

Summer Getaway: Big Sur Coast, California

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When you stop to think about it, nearly all fairy tales are set in a land far, far away for one simple reason: to allow readers to step outside their daily reality. But where, exactly, is this mythical place? It's closer than you realize because nowhere could be further removed from your everyday life than the 90-mile section of Highway 1 that runs through central California's Big Sur coast. Its remote location, carved into the steep face of the Santa Lucia Mountains above the crashing Pacific, means it's far removed from the daily deluge of emails, text messages, and phone calls. This sense of getting away from it all is perhaps Highway 1's greatest appeal.

A Palace and Pinnipeds

One place that should be on your must-see list is Hearst San Simeon State Park, more popularly known as Hearst Castle. William Randolph Hearst's former hilltop home offers a variety of tours through the lavish public and private spaces where this larger-than-life figure entertained his many celebrity guests.

From here, head less than 10 miles north to the Piedras Blancas Elephant Seal Rookery, the largest on the west coast. If your timing's right, you may see as many as 17,000 of the ocean-going behemoths that call these scenic beaches home.

Go To Town

One of the charms of a trip up this unique highway is the small towns you'll encounter along the way. Ragged Point, Gorda, Lucia, and the spread-out village of Big Sur all offer good restaurants and funky shops full of unusual wares — you know, for those times when you simply must take a break from all that gorgeous scenery.

See The Light

The Piedras Blancas Light Station, located just a few miles north of Hearst Castle, is a classic that dates back to 1875. Even more photogenic is the lighthouse at Point Sur State Historic Park. The 1889 stone structure is perched atop a 361-foot rock that looks like an island rising up out of the ocean. Tours of both lighthouses are offered several times a week.

Park It

While the entire Big Sur coast remains relatively untamed, there are a half-dozen California state parks there to protect some of the most special places. Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, for example, is home to one of the most spectacular waterfalls you'll ever see. Take the easy half-mile trail to the viewing area, where you can snap pics of McWay Falls, which pours 80 feet over the edge into the swirling turquoise waves below.

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