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Epic Honeymoon Road Trip: California's Pacific Coast Highway

Wednesday, June 29, 2016 | by Erin Lindholm

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Photo: Getty Images

Beach towns, off-the-grid escapes, wine country — the Golden State has no shortage of honeymoon-worthy destinations. The grande dame of them all, however, is not so much a destination as it is a journey: California's Pacific Coast Highway offers a taste of all of the above, along with some of the state's finest panoramas.

Departing from Los Angeles, the PCH winds north at a leisurely pace, hugging California's coastal curves for roughly 500 miles before arriving in San Francisco, passing through Malibu, Santa Barbara, Big Sur and

Mr. Burberry

eau de toilette

looping around Monterey Bay along the way. Already California dreaming? Use this [itinerary](#) as a starting point for planning what is sure to be a honeymoon road trip to remember.



Photo: Courtesy of Hotel Casa del Mar

Day 1: Arrive in Los Angeles

Collect your rental car and head straight for the coast: There's nothing like toes in the sand to mark the start of any vacation, let alone your honeymoon! Settle in for the evening at the beachfront [Hotel Casa del Mar](#) in Santa Monica, where suites offer 180-degree views of the Pacific Ocean. Walk out onto the Santa Monica Pier to catch your first — of many — West Coast sunsets.

Pro tip: Look into one-way car rentals between Los Angeles and Bay Area airports (San Francisco, Oakland and San Jose). There is an additional fee but it's worth it.



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Photo: Courtesy of The Goodland

Day 2: Santa Monica to Santa Barbara (85 miles)

It's time to hit the road! With sights set on arriving in Santa Barbara by late afternoon, plan for at least one beach stop and a lunch break somewhere along Malibu's 18-mile stretch — from Nobu to Neptune's Net, there are plenty of options. Where to stay: With in-room yoga mats, record players, and a fleet of beach cruisers, [The Goodland](#) is SoCal cool at its finest. Also: the [Canary Santa Barbara](#), with its rooftop deck in the heart of downtown, or [Bacara Resort & Spa](#) for a dose of luxury.

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Photo: Courtesy of Solvang

Day 3: Santa Barbara to San Louis Obispo (100 miles)

Today's agenda: wine country and California nostalgia. Stop for lunch at Pea Soup Andersen's in Buelton, founded 1924, before detouring through [Solvang](#), a historic Danish village that feels untouched by time. Sample local wines at one of the town's tasting rooms or head to the source itself: The Santa Ynez Valley is home to more than 100 vineyards and wineries. Post up for the evening at the iconic [Madonna Inn](#), a fabulous throwback to another era.

Day 4: San Louis Obispo to Big Sur (120 miles)

Along this stretch of Highway 1 you'll want to stop for scenic Morro Bay, Hearst Castle and to see the elephant seals of San Simeon. The road gets quite curvy; take it easy and enjoy the views. Aim to arrive in Big Sur well before sunset to get settled in the [Ventana Big Sur](#), a luxe zen retreat set amid meadows and redwoods, or the [Post Ranch Inn](#), which is perched on 1,200 foot high cliffs overlooking the Pacific.

Day 5: Big Sur to Carmel-by-the-Sea (50 miles)

Big Sur is a magical place, stick around for a while today to explore — hiking trails are plentiful and reward with incredible views. Alternatively, take time for a little R&R; the Ventana offers yoga, Tai Chi, and pilates classes and has an incredible spa. Idyllic Carmel-by-the-Sea is the perfect stop for the evening; boutique stays include the new [Hotel Carmel](#), a cozy, cottage-style hotel, or [Tradewinds Carmel](#), a tranquil, East-meets-West oasis.

Day 6: Monterey to San Francisco (120 miles)

If time allows, take the 17-Mile Drive, a scenic loop through Pacific Grove and Pebble Beach that finishes not far from the Monterey Bay Aquarium. After an aquarium visit and lunch at Fisherman's Wharf, it's time to hit the road. The most direct route to the Bay Area is to take the Santa Cruz highway north through the redwoods into the South Bay. If time allows, stay on Highway 1, which eventually drops into San Francisco before continuing north over the Golden Gate Bridge — a grand finale, if there every was one.

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