

## Pillar Point, Princeton-by-the-Sea, Moss Beach Tiny Seaside Towns Have Small Hotels, Fresh Fish, Local Brews

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■ [Aug 8, 2009](#)



Just north of Half Moon Bay, CA a string of charming coastal hamlets offer tide pools, serene harbors, fresh fish, coastal trails and an upscale hotel with harbor views.

Drive four miles north of Half Moon Bay and turn left on Capistrano Road to find a hidden string of lovely seaside areas perfect for a lazy rambling day near the water. Coming first to Pillar Point Harbor, a traveler can park and take an easy walk by starting at Johnson Pier. The path can take one to the outer breakwater, where it's nice to stop and watch the surfers. Head north from there to find the inner breakwater and fishing piers.

### **Princeton-by-the-Sea Has Fresh Seafood, Fishing Boats and a Historic Past**

Princeton-by-the-Sea was developed in 1908 to accommodate vacationers coming south along the coast by train from San Francisco. The streets were all named for college towns in the East. While the Cape Cod facades make the place charming, underneath it all, it's a brawny fishing port, producing 10 million pounds of fish, squid and crab a year. In the mid-1800s, this area was even rougher, since it was a whaling station run by Portuguese sailors.

On Prospect Way, an elegant cream-colored building stands apart, with big windows looking out on a lane lined by huge old trees and the waterline and bobbing boats beyond them. It was formerly the historic Princeton Inn, but now houses [Mezza Luna](#), a fine restaurant with Southern Italian dishes it combines with California/Mediterranean touches. The service is delightful, formal and friendly at the same time.

As Capistrano Road curves around the harbor, one sees the Half Moon Bay Brewing Company, a great place to spend the late afternoon, watching the sun set on the boats in the harbor while sampling the handcrafted beers and ales made right there. They also serve sandwiches and seafood.

### **The New Oceano Hotel and Nearby Shopping Village Offers Elegance, Convenience**

A quick walk along the sidewalk leads to the fairly new [Oceano Hotel and Spa](#), which in turn nestles up to an open-air courtyard and Harbor Village shopping area, which has 18 village shops, with nine currently occupied. They include gift shops and a bookstore, all locally owned. The Oceano has great views of the

harbor, ocean and coastal mountain range, with large, light-filled rooms that have fireplaces and soaking tubs. It has been voted as the best place to hold a wedding in the San Francisco Bay Area, thanks to its cliff-side lawns and gardens. There are also 11 elegant villas, a gym, a 5,000 square-foot spa, and the pleasant Oceano Bar and Grill.

**Search Tide Pools for Starfish and Sip a Drink on a Rustic Stone Balcony at Moss Beach**

A bit further north, at Moss Beach, off highway 1 at Nevada Street, is the Fitzgerald Marine Reserve, which offers beach walks and some of the best tidepooling on the north coast. Timing a visit while the tide is out is a smart tactic, as then the sea stars as big as dinner plates and spiny sea urchins in pastel colors are most evident. Nearby, on Beach Way, the Moss Beach Distillery reminds guests of the 1920s and Prohibition, when rumrunning boats from Canada used the rocky shore to deposit their cargo from Canada. The place is now a romantic restaurant with its own ghost and a rustic outdoor balcony patio high above the waves, where a couple can snuggle under a provided blanket while waiting for a table.

This area is a great weekend getaway from San Francisco, only a half-hour away. The informal coastal life style, live jazz at nearby clubs, local brews, fresh seafood and delicious chowders draw crowds in the summer. Reservations at hotels and restaurants are recommended.

