

Carmel-by-the-Sea: Quirky by design

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By Ron Stern | Global Gumshoe

Imagine a sleepy coastal town whose lifting morning fog reminds you of a cozy English village set among towering pines and cypress trees. Now picture the same place with no street addresses, sidewalks, parking meters or streetlights; a place where houses have names like Periwinkle and Sea Urchin and where four-legged friends are as welcome as the two-legged variety. Is this a dream? No, you are in Carmel-by-the-Sea.

Not willing to become a conventional city, early residents consisting of writers, artists and studious types decided to make Carmel-by-the-Sea, sometimes referred to as Carmel, a very special and unusual place to live. Built on a slope overlooking magnificent Carmel Bay with its white-sand beach, one of its most famous architects was Hugh Comstock. In 1920, he constructed a small fairytale doll cottage to house his wife's expanding doll collection. Complete with rolled eaves and asymmetrical designs, these "Comstock houses" were in high demand. Today, 21 survive, including the Tuck Box Restaurant on Delores Street where, in keeping with the English theme, you can enjoy afternoon tea.



Carmel-by-the-Sea might remind you of a seaside English village. (Photo by Ron Stern)

You might feel sorry for a new UPS driver in Carmel as, unlike any other city, this one doesn't have any street addresses. Rather, residents pick up their mail at the post office, which was meant to encourage meeting your neighbors. How do you find a house, you ask? Simply head three blocks north of Mission to the green house on the west with the name Purple Petunia.

What other oddities mark this town? How about no high heels or ice cream cones. Yes, you heard right. The former was owing to the uneven nature of the streets due to intruding tree roots, which a city attorney a long time ago felt was a liability issue. The law has been on the books since the 1920s, but, never fear, you can get around it by going to City Hall where they will issue you an official waiver. Actually, nobody was ever cited for this offense, and the certificate is more for show than anything else. Men can

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even apply ... in case the mood strikes.

As for the ice cream cone ordinance, rather than see sticky goo end up all over their nice streets, they simply banned the sale and eating of this confection. Enter Clint Eastwood, aka Dirty Harry, who ran for mayor on a pro-business platform in 1986 and repealed the law.

All this isn't to say that Carmel doesn't have much to offer visitors. Quite the contrary. There are 45 small inns, about half of which are dog friendly; 90 art galleries; 14 wine tasting rooms; and 60 restaurants, all within 16 walkable blocks.

For a city that is only 1 square mile, you can choose from quite a range of food options (including ice cream). There are, reportedly, more restaurants per capita here than in any other place on Earth.

At Trio Carmel, you'll sample fine wines, vinegars and olive oil. The Carmel Bakery on Ocean Avenue is a popular place for coffee and pastries, and their humungous chocolate macaroons are a popular choice. The Cypress Inn, located at Lincoln and Seventh, is co-owned by Doris Day and is, of course, pet friendly. You can spend the afternoon or evening in their emerald-lit bar watching Doris Day's old movies, having a meal and enjoying some Prohibition-era cocktails. Try the Orange Blossom that comes with a side of jellybeans, a popular choice when Ronald Reagan was filming here.



The Cypress Inn in Carmel is co-owned by Doris Day. (Photo by Ron Stern)



Carmel restaurants range from simple to elegant. (Photo by Ron Stern)

If you visit, make sure you are in good health because Carmel doesn't have a cemetery. The only exception is for the town dog, Pal, who is interred on the grounds of the Forest Theater.

As day gives way to evening, you'll also notice another Carmel peculiarity — darkness. Except for the internal glow of some houses or businesses, you will find yourself walking along uneven streets in pre-Edison days. The reason is simple, to be able to see the stars and moon, which is a nice thing. So make sure you bring a flashlight to light your way.

Nearby are other attractions that you may wish to visit such as wineries (75

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(Photo by Ron Stern)

in Monterey County), Big Sur, Cannery Row and the Monterey Bay Aquarium. The latter is a first rate operation with many dark hall exhibits including the mesmerizing orange-hued crystal jellyfish.

Camel-by-the-Sea may have its quirks but that's what makes it such an amazing place to visit. When you're not out shopping or eating, you can relax all tucked in at a local inn, sitting by the fireplace with a glass of wine and listening to the sounds of the

waves lapping the ocean shore. Go ahead and live the dream.

FTC disclosure: Promotional considerations and sponsorship provided by those mentioned in this article.

—Contact Ron Stern at travelwriter01@comcast.net.

Resources

Carmel

carmelcalifornia.com

Where to stay

Tradewinds Carmel

tradewindscarmel.com

Where to eat

Anton & Michel (modern European)

antonandmichel.com

Casanova Restaurant (Carmel's most romantic)

casanovarestaurant.com

La Bicyclette (European-style café)

labicycletterestaurant.com

Trio Carmel (specialty oil and vinegar)

triocarmel.com

Terry's Lounge at the Cypress Inn (classic cocktails and cuisine)

cypress-inn.com

Lula's Chocolates (hand-made chocolates)

lulas.com

The Carmel Wine Walk by-the-Sea

Available for purchase at the Carmel Chamber of Commerce for \$65 and provides tasters with a "Wine Walk flight" at their choice of any nine of the 14 tasting rooms.

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