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Travel Feature Story



Carmel-by-the-Sea at 100: It Doesn't Look a Day Over 40

By: CANDICE MERRILL
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As the 100th anniversary of Carmel-by-the-Sea approaches (it's officially on October 31, 2016) not a lot has changed in this sleepy little village of under 4,000 souls. Houses and businesses still have no addresses, the streets are still cobbled and there are no street lights. Okay, I exaggerate but Carmel-by-the-Sea is still a quaint little village full of charming cottages and a relaxing vibe.

There are very few chains allowed in the village, most of the shops, inns and restaurants are individually owned and run, making this place a unique gem in an otherwise cookie-cutter nation.

Artists and art galleries abound as does wine tasting in any of the 14 tasting rooms in town. Learn the history of this sleepy village on a walking tour or relish the food and wine scene on a culinary tour. If art is your thing the art tour will take you to and through the galleries and you'll get to meet some of the artists on the journey.

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We began our stay at the Wayside Inn a quintessential cottage-style inn with overstuffed beds, coffee makers and refrigerators. Some of the rooms have fireplaces, jetted tubs and patios or balconies (ours had all three). There is free wireless internet with a good strong signal and the most wonderful breakfast delivered to your door. You tell them what you want and when (I loved the quiche). Sleeping is easy on the overstuffed bed and it's so quiet and peaceful; a great place to relax and rejuvenate. All the shops are close by so you can park your car and forget it during your stay.

Dinner was at Vesuvio whose cuisine focuses on the foods of Southern Italy. We had many dishes that night but some of the stand-outs were: the spicy crab cake with chipotle aioli, the arancini lollipops, and Chef Pepe's famous garlic bread. My entree of Cannelloni Tricolore was not only a feast for they eyes, it pleased the palate as well. My companion's Veal Scallopine alla Marsala was a symphony of flavors.

For dessert I had the most fantastic Affogato; vanilla ice cream served with crumbles biscotti, hot espresso and Amaretto. Pouring the hot espresso over the cold ice cream and crisp biscotti gave the dish an almost cafe au lait quality, adding the Amaretto took it over the top into the after-dinner drink category. The Limoncello mousse cake was also divine with a subtle lemon flavor and creamy texture.

The next morning we learned all about the Centennial preparations from the former mayor Sue McCloud and Centennial parade master Tom Brocato. If you love a parade, Tom promises music, color and floats on Saturday, October 29. Sue gave someone insight into the village itself like it's dog-friendliness and the fact that you need to obtain a permit to wear high heels taller than two-inches.

We met up with Gael Gallagher of Carmel Walking Tours for a special tour of the village. From the beginnings of Carmel-by-the-Sea at the First Murphy House which was built in 1902 by Michael J. Murphy when he was 17 years old to the 42 hidden passageways and courtyards that dot the village, Gael hit them all. She showed a great knowledge of Carmel, it's history and citizens. The two-hour tour simply flew by.

Lunch was at Terry's Lounge in the Cypress Inn. Partially owned by Doris Day, the Cypress Inn is an animal-friendly place. Terry's Lounge is named after her only child, Terry who died of cancer. After some assorted appetizers of Grilled Brussels Sprouts (surprisingly good), Ahi Tuna Poke (fresh, mild and firm) and Dungeness Crab Timbale (richly delicious) I ordered their Cypress Burger loaded with caramelized red onions, gruyere cheese, bacon aioli and greens. I had it with a side of sweet potato fries. It was a delicious burger, very satisfying. My companion ordered the Cypress Club filled to overflowing with oven roasted turkey, Swiss cheese, bacon and avocado on toasted potato bread. You won't go hungry or unsatisfied with either of these sandwiches.



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Rohana LoSchiavo leads the Carmel Art Tour that we were scheduled for next. Carmel is still a draw for artists since it's founding. It currently boasts over 80 fine art galleries. To get a taste of the art and maybe meet an artist or two, let Rohana guide you through a 90-minute tour.

Dinner was at Anton & Michel in the charming Courtyard of the Fountains. After a recent renovation (completed in February, 2013), Anton & Michel still features some classic table-side service (think flambe desserts and classic salads) with a new California cuisine menu. We started our meal with the yummy Shrimp Spring Rolls with some Asian slaw, a honey glaze and sweet chili sauce. For the entree I chose the Pork Tenderloin with a mustard-molasses glaze, warm red cabbage and apple slaw and beluga lentils flavored with cumin. The pork was fork-tender and the lentils creamy and savory. My companion ordered the Rack of Lamb with citrus-Port sauce, oven-roasted vegetables and bacon-leek potato gratin. The lamb was plentiful and cooked to order and paired well with the creamy potatoes. For dessert we enjoyed a crême brulee with a touch of salted caramel.

The following day we met tour guide Staci at the Sunset Cultural Center (Carmel's state-of-the-art performing arts center) for a food tour. Come hungry and be prepared to eat! A few of the restaurants and specialty shops that stand out in my mind are Affina with it's menu of fresh bites, Casanova housed in a historic building with a warren of rooms, Van Gogh's table (Van Gogh did eat at this table only it was located in France) and hand dug wine cellar. We tasted champagne at Caraccioli wine tasting room and sampled olive oils and balsamic vinegars at Trio Carmel (we tried olive oil and balsamic vinegar on ice cream-sounds weird but it was delicious). We ended the tour with divine caramels and truffles at Lula's Chocolates, a local chocolatier that offers handmade chocolates and goodies.

Dinner that night was at an intimate Spanish style tapas restaurant called Mundaka which features small plates, paellas and cocktails. I began my evening with a white sangria which was a combination of white wine, rum and peach liqueur. This went down far too easily and I found myself ordering another. We tried many dishes that night and all of them were good but there were a few stand-outs. Patatas Bravas was a plate of crispy, golden potatoes on a base of sweet tomato sauce and topped with a creamy aioli. Also of note was the Pulpo "La Perieta," tender slices of octopus on a bed of sliced potato and topped with EVO. The Datiles, bacon wrapped dates filled with goat cheese and almonds, were a slam-dunk winner and the Paella Valenciana was a big hit filled with seafood, saffron rice and vegetables.

Another great thing to do in Carmel, but alas we didn't have time for, is the self guided wine walk which gives you opportunity to visit 9 of the 14 tasting rooms that are located on Ocean Avenue. You get a flight of wines at each room! But I'll be back because the passes do not expire and it will be the perfect excuse to visit Carmel again.

I did take time out to visit the beach which is dog-friendly and very picturesque, be sure and bring your camera. I did a little shopping in the quaint shops and a bit of relaxing. Oh and did I mention that the weather was glorious? If you need to get away and want to travel to a European village without leaving the country visit Carmel-by-the-Sea.

The 411:

The Wayside Inn, Mission Street and 7th Avenue.
(831) 624-5336, www.waysideinn Carmel.com

Vesuvio Restaurant, 6th Avenue and Junipero
(831) 625-1766, www.chefpepe.com/restaurants/vesuvio

Carmel Walks
(831) 223-4399, www.carmelwalks.com

Terry's Lounge, Cypress Inn, Lincoln Street and 7th Avenue
(800) 443-7443, www.carmelterrys.com

Carmel Art Tours
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(831) 624-2522, www.carmelcalifornia.org/things-to-do/wine_walk_passport.aspx

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