



Saturday, November 8, 2014

Girls Getaway to Carmel-by-the-Sea

A place with “by-the-sea” hyphenated in its name must be quintessentially charming. At least that was my mindset visiting Carmel-by-the-Sea for the first time, and the miniscule Californian coastal town doesn’t disappoint. There are no spotlights or neon signs, no addresses and no postal delivery. On residential streets there aren’t even sidewalks, so we literally needed a flashlight to find our way back to our cottage.



Get to know Carmel

This haven for artists, writers and eccentrics has been home to John Steinbeck, Upton Sinclair, and Jack London. Presently, Doris Day and Clint Eastwood call Carmel home. Eastwood was even the mayor from 1986-1988. Thank goodness he overturned a law outlawing ice cream. I would have voted for him based solely on that! The town even requires that anyone wearing “shoes with heels which are in excess of two inches in height and less than one square inch of bearing surface upon the public streets and sidewalks” have a permit! Carmel-by-the-Sea has certainly remained trapped in time, as quirky as when it was founded in 1902.

Since Carmel is only one square mile, everything is within walking distance. The population of less than 4,000 supports a community of more than one hundred art galleries, 50 restaurants and as many cottages and inns to stay in. It’s no surprise that visitors from around the globe are the lifeblood for this precious town. You can undoubtedly uncover plenty to do just wandering on your own, but if you’d like a tour, [Carmel Walks](#) offers a great primer. For a more culinary-focused adventure, [Carmel Food Tour](#) features seven food and drink tastings in a three-hour walking tour. Our guide, Staci, was fun and engaging, and happy to provide recommendations for dining in Carmel outside the tour. Winos will enjoy the [Wine Walk Passport](#), which allows you to try flights at any nine of 14 tasting rooms, including [Scheid Vineyards](#) and [Caraccioli Cellars](#), a couple of my favorites. Pace yourself and do the wine walk over the course of two or three days or the imbibing will catch up to you!



Luxe Life

The pinnacle of luxury in this laidback oasis is [L’Auberge Carmel](#), a charming Relais & Chateaux property first built in 1929. I’m greeted with frothy rooibos-infused iced tea before crossing the courtyard to my antiquated but homey room. Supple caramels on the desk seem like an apropos welcome to Carmel.

[Aubergine](#) is hands down the most exquisite dining experience in town. The table next to

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me was a couple from Mexico celebrating their 25th anniversary. They weren't even staying in Carmel but drove two hours from San Francisco, which doesn't exactly have a shabby dining scene.

At Aubergine, I had the best abalone of my life – tenderized and served with briny seaweed, sea foam and smoked avocado – capturing the essence of the ocean in each bite. Other seafood highlights included kumamoto oysters with ossetra caviar and Japanese snapper served simply with baby bok choy and blood orange sauce. Executive Chef Justin Cogley and Chef de Cuisine Aaron Koseba are masters at procuring the best fish and complementing it with simple, bold accents to let the ingredients speak for themselves.



Relax – live in the moment

The Refuge offers a zen-like experience that is very different from a traditional spa. You can get a massage here, but no facials, body treatments or nail services. Instead, the focus is on the health benefits of a hydrothermal cycle and there is a silence rule throughout the facility to encourage deeper relaxation.

You begin by heating up in a Eucalyptus steam room or Finnish dry cedar sauna for five to 10 minutes before plunging briefly into a cold pool, then relaxing for 15 minutes near the outdoor fire pits or in a zero gravity recliner before exploring the thermal waterfall pools. It's rare to be given step-by-step instructions on how to behave at a spa – I'm used to freely exploring on my own. However, the cycle did get my heart rate up and I felt invigorated after repeating it a couple of times. Plus, the cycle relaxes muscles, flushed toxins from the body, boosts the immune system and is even supposed to increase metabolism. What's not to like?



With a now lightning fast metabolism, head to **Grasings** for dinner. The abalone here is delicious as well, served over a vibrant salad of mixed greens, haricot verts and pomegranate seeds and scallops and wild-caught sea bass are deftly prepared too. For somebody as environmentally conscious about seafood as myself, it's a dream to be eating local seafood in Monterey, where chefs are just as careful about sourcing.

For breakfast or lunch the next day, **La Bicyclette**, a bustling, rustic European café, is a sure bet with a weekly rotating menu of specials. The wood-burning oven pizzas are a staple and although flavors may change, the butternut squash purée with arugula and speck ham and the local mushroom and caramelized onion pie are to die for.



Although there is so much to do to keep you busy, take some time to relax and live in the moment. If you see a passageway and you wonder where it leads to – take a wander. Give yourself time to sit on one of the many benches scattered around town and soak up the sun and people (and dog) watch. Frolic on the beach and wiggle your toes in the Pacific Ocean. Don't turn on the news, leave your worries at home and feel the joy of being alive.

Author Amber Gibson is a Food/Travel Writer, Model & Actress from Chicago currently contributing to the Girls Getaway Guide. To find out more about Amber, visit www.AmberGibson.com.

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About Me

 Casey Wohl - The Getaway Girl

Casey Wohl is passionate about two things: her girlfriends and traveling the world. By combining these two loves, Wohl has created a unique and helpful city-specific travel guide series for women worldwide. An author and award-winning public relations practitioner, Wohl has been featured on national, state and local television, radio, newspaper and magazines. Wohl is a contributing writer for GoGirlfriend, Passionate for Life (online magazine), Girlfriendology, GirlfriendCelebrations and Fabulously40. She has been featured on the nationally-syndicated television programs Daytime and The Daily Buzz, as well as Media Talk, Better TV, FirstWivesWord, and numerous blogs. She has received media coverage on 80 national news sites and publications, such as Woman's Day, Parenting, NBC 4 Washington, NBC 11 San Francisco, KETV 7 Omaha,

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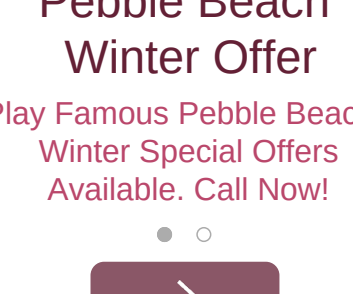
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