



Where else in the world can you cruise down one of the most beautiful roads in the country, eat on a cliff overlooking the redwood forest, then head to the beach and watch sea otters play while you sip local wine? Monterey County, California. That is where.

I spent a couple of weeks in Monterey this past summer doing a lot of exploring, but mostly, a lot of eating. I learned that the food scene is diverse, with a huge emphasis on local foods (there is a farmers market every day of the week).

I picked the brains of the locals I met at Crossfit Monterey, chatted with the bartenders at a brewery I frequented, and got a list of must eat places from a local business owner. My goal was to experience as much of the deliciousness of Monterey in my short time there.

Out of the many, many restaurants I tried, here are my top picks and recommendations on where to eat in Monterey County, California.

A HEALTHY TREAT AT KAI LEE ICE CREAM



Ready for this? The ice cream at Kai Lee Ice Cream is Organic, Corn-Free, Gluten-Free, Nut-Free, GMO-Free, and Soy-Free. It is also handmade and locally sourced. Whew! Butch, the owner, created ice cream for his daughter who has various food allergies, and has turned it into an incredibly delicious business.

After talking for quite some time, Butch let us try just about all of the freshly made ice creams he had in the freezer. We went with Cinnamon French Toast (tasted just like Cinnamon Toast Crunch) and Mint Chocolate Chip. He also makes ice cream for businesses around town, like the Vanilla Stout for a local brewery/restaurant, which was so tasty I got it multiple times!

Where: Tin Cannery Building, 125 Ocean View Blvd. Pacific Grove

PERFECTLY CRAFTED SUSHI AT CRYSTAL FISH



The sushi at Crystal Fish was honestly some of the best sushi I have ever eaten in the US. We sat at the sushi bar and watched our order come together right front of us. The service was excellent, though I heard it gets pretty crowded during prime time.

We opted for the Kamikaze Roll (shrimp tempura, spicy tuna, avocado & eel), Green Goblin Roll (tuna, salmon, seaweed salad, jalapeno), and the Cannery Roll (spicy scallop, avocado, tuna, macadamia nuts), as well as some Japanese Oysters and a couple of beers. So Good!

Where: 514 Lighthouse Ave. Monterey

AUTHENTIC MEXICAN FOOD AT LOPEZ RESTAURANTE Y CANTINA

From the outside, this cantina is very unassuming. A plain brick building on the outside, the signage is small and it is easily passable. Inside is similar, it is cafeteria-esque, with an open kitchen and minimal decor. Don't let the lack of ambiance deter you. The service is good, the menu is large, and the food is delicious.

The tortillas are made on site and the guacamole was perfectly seasoned. To me, there is nothing better than tortilla chips and fresh guacamole. There were six of us at dinner and we all ordered something different to share. Everything was tasty, particularly the enchiladas.

Where: 635 Cass Street Monterey

CRAFT BEER AT PETER B'S



This is a brewery that is cranking out fresh beers, and decent food to match. The atmosphere is welcoming and sitting at the bar makes socializing with other folks easy. The best thing to do when trying a new brewery is to go with a sampler. The flight of beer at Peter B's allows you to choose five different brews that pique your interest.

My favorites were the Coffee Imperial Stout and the Citra IPA. The Citra IPA was grapefruity and light, while the stout (made with Acme coffee) was clean and smooth. Chris loved the Double IPA.

Grab some appetizers, to compliment the beer. We loved the big pretzel, buffalo wings and ceviche!

Where: 2 Portola Plaza Monterey

“RESIST CORPORATE COFFEE” AT ACME COFFEE ROASTING

This tiny open air coffee bar and wholesale roaster is kind of hidden behind a garage, and you might have to drive around a few times before locating the small parking lot. The motto behind Acme Coffee Roasting is “Resist Corporate Coffee”, and they are doing everything they can to provide better brews than places like Starbucks (they are succeeding!).

They have a variety of different roasts from all over the world that can be bought by the pound, or enjoyed at the shop. The Cold Brewed Coffee, though a bit expensive, was outstanding. I came back for multiple cups a day.

Where: 485 Palm Ave. Seaside

OLD MONTEREY FARMERS MARKET



You can find a farmers market every day of the week in Monterey County, and every Tuesday, all year long, the Old Monterey Farmers Market sets up shop. Three blocks of the street shut down to crowds of people browsing produce tents, artisan shops, and food trucks.

Musicians entertain the crowd, as they stroll down the street tasting food and people watching. My favorites were the chips and homemade salsas, hummus from Hummus Heaven, almond brittle, and the tent of mustards and olive oils.

Where: Located on Alvarado Street between Del Monte and Pearl

INCREDIBLE VIEWS AT NEPENTHE RESTAURANT



One of the best views I have ever experienced while eating! The restaurant is perched atop a cliff, and has an almost 180 degree view of the ocean and coastline. The restaurant and bar upstairs fills up, but the cafe downstairs seems to move tables quickly.

We ate at the cafe and had a delicious meal of sandwiches, beer, and mimosas as we stared in awe at the amazing scenery before us. The meal was not cheap, but it was tasty, and the ambiance and view cannot be beat.

Where: Highway 1, Big Sur

BOEKENOOGEN WINERY



We spent a day making our way around Carmel Valley stopping at every winery for a tasting. I am much more of a craft beer connoisseur than wine drinker, but I do know when I taste a wine that I like. Out of all the wines I tasted on my wine tour, the wines at the Boekenooogen Winery were my favorite.

The ambiance of the tasting room was excellent: a rustic outdoor patio and small indoor bar. They offer two different tasting options; five wines for \$8 and seven wines for \$10.

Where: 24 West Carmel Valley Rd. Carmel Valley