



MAY 10, 2016

## Why Monterey Should Be Your New Favorite Travel Destination



Guess who finally made it to [Monterey](#)? This girl! It's one of those places that most Californians visit at least once, but it took me over 20 years of living in California to get over there. Better late than never I suppose.

I had an amazing time in Monterey and am already planning my visit back. Even though I was there for a weekend, I didn't come close to seeing everything I wanted to. The Monterey tourism [website](#) says to **#GrabYourMoment**, but in reality you need to grab a LOT of moments to see all there is to offer. But first, an extra exciting announcement: I've partnered with See Monterey to show you all the great things there are to do in Monterey County.

First of all, where is Monterey?

Monterey County is [located](#) in Central California, about 5 hours north of Los Angeles and 2 hours south of San Francisco (by car). Officially, it includes Monterey, Carmel-by-the-Sea, Big Sur, Pacific Grove, Pebble Beach, Carmel Valley, Salinas Valley, Moss Landing, Marina, Sand City, Seaside, Del Rey Oaks and Salinas.

*So why should Monterey be your new favorite travel destination (even if you don't know it yet)? Well simply put, it has something for every type of traveler. Don't believe me? Well, read on...*

## Getting there:

The best part about Monterey County is its location. While **flying** into Monterey Regional Airport (MRY) is the quickest way to travel, the real thrill of getting to Monterey is **by car**. While the most direct route will only take you five hours, the scenic route along Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) will have you wishing the road trip wouldn't end. If you'd rather let someone else take the wheel, the **Amtrak** Coast Starlight will take you directly from Los Angeles to Salinas. From there, you're one quick bus transfer away from Downtown Monterey.

## Where to Stay:



If you're looking for somewhere luxurious and in the center of town, look no further than the [Portola Hotel and Spa](#). It's less than a 5 minute walk from Fisherman's Wharf and a 20 minute walk to both Cannery Row and the Monterey Bay Aquarium, which makes it the perfect central location for exploring. My room was incredibly spacious and comfortable – I had such a hard time getting out of bed in the morning! The room had everything I could have wanted and more: complimentary fruit, chocolate, and water on arrival, a gorgeous balcony with a view of the harbor, a giant flat-screen TV and perfect shower water pressure (important!). The hotel itself also has a restaurant, gym, and pool. It's worth noting that the neighboring Conference Center and Portola Plaza are currently under construction, but this just means an awesome new expansion is coming very soon! Parking and wifi are both not included in the rate but are available for an additional charge. Although I usually don't stay in luxury hotels on my travels, I was incredibly pleased with my stay at The Portola. You can book it here [here](#) (affiliate). #TreatYourself

### **For the outdoors lover:**

Monterey County offers an endless amount of hiking trails, camping spots, beaches, and [outdoor activities](#) to help you chase adventure moments. You don't have to spend a single minute indoors if you don't want to!



- Hike and rock climb at **Pinnacles National Park**. Pinnacles is every rock climber's dream, with spectacular rock formations caused by the remnants of an extinct volcano. If you're lucky, you may even spot the famous California Condor, the largest land bird in North America.
- Go whale watching from **Cannery Row**. Some of the world's best whale-watching can be done in Monterey. Go on a tour with the professional marine biologists of *Princess Monterey Whale Watching*, or try your luck on your own by renting a kayak from *Adventures by the Sea*. You're almost guaranteed to spot some sort of exotic wildlife!
- Scuba dive at **Point Lobos State Natural Reserve**. If scuba diving is more your speed, don't miss the unparalleled diving experience at Point Lobos, where large and diverse fish populations reign. This is also a great place for hiking, so come and make the day of it!

*Even though I didn't hike when I went, I spent almost all my time walking outside! There's just too much scenic beauty to be seen.*

### **For the literary lover:**

John Steinbeck fans rejoice! Transport yourself to the setting of your favorite Steinbeck novel by visiting one of these three places and bask in the ultimate literary moment.

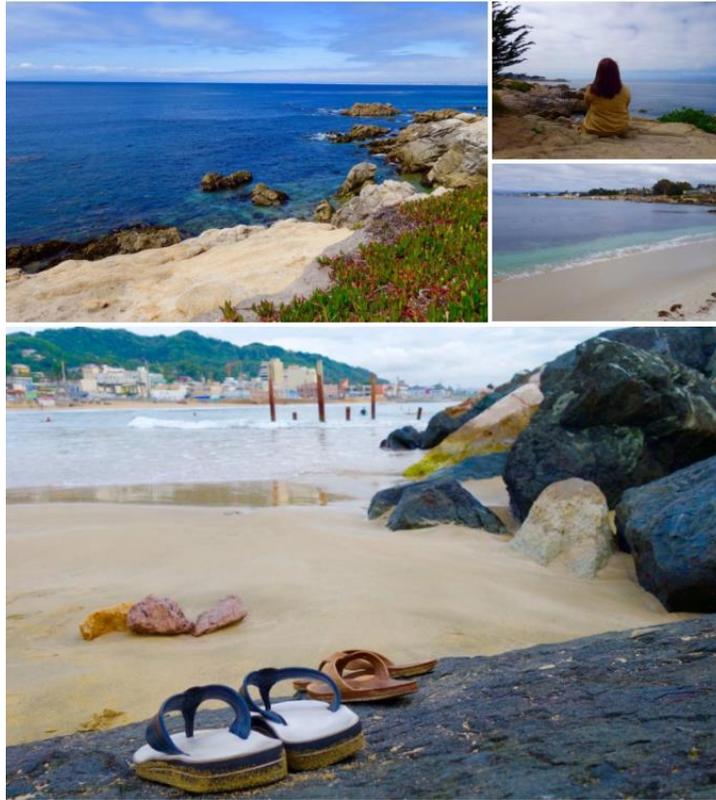


- Dine at the **Pine Inn**: Rumor has it that a few famous writers, including Steinbeck and Upton Sinclair, frequented this inn built in 1889. The antique furniture and décor will transport you back in time, so bring your notebook and get inspired!
- Drive through **Los Laureles Grade**: Drive through the charming Los Laureles Grade in Carmel Valley, the road featured in John Steinbeck's *The Pastures of Heaven*.
- Immerse yourself in history at the **National Steinbeck Center**: What better place to learn more about the award-winning novelist than in his hometown, at the National Steinbeck Center in Salinas? With exhibits spanning a variety of mediums, this is the best place to experience Steinbeck's literature brought to life.

*The only John Steinbeck location I made it to was Cannery Row, but I definitely want to visit the Steinbeck Center on my next visit! It's no secret that I'm a bookworm.*

### **For the ocean lover:**

Surf, sand and sun more your style? Monterey has got you covered with miles and miles of scenic beaches so you can grab life by the nature moments.



- Experience the ultimate beach day at **Lovers Point** in Pacific Park. The picturesque Lovers Point has something for all ocean lovers: swimming, boating, surfing and even picnicking. With features like the volleyball court, grills, and picnic tables, this might be one of the best beaches in Monterey County! The best part? You can walk here from the Monterey Bay Aquarium and the views are *stunning*.
- Ride big waves at **Asilomar State Beach**. If your idea of an amazing beach day is one spent doing water activities, then look no further than Asilomar State Beach. Here you can surf, kayak, or even fly a kite. Don't forget to check out the sea life in the tide pools as well!

*I love a good beach, and once I realized that I could walk to Lovers Point from Cannery Row, I changed my plans and opted to spend a few hours there. As you can see, the views are truly spectacular!*

### **For the arts and culture lover:**

There is no shortage of galleries, theaters, or beautiful historical buildings in Monterey, but I've highlighted a couple of my favorite discoveries. We could all use more cultural moments in our lives!

- Get lost in a new world at The **Forest Theater Guild**. Bring a picnic and plenty of blankets and snuggle up at Carmel's only nonprofit outdoor theater. This is a fun way to spend a cozy evening while supporting the local arts community. Be sure to make reservations in advance!
- Soak in beautiful architecture and history at the **California Missions**. Monterey County is home to three California missions: San Carlos Borromeo de Carmelo, Nuestra Señora de la Soledad, and San Antonio de Padua.

Fun fact: San Carlos served as the headquarters for Saint Junipero Serra, who founded *nine* of today's California Missions. The architecture alone makes it worth a visit!

*So much to do and so little time! I unfortunately didn't spend enough time in Carmel to visit the Missions or the Theater, but...next time!*

### **For the foodies (like me!):**

Fellow foodies, don't fret! Monterey is every [food lovers' paradise](#) with farm to table restaurants, fresh seafood, and a wide range of cuisines. I'm all about the making sure my trips are filled with foodie moments, and these are ways you can too.



- Explore the history of sardine canning at **Cannery Row**. Cannery Row, once a laborer area home to the sardine-canning business has since transformed into the ultimate tourist destination complete with shops, hotels, and restaurants. With plenty of dining options, come for the food and stay for the ambiance.
- Experience the ultimate ingredient-driven cuisine at **Aubergine**, the award-winning restaurant at L'Auberge Carmel. The eight-course tasting menu changes daily and the balance of innovation and flavor has earned the restaurant plenty of culinary awards over the years.
- Eat your way through Carmel. Get to know Carmel through your stomach by taking a guided tour with **Carmel Food Tours**. They offer both breakfast and classic food tours and both are guaranteed to leave you with a happy stomach and newfound perspectives on the history of Carmel.
- Cook your food and eat it too at **Stone Creek Kitchen**. At Stone Creek, you'll find a wide variety of cooking classes for all levels and interests. If you don't have time to take a class, stop by anyway. They offer seasonal meals for lunch and dinner plus plenty of gourmet gift options for any food lover.

**Restaurants:** *I ate at a mix of restaurants while I was in Monterey but the two I highly recommend are **Vivolo's Chowder House** for clam chowder and **Monterey Fish House** for fresh seafood!*

### **For everyone (seriously):**

Some places are so amazing that they'll impress just about everyone. These are my favorite kind of experiences because they turn into lifelong moments.



- Cozy up to the marine life at **The Monterey Bay Aquarium**. No visit to Monterey is complete without at least a few hours spent at one of the state's best aquariums. With over 35,000 creatures, this is the best way to get up close and personal with some of the world's most striking marine life.
- Cruise along the **17 Mile Drive**. With a coastline this beautiful, what better way to experience Monterey than with the 17 Mile Drive, the scenic coastal road stretching from Pacific Grove to Carmel? Be sure to bring your camera and prepare yourself for frequent stops. Tip: There's a toll road payment to drive the road, but if you spend at least \$35 at a Pebble Beach Company restaurant, they'll remove the fee. Make sure you snag a photo of the Lone Cypress, one of the most photographed trees in North America.
- Gawk at the purple sands of **Pfeiffer Beach**. This is not to be confused with Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park nor Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park (both of which, incidentally, offer spectacular hiking trails and waterfalls). At Pfeiffer Beach, you can find stretches of **purple** sand! If this isn't something that will impress everyone, I don't know what to tell you.
- Soak in the culture with one of the many **events and festivals**. Monterey County offers events year-round for everyone to enjoy – plan your visit around food, music, or even whale-watching festivals. Check the [website](#) when planning your next trip!

*I managed to do both the 17 Mile Drive and the Aquarium, but holiday traffic prevented me from hunting for purple sand...this time.*

I had the best time in Monterey and am so excited to go back! Special thanks to See Monterey for inspiring me to go. If you live in California and haven't been yet, GO! You're missing out on a great California gem.