creams, we reluctantly left Ron and Alice and headed back to the Jeep with tour guide Greg.

A lazy drive across town led us to our

This was going to be another one of our "Wow, we didn't know that!" adventures.

next stop: a place near Lake Casitas that Greg called "The Secret Gardens." Another quiet road soon exploded with the color and texture of a carefully cultivated paradise, cared for by a local architect and his family. As we pass

gardens of Southern California natives, exotic Australian plants, fantastic succulents, and countless more we couldn't hope to identify, we pull off the paved road and put that four-by-four Jeep

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Greg Bressani of Cloud Climbers Jeep Tours and Ron Asquith of Ojai Olive Oil.

Bicycle Rentals in Ojai



One of the most picturesque and popular rides is the Ojai Valley Trail – a 16-mile paved path built in 1989 and running parallel to California 33 between the beach in Ventura and Libbey Park in Ojai.

The scenic path is marked by wood railings and dotted with oak trees.

An 11-mile stretch winds through woods and riverbeds away from traffic and there are no big hills.

The 16-year-old store at 108 Cañada Road, sells and services bikes and rents for both men and women. Sizes range from extra small adult to extra large adult. The shop does not have child-size.

Maps detailing several rides for a variety of fitness levels are available.

108 Cañada 646-7736

Bicycles of Ojai is located in downtown Ojai, 2 blocks from the bike path and one block from Ojai Avenue

