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The Gorgeous Golf Courses Of Carmel, California

Pacific sunsets, storybook neighborhoods, and world-famous golf distinguish California’s Carmel.

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Pebble Beach Golf Links Hole 18

Carmel is a funky, fun, fabulous retreat for golfers as well as artists, writers, newlyweds, wine lovers, surfers, beach lovers, and bohemians of every stripe. The locals aren't snooty, and dogs are welcome everywhere. Celebrities walk the streets without fear of assault by autograph seekers—even the tourists are well behaved. Carmel has something for everyone as long as they don't take themselves too seriously.

The dot on the map on the southern bend of the Monterey Peninsula that is Carmel-by-the-Sea is a single square mile of gingerbread architecture, cobbled passageways, and café dining just steps away from an arc of white sand beach stretching from the rocky coves of Point Lobos to the eighth hole on famed [Pebble Beach Golf Links](#). Spend an hour roaming around, and you'll see why it is known as one of the most romantic cities in the world. Carmel is perfect for aimless walks, casual look-sees, and sunset viewings followed by candlelit dinners.



Poppy Hills

Great golf, of course, is a given. Every golfer simply must play Pebble Beach at least once. Is it expensive? Ridiculously so: \$495 + caddie! But walking those 18 glorious holes along the Pacific is a religious experience that's worth every penny. Forget what it costs and forget your score, too. Just revel in the thrill of fighting the wind to hit the seventh green while the surf crashes around it and sea lions frolic in the waves. Or how it feels to take dead aim at the same pin as Jack Nicklaus and Tom Watson on the historic 17th hole. And how can you put a price on playing perhaps the best finishing hole in America with the ocean to your left, OB right, and always a small gallery of onlookers hovering around the 18th green? Exorbitant greens fees? Who cares! When you walk the fairways of Pebble Beach Golf Links, you play where giants have played.

Pebble Beach gets all the headlines, but [Spyglass Hill](#) is arguably the better golf course by many standards. It's measurably harder, has more than a few intimidating shots, and can more severely punish a near miss. Spyglass may not have quite as many iconic holes, but it has more than its fair share of fabulous scenery, too. The opening hole reflects the dual nature of the course—trees, elevation, and the ocean combine to make a classic introduction to the layout. The hole is a long, downhill par five with a tee shot that threads a corridor of pines to reach the dogleg at the bottom of the hill. Once you've cleared the corner, the hole turns left and greets the ocean. The extensive bunkers in front of the green echo the dunes and beach beyond it.

[The Links at Spanish Bay](#) is the “bargain” course among those operated by the Pebble Beach Resorts (not counting

Del Monte), but there's nothing cut-rate about the golf to be played there. It's long enough (6,821 yards from the tips), tough enough (74.0 rating and 140 slope), and scenic enough to warrant a trip for its own sake. Spanish Bay is like the youngest sibling in a family whose two older brothers were star athletes before him in school. If they hadn't been born, he'd have all the raves to himself.



Spyglass Hill Golf Course No. 3

Spanish Bay has a links look with wind-swept fairways, tough waste areas and dunes to punish wayward drives, and greens that often invite a bump-and-run approach; although the turf is a little lush to rely on a ground game the way you would on a real links course. Surf and sand are the dominant themes of the front nine, where you can practically walk in the water when playing the par-three eighth hole.

One of the most successful course renovations in recent history was revealed last year at [Poppy Hills](#). Robert Trent Jones Jr. totally transformed his original 1986 design to make it better integrated with the natural landscape and more playable for golfers at all levels. He didn't make it easier, just better. Poppy Hills now features wider fairways with less artificial mounding and fewer out-of-place bunkers that previously punished seemingly perfect shots in the fairway. To keep it challenging, there's now very little grass rough to keep your off-line drives from rolling into the trees of the Del Monte Forest. That unfortunate roll also happens more frequently now, too, because the fairways were rebuilt to make them firm and fast. Hit it straight and you'll be happy.

You'll also see many new sandy waste areas, many of them in front of tees, that not only give Poppy Hills the scruffy, natural look favored today but also greatly reduce the water and chemicals required to maintain essentially unused acreage. The look and playing conditions aren't far from the new Pinehurst No. 2.



Links at Spanish Bay No. 6

For a pure-sunshine experience of central California, wander inland along the 15 miles of easy road through Carmel Valley. It's beautiful in a different way from the coast, but dotted with excellent restaurants, wineries, and outdoor experiences like the Land Rover Experience Driving School at [Quail Lodge and Golf Club](#), which also happens to be a casually upscale lodging alternative just minutes from the coastal attractions. The classic Robert Muir Graves golf course at Quail Lodge was refurbished recently and takes its place among the valley's other premier courses like Rancho Canada and Carmel Valley Ranch.

Even golfers need stuff, and shoppers in Carmel-by-the-Sea can ramble into 90 art galleries, innumerable unique stores like the Soiled Doves Bath House or Rumble Seat Music, antique shops, candy shops, hat shops, toy shops, and Grooming By The Sea, a full-service pet salon where walk-ins are expected. Need a place to hang your newly bought hat? Carmel features 45 inns like the quirky Lamp Lighter Inn and its sister property Forest Lodge, where Albert Einstein's visit is memorialized by a comedic mural on the back of one of the cottages. There are also four full-service hotels in the village including the legendary Cypress Inn, once owned by Doris Day.

When food and drink are essential to your well being (and when aren't they?), Carmel can satisfy your every hunger. More than 60 coffeehouses, bakeries, pubs, and restaurants provide a wealth of dining options—with nary a chain eatery in site. The surrounding Monterey County is also home to 75 wineries, most with friendly tasting rooms. One of the great opportunities for oenophiles is the Carmel Wine Walk Passport (\$65) that gives you a \$10 tasting at each of nine tasting rooms in a three-block area.

The social scene continues after dark at spots like the legendary Sade's Bar or the lively piano bar at Clint's Mission Ranch Restaurant. Keep an eye out for the former mayor, Clint ("make my day") himself.

No visit to the Monterey Peninsula is complete without a leisurely drive around 17-Mile Drive, one of the most scenic routes in America. You'll pass not only Pebble Beach but dozens of heart-stopping vistas of the Pacific and the most photographed tree in America, the Lone Cypress, atop its stony promontory at [Cypress Point Golf Club](#).

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