

TO SUR WITH LUST:

Urbanites seeking a sybaritic sojourn should high tail it along California's craggy coastline to the ultimate out West bastion: Big Sur. Wild and rugged, the 90-mile stretch along Big Sur coastline (just 200 mi. north of Los Angeles; 160 mi. south of San Francisco) is possibly the world's most beautiful drive. Designated as California's first scenic highway and a National Scenic Byway, Highway 1 lures travelers with its ever-changing cliffs, pounding surf, spouting whales and dramatic skylines.

For adventurers, Big Sur packs in hundreds of miles of hiking terrain, resident wild animals and all things oceanic. Its seamless blend of rustic yet revered lands have made "El Sur Grande" home to a long list of artists, poets and craftspeople since the area was first settled in the 1870s. A burgeoning arts scene delivers a great day of gallery hopping from metal and marble sculptures to woodcarvings and high-end works of art. Break up the day with a hike to the waterfalls at Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park then slip in for a restful lunch at Nepenthe, a Big Sur institution with rustic alfresco seating and an out-of-this-world view of the Pacific.

PLAY:

Henry Miller Memorial Library – "One of the most famous-and infamous-writers of the twentieth century," Henry Miller spent eighteen years (1944-1962) living in Big Sur while turning out some of his finest work, including [The Rosy Crucifixion](#), a three-volume epic about his life with his second wife, June; and [Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch](#), the story of his life in the region. The funky library, located in a redwood grove along Highway 1, offers a variety of books by Miller and his contemporaries, a sculpture garden, alfresco stage for performances and plenty of Big Sur character. www.henrymiller.com.

Bixby Bridge – Located on Highway 1, Bixby Bridge is world famous and a favorite of photographers and film shoots. More than 700 feet long and 260 feet above the stream below, Bixby Bridge is one of the top ten highest single-span bridges in the world. The bridge is just one chapter in the story of this magnificent scenic highway, officially opened in 1937 at a cost of \$10 million.

Big Sur Hiking Guides – Great way to spend an afternoon on more offbeat treks including Henry Miller hikes, Robinson Jeffers walks, etc. www.bigsurguides.com.

Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park – Enjoy a great day hike with trails traversing tan oak, redwood, madrone and chaparral to an 80-ft. waterfall or spot gray whales from the vista point on Overlook Trail (Dec./Jan.) www.parks.ca.gov; 831.667.2315.

Limekiln State Park - A little known state park of 716 acres with breathtaking views of the Big Sur coastline and hiking trails through redwood groves and along the rugged shore; explore the remains of the limekilns used in the 19th century. www.parks.ca.gov; 831.667.2403.

Pfeiffer-Big Sur State Park – Also home to the 61-room Big Sur Lodge, the 1,006-acre park is packed with conifers, oaks, sycamores, maples and redwood groves. A self-guided nature trail delivers a beautiful waterfall and valley view of the canyon from a wooden perch atop the mountain. www.parks.ga.gov, 831.667.2315.

Andrew Molera State Park – Home base for the Ventana Wildlife Society/Big Sur Cultural & Natural History Center, a reintroduction area for the release of the California Condor. The Ornithology Lab at Andrew Molera Park is a great place to watch bird-banding activities (Mon./Tues.; check for availability). A variety of rugged hiking trails traverse meadows and open up to the ocean, a gentle grade leads up to an aggressive trail running parallel to the sea. Horseback riding is also available. 831.667.2315. www.ventanaws.org; 831.455.9514.

Salmon Creek Waterfall – Set along scenic Highway 1 just short of Gorda, a quick 10-minute hike delivers a wonderful bridal fall cascading over huge granite boulders.

Point Sur Lighthouse Station – Located in Point Sur State Historic Park, the lighthouse has been in operation since 1889 and is the West Coast's only complete turn-of-the-century lightstation open to the public. The lighthouse and nine other buildings, including a complete blacksmith and carpentry shop, are viewable by guided tour. Designated a State Historic Landmark in 1980. Adults \$10; \$5 (6-17), Free (0-5). 831.625.4419. Offbeat: Moonlight tours on full moons.

Nepenthe – Set 808 ft. above the crashing surf, this rickety redwood and glass restaurant sits atop land that Orson Welles bought for Rita Hayworth in 1944. Later, Henry Miller moved in upon arrival to Big Sur. Today, lunch or cocktails watching the sun slip into the sea are a must. An open-pit fireplace fills the rooms with piquant wood smoke, swordfish sandwiches and Castroville artichokes as well as a sizable wine by the glass program are on tap. 831.667.2345.

Lodging

From rustic cabins to world-class inns, Big Sur offers a variety of lodgings.

Treebones Resort – Set on 10 sumptuous acres, this offbeat resort offers 16 comfortable Mongolian yurts with lights, heating, sky domes and a tasty waffle bar. www.treebonesresort.com; 877.424.4787.

The Esalen Institute - Founded in 1962 as an alternative educational center devoted to the exploration of what Aldous Huxley called the "human potential," Esalen is better known for its blend of East/West philosophies, experiential/didactic workshops and breathtaking grounds blessed with natural hot springs. Once home to a Native American tribe known as the Esalen, the Institute sits on 27 acres of spectacular Big Sur coastline with the Santa Lucia Mountains rising sharply behind. A four-year multi-million dollar renovation of Esalen's hot springs was completed in 2004/5. Swimsuits are optional; nudity common. Baths are open to the public by reservation 1:00 a.m. – 3:00 a.m.; \$20. Guestrooms include private units as well as shared facilities and bunks. www.esalen.org; 831-667-3000.

Big Sur Lodge – Located in ancient groves of redwood and oak trees in Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. 61 cottage-style rooms with porches and decks. www.bigsurlodge.com; 800.424.4787.

Big Sur River Inn –Nestled amid towering redwoods along the scenic Big Sur River, the historic Big Sur River Inn is steeped in romance, history and '30s nostalgia. Twenty cozy, rustic rooms with private baths and balconies overlooking the Big Sur River. Also on property are a heated swimming pool general store, restaurant and full bar. www.bigsurriverinn.com; 800.548.3610.

Ventana Inn & Spa – One of the top romantic stops on California's coastline, Ventana Inn & Spa just completed a multi-million dollar renovation of its 60 guestrooms set on 243 lush acres. Nestled on a 1,200 ft. perch overlooking Big Sur's dramatic Pacific coastline, this hideaway offers the discriminating traveler exceptional lodging, restaurant and spa services. The Inn's 12 unique buildings and luxury suites blend seamlessly with their natural surroundings. www.ventanainn.com; 800.628.6500.

Post Ranch Inn – Luxury with a capital "L" including the world-class Sierra Mar restaurant and spa, Post Ranch Inn is tucked into the hillside overlooking the Pacific. The Ranch just added 10 ocean-front suites in 2008. Consistently ranked as one of the top sleeps in the nation, the resort is both architecturally and environmentally stunning. 30 guest accommodations. www.postranchinn.com; 800.527.2200.

Deetjen's Big Sur Inn – True to its roots, Deetjen's is a Big Sur institution with cabin-like accommodations dotting Castro Canyon. Part old Hollywood with a Bohemian twist, the Inn offers 20 guestrooms and private cabins with wood-burning fireplaces, balconies and funky antiques. This is Big Sur right down to the no-telephone, no-television, no-cell service environment. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places. www.deetjens.com; 831.667.2377.

Big Sur Chamber of Commerce – Stan Russell, 831.667.2100; stan@bigsurinternet.com

Big Sur Arts Initiative – Erin Gafill, 831.667.1530; erin@bigsurarts.org

Monterey County – www.seemonterey.com

ANNUAL EVENTS

April

Big Sur International Marathon

Hwy 1, Big Sur to Carmel

Tel: 831-625-6226

www.bsim.org

This marathon, once again named the Best Marathon in North America by *The Ultimate Guide to Marathons*, is set along one of the most breathtaking routes in the world. Other events include a 21-mile power walk, 5K run, 9-mile walk, 10.6-mile walk, and marathon relay. Huge sports expo at the Monterey Conference Center during the week.

May

14th Annual Bird-a-thon

Big Sur

Tel: 877-897-7740

www.VentanaWS.org

Help raise funds for the Big Sur Ornithology Lab while you help the Ventana Wilderness Society count species of birds in Monterey County. Don't know an eagle from an oriole? Join a docent-led Group Count.

May

Big Sur Experimental Music Festival

Big Sur

Tel: 831-667-2574

www.henrymiller.org

In year five of this fascinating fest, the organizers explore the Baltimore-founded *Sound/Shift* concept, inviting 70+ musicians to contribute to one seven-hour improvisation.

May

Big Sur Hidden Gardens Tour

Big Sur

Tel: 831-667-1530

www.bigsurarts.org/garden_tour.htm

Visitors come upon musicians and artists as they discover a half-dozen beautiful home gardens in Big Sur. Receptions round out the usually sold-out tour. Reservations essential.

VISITOR INFO.

Monterey County is located 120 miles/192 km south of San Francisco and 345 miles/552 km north of Los Angeles along the classic California corridor. The region boasts 99 miles of prime Pacific Coastline, the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, three historic missions, 40,000 acres of premium vineyards, 25 golf courses and over 200 lodging properties. Monterey County includes the Monterey Peninsula, Big Sur, North County and the Salinas Valley. The Monterey Peninsula Airport (MRY), just three miles from historic downtown Monterey and minutes from the area's major attractions, is served by non-stop flights to and from Denver (DEN), Las Vegas (LAS), Phoenix (PHX), Los Angeles (LAX), and San Francisco (SFO). www.seemonterey.com.

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