

Destinations

by **JAX FAX**

Travel Advisor's Guide to
Worldwide Destinations

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Absolute Luxury

By Maxine Albert

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Sonoma's Undiscovered Gems You Don't Want to Miss

Sea Ranch Lodge, Sea Ranch

California's legendary Highway 1 is famed for its popular stretch around the gorgeous Monterey Peninsula and Big Sur. But if you head north to the Sonoma Coast passing the towns of Bodega Bay and Jenner, an equally dazzling coastal wonderland awaits. Cruising along this less traveled cliff-hugging road, you'll find stunning views of the blue Pacific, dramatic bluffs and plenty of spots to pull over, get out and take in nature's splendor.

I recommend a stop at Bodega Bay where the Highway 1 stretch begins following a 67 mile stretch on Highway 101 from San Francisco. This small, charming town is home to local shops, art galleries, superb seafood restaurants and friendly folks. You'll also find four hiking trails: each with amazing ocean vistas, colorful wildflowers from spring into summer and soaring seabirds. The trails are short and many combine all. These include: Bodega Head - a huge granite promontory that's part of Sonoma Coast State Park; A trail winding along a bird-viewing path at nearby Doran Regional Park; The East Trail with its southern coastal bluffs, sea stacks, Bodega Bay and sandy, two-mile-long Doran Split; and The West Trail that leads to an overlook view of Horseshoe Cove, the Marine Reserve and is one of California's best whale watching spots from October through February. Post hike savor the tastiest crab cakes, fish tacos, clam chowder and oysters at the fish

market/outdoor café Fishetarian, paired with great sea views.

A PLACE WITH IT ALL

Perched on a bluff where the Russian River meets the Pacific and just ten miles north, the coastal town of Jenner is a great spot to kayak, marvel at harbor seals, brown pelicans, ospreys, great blue herons, and other wildlife or kick back and enjoy the scenic beauty.

Heading 28 miles north on the heavenly highway takes you to Sea Ranch, a community of 7,000 acres of rugged coastline with over 2,000 homes clustered around redwood and Douglas fir forests, cypress hedgerows and trails. **The Sea Ranch Lodge**, a gem of a property set on 53 acres on Sonoma's rugged, beautiful coast in this delightfully secluded locale offers an unrivaled immersion in nature. The iconic lodge which was constructed to blend into the environment, reopened in 2021 and last year the 17 guest rooms opened after a major revamp that created a new fresh look www.thesearanchlodge.com

Accommodations are airy and spacious with cedar walls, custom woodwork headboards, closets and desks, soft light wood furnishings, earth-toned stoneware vases, hand-woven textiles, artisan ceramics and colorful accents. You can really get off the grid here with TV-free rooms that contain Bang & Olufson Beosound speakers for music and Occer

binoculars for whale and seal-spotting. Large picture windows offer breathtaking ocean vistas; striking bluffs, thundering surf, waves crashing into crevassed coves and miles of walking trails literally steps from your door.

The Bluff Trail hugs the cliff top and connects a string of sheltered beaches and coves. Some of the most stunning and dramatic scenery on the entire coast is right on the property. Adirondack chairs facing the sea are perfect spots to read, meditate or cocktail at sunset. Golfers can take advantage of the nine-hole Sea Ranch Golf Links just north of the lodge that incorporates the natural elements of the seaside terrain. Spa/wellness activities include yoga on the weekends, forest bathing at the Farm, guided hikes and blissful in room massages. Guests who rent one of the 11 houses that comprise the Sea Ranch Living program have access to facilities that are part of the Sea Ranch Association including an outdoor heated pool, tennis, pickleball and basketball courts.

The lodge also functions as a community center, since the area is so isolated and the bulletin board outside the café lists activities such as jazz concerts, art shows and writing workshops. While most come here for the solitude and prefer to explore on their own, concierge bookings are available for kayak excursions, wine tasting, and other curated experiences. Since it's such a gather-

Maxine's Travel Tip: I've been on the fence about whether to use soft or hard shell luggage. After my visit to California, bringing back wine from wine country as well as olive oil in my checked luggage - I can unequivocally say: Hard is the better option. It's sturdy, offers more protection and is better for clothing with rain soaked weather. My favorite is **Travelpro** - Great for the price with a zippered 2" expansion option, ultra strong protection, Interior zippered divider panels, adjustable hold-down straps, multiple accessory pockets provide built-in organization, and it's stylish.

Sea Ranch Lodge, Adam Potts



Sea Ranch Lodge, Adam Potts



Dining Room, Sea Ranch Lodge, Adam Potts



Chairs, Sea Ranch Lodge, Maxine Albert



Gorgeous Coastline, Sea Ranch Lodge

ing spot, lodge guests are likely to meet the personable locals at the lodge's bar, cafe or restaurant with its scenic outdoor porch seating.

As to the cuisine: the menu changes often depending on the season. The chef harvests as many of his ingredients as possible from the garden at the lodge's farm just down the road, and sources others from local ranches. Some standouts from my dinner included house-made white nettle mafaldine with oyster mushrooms grown at the farm, fiddlehead ferns, pecorino, Grimaud Farms duck breast and green garlic faro paired with excellent Sonoma wine.

Another excellent option for dinner, the restaurant Coast Kitchen at the oceanfront resort **Timber Cove**, lies 14 miles south on Highway 1. This excellent eatery offers delectable cuisine, fabulous cocktails and an impressive wine menu including the best Sonoma wine.

www.coastkitchensonoma.com

Timber Cove Resort, perched on a dramatic bluff above the Pacific on the untamed Sonoma coastline is a nature wonderland where guests enjoy both majestic redwoods and the cerulean sea. Newly renovated the casual, chic ambiance with warm hues, timbers, midcentury accents, awe-inspiring vistas and a spectacular bar - makes an enchanting escape.

www.timbercoveresort.com

For more information, www.visitcalifornia.com and www.sonomacounty.com