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Not your Uncle Sam's attic

By Jessica Gresko and Brett Zongker

One of the perks of living in the Washington region is our proximity to world-class museums and collections. We may have to share the bounty with more than 20 million tourists each year, but in the winter we can enjoy the National Gallery of Art's Renoirs, the Hope Diamond at the Smithsonian Natural History Museum, and the Library of Congress's vast collections in relative seclusion.

Another beauty of ready access is that we can easily return when something new arrives. Last month, the Smithsonian's Renwick Gallery, which focuses on crafts and decorative arts and is located across the street from the White House, reopened to the public after an extensive two-year renovation. And the public will be able to greet the National Zoo's new panda cub Bei Bei starting next month.

Speaking of new arrivals...

With millions of artifacts ranging from first ladies' dresses to the flag that inspired the national anthem, the Smithsonian Institution has been cheekily known for decades as "The Nation's Attic." Just don't let the new head of the Smithsonian catch you calling it that.

David Skorton, the former president of Cornell University who joined the Smithsonian on July 1, says he's "not fond of that expression."

"I think about an attic as somewhere that you sort of put stuff that you used to be interested in and might be interested in again someday. You don't know for sure. The Smithsonian, I've learned, is much more dynamic than that," said Skorton, a physician who was president of the University of Iowa before taking over at Cornell.

Skorton is the Smithsonian's 13th secretary. He oversees the Smithsonian's 19 museums and galleries, its zoo, a staff of 6,500, and an annual budget of more than \$1 billion. He replaces Wayne Clough, who led the institution for six years.

In an interview with the Associated Press, Skorton appeared to have settled in to his office on the second floor of the Smithsonian Castle, the 1855 building on the National Mall that was the Smithsonian's first.

In shelves lining one wall, Skorton — a cardiologist — had a model of a heart. A



Dr. David Skorton, the new Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, oversees 19 museums and the National Zoo. A cardiologist and former president of Cornell University, Skorton enjoys getting feedback from visitors and staff about the Smithsonian's vast holdings.

white hard hat from a recent tour of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, set to open in 2016, sat on a mantle. And in a corner was a music stand where Skorton, who plays jazz flute, says he sometimes plays at the end of a long day.

Then there's the sign on his desk with the letters "PGATUS." That's short for: "Please go ask the Under Secretary," one of Skorton's deputies. He's joking, but the sign is an acknowledgement he doesn't have all the answers.

One thing Skorton has been working on in his first three months is connecting with and hearing from the Smithsonian's staff. "I'm so hungry for and dependent on that feedback," he said.

At Cornell, he made himself accessible by

giving out his email address, joining Facebook, writing for the student newspaper, and living in a dorm for the first week of school. At the Smithsonian, he's also been giving his email address out and urging people to write.

He says he hopes at some point to join a Smithsonian Sleepover, where kids spend the night in a museum, though the 65-year-old Skorton says he'd need an air mattress. And he said he wants to do other things where he can "taste the experience" the Smithsonian is giving visitors.

"I could read a 200-page briefing, and it would be very valuable. But nothing's quite the same as sitting down with an eighth grader and saying, 'Is this cool? Is it

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Leisure & Travel



The 250-room Biltmore, in Asheville, N.C., is the largest private home in the country. Read about this and other attractions on page 51.

Monterey: natural and celebrity attractions

By Barbara Ruben

On a crescent of rock-strewn coast that juts from central California, John Steinbeck set one of his most acclaimed novels, *Clint Eastwood* was once mayor, Doris Day owns a hotel where dogs are revered guests, and actors like Bill Murray and Ray Romano tee off at a world-renowned gold course.

While the Monterey Peninsula has a celebrity pedigree, it is also famed for some of the state's more spectacular coastline and home to some non-human icons as well, including back-paddling sea otters, barking sea lions, and cypress trees that thrive on moisture from coastal fog during the area's long dry spells.

Located 120 miles south of San Francisco and 345 miles north of Los Angeles, the Monterey Peninsula includes four primary towns: Carmel-by-the-Sea, Pebble Beach, Pacific Grove and Monterey, each with their own personalities and attractions.

Cozy Carmel-by-the-Sea

Located at the southern end of the peninsula, the town of Carmel-by-the-Sea looks as if it sprang to life from a book of fairy tales. Cottages with peaked thatched roofs, curving eaves, rounded doors and asymmetrical stone chimneys designed by Hugh Comstock in the 1920s dot the town. The first two cottages, fittingly, were named Hansel and Gretel.

While some are private residences, oth-

ers house stores and restaurants, like Tuck Box, a tiny stucco restaurant with flower boxes and a red and white striped awning that serves lunch and afternoon tea. The Lilliputian House of Sweets, with stucco walls and a mossy roof, sells homemade fudge and licorice imported from Australia, Holland, Finland and many other countries.

Clint Eastwood served as mayor of the 3,800-resident town from 1986 to 1988. However, he wasn't the one who enacted some of its idiosyncratic laws.

For instance, wearing high heels over two inches requires a permit. While the local police do not cite those in violation of the ordinance, this peculiar law was authored by the city attorney in the 1920s to defend the city from lawsuits resulting from wearers of high-heeled shoes tripping over irregular pavement distorted by tree roots. No chain restaurants or stores are permitted within town limits.

Early leaders wanted the village to avoid becoming "citified," so there are no house numbers or streetlights. Those seeking directions receive hints like "fifth house on the east side of Torres Street, green trim, with a driftwood fence." (The city of Carmel starts at the borders of Carmel-by-the-Sea and does not have the same restrictions).

Canine residents are king in Carmel. They can run leash-free on the beach at the end of Ocean Avenue, which slopes steeply out of the business district down to

PHOTO © SEEMONTEREY.COM



That's some water hazard at the Pebble Beach Golf Links! The course — one of three that overlook the Pacific Ocean in the area of Monterey, Calif. — has hosted five U.S. Opens and will host the next in 2019. It was ranked number one on *Golf Digest's* list of America's Greatest Public Courses this year.

the sea. They are welcome at some of the town's 60 restaurants (by law they can't be in the main dining area, but can hang out with their owners when they dine outside, in the lobby and lounges).

Many business owners keep water bowls outside for thirsty pooches. More than 500 poodles from across the country descend on Carmel each October for a poodle parade, in which many dogs are dressed to the nines, from sunglasses to feather boas.

Animal lover Doris Day, who started a foundation devoted to all creatures great and small, has co-owned the Spanish revival style Cypress Inn in Carmel-by-the-Sea for the last 30 years. Movies, such as *Pillow Talk* and *Please Don't Eat the Daisies*, play on the TV in the bar.

"We firmly believe that pets are an integral part of the family," the home page of the inn's website states. "Pets may join their humans throughout the hotel, in the cozy living room for afternoon tea, or in our charming courtyard for breakfast or evening appetizers," it continues.

Home to writers and artists

Carmel has also been a haven for artists and writers for the last century. Poet Robinson Jeffers built a house on Scenic

Drive, which curves along the windswept edge of the ocean, using granite boulders from the shore of Carmel Bay. It was here he wrote most of his major works, and today, 65 years after Jeffers' death, Tor House is open for tours.

Writer Jack London also lived in Carmel for a time, as did singer John Denver, who died here in 1997 when his single-engine plane nosedived into the ocean after take-off from the Monterey Regional Airport.

The craggy coast also drew landscape photographer Ansel Adams, who moved to Carmel Highlands a few miles south of town and lived there for 20 years, until his death in 1982.

Renowned early-20th century photographer Edwin Westin extensively photographed Point Lobos, now a state reserve just south of Carmel, with gasp-worthy views of crashing waves, sun-bathing sea otters, twisted, flat-topped cypress trees and hiking trails.

The work of both photographers is on view and for sale at the Weston Gallery, one of more than 90 galleries in town. There's even a gallery devoted exclusively to the art of Dr. Seuss.

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PHOTO COURTESY OF CARMELCALIFORNIA.COM

Carmel-by-the-Sea is home to more than 20 cottages that would look at home in a book of fairytales. Some are residences, and others house businesses, such as the Soiled Doves Bath House, which sells soap and other bath products.

Monterey

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Golf courses with a view

Just north of Carmel, the unincorporated community of Pebble Beach is best known for its three golf courses that overlook the Pacific Ocean: Spyglass, Poppy Hills and Pebble Beach Golf Links. They are consistently ranked among the top ten courses in the nation. In 1919, green fees at Pebble Beach were \$2 for men and \$1.50 for women. Rates now range from \$350 to \$400 per 18-hole round.

The AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am each February draws a host of celebrities for its last day of play. Last year, singers Michael Bolton and Huey Lewis took park, along with actors Craig T. Nelson, Bill Murray and Chris O'Donnell, not to mention former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

Pebble Beach is also at one end of 17-Mile Drive, which hugs the shoreline and is considered by some to be one of the most scenic drives in the world.

It is also one of only nine private toll roads in the country, and the only one west of the Mississippi. It's worth it to pony up the \$10 per car to drive a slow arc along the road, which ends in Pacific Grove. Between the views, which seem to get more spectacular around each bend, and the tourists (especially in the summer), be prepared to spend well over an hour on the drive.

The often photographed Lone Cypress tree, located near the Pebble Beach end of the drive, is nearly 300 years old. The Monterey Cypress is a species native only to this region, and can live up to 4,000 years.

Aquatic life

Monterey dates back more than 400

years. Spanish merchant Sebastian Vizcaino was the first European to set foot on the Monterey Peninsula in 1602, and christened Monterey after the viceroy of New Spain, Count de Monte Rey.

After changing hands a few times, the city of Monterey eventually served as the original capital of California when the state constitution was signed here in 1849.

The city's biggest draw is the Monterey Bay Aquarium, which attracts nearly 2 million visitors each year to view the 300,000 marine plants and animals to be found there. One wing has a million gallon tank that depicts the open ocean. A three-story "kelp forest and deep seas" display features creatures never before brought to the surface.

Outside, the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary covers 5,312 square miles — one and a half times the size of the largest national park in the continental U.S. At its center is an underwater canyon twice as deep as the Grand Canyon.

It was in Monterey that native son John Steinbeck wrote *Cannery Row*. The novel is set in Monterey during the Depression, on a street lined with sardine canneries. In reality, nearly 250,000 tons of sardines were processed here in 1945, the year *Cannery Row* was published.

Preserved one-room cabins where the workers lived can be visited near the aquarium. The National Steinbeck Center, a 37,000 square-foot facility, is believed to be the largest facility devoted to a single American author.

Other cultural attractions include the widely acclaimed Monterey Jazz Festival, which takes place each September and is the longest continuously running jazz festival in the world.

Butterfly City USA

Laid-back Pacific Grove lacks the glitterati of Carmel and Pebble Beach, as well as the busy streets of Monterey around its world-famous aquarium.

But here, you can visit the beach on a summer afternoon and only have to share it with maybe a dozen others.

Also, there are many hotels just a few blocks from the ocean (updated from their 1950s motel origins) that are much less expensive than ones in surrounding towns. And the center of town boasts numerous

Victorian homes, some of which are bed-and-breakfasts.

Each October, the population of the city's non-human inhabitants swells by tens of thousands as monarch butterflies cluster in pine and eucalyptus trees to spend the winter at the Monarch Grove Sanctuary. The sanctuary is run by volunteers and open to the public. It was created after residents voted on a butterfly tax to fund its upkeep, earning Pacific Grove the nickname Butterfly Town USA.

If you go

Flights to the tiny Monterey Regional Airport (within a half-hour drive of all four towns) start at around \$430 roundtrip on United and Alaska Airlines from Washington-area airports in mid-January.

Or visitors can fly into San Francisco and drive two hours along the Pacific Coast Highway to the Monterey Peninsula. The least-expensive flights to San Fran start at about \$300 roundtrip on Frontier and Delta Airlines.

There is an abundance of lodging throughout this tourist destination.

In Carmel-by-the-Sea, Tradewinds Carmel has Asian-accented décor, including antique and custom designed furniture from Bali and China, fresh orchids and bamboo fountains. Some rooms have fireplaces and partial ocean views. The hotel has been featured in *Architectural Digest*. Rooms start at \$259 a night. See www.tradewindscarmel.com or call (831) 624-2776.

The building that houses the Casanova restaurant in Carmel-by-the-Sea once belonged to a cook for Charlie Chaplin. Diners can eat in a warren of dining rooms, or in a central indoor-outdoor room with a tree growing through the ceiling. The most intriguing room holds just one table — dined at by Vincent Van Gogh in his final days and imported from France.

The restaurant serves Italian specialties, such as a melt-in-your-mouth spinach gnocchi enveloped in parmesan cream sauce, and fettuccine with lobster, clams, mussels, prawns and white wine. Dinner entrees are \$22 to \$53.

For more down-to-Earth prices, try one of the many hotels in Pacific Grove. Sunset Lodge (www.gosunsetinn.com, 831-375-3529)

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Asheville, N.C. — more than the Biltmore

By Beth J. Harpaz

Asheville, N.C., is an old soul of a city renewed by a hipster vibe. Attractions range from new beer breweries and a honey bar (!) to the 120-year-old Biltmore mansion. You can see artists at work in the River Arts District, then go for a hike in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

For some time, Asheville's funky River Arts District has been home to artists, entrepreneurs and eateries in the old industrial area around the French Broad River. But the neighborhood continues to add interesting venues.

The Smoky Park Supper Club, built from recycled shipping containers and specializing in wood-fired cooking, opened in September. The Smoky Mountain Adventure Center, which features an indoor climbing gym as well as rentals for bikes, kayaks, canoes and other gear, opened in November.

And while the Asheville area already has more than two dozen beer breweries, a \$175 million New Belgium facility with a tasting room is expected to be brewing by January. Other breweries range from the artsy hole-in-the-wall Wedge Brewing in the River Arts District, to the gleaming,

modernist Sierra Nevada brewery near the airport. Sierra Nevada, which opened earlier this year, also has an excellent restaurant.

Downtown, the Black Mountain College Museum at 56 Broadway has expanded. Through exhibitions and programs, the museum celebrates the ideals and legacy of a remarkable experimental college founded outside Asheville in 1933.

The school lasted just 24 years, but its faculty was a Who's Who of avant-garde artists and intellectuals, including Willem and Elaine de Kooning, Merce Cunningham, John Cage and Buckminster Fuller.

Don't miss the honey bar at the Asheville Bee Charmer, 38 Battery Park Ave. The shop sells 50 varieties of honey, many from North Carolina beekeepers, but also imported from France, Italy, Spain, New Zealand, Ireland and Scotland. You'll be stunned by how different honey can taste — fruity, woody, earthy, spicy — depending on where bees collect their nectar.

The Center for Honey Bee Research and the "Bee City USA" initiative supporting pollinators and beekeepers are also headquartered in Asheville.

PHOTO BY DEREK OLSON PHOTOGRAPHY/SHUTTERSTOCK



The Smoky Mountains surround downtown Asheville, N.C., home to a variety of attractions for tourists — from the Biltmore, to breweries, to a honey bar at a shop that sells more than 50 varieties of honey.

Classic attractions

For a look at life in the Gilded Age, visit the 250-room Biltmore, built by George Vanderbilt. It's the largest private home in

the country, and it attracted 1.5 million visitors in the past year.

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Monterey

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is just a block from the beach and starts at \$99 a night, while ocean-front Lover's Point Inn (www.loverspointinnpg.com, 831-373-4771) starts at \$119.

The 107-acre Asilomar Conference Ground (www.visitasilomar.com, 888-635-5310) overlooking Monterey Bay includes both modern and historic Arts & Crafts style lodging built between 1913 and 1928. Rates start at \$159 a night.

While the hotel choices are abundant in Pacific Grove, restaurants are not. Head a few miles up the coast to Monterey for a variety of food in a range of prices. Hula's Island Grill is a throwback to the tiki restaurants and bars of the '50s and '60s, popular with locals and tourists alike. Try the blackened ahi tuna steak sandwich with sundried tomato pesto aioli for \$17. To learn more, see www.hulastiki.com or call (831) 655-4852.

Additional travel information is available from the Monterey County Convention and Visitors Bureau at www.seemonterey.com or

1-888-221-1010.

Also see the tourism website for Carmel-

by-the-Sea at www.carmelcalifornia.com or call 1-800-550-4333.



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