

Living the fairytale in Carmel

Kathy Strong, Special to The Desert Sun

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(Photo: Courtesy photo)

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An escape to Idyllic Carmel on the northern part of California’s central coastline does not have to be an ocean or countryside decision—you can easily have the best of both.

Nestled on one of California’s most scenic slices of coast is Carmel-by-the Sea or simply “Carmel,” known for its enchanted storybook setting—almost too perfectly charming to be real.

The walkable one-square-mile village is filled with Comstock thatched- roof cottages draped in flowers, hidden courtyards, romantic inns, cobblestone walkways and countless art galleries sprinkled among cozy Euro-inspired bistros.

If that isn’t enough to inspire a trip, then simply walk just a few blocks out of the village and the view is pure California coastal bliss, complete with rugged rocks, “ghost trees” whipped by the wind and a sparkling sea that leads to the green of Pebble Beach.

Just as intoxicating, is rural Carmel Valley just thirteen miles inland with its own laid-back charm. The salty breeze that permeates the village is replaced with the sweet aroma of fresh country air. You’ll discover rolling hills dotted with vineyards and award-winning wineries, celebrity cuisine and destination resorts with championship golf, horseback riding, cooking lessons—and even beekeeping.

The Village by the Sea

Carmel-by-the-Sea is a natural destination for romance with its storybook charm, but it is equally known for its dog-loving nature. Carmel is consistently ranked as one of the nation’s top pet-friendly



Exploring Carmel with your dog, Monterey County, California (Photo: Kerrick James)

destinations, and no one does that better than animal advocate Doris Day's Cypress Inn. The iconic 1929 gem was one of the first California hotels to welcomes pets. The Cypress Inn has seen a parade of overnight animal guests, including parrots, cats, iguanas and pot-bellied pigs. Standard amenities include concierges carrying grain-free dog treats and guest rooms equipped with dog bowls, plush dog beds and a Cypress Inn logoed collar tag. Don't be surprised with the evening turn-down service that leaves chocolates on the human pillows and biscuits for the

dogs.

Another favorite is boutique hotel La Playa Carmel. Freshly renovated, the 1905 former private mansion offers 75 guest rooms and is walking distance to everything. Built for the San Francisco-based Ghirardelli family, the hotel carries on the historic theme with fresh chocolate cookies and milk at turndown each night.

Carmel Trivia

You won't find streetlights, parking meters or even-numbered addresses in Carmel, where Clint Eastwood reigned as mayor from the mid- to- late 1980s. It may have been a relief to city fathers when the celebrity stepped down since Eastwood's presence brought overwhelming attendance, requiring city council meetings to move to larger halls. However, you might still be able to find Eastwood in his restaurant at Carmel Valley's Mission Ranch.

Not publicly known, a local ordinance remains on the books in Carmel—although not enforced. The city fathers decided to ban the wearing of high heels in the village to avoid falls on the quaint cobblestone walkways. No problem if you decide to bring your highest heels—just stop for fun by City Hall to sign a waiver of liability.

Fun fall events

On October 1-4, you'll be treated to "Taste of Carmel," featuring the area's local food and wine, live music and more at the historic Carmel Mission. Purchase a "Wine Walk-by-the-Sea Passport" that grants tasters a choice of any nine of the fourteen area tasting rooms in a self-paced stroll throughout the food and wine weekend.

The city of Carmel and the Monterey Chapter of the American Architects have

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collaborated for decades on one unique event held on Carmel Beach. The “Great Sand Castle Contest” takes place this year on October 4 from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. Anyone can enter the sand sculpting contest, and prizes are given out in lots of innovative categories. Don’t be surprised to see “bribery” in the form of bottles of wine or food for the judges.

Valley meanderings

You’ll sample some boutique wineries in Carmel, but head to Carmel’s rural side—just a short drive inland—to discover sun-blessed Carmel Valley that has become known for its burgeoning wine growing industry. Follow Carmel Valley Road starting at scenic Highway 1 and meander eastward, winding along Carmel River past endless opportunities for outdoor recreation and wine tasting. Quaint Carmel Valley Village with dining, antique shops and art galleries is where folk singer Joan Baez was living during the 1960s. Carmel Valley is also home to Garland Ranch Regional Park with more than 4,000 acres offering mountain trails for hiking, biking and horseback riding along the willow-lined banks of the Carmel River.

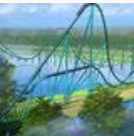
Harvest Weekend at the Ranch

Nestled in lavender fields, Carmel Valley Ranch is the perfect destination to relax, golf, spa, eat epicurean delights—and, believe it or not, learn about beekeeping. The 500-acre resort recently emerged from a multi-million dollar revitalization and is abundant with outdoor offerings, from archery to horses. Two fitness centers, two outdoor salt swimming pools, nine tennis courts and a full-service spa will keep you happily entertained.

Winding through the core of the resort from the valley floor though the foothills is the Carmel Valley Ranch Golf Course. As the only Pete Dye design in this part of California, the 18-hole, par-70 course has earned a reputation for its stunning views, friendly wildlife, tactical challenges and playability.

Carmel Valley’s unique microclimate bathes the course in more than 300 days of sunshine each year, and the location just a few miles from the coast which means that temperatures are comfortable, offering ideal playing conditions year-round; the course was designed to take advantage of dramatic elevation changes and verdant natural beauty.

Carmel Valley Ranch also possesses its very own sustainable, four-acre pinot noir vineyard and recently debuted its first *Swing* wines. The vineyard celebrates its harvest October 9-11 with an event-filled Harvest Weekend when the *2014 Swing*



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Reserve Pinot Noir will be released. Enjoy interactive vineyard tours, a “Sip like a Sommelier” workshop, wine luncheons and dinners, as well as a movie night featuring “Bottle Shock.”



Stretching 99 miles along the Pacific, Monterey County is home to some of the most spectacular coastal scenery in the country. (Photo: Courtesy of Monterey County CVB)

If you go

- Cypress Inn; www.cypress-inn.com; (800) 443-7443
- La Playa Carmel; www.laplayahotel.com; (800) 582-8900
- Carmel Valley Ranch; www.carmelvalleyranch.com; (855) 687-7262
- See Monterey; www.seemonterey.com; (888) 221-1010

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