

Monterey Bay, in two unique ways

Carmel-by-the-Sea and Carmel Valley offer widely different experiences

BY JIM BYERS, POSTMEDIA NEWS SEPTEMBER 4, 2015



Chateau Julien is a fine winery in the Carmel Valley, with excellent wines and very informative tours. Jim Byers/ For Postmedia News

CARMEL, CALIF. — Most travel stories focus on one particular destination. The trouble is, some people like luxury hotels and some like to save money. Some folks love to swim, others like to hike. Some folks drink beer, others prefer wine.

So here's the first of a story format I call "Two Ways." It allows me to give more information to you, thus allowing you to make more informed decisions about where to spend your money.

For my first Two Ways feature, I'm focusing on the gorgeous Monterey Bay area of Northern California; specifically on how Carmel-by-the-Sea and the next-door Carmel Valley offer such widely divergent experiences.

Carmel-by-the-Sea

This is the town made famous by the likes of Bing Crosby and Clint Eastwood. The utterly delicious Pebble Beach Golf Links anchors the north end of one of the world's prettiest beaches; a pure white stretch of sand with rolling waves and lolling sea lions. You'll find a marker with Crosby's likeness near the first tee of the course, which features stupendous views of the Pacific Ocean and the rising, coastal mountains in the distance.

Homes here are luxurious with a capital L, often with Spanish influences and expansive windows and patios. The streets of the town are lined with posh, designer shops and galleries selling a mix of high-end and affordable art. The landscaping is tremendous, too, with lush, green parks and flower beds and sweet-smelling evergreens that soak up the coastal fog.

The Hog's Breath Inn is a fine restaurant/pub owned by Eastwood, the town's former mayor, so stop in and make his day.

One great way to explore is to get a Carmel Wine Walk passport. For \$65 US you get a passport that never expires and allows you to visit nine of 14 winery tasting rooms spread around the compact town, which sits on a gentle slope of land rising up from the beach. It's great because you can walk between appointments and not have to worry about drinking and driving. And you can taste some very fine, locally made wines.

If you do drive, you don't want to miss the famous 17-Mile Drive; one of the most romantic and softly beautiful places in the world for a car tour. If you pull into Pebble Beach, look for the parking lot/beach access sign near the 17th green and the 18th hole tee box for magnificent views.

One of the best options for a place to stay is La Playa Carmel. It's a deluxe, 75-room property close to the beach (some rooms have ocean views) that's celebrating its 110th birthday this year. There's free wine tasting at night, not to mention milk and chocolate chip cookies (the hotel was built as a private home for a member of the Ghirardelli family). They have bikes you can take out for a spin, as well as a lovely pool and sumptuous grounds. The breakfast buffet is a doozy, complete with tasty sparkling wine from movie director Sophia Coppola (at least when I was there).

Carmel Valley

Carmel-by-the-Sea can be cool and drizzly at times, but Carmel Valley is well inland, away from the coastal fogs. Days are usually warmer and sunnier and drier; a key factor when you're investing in a holiday at U.S. exchange rates.

The valley alternates between narrow sections with windy roads (great for a convertible) to broader sections with open vistas and deep green golf courses. The hills are great for hiking, as are the open spaces and meadows at Garland Ranch.

Chateau Julien is built to resemble a French château and is one of dozens of fine wineries in Carmel Valley. They do great tours and their Merlots and Chardonnays are marvellous. Bernardus makes some wonderful Pinot Noir and other varieties and has a small, but cute, tasting room where the emphasis is on the product more than the architecture.

You'll find several cute villages up and down the valley, which would make for a marvellous bike trip if you've got the legs and lungs to handle some pretty serious inclines. A motorcycle trip would be glorious.

It's not Pebble Beach in terms of the views or stature, but the course at Quail Lodge is both walkable and quite pretty. It also recently had a major renovation. The lodge itself is wonderful, with lovely landscaping and a small pond or two with large units and swimming pools scattered about. I stayed in a large unit with tons of space, so it could be a great spot for families. The on-site restaurant, Edgar's, was serving a fantastic kale salad with almonds, peppers and feta cheese when I was there.

Carmel bills itself as the most dog-friendly spot in the U.S. Quail Lodge even has Max, a Torbec (Toronto-Quebec) poodle who's known as the head of PR — pet relations. Max's owner, Sarah Cruse, is the hotel GM and hails from Toronto.

© Copyright (c) The Vancouver Sun

[Previous](#)

[Next](#)



Chateau Julien is a fine winery in the Carmel Valley, with excellent wines and very informative tours. Jim Byers/ For Postmedia News

