

MARINA, MONTEREY COUNTY'S HIDDEN GEM

Call it the quintessential coastal Rx – fresh sea breezes, expansive white beaches, extreme sports enthusiasts, a stunning dune preserve and plenty of solar rays to melt away urban stress. Located on Monterey Bay just six miles north of Monterey on scenic Highway 1, Marina lays claim to five miles of prime Pacific turf coupled with a true Mediterranean climate ranging from 50 – 70 degrees year-round. For travelers hot on Mother Nature, this outpost is an ideal getaway for hikers, bikers, hang-gliders and kite enthusiasts who thrive on the great outdoors.

Pack a sense of adventure: the 170 acres of protected dunes and beaches including the Marina Dunes Preserve and Marina State Beach deliver a lunar seascape punctuated with surfers silently riding the horizon. Hikers can take the old sand mining roadway to a bevy of rare and interesting plants and birds that call this remote preserve home. Follow the trails that traverse the dunes and double back to the beach for an afternoon picnic. For two-wheeled travelers, tap into the Monterey Recreation Trail, a 29-mile paved path linking Marina to Cannery Row, Pebble Beach's 17-Mile Drive or the remote biking trails of Fort Ord.

Adrenalin seekers can skydive at the nearby Marina Airport, which delivers a view of the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, surreal row crops of Castroville and glistening bay. For more placid pursuits, visitors can take a front row seat on the dunes and watch the whales glide by during the annual winter and spring migrations. Equestrian enthusiasts also have an outlet: Marine Equestrian Center offers daily trail rides along the dunes and shoreline. Two key events make a trip to Marina memorable -- the visually stunning Festival of Winds every mother's day weekend delivers giant kites and hang-gliders who vie for a piece of the sky; the annual Marina Air Faire pushes the envelope every October. www.seemonterey.com.

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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