

## Getaway Guide: Family Fun in Monterey, CA



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French, Italian, Japanese, Spanish and Icelandic, those are just a few of languages we heard while strolling around Cannery Row, the Aquarium and the enchanting Fisherman's Wharf of **Monterey, California**. This serene and beautiful hamlet isn't just a must-go destination for those of us in the Bay Area but for the whole world.

Monterey is known for its thriving natural habitats, its beautiful views and vistas, as the iconic subject of John Steinbeck's masterpiece *Cannery Row* and for the awe inspiring Monterey Bay Aquarium. While this small town is often a destination for a romantic getaway, it also happens to be a perfect place for families to explore, enjoy and to make memories that will last a lifetime.

We headed south to Monterey to experience some of what the town had to offer first hand and have come back with suggestions of what can't be missed in this gem of the California coast. We want to hear from you, too! Make sure to rate and review you favorite Monterey spots on the Mommy Nearest app.

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**Best place to stay: [Hotel Pacific](#)**



A short walk away from Fisherman's Wharf, in downtown Monterey, you'll find the Mission style Hotel Pacific, an all-suites boutique hotel. Checking in, we noticed oodles of other families coming and going. The large rooms—with Wi-Fi, fireplaces and extremely comfortable beds—are a perfect choice for visiting families. Our room had a small balcony so we could sit back, relax and enjoy the clean sea air. Their complimentary continental breakfast is a great way start to the day and offerings included various cereals, bagels, blueberry muffins, fruits, Greek yogurt, juice as well as coffee and tea.

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**Best place to see sea life up close: [The Monterey Bay Aquarium](#)**



No matter what age your kids are, the Monterey Bay Aquarium, located in an old sardine factory, is an absolute must. You can see the adorable otters being fed, be mesmerized by their collection of jellyfish, learn about the habitats of Monterey Bay and play in the kid-centric Splash Zone.

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**Best way to get a history lesson: [Waterfront Cannery Row Tours](#)**

Tour guide, historian and author Tim Thomas is a fourth generation native of Monterey and provides daily tours of the area. His informative tours will give you and your kids context for what you are seeing in Monterey. And we promise you'll walk away with a much greater appreciation of area—from the Native Americans who once called the land home to Steinbeck's iconic book based on the town and the different kinds of sea life that put the town on the economic map. Tim offers tours daily from 1 to 3pm.

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**Best place to go tide pooling: [Asilomar State Beach](#)**



Tide pooling among the rocks at Asilomar State Beach is a perfect family adventure. There is a rich abundance of sea creatures that you'll be able to spot from anemones, hermit crabs and the occasional starfish. Make sure to wear shoes that have good gripping capabilities since the rocks can be slippery and bring an extra set of shoes with you just in case.

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**Best way to see the seals and otters up close: [Monterey Bay Kayaks](#)**



Yes, you can see the kinds of creatures that live in Monterey Bay in the Aquarium and from the docks and beaches, but it's especially magical when you can see sea otters, harbor seals, sea lions, marine invertebrates and the birds of the Bay up close in their actual habitat from a kayak. We like the tours from Monterey Bay Kayaks (\$45 per person), a safe and family friendly experience that will take you into the Monterey Bay harbor and along the Fisherman's Wharf area. After slipping into a sturdy wetsuit (optional) and a life jacket and getting an introduction to the basics of kayaking, your guide will take you out into the gorgeous Bay and will lead you to amazing and unforgettable views of the inhabitants of the area. We saw otters leisurely laying on a small kelp forest, seals swimming yards away and starfish, crabs and anemones clinging to the walls of the piers.

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**Best place to play: [Dennis the Menace playground](#)**



Sometimes kids just need to run around and be, well, kids. Make sure to carve some time out of itinerary to take them to the Dennis the Menace playground in El Estero Park, named for cartoonist Hank

Ketchum's iconic character and who spearheaded the design of the whimsical park. Kids love the suspension bridge that hung across the park as well as the tall climbing wall, crooked slides and the mini hedge maze (yes, they have a hedge maze!). There's even a statue of Dennis the Menace to take photos with!

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## Best places to eat



If your family is keen on seafood plucked fresh from the ocean, then you will all love the food choices in Monterey. Fresh fish, calamari, clam chowders and various dishes made from shrimp are available at restaurants all around town.

### Abalonetti Bar and Grill

Nestled among the shops and eateries on Fisherman's Wharf you'll find the old-school Abalonetti Bar and Grill, a family-friendly restaurant serving up seafood, steaks and pizzas fresh out of their wood burning oven. We sampled the Roasted Gilroy Garlic, Marinated Monterey Calamari, Sesame Crusted Ahi Tuna, Steak and the Popcorn Shrimp (which my daughter gobbled up), all of which were delicious with generous portion sizes. Ask to be seated outside if you want to dine al fresco, which can be great for kids.

### Jacks Restaurant & Lounge

For a more white table cloth type dining experience, stop by Jacks Restaurant & Lounge in the ground floor of the Portola Hotel in downtown Monterey. For lunch, they serve up classic dishes such as Caesar Salads, Club Sandwiches and Roasted Filet Mignon Sandwich. They also have a pirate themed kid's menu with dishes like Black Beard's Pasta, the Barnacle Burger Bites and the Ships Ahoy Hot Dog.

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## Tips for Your Visit:

- Make sure to walk part of the [Monterey Bay Recreation Trail](#). The trail actually runs 29 miles, but the walk from Fisherman's Wharf to the Monterey Bay Aquarium is not just doable but totally majestic.
- Monterey is an awesome place to visit any time of year, but it particularly nice in the summer, spring and fall. Winter can be a bit chilly, though it is prime time for whale watching (they migrate from January through March)

- While you are there, make sure to do the 17 Mile Drive and visit Carmel.
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