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## Half Moon Bay An Escape from City Life

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*I've always loved the water. In fact growing up, most of my summers were spent at the a coastline town of Calatagan, Batangas, which is about two hours south of Manila. If you lived most of your life in the Philippines, you would agree with me that the country has the finest beaches in the world -- the white sands of Boracay, the pure natural beauty of Palawan, the surfing haven of Siargao.*

Moving to the Bay Area wasn't a bad idea, but I thought that I still have yet to find that perfect beach -- comparable to those that I've grown up with.

Then came Half Moon Bay.

One Sunday afternoon, not knowing where to go for lunch, a friend suggested that we go to Half Moon Bay and try to find a decent place to eat. As we drove down Pacific Coast Highway, I was amazed at the sight that unfolded before my eyes -- huge cliffs dropping off into the ocean, the sun's warm cast reflecting on the water set against a hilly backdrop. We were surrounded by a picture-perfect scenery of sand and waves.

It's the kind of paradise that would make you wish to enjoy in quiet solitude, but to no avail. Throngs of people from across the Bay Area come to Half Moon Bay every weekend to catch the breath-taking scenery.

Even though the afternoon was windy and cold there was still a sizable number of people at the beach. Everybody knows about Half Moon Bay and how beautiful it is, but nobody wants to tell you because they want the place for themselves. But Half Moon Bay is not just about the sea. What began as a rural agricultural area, primarily used for grazing cattle, horses and oxen used by Mission San Francisco de Asis (established in June 1776), the community began to develop in the 1840s as the first real town in San Mateo County. Originally known as San Benito, it was then renamed Spanishtown and became a racially diverse community. Spanishtown was officially renamed Half Moon Bay in 1874.

What was once a sleepy, little town of farmers who till the rich coastal soil and an ideal beach spot for surfers who ride the legendary waves in a place called Mavericks, has mushroomed into a tourist's haven with great shops, restaurants, bars and inns.

After absorbing the fresh sea breeze and numerous photo ops, we all settled in at Sam's Chowder House to have our fill of their delicious food. Of course, we

didn't pass up on the opportunity to taste their New England Chowder -- a creamy concoction of clam broth, clams, potatoes, smoked bacon, onion and thyme. Their Fried Seafood Combination Platter proved to be a dish to be reckoned with -- a mouth-watering late of calamari, prawns and cod, served with coleslaw and fries on the side. However, the best about dining in this part of Half Moon Bay is the spectacular view.

We enjoyed the rest of the afternoon (and later, the dazzling sunset) by touring the posh Ritz-Carlton Hotel, probably the only establishment that breaks the small-town feel of Half Moon Bay.

Sitting on top of a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, the place is where Victorian meets nature. The wide greenscape is the perfect venue for any relaxing activity, whether for a sunset wedding at the gazebo lawn or a great game of golf at their picturesque course. On a windy or cold day, you can still enjoy the same view by dining in any of their restaurants. After the filling seafood platter at Sam's, we all watched the sun go down while sipping our caffeine fix and relishing delectable desserts -- Creme Brulee, English Pudding and Earl Grey Chocolate Cake.

Living in Daly City, I was surprised to have visited a place not far off from where I live and not come across a Gap, Old Navy or Ross store. For some who are used to living in the big city, Half Moon Bay may come across as boring. But the quaint and quiet charm of Half Moon Bay is undeniable, one that will remain with you even after you've left the place.