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***NATURES NUPTIALS: MONTEREY COUNTY IS THE ULTIMATE ALTERNATIVE
FOR ALFRESCO WEDDINGS & HONEYMOONS***

MONTEREY COUNTY, CALIF. – From Big Sur’s rustic redwood groves to kayak at sea ceremonies, the region’s natural assets are a top choice for couples coveting mother nature. Kick the city option and head for the sea, vineyards, greens or redwood groves for a wedding certain to spark the flames of any outdoor enthusiast. With Monterey County’s variety of vow options, finding the right setting for a wedding or honeymoon is truly a piece of (wedding) cake. Consider the backdrops: Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, 40,000 acres of vineyards, 99 miles of prime Pacific coastline, 24 golf courses and two of the nation’s most romantic enclaves: Big Sur and Carmel-by-the-Sea.

GET NATURAL

Go green with a wedding among the redwoods in **Big Sur**. These 2,000 year-old towering temples always seem to put things into perspective and are the perfect love potion for tying the knot. Prior to the wedding, make like the Esalen Indians, hundreds of years prior, and trek deep into the forest to the largest Big Sur waterfall for a Marriage Purification Ceremony via **Big Sur Hiking Guides** (\$200). Other Big Sur options include beachfront vows at **Andrew Molera State Park**, riverside rituals at **Big Sur River Inn’s** lush perch or a garden grove wedding at **Ventana Inn & Spa** with 50-mile views of the Big Sur coastline to seal the deal.

What’s fluid, sexy and full of life? The sea! Why not exchange vows aboard a kayak for two on Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary or **Captain Dutch’s** –30’ sailboat offering overnight lodgings for the ultimate rock-the-boat honeymoon. A plethora of at-sea options include luxury yachts and streamlined sailboats moored in Monterey Bay. For a “reel” experience, tap into a fishing expedition/wedding and fresh fish fry via **Randy’s Fishing & Whale Watching** and Café Fina or **Monterey Whale Watching**. Another offbeat venue is a group naturalist-led kayak tour and wedding with the backdrop of Pacific Grove’s famed **Lover’s Point Park**, followed by a reception at **Adventures By The Sea’s Pirate’s Cove**, a private beach house on the bay with alfresco huts, clambakes and bonfires.

Experimental types might consider a wedding above terra firma. A haven for kite boarders and hang-gliders, **Marina Dunes Preserve** and **Marina State Beach** deliver a lunar seascape, punctuated with surfers silently riding the horizon. Couples can wed on a pristine sand dune then exit stage left on their favorite craft. This is also an option for surfers marrying at sea. Nearby, the remote dunes and biking trails of **Fort Ord** – an impressive network of 86 miles of scenic mountain bike trails and wild flowers – is an ideal backdrop for a casual wedding of biking enthusiasts who can hit the trails en masse for a rip-roaring reception on wheels.

Leaving no stone unturned, the **Pinnacles National Monument** – a spire-swept monument of 23 million-year old volcanic rock formations – is a haven for hikers and rock climbers. Couples can wed amidst the giant rock formations or scale to the top of one of the peaks for a wedding with unparalleled views. Next door, Chalone Vineyards and **Inn at the Pinnacles** make a dynamic reception duo.

Hikers who value nature at its naked best can opt for true bliss at **Point Lobos State Nature Reserve**, home to some of the region’s most dramatic seascapes and thousands of seabirds, seals, sea lions and migrating whales. Noted as “The crown jewel of the state park system,” Point Lobos is also home to the only two naturally growing strands of Monterey Cypress trees remaining on earth and a stunning lineup of beaches worthy of film credits. Top picks include China Cove (filming spot of *The Sandpiper* with Elizabeth Taylor) and Gibson Beach.

Carmel-by-the-Sea is the spot for couples seeking a beachfront wedding, complete with bonfires and a backdrop of Pebble Beach. Carmel Beach and Carmel River State Beach offer their own unique flavor, with the added bonus for being Fido friendly. For a wilder romp, head to **Carmel Valley** for a wedding on horseback. **Holman Ranch**, a 400-acre country estate with breathtaking mountain views and a full stable of steeds, delivers the equestrian dream in style. **Pebble Beach Equestrian Center** also offers surf and inland horseback rides in the pristine Del Monte Forest – perfect for couples seeking a private union followed by a gallop into the sunset.

With 40,000 acres of vineyards, a wedding among the vines is a sure bet in Monterey County. Carmel Valley sports two incredible options: **Bernardus Lodge** and **Chateau Julien Wine Estate**, a 16-acre French country winery in the heart of the valley. Bernardus Lodge also features a stellar rose garden and arbor to parallel its signature Sauvignon Blanc. Larger vineyard settings are available at the far end of Carmel’s Cachagua Valley, a dense winegrowing area including **Heller Winery**. Along the River Road wine tasting trek, **Wrath Vineyard**, **Paraiso Vineyards** and **Hahn Estates, and Scheid** are appetizing options. Nearby, **The Holly Farm** is the perfect mix for a garden wedding at the lush five acre private estate. Reminiscent of an early California hacienda, the grounds include a collection of restored adobes, cabanas and suites for lodging.

For a true romantic walk on the wild side, couples can opt for a wedding at **Vision Quest Ranch**, a 50-acre exotic animal training facility and safari-style lodgings set deep in Steinbeck Country. This magical site is also home to **Wild Things**, an exotic animal training facility with 100+ critters. Exchange vows among the African elephants and fall asleep to the sound of roaring tigers, singing their own love serenade.

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.

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