

HOME DINING RECREATION TRAVEL COMMUNITY HEALTH SHOPPING

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THE COOL ISSUE



Ventura A to Z,
spring fashions,
Monterey
getaway, and
jobs that will
make you green
with envy.



The gorgeous coastline and rugged beauty of Monterey County offers land and sea diversions (left); the welcoming lobby of the new Hotel Abrego offers style away from the wharf (above).

ALL ABOUT MONTEREY

Think “Monterey” and the first word that might pop to mind is “aquarium.” And there’s no question that the Monterey Bay Aquarium is first-class—but there’s so much more to do in this inviting region that it’s possible (sometimes even desirable) to have a getaway where the only fish you see is what you order for dinner. So leave the kids at home for an adults-only trip of wine, luxurious lodging, and meandering drives through gorgeous landscapes.

Wine

Monterey County boasts nine American Viticultural Areas (AVAs) with more than 85 growers and almost 30 tasting rooms—even one on Cannery Row (*Bargetto Winery*; www.bargetto.com) and another just a short walk away (*Pierce Ranch Vineyards Tasting Room*; 831-372-8900). Chardonnay and pinot noir are the most commonly grown grapes here, and vintners are racking up accolades from those in the know for each. Miles of countryside pass through scenic hills that hide vineyards and tasting rooms just off the 101, and travelers from the 805 can sample a few selections on the drive up. But there’s plenty more to try even closer to downtown Monterey, along the River Road Trail which follows Carmel Valley Road, a 12-mile trip from Monterey to Carmel Village. Stop at Heller’s tasting room (www.hellerestate.com) to sip organic wines in the charming shop with a backyard where co-owner Toby Heller’s sculptures are for sale. Talbott (www.talbottvineyards.com) is known for chardonnays that consistently score 90 points

or higher (the 1996 vintage was the only wine in Monterey to score 100 from *Wine Spectator*). It’s an easy drive and there are shops and restaurants in addition to tasting rooms here, meaning visitors can take their time and enjoy the surroundings without worrying about getting right back on the road before visiting the next purveyor.

Scenic Drives

Head east on Route 68 to the Salinas Valley, known as “the salad bowl of America” because 80 percent of the country’s produce comes from this region. The Farm (www.thefarm-salinasvalley.com) is a working farm and produce stand notable for gigantic representations of farmers by artist John Cerney; it’s also a great place to grab some fresh fruits and veggies (or pie) for an afternoon picnic. With the Santa Lucia Highlands on one side and the Gabilan Mountains on the other and verdant farmlands in-between, it’s a gorgeous reminder that food doesn’t originate at the grocery store. This month, expect to see shoots of



green poking through the rich valley soil as crops start their next growing cycle—be on the lookout for strawberries, lettuce, artichokes, and grapevines just starting to come out of dormancy. Visitors who want more information about the farm-to-plate experience can arrange a sightseeing, agriculture, or winery tour with Ag Venture (www.agventuretours.com), which can be customized according to group size and interest and can include cooking classes and specialty food tastings (from \$50 per person).

Following the coastline from Monterey to Carmel, the famous 17-mile drive is a highly recommended diversion for its stunning views of the rugged coastline, Pebble Beach golf course, and the famous lone cypress, which stands starkly against the Western sky and is recognizable as the symbol for Pebble Beach.

Where to Stay

After a day sipping and tasting and driving and viewing, it's nice to have a soft spot to rest one's head. Staying on Cannery Row puts visitors within walking distance of shops, restaurants, and the aquarium; for a different experience, stay off the beaten path.

With just 10 rooms and suites sumptuously appointed and individually decorated, the **Old Monterey Inn** (www.oldmontereyinn.com) oozes romance. Tucked in a quiet neighborhood, this is the place to stay when “getaway” is all about getting away. Peruse the room descriptions and photos on the website and choose the room that speaks to you (the Brighstone Suite, with its cheery decor and large massage tub for two in front of a fireplace is especially nice). Guests are automatically upgraded to the next room category, if available, at no extra charge. Full gourmet breakfasts (with entrées like Orange Blossom French Toast, spanakopita, and Artichoke and Mushroom Strata Soufflé) are served in the formal dining room and use local ingredients; the inn also will create “picnic” breakfasts for early-morning departures. Guests can mingle at the daily afternoon tea and the wine and hors d'oeuvres reception; the garden and common rooms are also luxurious places to while away an hour or two. The property

offers several specials in the coming months; check the website for more details. Book before March 31 and stay two nights (from \$219) and get the third night free.

It's not on Cannery Row; in fact it's in a business district next to a Best Western and across the street from a gas station. But that doesn't keep the rooms at the recently opened **Hotel Abrego** (www.hotelabrego.com) from feeling like they're a world away. And for the price (from \$159), it's definitely worth consideration. Most rooms have a cozy fireplace and are decorated in soothing earth tones. Rooms are relatively large, and though this is a hotel, not a resort, there's an eye for detail and design that makes the rooms feel much more expensive than what you're paying. Breakfast is served in the Craftsman-meets-adobe-inspired lounge, where small and large plates along with local wines and beers are served at lunch and in the evening. Several upscale restaurants and bakeries are within walking distance; Cannery Row is just a short drive away.

Long the doyenne of Cannery Row accommodations, **Monterey Plaza Hotel & Spa** (www.montereyplazahotel.com) received the Forbes Four-Star Award last year. It's got restaurants, it's got a spa, it's got great outdoor space overlooking the bay, and it's right smack on Cannery Row, a short walk from everything. Rooms (from \$220) are stylish and comfortable, featuring Biedermeier-style furniture and marble bathrooms. Spring for an ocean-view room to take full advantage of the location.

The InterContinental The Clement Monterey (www.intercontinental.com/montereyic) is the newest addition to Cannery Row. Room decor mimics the sea, in soothing sea green and sand tones, plus it offers all the amenities expected from a new luxury property. Many rooms have balconies and there are several suites and rooms that connect to accommodate families of any size. Note that some rooms (from \$170) have windows and balconies that overlook a busy Cannery Row shopping area, so noise might be an issue on a busy weekend night. ■

For more information on a Monterey vacation, visit www.seemonterey.com.



From top: A view of the recently opened The InterContinental The Clement Monterey on Cannery Row; a junior suite at the property has a fireplace and a soothing sand-and-sea color scheme; artist John Cerney's massive representations of local farmers are a must-see.

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