

AFM Travel: Big Sur's Post Ranch Inn

Written by Allison Young

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A back-to-nature escape at Post Ranch Inn is sensory overload at its best.



With the hustle and bustle of life, even travel has turned into a high-octane experience. Instead of reveling and relaxing, the tourist turns to rip cords, off-road adventures and shark feedings—adrenaline-fueled feats that have you running from one activity to the next. In this scenario, the hotel is nothing more than a crash pad, a place to sleep off your action-packed day and shower before you're off again. But here's a novel concept: What about a hotel that doubles as the escape itself?

Enter Post Ranch Inn. Perched 1,200 feet above the Pacific in Big Sur, Calif., this diamond in the rough delivers an unparalleled experience by appealing to all five of your senses. No doubt, Mother Nature herself would give her stamp of approval.

A room with more than a view

The cliff-hugging hotel sits on the edge of the world on a dramatic bluff overlooking the fierce and foamy Pacific below. And that's only half of the equation. The other side of the 100-acre property is flanked by the majestic Santa Lucia Mountains. Needless to say, the views are epic.

The word "rooms" doesn't do the accommodations justice. The original architect, Mickey Muennig, is said to have camped out at each site so he could design around nature, not despite it. He succeeded. Instead of the usual boxed bunkies, choose from circular dwellings with undulating walls made of salvaged redwood, angular tree houses built on stilts to protect the fragile root balls below or sod-roofed rooms that bring to mind Tolkien's Shire. You'll feel nature all around thanks in part to the floor-to-ceiling windows—the best wallpaper in the world.

There may not be a TV or a clock in the room, but that's not because of a lack of technology. Rooms come complete with a digital music system, iPod docking station and Wi-Fi; some even boast outdoor hot tubs. Upper-crust campers will also savor in the locally made organic bath amenities, pre-set wood-burning fireplace and complimentary mini bar stocked with organic chocolate, Kettle Chips and nuts, plus a mini bottle of red and white wine to wash it all down.

Breakfast is also covered, and what a wake-me-up meal it is. Picture a buffet of made-to-order omelets, fresh fruit, Greek yogurt, sweet breads, homemade jams and freshly-squeezed juices. If you don't want to leave your room (that elevated California king bed topped with organic linens is tough to ditch), just have a breakfast basket delivered to your room.

The sweet smell (and sound) of success

If honking horns, the clatter of keyboards and the constant buzz of cell phones is your norm, Post Ranch will be more than a pleasant diversion. Instead, you'll hear the chatter of birds and the rustling of wild turkeys. Other hotel guests include the Smith's blue butterfly, California red-legged frog and the California condor, endangered species that the Ranch is doing everything it can to protect.

Twisting hiking trails through the property will also introduce you to families of ferns, smokestack-tall trees and a wealth of wildflowers, each with its own sweet aroma. There's also an on-site garden where you can sit for a silent moment and actually hear your own thoughts.



The spa touch

The back-to-nature theme continues at the spa. In keeping with the design of the property, the treatment rooms almost feel like they're floating in the trees. The menu of treatments follows suit. As well as the usual spa suspects, you'll find holistic treatments that go beyond ironing out muscles and hydrating weathered skin to soothe, balance and heal. Massage therapists aren't the only healers on hand; the hotel has its own Shaman who will lead you on soul-touching treatments that aim to energize and purify. To further unplug, there's complimentary yoga, meditation, Tai Chi, guided nature hikes, stargazing and the pièce de résistance: two heated cliff-top basking pools that will deem every other hot tub ordinary.

A taste above (literally)

Post Ranch's acclaimed Sierra Mar restaurant sits on the edge of a cliff overlooking the Pacific. There isn't a bad seat in the house; nor a bad meal. Thank acclaimed Executive Chef Craig von Foerster, who lets seasonal ingredients dictate the dishes—not the other way around. The result: an ever-changing four-course, prix fixe menu made with local and garden-fresh ingredients. And the wine list is just as impressive with more 13,000 bottles and 2,600 selections. No wonder celebs and locals alike frequent the joint.

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To make your meal even more epic, dine while you watch the sun dip behind the horizon. Or linger over lunch November through March and hope to spot the white spouts of migrating whales. Now that's something to cross off your to-do list.

TO LEARN MORE:

Post Ranch Inn www.postranchinn.com.

No guests under 18 permitted.