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Life / Travel

Carmel, California: Enjoying beach picnics, a wine walk and a sunset concert

Yes, the bijou little town is a great jumping off point to see other things, but it's also a great place to enjoy for its own sake

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DREAMSTIME

Carmel is a twee town on the California coast and has a brand of charm that captivates some.

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By: Jim Harrington Special to the Star, Published on Fri Nov 14 2014

Many travellers use Carmel-by-the-Sea as a base for exploring the greater area, and taking in such nearby attractions as the always-fascinating Monterey Bay Aquarium and the picturesque Point Lobos. I get that. Yet I also understand why someone might never want to leave once they set foot in this lovely European-style village.

Carmel offers just about everything one could want, from sandy beaches and gorgeous scenery to first-rate accommodations, restaurants and all kinds of recreational activities.

It would be a great spot for a month-long vacation — or maybe a longer one.

You can enjoy this gorgeous city in smaller episodes, too, as a weekend jaunt or simply for one perfect day.

A wine walk: When it comes to wine-tasting, people often think of Napa and Sonoma first, but Monterey County is a premiere wine region. And there's arguably no better, or, at least, easier, way to experience it than via the Carmel-Wine-Walk-by-the-Sea, a self-guided, self-paced tour that winds through 12 tasting rooms in a square mile. The stroll includes such wineries as De Tierra Vineyards, Manzoni Cellars and Scheid Vineyards.

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Pick up a \$65 wine-tasting “passport,” which gives you a \$10 flight at each of nine tasting rooms. The best thing about this wine-walk is that you don't have to drive between tasting rooms. Plus, the passport doesn't expire, so you can spread out your wine-tasting over the course of several trips to the area.

Beach picnic: Visitors will find many excellent dining options in and around Carmel-by-the-Sea, but none can offer a view that competes with what you will find at Carmel Beach, just a short stroll from the village down Ocean Avenue. Pack a picnic and revel in the soft sand, exceptional surf and scenic setting. It's one of Carmel's definitive experiences, especially at sunset, which is as dramatic as it is romantic.

Plenty of local businesses can help you pack a picnic, but one of the best spots is 5th Ave Deli, which offers fully loaded picnic “lunchboxes.” The Carmel Classic (\$16.99) includes an oven-roasted turkey and cheddar sandwich, pasta salad, chips and a dessert, while the Deluxe (\$18.50) offers a curried chicken sandwich, green salad, chips, water and yummy carrot cake. If none of the lunchboxes strikes your fancy, simply create your own picnic from the bounty of sandwiches and salads here — or browse the offerings at The Cheese Shop, where you will find items from around the globe.

A tuneful evening: What better way to conclude a perfect day than with some live music at one of Northern California's best venues? Schedule your trip to Carmel when there's something happening at the lovely Sunset Center. This facility, which feels as much like a cathedral as it does a concert hall, boasts some truly mind-blowing acoustics, great sight lines and cozy seats.

The regular bookings include a number of significant local arts organizations, including the Monterey Symphony, Carmel Music Society, Chamber Music Monterey Bay and the Carmel Bach Festival, but the venue also hosts international touring acts. I've seen everyone from folk star John Prine to singer-songwriter Mike Scott at the Sunset Center. The venue also hosts theatre, dance and other events.

San Jose Mercury News

Just the Facts

Wine Walk: Stroll from tasting room to tasting room on the Carmel Wine Walk-by-the-Sea. A tasting passport costs \$65 and is available at the Carmel Chamber of Commerce Visitor Center, San Carlos Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues, carmelwinewalk.org.

Picnic: Choose from a number of gourmet sandwiches, salads and picnic “lunchboxes” at the 5th Ave. Deli and Catering, Fifth Ave. between San Carlos and Dolores streets; 5thavedeli.com. Find The Cheese Shop at the corner of Ocean and Junipero Ave., thecheeseshopinc.com.

Music: The Sunset Center has concerts and other events booked through mid-2015. Recommended upcoming shows include R&B-gospel legend Mavis Staples on Jan. 18. Find calendar and ticket information at sunsetcenter.org. The venue is located at San Carlos Street and Ninth Ave.

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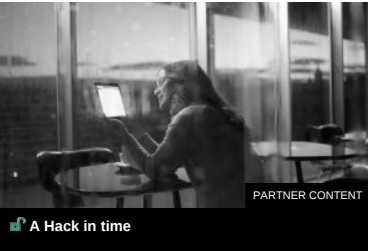
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