

and a home at 13th Ave and Monte Verde St is covered in bark. A wicked, cool house in the shape of a ship, made from stone and salvaged ship parts, is near 6th Ave and Guadalupe (the road west of Carpenter St). There's more. Go and find them.

For a more formal introduction to the town, consider a **Carmel Heritage Society** (☎ 831-624-4447, tours.510.com) walking tour, which is 90 minutes long and leaves at 9:30am most Saturdays from **First Murphy House** (on 6th Ave & Lincoln St). No reservations required.

Despite being perennially overcast, the **Carmel Beach** is a nice crescent of white sand.

MISSION SAN CARLOS DE BORROMEO DE CARMELO

The original Monterey mission was established by Padre Serra in 1769, but poor soil forced the move to Carmel in 1771. Although the missionaries founded 20 other California missions, this mission (☎ 831-624-1271; 3080 Rio Rd. adult/child \$5/1; ☎ 9:30am-5pm) remained Serra's base.

Today it's one of the most attractive and complete of the California missions. The **mission church** was originally built of wood, then replaced by an adobe structure and, in 1793, by the present stone church.

Don't overlook the gravestone of 'Old Gabriel,' a Native American convert whose Father Serra baptized personally, and whose dates put him at 151 years old when he died. Supposedly the oldest man to have ever lived in the modern era, he smoked like a chimney and outlived seven wives. There's a lesson in there somewhere.

TOR HOUSE

Even if you've never heard of the 20th-century poet Robinson Jeffers, a pilgrimage to the structures he built with his own hands – **Tor House** (☎ 831-624-1813; 26304 Ocean View New tours adult/student \$17.2; ☎ 10am-3pm Fri & Sat) and the Celtic-inspired Hawk Tower – offers fascinating insight into both the man and the ethos of Carmel; he embodied, not to mention a host of intriguing architectural aspects: one of the portholes in the tower came from the wrecked ship that carried Napoleon from Elba. The only way to visit the property is to reserve space on a tour.

POINT LOBOS

About 4 miles south of Carmel, **Point Lobos** (☎ 831-624-4909; pt-lobos.parks.state.ca.us; per vehicle \$8) has a dramatically rocky coastline. It takes its

name from the Punta de los Lobos Marinos, or the 'Point of the Sea Wolves,' named by the Spanish for the howls of the resident sea lions. The full perimeter hike is 6 miles, but several short walks take in the wild scenery. Favorite destinations include **Sea Lion Point** and **Devil's Cauldron**, the latter a whirlpool that gets splashy at high tide.

Sleeping & Eating

You're more likely to see a gray whale breaching in September than find cheap accommodations in Carmel. You will find a slew of small boutique hotels and cozy B&Bs, but these fill up quickly, particularly in summer. **Carmel Village Inn** (☎ 831-624-3864; www.carmelvillageinn.com; on Ocean & Junipero Aves; r with fireplace \$175-245, without fireplace \$145-195) With cheerful flowers decorating its exterior, this central motel diagonally across from Devendorf Park has 34 pleasant rooms each with a fridge, TV and coffeemaker. Free wi-fi and continental breakfast, to boot.

Pine Inn (☎ 831-624-3851; 800-228-3851; www.pineinn.com; on Ocean Ave & Lincoln St; r \$49-300; ☎) Antiques and cozy lighting create an ambience of 19th-century comfort in the Pine's 49 rooms, and the lobby is a stunner in bordello red and brass trim. Right in the heart of town, it's surprisingly affordable, relatively speaking, though the less expensive rooms are short on cat-swinging space. Continental breakfast at the adjoining Italian restaurant is included in the rate. Try not to arrive after 9pm.

Tickle Pink Inn (☎ 831-624-1244; www.ticklepink.com; 155 Highland Dr; r \$239-500; ☎) Perched on a hill a few miles south of downtown, the Tickle Pink is almost sinfully romantic, with a bottle of sparkling wine awaiting your arrival and a staff that specializes in making guests feel warm and fuzzy. Every room has a decadent ocean view and a balcony from which to admire it, and if you've forgotten your binoculars they'll lend you a pair. Lots of upscale inns do evening wine-and-cheese and extended continental breakfast, but here it's done with real style.

Bruno's Market & Deli (☎ 831-624-3821; on 6th Ave & Junipero St; meals \$5-9; ☎ 7am-9pm) The best local grocery store, Bruno's has a superb deli for creating picnics. Daily lunch specials are popular. It also stocks Sparky's fresh draft beer, based in Pacific Grove.

Boutique (☎ 831-625-7800; Mission St down Ocean & 7th Aves; mains \$17-32; ☎ from 4:30pm) One of Car-

mel's culinary highlights. Bouchée delivers refined French dining with a tapas twist. Its menu of 'small bites' is divided into light, medium and full-bodied – playing off its adjoining wine-bar and wine-merchant venture – though many of the dishes are available in main-course portions as well. The black capellini pasta highlights red abalone caught in the Monterey Bay. The 14 tables are packed in fairly tight, so watch those elbows.

Jack London's (☎ 831-624-2356; Dolores St down 5th & 6th Aves; dishes \$6-20) Secreted away down a walkway off Dolores, it serves hot food until...wait for it...midnight! A Carmel mainstay since 1973, Jack's pairs upscale pub grub with a selection of microbrews and potent mixed drinks. With a cozy fireplace, the bar is also a fine place for just a drink.

Getting There & Around

Carmel is only 5 miles south of Monterey by Hwy 1. MST buses 4 and 5 run north to Monterey (p155) and south to the mission. Bus 22 passes through en route to Big Sur. Free unlimited parking can be found at **Vista Lobos Park** (on 3rd Ave & Torres St).

BIG SUR TO SAN LUIS OBISPO

On this 130-mile stretch of Hwy 1, you'll snake along the unbelievably picturesque coast south until it joins with Hwy 101 at San Luis Obispo. Even if your driving skills are up for the myriad of hills and switchbacks, others aren't expect to average under 40mph for the route. Parts of the road are battle-scarred, evidence of the eternal struggle to keep it open after landslides.

BIG SUR

You know you've arrived somewhere special when the bathroom graffiti doesn't relate who hearts whom or when so-and-so was there, but instead counsels that 'the untouched world lies only beyond the limitations of man.' Yet Big Sur is more an experience than one tangible place. With a population hovering around 2000 scattered amid 250 sq miles, Big Sur has no traffic lights, banks or strip malls, and when the sun goes down, the moon and stars are the only streetlights, if summer's dense fog hasn't extinguished those as well. Much

ink has been spilled extolling the raw beauty and energy of this stretch of land shoehorned between the Santa Lucia Range and the Pacific Ocean, but nothing quite prepares you for your first glimpse of the craggy, unspoiled coastline, painted with nature's most intense color palette.

In the 1950s and '60s, Big Sur – so named by Spanish settlers living in Carmel who referred to the wilderness as *el país grande del sur* (the big country to the south) – became a favorite retreat for writers and artists, including Henry Miller and Lawrence Ferlinghetti. And still it attracts mystics, artists and eccentric types looking to contemplate their navels along with harried city slickers ready to disengage from their cell phones and reflect deeply in and on this emerald edge of continent.

Although it's only 90 miles from Carmel to San Simeon, driving along this narrow two-lane highway is slow going. Allow at least four hours to cover the distance. Traveling after dark is perilous and futile, since you won't be able to see any of the countryside. Watch for cyclists, and remember, downhill traffic yields to uphill traffic on single-lane roads.

Orientation & Information

Visitors often wander into businesses along Hwy 1 and ask, 'How much further to Big Sur?' In fact, there is no town of Big Sur as such, though you may see the name on maps. The little commercial activity here is concentrated along the stretch between Andrew Molera State Park to the north and Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park to the south. Sometimes called 'The Village,' this is where you'll find many of the restaurants and lodging options, and the post office.

Just south of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park is the **Big Sur Ranger Station** (☎ 831-667-2315; ☎ 8am-4:30pm), your source for information and maps for Los Padres National Forest, the Ventana Wilderness and the state parks. In southern Big Sur, south of the turn-off to the Nacimiento–Ferguson Rd is the **Pacific Valley Ranger Station** (☎ 805-927-4211; ☎ 9am-5pm; www.bigsurvalley.org) published by the Big Sur Chamber of Commerce.

Note that road and emergency services here are distant – in Monterey in the north or Cambria in the south. Fill up the tank beforehand, and be careful.

Sights & Activities

These are listed north to south. Note: if you pay the entrance fee for one state park, you get in free to any others that day.

BIXBY BRIDGE

About 13 miles south of Carmel, the much photographed landmark Bixby Bridge, spanning Rainbow Canyon, is one of the world's highest single-span bridges at 714ft long and 260ft high. Completed in 1932, it was built by prisoners eager to lop time off their sentences. There's a photo-op pull-off just north of the bridge. Don't be tricked into thinking that the similar-looking Rocky Creek Bridge, just north of Bixby, is the real deal.

POINT SUR LIGHT STATION STATE HISTORIC PARK

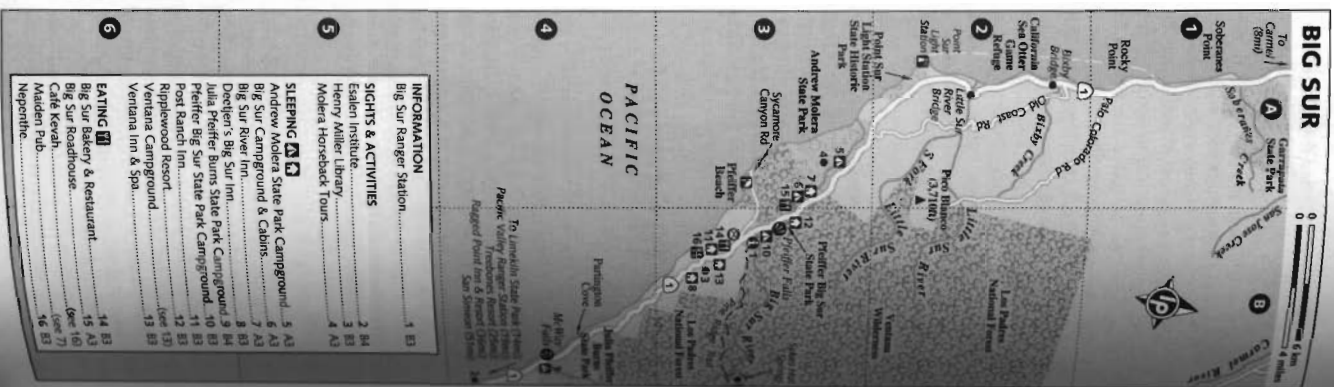
A little more than 6 miles further south of Bixby Bridge, Point Sur looks like a velvet green fortress rising out of the plain. It's actually an imposing volcanic rock that looks like an island but is connected to land by a sandbar. Atop the rock is the 1899 **Point Sur Light Station** (☎831-625-4419; www.pointsur.org; tours adult/child \$8/4), which remained in operation until 1974. Views and details of life here are engrossing, to partake you need to join a three-hour tour. Meet at the farm gate on Hwy 1 at 10am or 2pm Saturday or 10am Sunday year-round. There are also some weekday tours from spring through to fall – call for details.

ANDREW MOLERA STATE PARK

This oft-overlooked park (☎831-667-2315; per vehicle \$8; ☎8am-5pm) enjoys a remote and wild settings, lots of wildlife and great beachcombing – at last visit condors were making quick work of a whale carcass about a half-mile south down the beach. The first-come, first-served, 24-hour, **walk-in campground** (campsites \$9), a little under half a mile from the parking lot, has fire pits, vault toilets and drinking water, but no water views. A quarter-mile trail leads from the campground to a beautiful beach where the Big Sur River runs into the ocean. **Molera Horseback Tours** (☎831-625-5486, 800-942-5486; www.molerahorsebacktours.com; ☎Mar-Nov) offers a variety of guided trail rides from \$25.

PREIFFER BIG SUR STATE PARK

Named after Big Sur's first European settlers who arrived in 1869, **Preiffer Big Sur State Park** (☎831-667-2315; day-use \$8) is the largest state



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BIG SUR IN A DAY

If the harried traveler who can't carve out a few days to absorb the enchantment of Big Sur, try the sometimes you have to make do with what you've got. Assuming you're driving north to south, get three first to **Big Sur Bakery & Restaurant** (p163) for coffee that will put hair on your chest, then calm yourself with a stroll on fantastic **Pfeiffer Beach** (below). Do lunch at the classic **Nepenthe** (p164) restaurant or its downstairs sister **Kivah** before getting in touch with your literary boho side at the **Henry Miller Library** (below). Gawk at the kelp forests in **Partington Cove** (below) before snapping your very own postcard-perfect photo of **McWay Falls** (below). If you find time to stay overnight, go yurt-style at **Trebonis Resort** (p163). If you're up late and down with nudity, reserve hot-tub space at the **Esalen Institute** (p162), open to the public from 1am to 2am.

park in Big Sur. There are miles of pristine hiking through redwoods in its 964 acres, though the popular trail to reach long and lean **Pfeiffer Falls** is only a 1.4-mile round-trip walk.

A 218-site **campground** (☎reservations 800-444-725; www.parks.ca.gov; campsites \$25-35) is beside the Big Sur River in a valley shaded by redwood groves; facilities include showers. Summer crowds are the drawback to this otherwise idyllic scene.

PREIFFER BEACH

Just west of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, this phenomenal, crescent-shaped **beach** (day-use \$5) is notable for its huge double rock formation through which waves crash with life-affirming power. It's often windy, and the surf is too dangerous for swimming. Dig down into the wet sand – it's purple!

To get there from Hwy 1 south, pass the turn-off for Andrew Molera State Park, about a quarter-

mile south of the Big Sur Ranger Station, then make a sharp right onto the unmarked road with the small brown sign that says "near row road" at the top. Follow this for 2.3 miles to the parking lot, and the beach is a two-minute walk away.

HENRY MILLER LIBRARY

A denizen for 17 years, Henry Miller wrote, "It was here in Big Sur I first learned to say 'ahem'." The **Henry Miller Library** (☎831-667-2314; www.henrymiller.org; suggested donation \$1; ☎ usually 11am-5pm Thu-Sun; ☐) is Big Sur's most cultured venue, but was never Miller's home. (He lived about 4 miles to the south.) The house belonged to Miller's friend, the painter Emil White, until his death and is now run by a nonprofit group. The library has all of Miller's

written works, many of his paintings and a great collection of Big Sur and Beat Generation material, including copies of the top 100 books Miller claimed were most influential on him. Stop by for a browse, some free coffee and a game of ping-pong. Check the website for details on the library's numerous cultural events.

The library is a quarter-mile south of Nepenthe restaurant.

PARTINGTON COVE

From the western side of Hwy 1, a poorly marked steep dirt trail descends half a mile along Partington Creek to Partington Cove, a little-visited but very beautiful section of Big Sur. On the 1-mile loop you cross a cool bridge and then walk through an even cooler tunnel. During Prohibition it was a landing spot for rum-runners. The water in the cove is unbelievably aqua and within it grow incredible kelp forests. There's no real beach access, but you can scamper on the rocks and look for tide pools as waves cuff ominously.

The turn-off is inside a large hairpin turn 8 miles south of Nepenthe restaurant and 1.8 miles north of Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park.

JULIA PREIFFER BURNS STATE PARK

This **park** (☎831-667-2315; day-use \$8) hugs both sides of Hwy 1 and features redwood, tan oak, madrona and chaparral. At the park entrance (on the east side of Hwy 1) are picnic grounds along McWay Creek. The 4.5-mile **Ewoldsen Trail** offers views of the ocean and the Santa Lucia Range.

The park's highlight is California's only coastal waterfall, the 80ft **McWay Falls**, which drops straight into the sea – or onto the beach, depending on the tide. We dare you to take fewer than a dozen photos. To reach the

waterfall viewpoint, take the short Overlook Trail heading west and cross beneath Hwy 1. Nearby, two small walk-in **campgrounds** (reservations.800-444-7275; www.parks.ca.gov/campsites \$15-20) sit on a semiprotected bluff. Camper registration is at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park campground, 12 miles north.

ESALEN INSTITUTE

Eleven miles south of Nepenthe, world-renowned workshop and hot springs mecca the **Esalen Institute** (831-667-3000; www.esalen.org) is like hippie camp for adults. Week- or week-end-long workshops run the gamut from your standard Deepening your Yoga Practice to Ericksonian Hypnosis & Gestalt and Women's Leadership. Fun fact: Hunter S. Thompson was the gun-toting caretaker here in 1960.

When space is available, you can stay at Esalen without participating in a workshop, but you'll have to check at the guesthouse. Accommodations are in rooms sleeping up to three people (per person \$150 to \$180) or in four- to six-bed dorms (per person \$105 to \$110). The bathrooms can be leaky and the bunk beds lumpy, so don't go in expecting Post Ranch luxury. The rates include three organic buffet-style meals... which even offer meat!

The Esalen baths are fed by a natural hot spring and sit on a ledge above the ocean. Dollars to doughnuts you'll never take another shower that compares view-wise with the one here. The clothing-optional 'nighly bathing' is open to the public from 1am to 3am by **reservation** (831-667-3047; bathing \$20) only. The fee is payable by credit card only.

Sleeping

Lodging in Big Sur ranges from basic four walls and a mattress to glossy mag-worthy resorts. Campers will find many options as well, though reserving is also advised. Worse comes to worse, you can pull over and crash out in your car. If the police come a-knockin', just tell them you were grabbing a catnap – you had gotten drowsy and didn't want to fall asleep at the wheel. They're pretty understanding – just don't sleep in your vehicle in the same spot two nights in a row.

BUDGET

There's camping in three of Big Sur's state parks: Andrew Molera State Park (p160), Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park (p160) and Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park (p161).

Ventana Campground (831-667-2712; www.ventanawildernesscampground.com; campsites \$24; 831-667-2712)
 (M-F 9a-4p) Just south of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park and set in a 40-acre redwood grove, this 80-site campground has beautiful secluded campsites with a lot of privacy.

Big Sur Campground & Cabins (831-667-2222; campsites \$25-29; tent cabins \$54-59; cabins with bathroom & kitchen \$100-225) In the Village, this option, popular with RVs, has 79 sites and some small cabins shaded by redwoods right on the Big Sur River. The camping store stocks the basics, and there are laundry facilities, hot showers and a playground.

Linekith State Park Campground (831-667-2403; reservations 800-444-7275; www.parks.ca.gov/campsites/25/) This park gets its name from the four remaining lime kilns originally built here in the 1880s. A short hike leads to a 1,000ft waterfall. The campground sits right by the park entrance, tucked under a bridge next to the ocean; it has flush toilets and hot showers. Sites 1 and 2 are tops – secluded and with ocean views.

MIDRANGE

Deefern's Big Sur Inn (831-667-2377; www.deefern.com; \$75-195) Nestled among redwoods and wisteria along Castro Creek, this enchanting conglomeration of rustic rooms and cottages was built by Norwegian immigrant Helmut Deefern in the 1930s. He salvaged the redwood to add on more rooms and cottages – now totaling 20 thin-walled units – for the myriad transients who were showing up at his doorstep. Some rooms are warmed by wood-burning fireplaces, and the cheapest ones share a bathroom, but all book up far in advance. The cozy dining room serves hearty breakfasts and dinners. Deefern's is a quarter of a mile south of the Henry Miller Library, and operates on a nonprofit basis.

Ripplewood Resort (831-667-2242; www.ripplewoodresort.com; cabins \$90-150) Ripplewood has struck a blow for fiscal equality by having the same rates year-round. Cabins vary in details, all have kitchens and private bathrooms, some have fireplaces. The riverside cabins – like *Nine* and *Two* – are quiet and surrounded by redwood, but the hillside ones can be noisy.

Big Sur River Inn (831-667-2700; 800-548-5018; www.bigsurriverinn.com; \$85-150; site \$180-225) In business since 1888, this inn – the most northern of the bunch – offers 20 comfy, country-style rooms, some with balconies overlooking

the river (which many would call a creek). The grassy lawn between the water and the inn is a magnet for kids. There are several good eating and drinking options here, like the Big Sur River restaurant and the Maiden Pub. The enlightening community bulletin board carries notices about kundalini classes, acreage for sale, and entreaties to improve your karma by returning a stolen chainsaw.

Ragged Point Inn & Resort (805-927-4502; www.raggedpointinn.com; \$129-279) Fifteen miles north of San Simeon stands Ragged Point, an appropriately named cliff outcropping with views of the coastline in both directions. This sprawling and expanding resort, inexplicably popular with middle-aged motorcyclists and Japanese tour groups, has 30 rooms, some with ocean views – No 5 is especially nice – and you score a fireplace, jacuzzi and kitchenette if you spring for a deluxe.

Trebonnes Resort (877-424-4787; www.trebonnesort.com; 71895 Hwy 1; yurts/campsites \$129-180/55; 877-424-4787) Don't let the word 'resort' throw you. Yes, it's got an ocean view hot tub, a heated pool and massage treatments, but this delightful charmer is actually a ridiculous bargain, especially for families. And when was the last time you slept in a yurt? The exteriors of the 16 circular tentlike constructions belie their polished pine floors, sumptuous quilt-covered beds, sink vanities (dispensing fresh well water) and redwood decks. One of the four family-sized yurts even has a ping-pong table inside. The bathrooms and showers are a quick stroll away in the main lodge, but fresh air's why you're in Big Sur, right? Five ocean view campsites are set aside for tent-bearing guests. The complimentary make-your-own-wildie breakfast will stand you in good stead for your morning's adventures. Trebonnes is 3 miles south of Plaskett Campground in southern Big Sur, and its sign is pretty tiny.

TOP END

Post Ranch Inn (831-667-2200; 800-527-2200; www.postranchinn.com; \$550-1389) The last word in luxurious coastal getaways, the legendary Post Ranch pumps guests with lodgings that feature state spa tubs, private decks, fireplaces, and even walking sticks for those coastal hikes. There are 30 individual yurts, but you'd be forgiven for thinking you were the only guest here. Ocean-facing rooms have the best view on the Central Coast, while the nonview tree houses have a bit of sway supplied by your

own motion. One sour note: the staff can be stiff and standoffish. Nonmillionaires can take a free half-hour tour on weekdays at 2pm. The inn is just under a mile south of the Big Sur Bakery & Restaurant.

Ventana Inn & Spa (831-667-2331; 800-628-6500; www.ventanainn.com; r/rom \$460; 831-667-2331) Other than the introduction of flat-screen plasma TVs in the suites, serene, romantic Ventana hasn't changed all that much since it opened in 1975. Madame Ventana wears Post Ranch clothes but has an Esalen soul, and caters to honeymoon couples and paparazzi-fleeing celebs. Guests can pad from yoga class to the Japanese bathhouse to the indigenous plant gardens to the clothing-optional pool, or chose instead to hole up all day next to the wood-burning fireplace in their rustic-style room or cabin.

Eating

For more options, see the Sleeping section.

Big Sur Bakery & Restaurant (831-667-0520; pizza \$14-19; dinner mains \$27-36; 831-667-0520; bakery daily, restaurant Sun) This funkily decorated, warmly lit house behind the Shell station in the Village has offerings that change through the day and season. Wood-fired pizzas and stellar burgers share the lineup with more refined – but just as satisfying – dishes like wild salmon with succotash. The bakery pours the best coffee in Big Sur and sells its own house granola. In the words of one local, their ham and cheese croissant is...mwa! Tasty shit. Poke around the spirit garden next door. Just south of the post office.

Big Sur Roadhouse (831-667-2264; mains \$13-24; 831-667-2264; dinner Wed-Mon) Marcus and Heather Foster opened the Latin-flavored Roadhouse after working together at Sierra Mar, the Post Ranch Inn's hoiy-toi-y eatery. Thankfully, they've chosen to share with us fresh, impeccable cuisine (like plantain *tosstones* with tiger prawns) minus the haute attitude. Inside, the restaurant fairly glows from the corner fireplace and copper-top bar, not to mention the smiles from diners' faces. The front patio is more often than not covered in exuberant chalk drawings. Just south of the River Inn.

Big Sur River Inn (831-667-2700; mains \$11-23; 831-667-2700) This inn in the Village has a woody old supper-club feel; a fireplace that could eat you alive and a deck that overlooks the river teeming with throaty frogs. The food is classic American, sourced from organic local produce and hormone-free meat.

Tucked next door to the south is Maiden Pub, with an incredible beer bible and a motley group of local musicians jamming their hearts out on the weekends.

Nepenthe (☎ 831-667-2345; mains \$13-22) Nepenthe (nuh-pen-thee) comes from a Greek word meaning 'isle of no sorrow', and indeed, it'd be hard to feel blue while sitting on its cliff-top terrace, the vast ocean vista spread out before you. The food, while tasty (try the renowned Ambrosia burger), is secondary to the view and Nepenthe's place in history. Orson Welles and Rita Hayworth bought the land in 1944, and in 1947 Bill and Lolita Fassett opened the restaurant. Nepenthe is 3 miles south of Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park.

Cafe Kevah (dishes \$8-12; ☒ breakfast, lunch; ☎) For cheaper eats and almost the same views as Nepenthe, go downstairs to this outdoor cafe.

Getting There & Away

Although there are seasonal buses from Monterey to the northern sections of Big Sur, the area is best explored by car, since you'll be itching to stop frequently to take in the rugged beauty and stunning vistas that reveal themselves at every turn.

If you opt for public transit, MST bus 22 (\$4, 75 minutes, twice daily) goes from Monterey (p155) via Carmel as far south as Nepenthe restaurant between late May and early September. The buses are equipped to take two bicycles.

PIEDRAS BLANCAS

Nearly extinct 100 years ago, elephant seals have made a remarkable comeback along California's coast. There are seals hanging around much of the year (though mid-August to mid-October they're thin on the ground) just 4.4 miles north of Hearst Castle, but from December through February the males return and the year's births begin. On sunny days, the seals usually 'lie around like elephant slugs,' in the words of one **Friends of the Elephant Seal** (☎ 805-924-1628; www.elfseal.org) docent, but when the temperature drops, they get aggro. 'The behemoth bulls, who can weigh between 3000lb and 5000lb, engage in mock and sometimes real combat, all the while emitting toilet-plunger grunts.

HEARST CASTLE

Though newspaper magnate William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951) didn't call his 165-room monstrosity a castle – preferring

its official name *Cuesta Encantada* (the Enchanted Hill) or more often simply 'the ranch' – it beats the pants off most castles in the world in the orientalist contest. It's a wondrous historic (Winston Churchill penned anti-Nazi essays here in the 1930s), over-the-top homage to material excess perched high on a hill and a visit is a must.

Architect Julia Morgan based the main building, or Casa Grande, on the design of a Spanish cathedral, and over the next 23 years catered to Hearst's every design whim, deftly integrating the spoils of his fabled European shopping sprees (ancient artifacts, entire monasteries etc.) into the whole. The estate sprawls out over 127 acres of lush landscaped gardens (and at the time, the largest private zoo in the world), accentuated by shimmering pools and fountains and statues from ancient Greece and Moorish Spain.

Hearst and his longtime mistress Marion Davies (his first wife refused to grant him a divorce) adored entertaining at the ranch, and it saw a steady stream of the biggest movers and shakers of the era. Invitations were highly coveted and much fun was had, but Hearst had his quirks – he despised drunkenness, and restricted his guests' alcohol consumption to two drinks. Guests were also forbidden to speak of death.

To see anything of **Hearst Castle** (☎ general information 805-927-2020; reservations 800-444-4445; www.hearstcastle.com; tours adult/child May-Sep \$24/12, Oct-Apr \$20/10), you will need to take a tour. For most of the year, you will absolutely need reservations for these tours. In the peak summer months you'll need these a week or more in advance. Before you leave, or if someone fell down on the reservation duty, visit the museum area in the back of the visitors center.

Tours start daily at 8:20am, with the last leaving at 3:20pm (sometimes later during summer). There are four main tours: for each you depart from the visitors center and make the 10-minute bus ride up the hill. No matter how many tours you go on you have to make the journey up and down each time. Each of the tours lasts about 1½ hours, and every tour includes the highlight *Nepenthe and Roman pools*.

It's best to start with **Tour 1**, aka the 'Experience Tour', as you get an overview of the estate and a chance to see a film about Hearst's life. This answers all the basic ques-

tions and prepares you to delve deeper. Unless you have just a passing interest in the castle, you'll likely be sucked into wanting to take more tours. The docents are almost *preternaturally* knowledgeable – just try and stump 'em.

Tours 2, 3 and 4 change their itineraries occasionally, but generally focus on the upstairs, pools or gardens, and are much less crowded than the Experience Tour.

The new **Evening Tours** (adult/child \$30/15; ☎ tours field@hca-may & sep-dec offer an overview as well, but the special twist is that visitors – make that guests – get to spy on what the house felt like while Hearst was entertaining (which was always), thanks to the costumed performers-cum-docents around every corner, lounging and preening. Reserve far in advance for this 2½-hour tour.

Getting to Hearst Castle without your own wheels can be a challenge. However San Luis Obispo's RTA (p171) makes two daily round-trips (\$2.50, 90 minutes) between San Luis Obispo (SLO) and the visitors center via Morro Bay and Cambria.

CAMBRIA

pop 6100

One of Cambria's early nicknames was Slabtown, after the rough pieces of wood its early buildings were constructed from. Though the name was changed to the more melodious-sounding Cambria in 1870, the modest, self-effacing temperament of Slabtown seems to have stuck. Cambria has three distinct parts: the historic center a half-mile off Hwy 1 with cafes, shops and restaurants along Main St; the tourist-choked newer center often called 'Cambria West', also on Main St but right off Hwy 1; and the motel-lined Moonstone Beach, which, though its eponymous moon-stones – aka Jasper – are long gone, still tempts menderders to its boardwalk and stretches of sand.

All places following are on the east side, except the **chamber of commerce** (☎ 805-927-3624; www.cambriachamber.org; 767 Main St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri, noon-4pm Sat & Sun).

Bridge Street Inn (☎ 805-927-7653; www.bridgestreetinn.com; 4314 Bridge St; dm \$25, r \$40-70 all-incl breakfast) Framed by an exuberant jasmine arbor and charm at a great price, though the beds could be comfier. There is a communal kitchen – and let's not forget the wi-fi and

the volleyball court. It's small, so reserve ahead.

Ollaliberry B&B (☎ 805-927-3222; www.ollaliberry.com; 2476 Main St; r \$135-220) A stay at one of the Ollaliberry's nine cozy, cheerful guest rooms, replete with pastels, quilts and not a few ruffles, is like a visit to the fun grand-ma's house. All rooms have their own private bathroom and all but one has a fireplace. If the expansive gardens and deck don't relax you enough, get an on-site massage from innkeeper and massage therapist Marilyn Draper. FYI, an ollaliberry is similar to a blackberry.

Robin's (☎ 805-927-5007; 4095 Burton Dr; lunch \$7-10, dinner \$13-24; ☎ 11am-9pm) The best place to eat in town. Robin's has been whipping up fresh quasi-international cuisine using local ingredients for more than two decades. The curry chicken salad gets high marks, and there's plenty for nonmeat-eaters, like the portobello and spinach lasagna. Dine inside, out in on the wisteria-draped patio or get something to go from the deli counter.

Lily's Coffeehouse (☎ 805-927-7259; 2028 Main St; ☎ 8:30am-5pm Wed-Mon) Something of a community gathering spot, Lily's has a peaceful front garden patio where you can tap into free wi-fi while sipping your \$1 espresso. Drop in on Saturday from 11am to 4pm and order a crepe made to your exact specifications.

Camozzi's Saloon (☎ 805-927-8941; 2262 Main St E) Grab one of the eight beers on tap and take a long look at the walls covered in photographs of old-time Cambria. Pool tables, shuffleboard and a jukebox will be waiting when you're done with your history lesson.

ESTERO BAY

Estero Bay is a long, shallow, west-facing bay with Cayucos at its northern end and Morro Rock at its southern end. Morro Bay, a deep inlet guarded by Morro Rock and separated from the ocean by a 12-mile-long sand spit, sits about halfway between the two and has most of Estero Bay's services and tourist activity. Morro Rock is the bay's unmistakable landmark.

San Luis Obispo's RTA (p171) bus 12 (\$1 to \$2.50, hourly 7am to 7pm, Monday to Saturday) travels up Hwy 1 from San Luis Obispo, stopping in Morro Bay. Two runs every day continue on to Cayucos, Cambria and San Simeon.