



CONTACT:

Jenna Palacio

Associate Director of Communications

P: 831.657.6402

Jenna@mccvb.org

John David Van Kirk

Communications Coordinator

P: 831.657.6413

JohnDavid@mccvb.org

***SAVVY TRAVELERS ARE TRADING IN THE HAMMOCK FOR A HIGH SPEED STINT IN EXOTIC ANIMAL TRAINING,
DEFENSIVE DRIVING & PLEIN AIR PAINTING***

Education + Vacation Programs Add Depth to Tourism Options in Monterey County

MONTEREY COUNTY, CALIF. – From defensive driving lessons to frothing the perfect oyster bisque, vacationers today are seeking more than ticking away time in a hot little hammock. With more than 56 percent of U.S. travelers claiming an interest in educational vacations*, destinations have redefined the art of the escape with a host of creative programs set to instill a sense of achievement. Monterey County offers an unparalleled classroom rife with 99 miles of prime Pacific coastline, empowering redwoods, culture-rich cities and legendary settings literary greats, artists, poets and photographers have long made famous.

CULTURAL ESCAPES

From rugged landscapes to pounding surf, this region was ripe for Ansel Adams and Edward Weston as well as any budding photographer seeking to hone their skill. Aim, click and go to **Robert Knight's "Earth Expeditions,"** an action-packed adventure delivering the region's top seascapes, waterfalls and wildlife – from red-tailed Hawks to resident whales. This Carmel gallery owner and award-winning landscape and wildlife photographer offers "Carmel Valley & Steinbeck Country" and "California Coast Safari" workshops, field guiding students through a variety of artistic and technical aspects of photography while exploring the rich diversity of iconic wildlife Monterey County lays claim to. Photoshop instruction, private boat charters, transport and meals included. www.robertknightgallery.com/earth-expeditions.php; 831.626.1230.

Michael Seewald's "Fun Shops" features an intensive three-day or week-long photography workshop staged throughout Carmel and Monterey. Tapping into the region top photogenic spots - Cannery Row, Big Sur, Fisherman's Wharf and Point Lobos State Nature Reserve – students learn to create compositions with "controlled eye movement" paired with plenty of field practice. Area gallery treks and critiques, along with group meals, round out the fun shops. <http://tiny.cc/G17KW>; 760.633.1351

Women seeking to jumpstart their creativity can plug into **Artista "Creative Safaris for Women"** with a three-day Carmel-by-the-Sea getaway focusing on multiple mediums. From collage to abstract painting in acrylic, the courses

include demonstration, experiments and “Chardonnay breaks.” A course in Encaustic Painting - painting with hot wax, one of the world’s oldest techniques - covers the basics from tools and color theory to incising, imbedding objects and rubber stamping. www.artistacreative.com; 831.625.5748.

Pack some shades and a sense of adventure for **Robert Lewis’ “Plein Air Bootcamp,”** focusing on Monterey County’s lush landscapes. Seasonal workshops put artists front and center with on-location painting, instruction and completion of each piece at day’s end. Lewis, a Pacific Grove gallery owner with art shows spanning the nation, delivers a relaxing and informative course, the high note being his favorite alfresco spots from the old Fort Ord lands to Carmel Beach, Monterey Harbor and eye-popping seascapes in Pacific Grove. www.pleinairbootcamp.com; 831.402.8406.

Visitors intrigued with the annual Scottish Games & Celtic Festival (August) or those fascinated by the sunset bagpipers traversing Pebble Beach can try their hand at the **Great Highland Bagpipe** with Michael d’Avenas of the Monterey Celtic Arts Academy. Working with a nine note Mixolydian scale, this traditional bagpipe requires more arm than lung, according to d’Avenas, who also works the Inn at Spanish Bay circuit. The introductory lesson includes a brief history on Scottish bagpipes, instruction on proper fingering of the instrument, basic pipe technique and actual playing. No kilts required. 831.277.5993.

SPIRITUAL STEPS

Who knew one could combine enlightenment with a crash course in sybaritic indulgence? Enter **Tassajara Zen Mountain Center**, a Buddhist-run retreat tucked deep within Carmel Valley. From “Discovering the Dharma of Money” to “Relationships as Spiritual Practice,” guests can check in (via an hour and a half off-road drive) and truly check out with drop-jaw vegan cuisine, gourmet breads, massage and soothing soaks between workshops. Established in 1966 as the first Soto Zen monastery outside of Asia, Tassajara straddles the rugged Santa Lucia highlands on ancient turf combining natural hot springs, forested mountains and creek side trails. The telephone-, television- and electricity-free retreat offers a variety of lodging from classic Redwood Yurts to Tatami Cabins and turn-of-the-century Stone Rooms fronting the creek. Seasonal (May – early September). www.sfzc.org/tassajara.

Situated on 120 world-class acres in Big Sur, **Esalen Institute** is the one-stop shop for pumping up human potential with 500+ annual workshops traversing poetry to painting, rolfing, relationships and writing. Words like “ancient wisdom” and “self-aware consciousness” flow as freely as the nurturing natural hot springs, set above the crashing surf in a gorgeous bath/massage house. From seminars in “Beyond Yes: Negotiating with Wisdom,” to “Tantra: The Art of Conscious Loving,” these heavenly grounds have seen the likes of three Beatles, President Gorbachev, Aldous Huxley, Abraham Maslow, Hunter S. Thompson, John Steinebeck, Joan Baez and local wordsmith Henry Miller. www.esalen.org.

Couples wanting to work out their kinks can take to the massage table with an **“Art of Massage”** program at **Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa**. Set smack on Monterey National Marine Sanctuary with a backdrop of barking seals, seagulls and resident otters, this four-star property’s penthouse Vista Blue Spa pairs couples with a resident therapist for a two-hour course in relaxation massage including technique and hands-on practice. Champagne and strawberries conclude the afternoon and as a return home gift, students receive recipes for the spa’s signature Monterey Bay Salt Glo treatment. Overnight accommodations included. www.MontereyPlazaHotel.com.

WALK ON THE WILD SIDE

Clock the comeback of the California condor with a two-hour “**Condor Viewing Tour**” via **Ventana Wildlife Society**. This educational program uses radio telemetry to track the wild birds while traversing the stunning Big Sur coast. Visitors key on songbirds should tune into the “Best Birding in Big Sur Tour,” a three-hour trek starting at the Society’s bird banding lab then field scouting for some 375+ species along the Big Sur River in Andrew Molera State Park. For hard-core Condor enthusiasts, the “Condor Viewing Tour & Base Camp Visit” features a full day eco-trip to the remote base camp and rearing release facility. An “Overnight Tour” for a minimum of two people is also available; donations support the Society.

www.ventanaws.org.

If cats have you considering a career switch, **Vision Quest’s Animal Training School** is the stop. Located on 50 acres of rugged outback in Steinbeck Country, this working facility and rescue camp housing 100+ animals offers two-, five- and 10-day courses for enthusiasts interested in learning animal training, showmanship and husbandry. These hands-on courses require physical and mental work, coaching a bevy of lions, cougars, elephants, tigers, camels, reptiles and birds of prey. From Oz the leopard to Brandi --an American black bear of *Grizzly Adams* fame— students are immersed in all things Animal kingdom. Also available: A deluxe seven-hour Walk with the Animals program.

www.visionquestranch.com/html/training_school.html.

CULINARY KICKS

Sweet tooth can check into the monthly cooking and pastry classes rolling out at **L’Auberge Carmel**. Executive Pastry Chef Ron Mendoza (formerly of the French Laundry) puts guests through the paces from crafting a fearless flambé to tweaking summer fruits into a symphony for the senses. Cooking classes with Executive Chef Christophe Grosjean and Wine Exploration courses, including the art of pairing wine and modern cuisine, are also offered. www.laubergecarmel.com.

Bring the benefits of organic farming back home with farmer Mark Marino at **Earthbound Farms**. Set on 32 prime acres in Carmel Valley, the nation’s largest grower and shipper of organic produce steps up with seasonal field classes and workshops from creating stepping stone garden paths to crafting corn husk dolls. Shears in hand, snip a basketful of florals then belly up to the design table with a local florist to learn the art of flower arranging. Educational Bug Walks and Harvest Walks – where kids can clip their own vegetables to take home – round out the options.

www.ebfarm.com.

From artichokes to arugula, a technical tour of the “Salad Bowl of the World” is a ripe opportunity to learn about the underbelly of one of the nation’s top agricultural producing regions. The seamless sea of row crops that stretch from land to sea in the Salinas Valley have inspired both star chefs and John Steinbeck. Pack the family for an outback education on all things green via **AgVenture Tours**. Kick off the tour with a visit to a working artichoke ranch, walk the fields observing harvesting, planting, irrigation and all aspects of organic farming. Muse the micro-greens and learn the low down on new technology from agricultural expert Evan Oakes, whose personal relationships with the farmers make this a true insider’s tour. www.agventuretours.com.

Annual events are another way to indulge both mind and palate. **Monterey Bay Aquarium’s** renowned Cooking for Solutions celebrates sustainable seafood and healthy choices in food and wine to protect the soil, water and ocean wildlife. A Friday culinary gala, plus events at the aquarium, educational adventures and cooking demonstrations round

out the event. Top toques spice things up throughout the weekend; past participants have included Alice Waters, Alton Brown, Thomas Keller, John Ash and Rick Bayless. www.cookingforsolutions.org. **Pebble Beach Food & Wine** uncorks a variety of seminars for the avid oenophile. Belly up for a course in blending five top varietals into a cult cabernet cuvee or grab a glass for a technical tasting of the “Global Range of Pinot Noir” with wines represented from France, Italy, Oregon, California and New Zealand. Continue the search for the ultimate juice with a swing through Monterey’s Santa Rita Hills appellation, home to a cache of top-shelf Pinot Noirs. www.pebblebeachfoodandwine.com

SPORTING CHANCE

Ready to master a street sports car or hone those defensive driving skills? Buckle up for a true testosterone test at the **Skip Barber Racing School at Mazda Raceway Laguna Seca**. The “One Day Combo” course puts the pedal to the metal with instruction on high performance defensive driving including slide and recovery techniques and race-style heel-and-toe downshifting. Strap into a high-octane Dodge Viper on the world-famous 2.24-mile, 11-turn track and approach the Corkscrew Turn at 100 m.p.h., practicing braking, downshifting and cornering in split second intervals. One-day “Introduction to Racing” courses also available. www.skipbarber.com.

Get some air with **Sky Dive Monterey Bay’s** new training program, which transforms enthusiasts into certified skydivers in two to three days. This fast track method blows socks for anyone high on kissing the sky with seven freefall training jumps paired with intensive ground instruction. For those seeking a more leisurely adventure, take the plunge via the “world’s highest tandem jump” at 18,000 feet. A quick 20-minute training and safety briefing, paired with an instructor and dual harness, delivers a birds’-eye view of the Monterey Peninsula and Marine National Sanctuary following a throat-choking one-minute freefall clocking in at 120 miles per hour. www.skydivemontereybay.com.

On the waterfront, **Marina State Beach** is the tipping point for hang-gliders and kite boarders, thanks to its powerful infusion of afternoon and early evening winds. Visitors can set up and launch just south of the parking lot. For a less strenuous stint, tag into Noah Greenberg’s **Carmel Surf School**. This 20-year veteran of the swells can turn any novice into a sure-fire surfer in two to three lessons; minimum age: three years! www.carmelsurfllessons.com. For the more leisurely set, stroll the pristine Marina Dunes Preserve, punctuated with wild flowers and the occasional harbor seal. www.mprpd.org/parks/marina.htm.

New on the radar of ocean experiences is **Kayak Surfing**. Learn the art of carving, roll techniques and getting in/out of the wave in a safe, serene environment. Lessons and a full line of specialty surf kayaks enable a beginner get their groove on. Those hot on Laird Hamilton’s new sport can hit the waves running with classes in **S.U.P. – or stand-up paddling**. This trend combines surfing with canoe-style paddling in a stand up position, exercising the core and sense of balance. Learn the basics of balance, strokes and paddling techniques. www.adventuresbythesea.com, www.kayakconnection.com, www.montereybaykayaks.com.

Seeking a rendezvous between a rock and a hard place? Learn the ropes via **Sanctuary Gym at Pinnacles National Monument**, a top locale for learning the art of rock climbing on 23 million-year old formations. Home to the California condor release program and a crazy collection of crimson conical spires, the Pinnacles’ multitude of options is suited to both beginner and advanced climbers. Key areas are rigged with permanent anchors allowing for safe instruction and ascension. Day courses include the basics of top roping, anchor building, belaying, knot tying and safety

practices. On a lighter note, this is also ground zero for ranger-led bat walks, “experiential” night hikes and eyeing 20+ condors who reside on this lunar-scape. www.rockgym.com; <http://www.nps.gov/pinn/index.htm>

Visitors can also sleuth the seas via **Monterey Bay Dive Center** with a full day Discover SCUBA program. Instruction and dives in the Monterey Bay National Sanctuary (with an underwater canyon twice as deep as the Grand Canyon), Point Lobos State Nature Preserve or San Carlos Beach offer insight into the region’s rich diversity of sea life.

www.montereybaydivecenter.com. For the smaller set, **Monterey Bay Aquarium’s Underwater Explorers** program treats kids 8 - 13 years to an aquatic adventure with a surface SCUBA dive in the Great Tide Pool on Monterey Bay.

www.mbayaq.org.

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, 24 golf courses and over 250 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), San Diego (SAN) and San Francisco (SFO). www.SeeMonterey.com.

#

*TIA “Voice of the Traveler” survey, 2006.

04/2011