



THE CAMP STORE

WELCOME TO THE HOTTEST SPOT IN TOWN.

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a) Live music with an ocean view, what could be better? b) The Carlsbad sunset club now has a southern chapter. c) At The Camp Store you can feel the welcome.





Camp stores are your friend when you run out of propane or bug spray. Usually they are not much more than that, spare in their utilitarian function. But walking along the coast and happening upon The Camp Store, my friends and I thought, "What is this place?" It was too early in the morning for the store to be open, but you could feel the welcome. It left an impression of community, though no one was there yet. Coming back at sunset, I found what I had anticipated. There were not just people, but a community of people enjoying the view, the pizza and the camaraderie.

The Camp Store, at South Carlsbad State Beach Campground, has become the vibe for south Carlsbadians, not just the campers. The ingredients to its success are simple: good food, good drink, good music, good prices, good company, with room for the kids to run around and a stunning view.

But the secret, secret sauce is a sense of celebration of where we find ourselves on this planet. There are tall lifeguard chairs to sit in and say to oneself, "I can't believe I am here right now." Visual exclamation points added when the dolphins show up or a whale breaches. The south Carlsbad sunset club gathers here (the northern club goes to the grass by Offshore Surf Shop) at the end of the day. A gong sounds when the sun slips below the horizon line (accompanied by whoops if there's a green flash).

Basic ingredients, simple success. Anthony Marcotti learned how to bake a business in Indonesia. He ran surf trips to the Mentawai Islands in Indonesia and was one of the founding partners of the Kandui Resort there. And part of a stunning beach development at Vunabaka in Fiji. Indonesia, Fiji, Carlsbad—spectacular all.

When Marcotti saw that the concession at South Carlsbad State Beach was open, he decided to come home from the humidity. Opening the business in June 2020, Marcotti spent nine months of hard labor and a lot of personal capital to refurbish and reimagine the rundown facility and turn it into what we all now love as The Camp Store. He learned on the islands to lean into locals for the authentic experience.

The beer taps and the cans in the fridge are from some of our best breweries. Pizza is universal, of course, but the pizza at The Camp Store is not a frozen, convenience store afterthought. The dough rises on-site and is baked in a state-of-the-art pizza oven. Pairs with a nice California wine or crisp, cold beer. All this can be enjoyed outdoors amid native landscaping.

The Camp Store has some elaborate light shows for Halloween and Christmas. It's become one of the holiday must-dos for locals and makes campers feel at home. Marcotti would like to bring animatronic dinosaurs in the summer months and then lend them to The Ocean Institute in Dana Point for school field trips.

The Camp Store also goes local with live music on Wednesday through Sunday nights, and every evening during the summer. Seasoned campers are as surprised by this enjoyable venue as much as locals are eager to check the lineup list. Bands like the Ginger Roots, the Swingin' Johnsons and The Ram are just a few of the local favorites.

There isn't parking at The Camp Store. Campers can walk from their sites, but for Carlsbadians or visitors staying somewhere else, the trek from Poinsettia Lane or Avenida Encinas is worth it. Come feel the welcome, relax and enjoy good food, good drink and good vibes next to the big blue.

THE CAMP STORE
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PROBLEMS IN PARADISE

"I'm either a genius or really stupid," Anthony Marcotti says of starting The Camp Store, referring to the teetering partnership between a government entity and a private business.

"San Elijo [campground store] gave up and got out of their contract. It's been empty for six and a half years," Marcotti says of the concessionaire's conundrum.

When people come into power they either use it to control others with endless rules and pronouncements or to enrich those they serve for a greater collective thriving. It's the glass half-empty/half-full assessment applied to power. Call the former the HOA effect. Call the latter good leadership. When it comes to the state's power over The Camp Store, its ever-changing rules and maddening pronouncements seem like an HOA run amok.

What's happening in the San Diego district seems to be a microcosm of California's Sacramento problem. If a business does minimally well, certain fees apply. If it does phenomenally well, "tax" the hell out of it. That's the California way of governance. It works not for the people's thriving, but for the state's ends. And California is losing businesses and its tax base because of it.

The state takes 15% off the top of The Camp Store's total revenue as rent. The simple logic would seem that if Marcotti succeeds, the state gains. One would think it would be to the state's advantage to help him succeed, by say, increasing parking. Currently, there are only a handful of 20-minute spots and patrons have been told these are not for The Camp Store.

According to Marcotti, he was also notified that his rent was late 11 months in a row, but not until the late fees were \$11,000. Once the state's accounting moved into the 21st century and funds could be directly transferred, the store has not been late. Marcotti says the state has not provided proof of his lateness despite numerous requests (which would be postmarks). In one instance, the state did not cash the "late" rent check for 62 days. The state says it had been in communication with Marcotti since the start of his contract. Communication as to what was not stated. Plus, Marcotti offered The Camp Store as a collection spot for a Christmas toy drive in partnership with Carlsbad Police and Fire. The state charged him a \$100 special event fee.

And in another instance in 2022, why was The Camp Store given a 51/100 performance rating? The state's answer: "Assessments are made on the day of the evaluation using a standard template. The initial rating for The Camp Store was 51/100. Concessionaires are then given 30 days to review, discuss and make improvements before the evaluation score is finalized. Through this process, Mr. Marcotti's final score was 96%, which places the overall rating in the excellent category. San Diego Coast District only has one camp store currently so there are no other ratings to compare." What is the standard template if there are no other camp stores in the county? Why was the evaluation changed to excellent when there were no improvements made, but Marcotti simply asked why in the world he'd been given that rating? It's as if someone at the state thought, oh no, someone is actually paying attention. We are.

These are only three things on a list of concerns, and not even the biggest ones. The state's responses to our questions were mostly restating policy without answering specifically. One could infer they only want a camp store that sells propane, sunscreen and s'more sticks on a narrow margin to seasonal campers. Not an innovative and inviting business for everyone on this spot of California to enjoy.

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- a) The Camp Store taps into locals.
b) Anthony Marcotti is owner of The Camp Store. c) The Camp Store's offerings pair nicely with twilight.
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