

# Travel

## Coastside and so cool

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As the notorious [Sacramento](#) summer heats up, we'll all look for travel destinations where the term "triple digits" refers to a three-legged race at a picnic and not the local weather.

To get a jump on the annual evacuation out of summertime [Sacramento](#), we took off for the 25-mile strip of Highway 1 between Montara (south of [San Francisco](#)) and Pescadero (north of [Santa Cruz](#)), promoted as "Coastside" in the handout literature. In between is [Half Moon Bay](#), the largest of the towns along Coastside.

We played stop-and-go from [place](#) to [place](#) for two days. Knowing we couldn't do and see a fraction of what the area offers, we settled for a serendipitous sampling of whatever crossed our path.

So, what does this stretch of San Mateo County offer? Let's see ... guided eco-tours, farm tours and stays, [horseback riding](#), bicycling, kayaking, fishing, surfing, beachcombing, tide-pooling, whale watching, hiking, golf, wine- and cheese-tastings, birding and – this is big in our book – fresh seafood.

Once we reached Coastside, it didn't take long to figure out that the "attractions" are spread out.

"There's a lot to do, even though it's not in your face," Charise McHugh said by phone before we left [Sacramento](#). She's the CEO of the [Half Moon Bay Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Bureau](#). "You don't just drive along and see an [amusement park](#). You have to look. The important thing is we still have our small-town feel – that East Coast quality."

How true. Many of our detours off Highway 1 took us through charming seaside neighborhoods reminiscent of fictitious Cabot Cove, the idealized Maine fishing village in the long-running hit TV series "Murder, She Wrote."

Of course, one big draw of Coastside is the beaches. Actually, we should say "beach," as the coast is one long, dramatic beach (some of it inaccessible) that's been designated as a series of smaller beaches with different names. Take your pick and pull over; each has its charms.

As we hit Highway 1 – a.k.a. the Cabrillo Highway – and drove through the usually fog-swept town of [Pacifica](#), we reminded ourselves of our goal – maybe the same one you'll take with you – which was: explore.

In a few minutes we passed by [Montara State Beach](#) and pulled in to the well-landscaped Point Montara Lighthouse Hostel (16th Street and Highway 1; 650-728-7177 and [www.norcalhostels.org](http://www.norcalhostels.org)).

The compound is part of the Hostel International chain and occupies a prime chunk of real estate. The 30-foot-tall working lighthouse itself was built in 1881 and erected at Point Montara in 1928. Guests are housed in restored wood buildings. Rates range from \$26 to \$72.

In next-door [Moss Beach](#) we found the [Moss Beach](#) Distillery (140 Beach Way, 650-728-5595 and [www.mossbeachdistillery.com](http://www.mossbeachdistillery.com)), a landmark overlooking Seal Cove.



Inside a white stucco building with stained-glass windows is a well-preserved restaurant filled with memorabilia.

Its amenities echoed the ones we were to see at the seaside restaurants we visited: wonderful vistas from the plentiful windows inside, and from the heated patios and decks outside. Most decks feature fire pits and heaters; some restaurants offer blankets and Adirondack chairs.

The Distillery began life in 1927 as Frank's [Place](#), a Prohibition-era speakeasy for the swells who drove down from San Francisco. Adding to its mystique is the ghost that haunts the [place](#). The [Blue Lady](#) is a regular, one might say, the subject of segments on TV's "Unsolved Mysteries" and "Ghost Hunters."

Our meandering around [Moss Beach](#) led to the lush Cypress [Flower Farm](#) (333 Cypress Ave., 650-728-0728), one of the numerous nursery-garden centers in the area.

"We grow about 80 varieties of flowers in the ground – not in pots – on a 12-acre field," said owner [Sharon Dardenelle](#). The flowers are cut and sold on site and at [farmers markets](#).

The outdoor nursery is like a mini-forest, thick with "coastal-loving plants" and garden art. The wooden barn houses a home-and-garden store and gift shop.



"Grab a cup of lemonade and sit on the swing outside," Dardenelle suggested, so we did.

The must-see [Fitzgerald Marine Reserve](#) also is in [Moss Beach](#) (turn onto [California Avenue](#) from Highway 1). It is maintained by the [San Mateo County Parks Department](#) ([www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/portal/site/parks](http://www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/portal/site/parks)).

The attraction happens at low tide, when a "marine shelf" is exposed, allowing visitors to walk out on the rocks and explore tide pools.

But: If the tide is high, drive on by. As the Web site [www.fitzgeraldreserve.org](http://www.fitzgeraldreserve.org) points out, "Tidepooling is best done just before and after low tide."

Before you visit the reserve, check the "online tide guide" at that Web site, or stop at a marina or tackle shop and ask. More information: [www.sfgate.com/getoutside/1996/jun/fitz.html](http://www.sfgate.com/getoutside/1996/jun/fitz.html).

A few miles south is [Pillar Point Harbor](#) in Princeton-by-the-Sea. It's not far from Mavericks, the home of the annual surfing competition, which was called off this year due to a lack of monster waves.

We strolled around, enjoying gusts of refreshing, salty air sweeping in from the sea. Screeching seabirds performed aerial ballets around the commercial fishing boats and sailboats moored in the marina.



The harbor is the home of companies offering whale-watching excursions, sportfishing trips, eco-tours, and kayak and bike rentals. Dining ranges from casual to high end. Just remember: You're on the coast and you'll pay for the view.

Nearby is the Pillar Point Marsh, Beach and Shoreline, a fine place for walking and birding. Hiking trails are up above, on the bluffs.

The biggest news in recent years was the 2008 grand opening of the [Oceano Hotel & Spa](#), a classy property dressed up in a style we'll call "New England Nautical." We sipped coffee in front of the lobby fireplace and admired the decorative touches.

The Oceano is a Bay Area destination for weddings and receptions, and recently opened a full-service spa. It also maintains the indoor Shoppes at [Harbor Village](#).

Information and reservations: (888) 623-2661, (650) 726-5400 and [www.oceanohalfmoonbay.com](http://www.oceanohalfmoonbay.com).

We had three meals at the harbor:

- Crab Landing, (650) 712-1288 and [www.crablanding.com](http://www.crablanding.com): An upscale seafood-and-steak [house](#) (with sushi). The steamed clams, crab-topped artichoke-filled ravioli, and seared ahi were first rate.
- Ketch Joanne, (650) 728-3747 and [www.ketchjoannerestaurant.com](http://www.ketchjoannerestaurant.com): The deep-fried rock cod was so fresh it flaked apart when a fork touched it.
- Cafe Mezzaluna, (650) 560-0137 and [www.mezzalunabythesea.com](http://www.mezzalunabythesea.com): The cafe and the more formal Mezzaluna Italian restaurant are sisters. At the cafe, we split a slice of zucchini frittata and a sfogliatella. The latter is a cone-shaped pastry of crispy phyllo filled with ricotta cheese. The food at both restaurants is made from scratch. Our cafe snacks were marvelous.

For more information on Pillar Point Harbor: [www.lovetoeatandtravel.com](http://www.lovetoeatandtravel.com), [www.smharbor.com](http://www.smharbor.com) and [www.beachcalifornia.com](http://www.beachcalifornia.com) and [www.trails.com](http://www.trails.com).

If you were to imagine a quintessential New England seafood restaurant, it would look a lot like Sam's Chowder [House](#) (4210 Cabrillo Highway, at the far north end of [Half Moon Bay](#); 650-712-0245 and [www.samschowderhouse.com](http://www.samschowderhouse.com)). Sam's has it all – a well-decorated [dining room](#), oyster bar, plenty of picture windows, outdoor decks with fire pits and blankets, and a seafood-heavy menu (the "lobster clambake" is a hit).

We sampled the rich Manhattan and thyme-flecked New England clam chowders, and Sam's special lobster roll, "selected (as one of) the top five best sandwiches in [America](#) by the 'Today' show." Big chunks of Maine lobster meat are slicked with clarified butter and flecked with celery bits, salt and pepper, then heaped on a grilled bun and served with potato chips and coleslaw (\$19.95).

"We sell between 800 and 1,000 a week," said executive chef and partner [Lewis Rossman](#). "We feed close to 5,000 people a week, so the lobster roll is nearly 20 percent of our business."

One bite (then two, then three ...) tells you why.

Our next stop was the intersection of Highway 1 and scenic Highway 92 in [Half Moon Bay](#), where we turned left at the traffic light, then right on Main Street. We crossed a little bridge and parked in the officially designated downtown area.

We joined other visitors and locals lingering at sidewalk cafes and cruising in and out of gift shops, bookstores, antiques stores, [art galleries](#), restaurants and boutiques. Instead of graffiti on the walls, we saw murals gracing the sides of several buildings.

This interesting historical area was once known as Spanishtown, and it's recommended you stop by a bookstore or the visitors center at 235 Main St. and buy the [Spanishtown Historical](#)

[Society's](#) Walking Tour guide (\$3.50). For more information: [www.spanishtownhs.org](http://www.spanishtownhs.org) and (650) 726-7084.

For a quick rundown of some of what we had time to see on Main Street, go to [sacbee.com/livinghere](http://sacbee.com/livinghere).

Back on Highway 1 south, we detoured onto [Miramontes Point Road](#) and passed by the multimillion-dollar houses of [Ocean Colony](#), fronting two [golf courses](#).

Feeling rather sporting, we stopped at the [Ritz Carlton](#) for a Pimm's No. 1 Cup at the bar. The spectacular hotel reminded us of a stately British manor house or castle. Information: (650) 712-7000 and [www.ritzcarlton.com](http://www.ritzcarlton.com).

About 15 miles south of Half Moon Bay is the strikingly dramatic Pescadero State Beach and the [Pescadero Marsh Natural Preserve](#), well worth a look-see.



We turned onto [Pescadero Road](#) and two miles inland and found the landmark Duarte's Tavern (since 1894; 202 [Stage Road](#)). The homemade cream of artichoke and green chile soups were as good as we'd heard. Bonus: The jukebox gives two plays for a quarter. Information: (650) 879-0464 and [www.duartestavern.com](http://www.duartestavern.com).

For art appreciation, we stopped at the barn-size studio that houses Made In Pescadero (216 [Stage Road](#)).

"We're a working gallery (selling) hand-crafted furniture (and accessories) made by local woodworkers," said manager [Sonja Jurgensen](#).

The woodwork is gorgeous – ladles, jewelry boxes, tables and bed frames made from the likes of spalted maple, California walnut and quilted bubinga (\$45 into the thousands).

Information: (650) 879-9128 and [www.madeinpescadero.com](http://www.madeinpescadero.com).

The [Pescadero Country Store](#) (251 [Stage Road](#)) is dominated by a gigantic, oak-fired pizza oven. The inside oven was imported from [Italy](#), said store owner [Cindy Simms](#). The structure that houses it is made from pre-molded concrete and was covered in hand-cut tiles by the local artist who designed it.

If you're still hungry after slices of thin-crust pizza, the store hosts outdoor barbecues and live music from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. on weekends.

"The cheese stands alone" is the motto of the award-winning [Harley Farms Goat Dairy](#) (205 North St.). Our visit was entertaining and informative, starting with the samples of creamy goat cheeses in the down-home tasting room.



The herd of American alpine does and their kids kept up a chorus of "baas!" as we chatted with farm manager [Ryan Andrus](#) ("I'm the goat whisperer") in the hay loft, or feed barn.

Is there a big demand for [goat cheese](#)?

"We can't make enough of it," he said.

Reserve a spot for the two-hour tour and cheese-tasting at [www.harleygoatfarms.com](http://www.harleygoatfarms.com). Cost is \$20 adults, \$10 children ages 6 to 10, free for ages 5 and younger.

## **Some of what you'll find in downtown Half Moon Bay**

- Tu Pueblo, 650-726-7743 and [www.tupuebloimports.com](http://www.tupuebloimports.com). The term "riot of colors" applies to this collection of handmade folk art from [Mexico](#).

- Cunha's Country Grocery and Emporium, (650) 726-4071: Downstairs is a grocery store with a well-stocked deli case. Upstairs is an emporium with eclectic sundries. Coming soon: a surf shop.

- The Half [Moon Bay Bakery](#) (650-726-4841) is small and stuffed with napoleons, eclairs, breads, doughnuts and cookies.

- Larger and more formal is the [Moonside Bakery & Cafe](#) (650-726-9070 and [www.moonsidebakery.com](http://www.moonsidebakery.com)), stuffed with pastries, fruit tarts, and serious cakes and pies, and serving breakfast and lunch.

- Mary Ireland Colucci sat inside the oasis of the [Courtyard Gallery](#), surrounded by elegant pieces of art "by selected sculptors from throughout the world" (650-712-1114 and [www.courtyardgallery.net](http://www.courtyardgallery.net)). Across the courtyard, her husband, [Bart Colucci](#), carried a case of wine into the Barterra Winery tasting room, which the couple also own (650-712-1635 and [www.barterrawines.com](http://www.barterrawines.com)).

- The outdoors area at Half To Have It (650-712-5995 and [www.halftohaveit.com](http://www.halftohaveit.com)) is crowded with garden-oriented stuff and paved with smooth shards of multicolored glass instead of gravel. Inside the barn, says the signage, are "rare finds, treasures and vintage collectibles." Some would say a life-size cardboard cutout of Mini-Me is junk, but not us. Have fun - we did.