

Highway 1: Central California's Best Road Trip

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2

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Highway 1: Central California's Best Road Trip

SUZANNE KOCH, NOVEMBER 8, 2018

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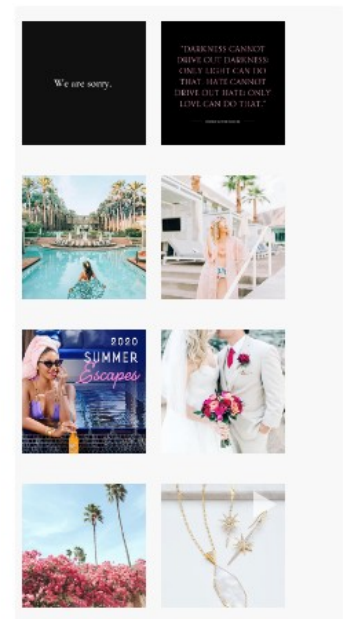
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Recently reopened after a mudslide shut it down, the [Highway 1 Discovery Route](#) is back up and running, providing an easy, breezy and scenic route stretching for 101 miles up the central coast of California. The Discovery Route reaches from Nipomo and heads north to Ragged Point, where the iconic entrance to Big Sur is.

We took a recent road trip up the coast from San Luis Obispo to just north of San Simeon. The drive is not only breathtaking, it's also insanely easy to navigate. While Siri narrated my trip to me in the background, I could have easily done without her. As a frequent visitor of SoCal, I envisioned a busy drive full of California traffic and windy roads. Instead I found an open highway and miles of open land. This was no Los Angeles. To experience the best parts of the drive for yourself, fly into San Luis Obispo Airport (SBP) and follow along to my can't-miss stops.



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Day 1

Wine & Cookies

After landing in the single-terminal airport, hop into a rental car and drive five minutes south for a quick wine tasting at **Claiborne & Churchill Winery**. Founded in 1983, the small family-owned and operated winery specializes in dry wines. Make sure to try their Resiling, which was surprisingly dry and delicious. Afterwards, head north for 26 miles to downtown Cayucos for a quick pit stop to stock up on the addicting treats at **Brown Butter Cookie Company**. The sweet and salty melt-in-your-mouth cookies come in a variety of flavors like original, cinnamon, almond, spice and more. The charming red store in Cayucos serves as the brand's flagship location where they churn out dozens daily and where you can get your hands on free samples. But don't expect to leave here empty-handed; these bite-size gems are irresistible.

Check-In to Oceanpoint Ranch

Reminiscent of a quaint roadside inn, **Oceanpoint Ranch** is near the end of Cambria's string of boutique hotels, about 20 minutes



north of downtown Cayucos. Surrounded by willowing trees, the hotel was recently renovated and rooms now feature a ranch-chic vibe. My room was adorned with rich leather accents, wood furnishings, a cozy fireplace and plaid prints. Located along Moonstone Beach, the family-friendly hotel is welcoming and peaceful. A year-round heated pool, yard games, outdoor fire pits and direct access to the beach offer something for everyone.

Dinner at Sea Chest Restaurant

For dinner, head to **Sea Chest Restaurant**, a favorite of locals and travelers passing through. The restaurant is close enough to walk to from Oceanpoint Ranch and is a straight shot south down Moonstone Beach Dr. which runs parallel to the ocean. Upon arrival, it's clear to see Sea Chest has their dishes down to a science and have ever since they opened in 1975. We suggest taking a seat at the oyster bar to catch the cooks live in action, whipping up everything from the fresh catch of the day to cioppino, scampi and more. This tasty outlet gets busy though so arrive early or be prepared to wait. It's not uncommon to find guests lined up before it even opens at 5:30 p.m. Note, Sea Chest is closed on Tuesdays and only accepts cash, but don't worry there's an ATM on site.

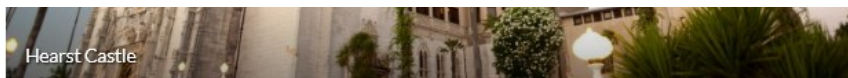


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Day 2

Elephant Seal Rookery & Hearst Castle

Before heading to iconic Hearst Castle, drive 10 miles north (about five miles north of Hearst Castle) to catch sight of the sunbathing elephant seals at the **Elephant Seal Rookery**. Viewing areas are open daily and free to the public and offer fun sights of the seal-packed shores.



Next, head back down to **Hearst Castle**. This castle on a hill might seem out-of-place and somewhat random, but that was exactly the objective of media tycoon William Randolph Hearst when he built it. Located atop a hill in San Simeon, the castle's design was inspired by Europe's art and architecture at the time. It's situated on nearly 270,000 acres of ranchland which the Hearst family still owns and operates today. In its heyday, the home played host to many a celebrity from the 1920s and '30s including Hollywood starlets like Charlie Chaplin, Greta Garbo and Joan Crawford and other notable figures like Howard Hughes, Winston Churchill and Calvin Coolidge among others. Today, the home is open to the public for a variety of tours. I experienced the Grand Rooms Tour, a good bet for any first-time visitor. Step inside Casa Grande, the largest house at Hearst Castle after

exploring the surrounding common grounds and gardens. You'll also get full access to the Neptune Pool, the iconic and oh-so-photogenic Roman-style oasis.

After snapping tons of photos at the castle, pop across the street for an easy lunch at **Sebastian's**. Order one of the juicy half-pound burgers, made with beef from Hearst Ranch. Wash it down with a tasting at **Hearst Ranch Winery**, which is housed in the same historic building as Sebastian's.

Covell's California Clydesdales

After filling up on burgers and wine, head back into downtown Cambria for a ride on a Clydesdale horse. While my experience extended to riding a pony when I was younger, I wasn't sure what to expect.

Family-owned **Covell's California Clydesdale** is located on a 2,000-acre ranch in the Monterey Pine forest. I visited for a two-hour ride on one of the ranch's Clydesdales. The

ride took me up a dusty trail in the late afternoon sun. After arriving at the top of a hill that overlooks the surrounding region, I felt like I was in a Western movie surveying my ranch from above. This one-of-a-kind experience is one not to miss.



Robin's

While in downtown Cambria, make a visit to **Robin's**. I'm a big fan of curry and after hearing from a handful of locals that I had to try the one at Robin's, I couldn't pass it up. Located in the heart of downtown, on a small road off Main St., the cozy restaurant is situated in a historic adobe house. Its eclectic menu includes savory dishes like duck mole, cocoa crusted filet mignon and three types of curries. After inhaling the Thai Green Chicken Curry, I can confidently say, the locals were right.

For more information on Highway 1, visit: highway1discoveryroute.com

After checking out of your hotel on the morning of day three, don't head to the airport, head to **Paso Robles**. A short, albeit stunning, 40-minute drive from Cambria, Paso is home to wine country for the less pretentious. Click [here](#) for our guide to the can't-miss wineries and where to stay and eat.

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