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# Getting Cozy in Carmel-by-the-Sea

by Jill Gleeson

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Carmel Beach (Source:carmelcalifornia.com)

It's a little slip of a town, just one square mile and less than 4,000 residents. You won't find any gay bars here, no cruising spots. If you're looking for hot-and-heavy hookups you best head to San Francisco, just 120 miles north. But for those who have found their Mr. or Ms. Right (or Right Now), there is no more romantic destination in the country than California's fabled [Carmel-by-the-Sea](#). And as befitting a spot settled by artists on the liberal Left Coast, it is happily gay-friendly and entirely charming.

"The LGBTQ community doesn't have to worry about having a problem in Carmel," says Monta Potter, CEO of the [Carmel Chamber of Commerce](#) since 2003. "It's not a complicated place to be. It's simple, and I think it brings couples closer." Potter, who is gay, adds, "It's a great place to shop, it's beautiful, it's got a wonderful beach. The lighting is different than in most communities... there aren't any stoplights and very few streetlights, so at night you have to walk with a flashlight, which makes it very romantic and it's great to be able to see the sky."



Carmel Secret Garden (Source:carmelcalifornia.com)

### Street Scene

Carmel-by-the Sea's cobblestone streets are rich with architectural gems, from the famed Comstock cottages that resemble a fairytale made real, to the Aspen-style design of [Carmel Plaza](#), located on the town's main street, Ocean Avenue. Consisting of low, one- and two-story structures, many graced with window boxes and planters filled with brilliantly-hued flowers, the downtown offers specialty shops galore.

Among the not-to-be-missed are [Trio Carmel](#), with wine, olive oil and balsamic vinegar tasting and sales; [Lula's Chocolates](#), purveyors of the world's best handmade sea salt caramels; and [Pilgrim'sWay Books](#), boasting a secret garden tucked away in back.

Mysterious pathways wind through downtown, leading to hidden courtyards that just might encourage a quick canoodle. Guide [Gael Gallagher](#), who has been leading tours of the Monterey Bay area for three decades, advises visitors to take their time exploring this labyrinth, calling it one of the town's "great charms."

Pleasing, too, is the lack of fast-food restaurants, neon signs, parking meters, boardwalk and tacky stores that so often befoul seaside destinations. Wise city planners have ensured there is nothing to detract from the white sand splendor of [Carmel Beach](#).



Refuge (Source:Hunter PR)

**Fun in the Sun**

Thanks to a mild climate with an average high of 65 degrees Fahrenheit, the beach is enjoyable year-round. John Haveles, manager of the [Horizon Inn and Ocean View Lodge](#) and a member of the local gay community, advises visitors further enjoy the area's natural beauty by kayaking on the bay."You can rent kayaks and it's just wonderful," he enthuses. "Or, you could rent bicycles and go bike riding. Hike. Do the [food tour](#). And if you like art, we're just inundated with galleries."

For premium relaxation, sample soothing hydra-thermal therapy at [Refuge](#), which features saunas, steam rooms and hot and cold pools. Looking for a more wild than mild adventure? Book an off-roading lesson at [Quail Lodge and Golf Club](#) with [Land Rover Driving Experience](#).

And, of course, Carmel-by-the-Sea remains a cultural Mecca. Along with its 80-some art galleries, the town is home to the Gothic-inspired grandeur of the [Sunset Center](#), where maverick composer Philip Glass hosts an annual festival and performers like k.d. lang love to play.



Carmel Cottage Inn

**Coastal Bites and Comfy Digs**

With roughly 50 eateries in Carmel, most sporting delightful bars, dining out is a favored pastime for residents and visitors alike. Potter recommends the superb sidecars at the Doris Day-owned [Cypress Inn](#); she likes the duck salad at the enchanting [Casanova](#), replete with the imported table where Van Gogh once took his meals.

For cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, Haveles is a fan of [Vesuvio's](#) stunning rooftop bar, though perhaps Carmel's best Italian restaurant is [Cantinetta Luca](#), serving superb pasta and artisan cured meats imported from around the planet. [La Bicycleette](#), with a wide-ranging, Old World menu made from locally sourced ingredients, and [Grasing's](#), dishing out true California coastal cuisine, are also two of the town's finest bistros.

Like its superb restaurants, Carmel-by-the Sea's accommodations offer an abundance of options. Cozy inns are everywhere, but for guests requiring greater privacy, [Carmel Cottage Inn](#) features five beautifully appointed bungalows to rent.

The gay-managed [Vagabond's House](#) greets guests with an on-property spa, while the [Horizon Inn](#), according to Haveles, boasts a winning combination of excellent service, good amenities (including eight rooms with an ocean view) and reasonable rates.

"What I like about the owners here," Haveles notes, "is that everybody is the same. We don't even use the category LGBTQ-friendly. I don't think any of our guests would ever feel unwelcome. They also won't feel singled out as being LGBTQ and that's exactly the way it should be. It's a welcoming environment - we just want people to come and enjoy Carmel, which is a great city!"

Jill Gleeson is a travel and adventure journalist based in the Appalachians of Central Pennsylvania. Find her on Facebook and Twitter at @gopinkboots.

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