



## Monterey, Carmel and the Amazing Big Sur... the Ultimate American Road Trip

I was afraid this would happen. I've been longing to visit the Monterey bay area for what seems like forever. You know how sometimes you read about a place and you just know that you are going to fall in love with it before you even get there. Well, that's Monterey and Carmel for me. And yes...I did fall in love! Monterey offers the ultimately iconic California experience and it's easy to see why the drive to Big Sur has been voted the top road trip in the United States. The coastline is just breathtaking.

There are an endless number of things to do here. The drive is a must, of course. But there's also the shops and attractions of Cannery Row, the art galleries of Carmel, sipping handcrafted wines at tucked-away tasting rooms where the winemaker might just be the person pouring, surfing or paddleboard lessons, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, or play 18 holes at legendary golf courses. It just doesn't end. Plus, the amazing Esalen Institute is based in Big Sur, where you can take fascinating courses on consciousness studies. I might just end the trip now and stay here!

We checked into the beautiful Portola Hotel & Spa in Monterey located steps away from unique shopping, dining, Fisherman's Wharf and a great running/biking trail right along the water where you can see Harbor Seals and Sea Lions lounging on rocks. Our room was nautically-themed and spacious with a patio and cabana, a luxuriously comfortable king size bed and of course Green from Natura room amenity products and packages which are made from rapidly renewable material and are bio-degradable. Monterey is extremely pet friendly and we noticed many guests with their dogs in the hotel – you can even have a dog bed, bowl and bone for Fido!

The Portola Hotel & Spa is Silver LEED® Certified, becoming the first "Green" Hotel in central California, the third Hotel in California and the sixth Hotel in the U.S. to attain this high level in "Existing Building" Category. Their list of ecofriendly initiatives is long, but some of the more unique things that I thought they were implementing are:

- Their onsite restaurant, Jacks' carpet is made from sheep wool and the backing is a natural jute and latex, all of which are rapidly renewable materials and the carpet is 100% compostable at the end of its useful life
- Landscaping featuring native and drought tolerant vegetation and drip irrigation controlled by weather conditions
- Actively participate in the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch® Program, designed to raise awareness about the importance of making ocean-friendly seafood choices
- Peter B's Brewpub changed operations to save over 41,000 gallons of water a year and recycles mash from brewing the brewing process to local farmers and growers
- The Hotel produces hot water with cogeneration which simultaneously generates electricity on site

We set out that day to explore Cannery Row and the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Through the boom and bust of the whaling and sardine industries, to structural and economic despair followed by restoration and re-development, the tale of Cannery Row continues to fascinate people. You can pretty much find just about anything here from touristy shops to wine tasting rooms to brewpubs and more. The Aquarium is a great way to spend a few hours, especially with the kids, as they have feeding times for sharks, sea otters and fish which was exciting to watch.

That night we headed into Pacific Grove, which is a cute little seaside town. We ate at Passionfish – one of the best meals of the trip so far. Ted Walter, a Classic French-trained chef, worked in restaurants across the country before perfecting his own unique style and opening Pacific Grove's Passionfish with his wife Cindy in 1997. Since then, Ted has earned a national reputation for his simple, inspired cuisine, incorporating fresh, organic produce and sustainable seafood. He is also an active advocate for the sustainable seafood movement, using his talent and his restaurant as platforms for delivering sustainable seafood education. Passionfish was the first in Monterey County to be certified as a Green Restaurant. The halibut with tangerine-tamarind coulis and provençal yellow



loved their open air pavilion. In Greek, Nepenthe means "isle of no care," a place to find surcease from sorrow. People have come to this place, not just from the ridge-tops and canyons, but from all over the world. The cool and eclectic Phoenix Shop grew out of the traveling merchants who brought their colorful wares. Famous even before it opened for its unique architecture and incandescent views, Nepenthe is known today for its family hospitality, legendary guests, and irresistible "Ambrosiaburger."

We ended the day a few miles down the road at the Big Sur Roadhouse, which features Chef Matt Glazer's fresh take on classic California cuisine with a Cajun twist. The seasonal menu is filled with locally sourced organic ingredients. Also, not to be missed, San Francisco designer Steve Justrich's "homegrown modernism" has transformed the Roadhouse into a truly unique and fitting environment for dining in Big Sur. It's a great place to relax and dine, especially on their open air patio with couches and fire pits.

If that wasn't enough, the Portola Hotel sponsors the annual Monterey Beer Garden event, which happened to be occurring the weekend we were there. Hosted by the first craft Monterey brewery, Peter B's Brewpub, this beer enthusiast event features the top central California regional breweries. We got to meet the actual brewers of many breweries and sample from Stone, Boulder Creek, Santa Cruz Mountain, Uncommon Brewers and more. It was a great day with live music, lots of food and delicious beer tastings. What an awesome way to end our fantastic Monterey experience! Visit [www.portolahotel.com](http://www.portolahotel.com).

*Submitted by Dr. Diane Hayden.*

squash was exquisite and the Wild King salmon with bacon-onion-corn braise, roasted tomato and lemon jam was the best salmon we've had yet.

The next day we ventured into Carmel, which I fell in love with immediately. If you don't think you'll ever get to the Amalfi coast in Italy, then you have to come to Carmel as it's about the closest thing to it I've seen. All Italian style architecture; the shops, galleries, tasting rooms, and restaurants are beautifully designed with many tucked away in cozy little courtyards. Just a short walk from town down to the beach, you can see one of the most amazing sunsets you'll probably see in your lifetime. We dined at Basil in their outdoor patio area – when it got a little chilly, they had lovely fleece blankets and gas fireplaces to keep you warm. The menu is based on seasonal and locally grown organic ingredients; fresh, wild sustainable seafood and creative local California cuisine. Chef Peters' passion for Farm to Table food and being sustainably responsible made Basil the first Certified Green Restaurant in Monterey County. Don't miss the shaved brussel sprout salad with hazelnuts and the local burrata – some of the best I've had.

Our last day we drove the classic 17-Mile Drive through Pebble Beach – unbelievably stunning cliffs and shoreline. So much so that it actually costs \$10 to drive the route – but it was well worth it. There were many places you could pull off and take photos – which might not do it justice, but you'll still want to remember. We headed down to Big Sur and were lucky enough to see a whale breaching out in the ocean. Unlike the east coast – because you're driving on the side of cliffs here, you can see the ocean for miles and miles. We stopped at Nepenthe for a glass of wine and the sunset and I