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LIFESTYLE TRAVEL

An Enchanting Dream Vacation in Carmel-by-the-Sea



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It all started on a sunny afternoon in Carmel-by-the-Sea on the Central Coast of Northern California. One glorious day, I was so inspired by the beauty of the flowers blooming around town, that I decided to spend time discovering majestic gardens.



My little afternoon adventure led me into the picturesque gardens at La Playa Carmel – a quintessential Carmel-by-the-Sea inn that overlooks Carmel Bay, with sprawling views from Point Lobos to Pebble Beach.

As I was meandering through the gardens, I started daydreaming about staying at the hotel, wishing I could have the chance to capture all the beauty around me.



That magical moment spent fantasizing about vacationing in Carmel-by-the-Sea turned into a remarkable experience just a few weeks later... one that you wouldn't believe unless I told you.



A few weeks after that fateful day in the gardens of La Playa hotel, I received an unexpected invitation from CarmelCalifornia.com, offering me the opportunity to enjoy a vacation in Carmel-by-the-Sea. I instantly thought, “Someone up above must have been listening to my prayers, because my wish was being granted!”.

Since I’m based locally, this vacation was actually a ‘staycation’ for me (making it even easier to say yes). So, of course, I jumped at the chance to turn my mesmerizing dream into an inspiring reality.



Their team told me I’d be staying at **La Playa Carmel** (which I couldn’t be more excited about), in addition to playing tourist for a few days, enjoying a few local activities, attractions, and must-visit destinations in town.



As I checked-in to my “home away from home”, I quickly nestled in and got comfortable. The warm and inviting Spanish-inspired atmosphere makes La Playa Carmel a cozy place to stay, whether you’ve traveled from near or far. The plush accommodations, recently renovated bedrooms (with ocean views), and traditional décor make it a tranquil setting for relaxing in style.



With panoramic garden and ocean vistas, the hotel offers unparalleled views from every corner. You can enjoy wine and appetizers on the terrace, engage in a playful game of life-sized chess (down in the courtyard), or just take in the peaceful views from your bedroom window.



The hotel even offers extra amenities, such as freshly baked chocolate chip cookies and milk each evening, cruiser bicycles to go riding around town, and Sangria in the lobby every afternoon.



Every morning, guests saunter downstairs to the terrace lounge to indulge in a sumptuous Champagne Breakfast Buffet, complete with Make-Your-Own Omelette and Waffle Bars, fresh fruit and pastries, oatmeal, yogurt, granola, and other delectable goodies.



Originally designed in the early 20th century (as a private estate), La Playa Carmel has undergone a series of changes throughout the past century, with its recent renovations over the past few years. This luxurious bed and breakfast is more than just another charming Central Coast inn, it’s also an iconic landmark in Carmel-by-the-Sea, as it’s steeped with rich history and character.



“Once a luxurious mansion built in 1905 by an artist as a gift to his wife, a member of the Ghirardelli family, for over 100 years La Playa Carmel resort has been known as the “Grande Dame of Carmel.” Newly restored, this 75-room **historic hotel** is located just steps from the sands of Carmel Beach and the renowned shops, galleries and restaurants of charming Carmel-by-the-Sea. The cornerstone of one of California’s most prestigious neighborhoods, this landmark Carmel Hotel features meticulously tended gardens, intimate patios, secluded courtyards and a tranquil terrace swimming pool.”



When it was time to finally venture out into town, one of the first places we visited was Devendorf Park for the annual **Carmel Art Festival**. Displaying artwork from local artists, including renowned sculptors and painters, this inspiring festival showcases the impressive work from a variety of artists.



Since I’m a flower aficionado, one of the collections that caught my eye featured a series of romantic flowers, done by local artist, **Stacy Barter** (featured below). Her work captures the whimsy and magic that blooming flowers create through the unfolding of their delicate petals.



After perusing the artwork in the roped-off streets, we took a stroll through the park to get up-close and personal with the life-sized sculptures, including this humorous sculpture of Mark Twain relaxing on a park bench (pictured below with my friend, Hayley).



To explore Carmel-by-the-Sea on foot is one of the best ways to go. Why not indulge in a little local wine tasting along the way?! To make the most of our ‘Sunday Funday’, we opted to do the [Carmel Wine Walk by-the-sea](#), which includes wine tasting passes at 10 local tasting rooms, including Scheid Vineyards, Galante Vineyards, Carmel Road Winery, and more.



We bounced from one wine tasting room to the next, learning about the varietals, superb local growing climate (in Santa Lucia Highlands and the Salinas Valley), and the unique story behind each winery.



A couple of my favorite wine tasting rooms we stopped at in Carmel-by-the-Sea were **Caraccioli Cellars** (as it's renowned for its spectacular sparkling wine) and **Alexander Smith** (which has the most adorable shabby chic-inspired tasting room).



After a long day of exploring Carmel’s wine tasting rooms and art exhibits, it was time to meet the group at the newest Mexican restaurant in town – **Cultura Comida y Bebida**. This unique, authentic Oaxacan-inspired restaurant was a result of purveyor **Sarah Kabat-Marcy’s** trips to Mexico, which catalyzed her to open this popular hotspot in partnership with locally-renowned chef, **John Cox** (formerly of the Post Ranch Inn). Known for flavorful dishes (including exotic cuisine – such as gourmet crickets), this vibrant restaurant and bar boasts fresh seasonal cocktails, a lively atmosphere, and sultry Salsa dancing (once a month).



To give us a glimpse into the mind of a local artist, the next day we were treated to an Art Immersion Workshop with Carmel-by-the-Sea artist & gallery owner, **Mary Titus** of **TITUS Gallery**.



We were welcomed into her contemporary art studio for an afternoon of learning how to do her painting style, to hear her stories about how she got into the art world, and to personally create our own masterpieces (with her guidance).



As one of the 21 artist-owned galleries in Carmel-by-the-Sea, Mary regularly hosts private painting sessions and weekend workshops, encouraging both visitors and locals to unleash their creative sides. Her unique painting style (including a technique I could only describe as “speckling”) creates a bold, dramatic statement through vibrant, colorful abstract designs.



Mary explains her creative process as one that unfolds naturally as the paints meld together, becoming a new iteration of itself as the piece takes shape and the paints start to dry. She even has fun playing with different types of materials as her brushes (such as paper bags and cardboard edges) to create different shapes and textures on the canvas. She rarely starts with a design in mind; rather, she uses the tools, the canvas, and the paints to guide the direction of the artwork, resulting in a stunning masterpiece every time.



To conclude our staycation in Carmel-by-the-Sea, we met up with the group for dinner at one of the local hotspots, **Vesuvio** restaurant, which is owned by Carmel restaurateurs, **Rich & Sandra Pepé**. This upscale eatery features a cozy bar (great for fireside chats), a rooftop lounge (which is ideal for star-gazing), and a formal dining room. It's also one of the best places in town to get authentic Italian cuisine and premium cocktails. Not to mention – it's one of the most happening social scenes in the area, making it a regular spot for locals and tourists.



From art and architecture to boutique shopping and gourmet food & wine, there's no shortage of enjoyable activities to partake in while visiting this gem of a town. To learn more about Carmel-by-the-Sea, visit CarmelCalifornia.com to discover why this charming coastal community is often called "the most romantic town in the United States".

For more travel tips and vacation ideas, check out the [Travel](#) section on *Inspirations & Celebrations*.

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