

January 30, 2010

## Ask the Locals: Half Moon Bay, California and Beyond



This weekend, Peter is broadcasting his radio show live from the Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay.

Located about 25 miles south of San Francisco, Half Moon Bay has long been a favorite vacation spot known for its prime surfing conditions, golf, parks, and historic state beaches.

Keep reading to find out what the locals love about this coastal getaway.

## Chris Ryan, Executive Editor, *Sunset Magazine*

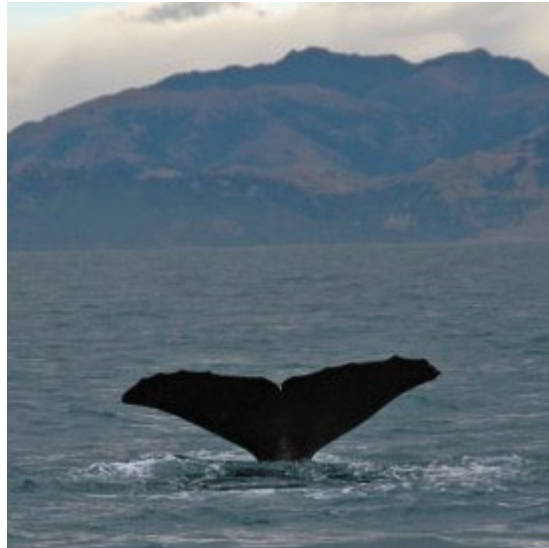
Halfway between Half Moon Bay and San Francisco is a small coastal city called **Pacifica**. I like to run along the boardwalk in Pacifica, past the seawall that keeps the surf out of Sharp Park Golf Course (which looks like a mini Pebble Beach, with its wind-tortured trees).

I run up a killer staircase to the top of **Mori Point** to try to watch the whales going by.

The National Park Conservancy has been rebuilding trails (and that staircase) and replanting native plants, so it's looking better and better. Once I reach the top of the point, it's hard to believe I'm just a 15-minute drive from the city.

Afterwards, stop by [Gorilla Barbeque](#) farther down Highway 1 in Pacifica. As one might guess, Gorilla's specialty is meat: pork ribs, pulled pork, beef brisket, you name it (but vegetables are also an option). The restaurant is inside an old train car, which makes for tight quarters, but most of the seating is outdoors. It's right near the surfers' beach, so you might see a lot of people in wetsuits.

[Sam's Chowder House](#) in Half Moon Bay has good lobster rolls and Adirondack chairs outside, but it's not exactly unknown—at lunchtime, you should get there by 11 a.m. if you don't want to wait in line forever.





About 18 miles south in Pescadero, one of the coolest things is a berry farm called [Pie Ranch](#): Not only do they sell berries (and pies), but their mission is to expose city kids to agriculture. They supply pies to a bakery/café in San Francisco called **Mission Pie**, which is staffed by local high schoolers—the students also come down once a month and work on the farm.

On the third Saturday of each month, there's a barn dance/potluck/fundraiser in which people can do a little farm work, take a tour, have a potluck dinner, and then dance!

Whether you're an avid biker or prefer to remain behind the wheel of a car, **Stage Road**, the inland route between Pescadero and San Gregorio is a drop-dead gorgeous little country road that winds through the foothills above the coast.

Get more ideas in our [Hiking & Biking section](#).

Tourists used to flock to San Francisco's Pier 39 to see the hundreds of sea lions that made it their home 20 years ago; but in the past few months, they've mysteriously set off to new waters. A good alternative is [Año Nuevo State Park](#), about a mile south of Pescadero. The park is the largest mainland breeding colony for northern elephant seals, making it a popular choice for those who need their dose of pinnipeds. Their breeding season is December 15 through March 31, so park access is only allowed through guided walks. In spring and summer, the elephant seals return to the beaches to molt and visitors can apply for a permit to enter the park.

The drive down **Highway 1** from Half Moon Bay to Santa Cruz is, I believe, the most undersung drive in California.

Most travelers that fly into San Francisco and then drive down the coast tend to skip this part to save time (zipping down 101 or 280 and then cutting over at Carmel).

But I think this drive is just as beautiful (and ever-so-slightly less terrifying or vertigo-inducing) if not more so. There's rolling green/gray grassy hills to one side, sandstone bluffs to the other side, interrupted every few miles by a tiny pocket beach with dramatic surf: Pomponio State



Beach, San Gregorio State Beach, Pescadero State Beach, Bean Hollow State Beach ... I love that drive.

## Liam Mayclem, producer and host, CBS 5 “Eye on the Bay”

[Camerons Restaurant and Inn](#) in Half Moon Bay is a British-style pub with more than 20 beers on tap. The most unusual aspect about this place is the 1966 English double-decker bus parked next door, which was brought in to circumvent the smoking ban. Other

Anglo touches include a red phone booth and a small shop selling English treats.



Half Moon Bay is an excellent area for sea kayaking, whether you're a novice or expert kayaker. [Half Moon Bay Kayak](#) offers introductory classes once or twice a month, year-round, and has a variety of local excursions including weekly trips to Pillar Point Harbor, and longer coastal paddles in the summer and fall. Single and double rentals are also available.

It's always a plus when you can experience a destination the eco-friendly way. [Coastal Elegance Tours](#) offers nature tours both on foot and on hybrid bicycles (part

road/part mountain bike). Try an easy cycling tour between Half Moon Bay and Pillar Point Harbor, or a more advanced ride along the seaside bluffs to Montara's Historic Light House.

For more information on Half Moon Bay, visit [www.halfmoonbaychamber.org](http://www.halfmoonbaychamber.org).

Check out [guests from Peter's radio show in Half Moon Bay](#).

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