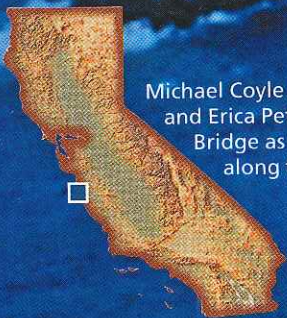




Michael Coyle flies with Greg Illes and Erica Peterson past Bixby Bridge as they head south along the coastline.





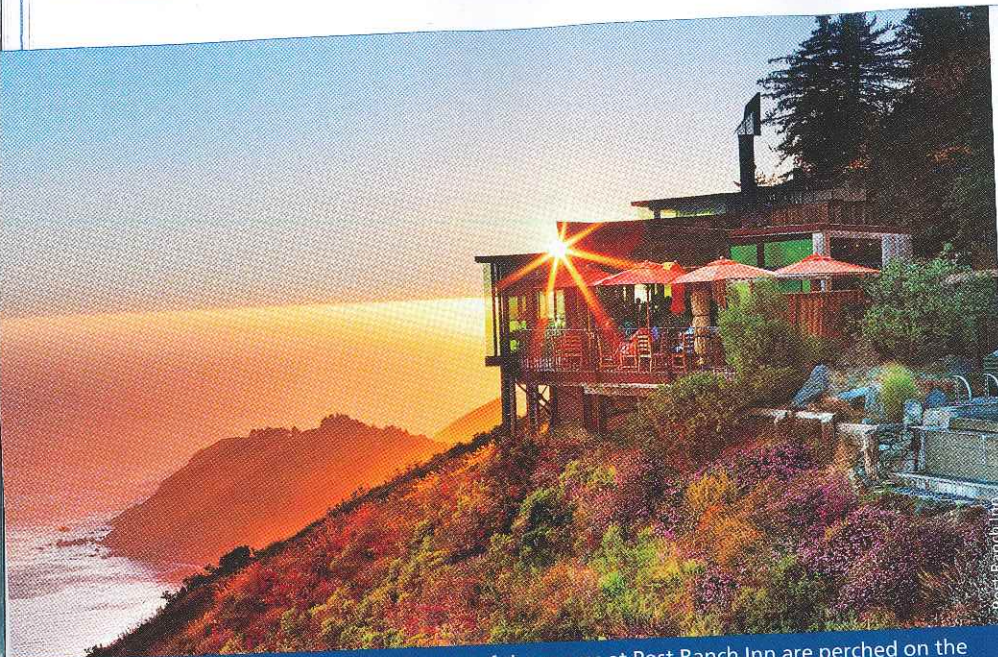


# BIG SUR, CALIFORNIA

## ZEN CENTRAL

by Crista Videriksen Worthy • aerial photos by George A. Kounis





Above: The restaurant, spa, and many of the rooms at Post Ranch Inn are perched on the cliffs above the Pacific Ocean.

Below: Winter is a good time to look for migrating gray whales from the hiking trails in Garrapata State Park.



California State Parks

About halfway between the busy metros of Los Angeles and San Francisco, Big Sur is California's "Zen Central" on the Central Coast. It's a place where the harried can go and relax almost instantly. There's something about this place that has attracted generations of people, from writers and beatniks to film and television stars, to "turn on, tune in, and drop out," as Timothy Leary said. The late Richard Feynman, the Caltech genius who won the 1965 Nobel Prize in physics, used to close his eyes and sigh, smiling, as he recalled to me his adventures in the hot springs at Esalen, the Big Sur retreat where he taught mind-opening workshops.

As you drive south from Monterey on Highway 1, you'll experience not only one of the longest stretches of undeveloped coastline in America, but also one of the most scenic drives in the world, mythic in reputation. A thousand feet above the ocean, the

highway barely clings to the cliffs, while the forest-clad Santa Lucia Mountains rise thousands of feet above. Iconic bridges cross deep canyons; thankfully turnouts allow you to pull over and feast your eyes, lest you drive off a cliff while gawking. At other times, Highway 1 drops to sea level, and you'll pass coves of impossibly turquoise water bordered by tall rock formations and pounding waves. Meander along the beach or wander among the redwoods, and you'll feel peace descend upon you. For a more intensive experience, enroll in a workshop at Esalen. Then relax in the hideaway that suits your tastes and budget.

What do visitors do in Big Sur? Simply: absorb the beauty and reconnect with themselves and each other. There's no downtown and only 1,000 residents in this 90-mile stretch of coastline. Big Sur offers only a few visitor accommodations and

restaurants, so it's never crowded. Fall reveals Big Sur at its best, when the summer fogs have mostly gone, and winter typically brings the year's best sunsets.

## Flying There

There's no airport in Big Sur, so you'll fly in to the Monterey Regional Airport (MRY), at the southern end of Monterey Bay. The entire California coast is prone to fog, especially in spring and summer. Monterey offers several instrument approaches, including an ILS, but if conditions prevent landing at MRY, Salinas Municipal Airport (SNS), 12 nm northeast, makes a good alternate.

Weather permitting, arrivals from the south can fly just offshore and preview the sights along Highway 1 between Big Sur and Monterey; lovely deserted beaches, dramatic coastal cliffs, and the iconic Bixby Bridge. Along the coast to Monterey from either direction, pilots are requested to remain at or above 2,000 feet AGL over several wildlife refuges. Note that flight below 1,000 feet over the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, depicted on the sectional chart, violates NOAA regulations (see 15 CFR 922) and could result in civil fines up to \$100,000. MRY is a Class C airport, so establish two-way communication with Nor-Cal Approach on 127.15 or 133.0 MHz before entering the airspace. Expect Runway 28R; the parallel Runway 28L is longer and usually reserved for larger turbine aircraft. Pattern altitude is 1,500 feet MSL north of the field and 1,800 feet MSL south of the field, due to terrain. On departure, avoid turns below 900 feet AGL, east of Highway 1, unless directed by ATC. During a voluntary curfew from 11 p.m. to 7 a.m., departures are discouraged, and landings are limited to Runway 28L and takeoffs to Runway 10R unless conditions dictate otherwise.

Just west of the tower, **Del Monte Aviation** has a single-engine handling fee of \$45 (twins \$55), nightly parking \$10 (twins \$20), waived with min 15-gallon fuel purchase (twins min 25-gallon), open daily 6 a.m.–10 p.m., 831-373-4151 or 800-452-6184, [www.DMA-MRY.com](http://www.DMA-MRY.com). **Monterey Jet Center**, at the southwest corner of the field, has the same handling and tiedown fee prices as Del Monte, open 5:30 a.m.–9:30 p.m., 831-373-0100 or 800-679-2992, [www.MontereyJetCenter.com](http://www.MontereyJetCenter.com).

## History

Archaeological finds document that the Esselen tribe occupied the area as early as 3500 BC. Juan Cabrillo sailed up the then-uncharted California coast in 1542 on behalf of the Spanish Empire to explore and map it. It wasn't until 1769 that the area was colonized. Fearing that the Russians would move down from Alaska and claim California first, the Spanish sent an expedition under Gaspar de Portolá to found settlements and missions. In central California, steep coastal terrain restricted the Spanish to the Monterey/Carmel area and inland valleys. They

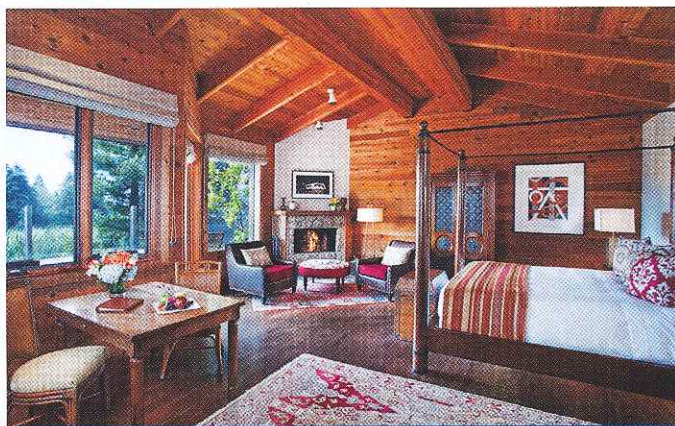




Wikimedia Commons



Doug Ellis



Ventana

Clockwise: McWay Falls plunges onto the sand at McWay Cove in Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park; The Cottage House at Ventana is a standalone retreat with an oversize wood-burning fireplace, private hot tub, king bed, and large dining alcove; The Esalen Center offers a multitude of classes and workshops designed to further personal growth.

referred to the wilderness south of Carmel as *El Sur Grande* (The Big South). After California became a U.S. territory, settlers mixed the Spanish name with English, giving the remote coastal area south of Monterey its current name of Big Sur.

After the 1862 Homestead Act that opened settlement in the West was passed, a few homesteaders began building cabins there. Among the first to arrive were Michael and Barbara Pfeiffer who set up their Big Sur homestead in 1863; it is their daughter Julia for which one of the local state parks is named. Several other landmarks are also named for some of the early settlers; names such as Soberanes, Doud, Post, and McWay are easily recognizable throughout the area.

With travel difficult even in the best weather, the population remained small, but the area's beauty and isolation lured writers. Poet and outdoorsman Robinson Jeffers, an icon of the environmental movement, arrived in the 1920s. The construction of Highway 1 (on which John Steinbeck worked) along the California coast in the 1930s opened the 90 miles of coastline between Monterey and San Luis Obispo to visitors, including a wave of bohemians like Jack Kerouac, Henry Miller, and Hunter S. Thompson.

Big Sur's isolation provided a natural sanctuary for contemplation. In 1958, a Catho-

lic monastery was opened, followed soon thereafter by the Esalen Institute, which helped popularize Eastern philosophy as well as other 1960s counterculture movements, including Gestalt therapy, massage, yoga, organic foods, and the use of psychoactive drugs. The 1969 Santa Barbara oil spill led to increased public calls for protection of the coastline and, in 1992, Congress created Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary. Tight building restrictions continue to protect Big Sur from large-scale development.

## What to Do

Although we list some activities in this section, what you do and where you eat while in Big Sur often has a lot to do with where you stay. Each inn offers great hiking and dining onsite; several offer workshops, activities, or a spa. Bring a jacket that can handle the occasional rain shower, layers of breathable clothing, sturdy hiking shoes, and binoculars to view wildlife. Big Sur summers are usually dominated by a marine layer at about 1,000–2,000 feet MSL, though the mountains above are sunny. By September, the fog begins to dissipate; autumn is the sunniest season.

Driving south from Monterey, you can stop at any of a series of state parks to look for seals and sea otters. **Point Lobos**

**State Natural Reserve** begins three miles south of Carmel. Its rich waters make it popular with scuba divers. Proof of certification is required and online reservations are recommended. You can hike along the shoreline to hidden coves or visit the Whaler's Cabin that was built by Chinese fishermen in the mid-1800s and now serves as a cultural history museum. **Garrapata State Park** begins seven miles past Carmel. Some portions of the park east of the highway burned in the 2016 Soberanes Fire, but there are hiking trails through the low-lying coastal scrub along the ocean at Soberanes Point (enter through gates 8, 9, or 10, marked with signs on the highway), where you may spot gray whales as they head south during their winter migration. To wiggle your toes in the sand, pull off at Garrapata Beach (gates 18 or 19), near Doud Creek. **Point Sur State Historic Park** is 19 miles south of Carmel and is home to the Point Sur Lightstation, first lit on Aug. 1, 1889, and still in operation. Three-hour walking tours are available on weekends and seasonally on Wednesdays, moonlight tours available Apr–Sep, \$5–\$20, [www.PointSur.org](http://www.PointSur.org). **Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park** is 26 miles south of Carmel, near mile marker 47.2 on Highway 1. If you walk along the banks of the Big Sur River,



shaded by sycamore, oak, maple, cottonwood, and redwood trees, you can look for kingfishers, dippers, woodpeckers, raccoons, and deer. The Ernst Ewoldsen Nature Center and Big Sur Lodge (see *Where to Stay*) are here as well. Campsites near the river fill up several months in advance, even in winter. **Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park** is 37 miles south of Carmel, near mile marker 35.8 on Highway 1. There is no beach or ocean access, but the short quarter-mile hike up the Canyon Trail to the 80-foot-tall McWay Falls more than makes up for this. You can also take the 0.6-mile roundtrip Waterfall Overlook Trail that passes under the highway and heads north to a view that overlooks the waterfall

and beach. Endangered California condors can often be spotted in the eucalyptus trees as you enjoy the panorama of the Pacific. A \$10 day-use fee is good at all the above parks until sundown; find more information, maps, or make reservations at [www.Parks.ca.gov](http://www.Parks.ca.gov).

Between Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park and Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, you'll find two Big Sur must-dos. Lunch, dinner, or at least a glass of wine on the terrace at **Nepenthe** (see *Where to Eat*) is sublime—the sweeping ocean view is mesmerizing. You'll notice a huge phoenix sculpture, carved from a single piece of oak. The bird stands on the stump of the original oak and lends its name to the remarkable gift shop down-

stairs. **The Phoenix** is where you'll find memorable gifts for the special people in your life, from colorful hand-knitted sweaters and socks to fine art prints and unique jewelry, ceramics, glass, and garden décor, 10:30 a.m.–7 p.m., 48510 Hwy 1, 831-667-2345, [www.NepentheBigSur.com](http://www.NepentheBigSur.com).

When Henry Miller moved to Big Sur in 1944, his books *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn* were still banned in the U.S. Nevertheless, smuggled copies brought Miller notoriety and influenced the new Beat Generation writers, especially Jack Kerouac. After Miller died in 1980, his best friend Emil White named his own house the **Henry Miller Memorial Library**. The property became a non-profit upon White's death in 1989. Less than a mile south of Nepenthe, it's now a bookstore, arts center, occasional performance or writing workshop venue, and a great place to read by the fire with a good cup of java, 11 a.m.–6 p.m. (10 a.m.–5 p.m. in winter), 48603 Hwy 1, 831-667-2574, [www.HenryMiller.org](http://www.HenryMiller.org).

The **Esalen Institute** is 11 miles south of Nepenthe and three miles south of Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park. This retreat center and educational institute brings together seekers from around the world. Hundreds of workshops are available with topics on everything from mindfulness and learning how to be present in the moment, to relationships, yoga, sex, writing, massage, Gestalt, painting, farming, creativity, singing, and much more. The wonderful hot springs (or baths, as they call them) are on two levels on the cliffs, overlook the ocean, and are clothing-optional; showers are nearby. You can schedule a 75-minute massage for \$145, if attending a workshop or staying on property (\$185, otherwise). Workshops are weekend, five-day, or seven-day, and all prices include meals, movement program (yoga, dance, meditation, etc.), and use of the facilities. Stay off-site or use your own sleeping bag on the floor in a common room or, for graduated additional fees, you can have a bunk bed in a shared room, a private room, or a private house, \$405–\$6,750, 55000 Hwy 1, 831-667-3000 or 888-837-2536, [www.Esalen.org](http://www.Esalen.org).

## Where to Stay

In the 1980s, Bill Post (great-grandson of one of the original homesteaders) and his business partners began to develop 100 coastal acres of his Big Sur cattle ranch into the **Post Ranch Inn**. Opened in 1992, it is Big Sur's most exclusive getaway. Perched 1,200 feet above the ocean, it offers just 40 exquisite, adults-only private hideaways. Accommodations include houses, duplexes, and attached suites. Stone, glass, steel, and reclaimed wood are curved and shaped around their environments. Ocean-view rooms feel like you're suspended above the cliffs. Mountain/forest-view properties include unique freestanding Tree Houses, perched nine feet above the ground yet dwarfed by towering redwoods. The 1,800-square-foot, one-bedroom Post House, where natural

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Post Ranch Inn



Post Ranch Inn



Big Sur River Inn



Glen Oaks Big Sur

Clockwise: Post Ranch Inn Cliff Houses feature private decks, hot tubs, fireplaces, and breathtaking views; Two 104-degree Infinity Spas at Post Ranch Inn meld sea and sky for complete rejuvenation; At Glen Oaks Big Sur, the one-bedroom Big Sur Cabin is nestled under tall redwood trees across from the Big Sur River; Big Sur River Inn guests often place Adirondack chairs into the river to cool off on warmer days.

redwood interiors and walls of glass blur the boundaries between indoors and out, offers maximum privacy and panoramic views. All rooms are supplied with wood-burning fireplaces, custom furniture, original art, Wi-Fi, organic bath products, luxurious robes and slippers, walking sticks, binoculars, and a mini-bar with complimentary local chocolates or salted caramels, granola bars, nuts, cheeses, and wine. Many rooms have heated floors and private soaking tubs. Clean power is provided by the inn's huge solar-powered system. Reservations include a daily gourmet buffet breakfast, valet parking, and activities like yoga, guided nature hikes, garden tours, and stargazing via a 12-inch Meade telescope. Also complimentary is the use of the two heated infinity pools that seem to merge with the ocean below, a heated swimming pool, fitness center, shuttle, and guest Lexus vehicles. The library offers books, games, a television, computer, and printer, while the gallery showcases local art. Shop at the Mercantile for clothing, jewelry, and home furnishings. The Spa offers a range of rejuvenating massage, face, and body treatments, but you can also enjoy these services in the privacy of your room. Healing Arts include Ayurvedic Rituals, Shaman Sessions, Fire Ceremony, Drum Journey, Mandala Painting,

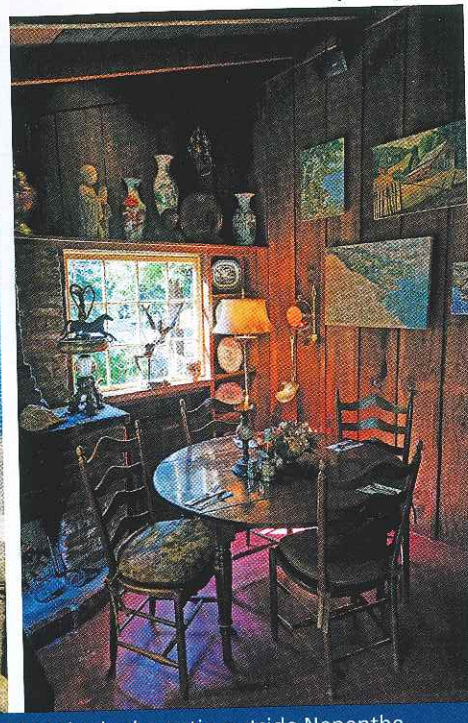
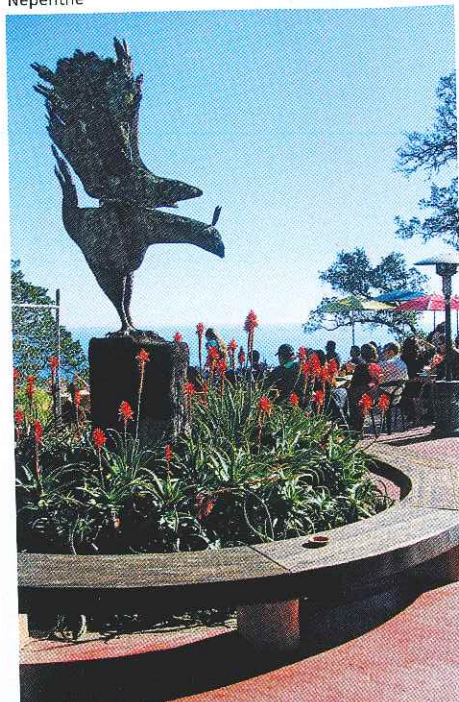
and more. The *Wine Spectator* Grand Award-winning Sierra Mar restaurant is onsite and boasts ocean views, top-tier cuisine, and one of North America's largest wine selections, over 14,000 bottles. Rooms \$900–\$2,500, Post House \$3,950, 47900 Hwy 1, 831-667-2200 or 800-527-2200, [www.PostRanchInn.com](http://www.PostRanchInn.com).

Set among the ridges, meadows, and forest above and just east of Highway 1, **Ventana** was the area's first luxury inn. Take advantage of the daily yoga classes and one-hour guided walks, afternoon wine and cheese receptions, Japanese hot baths and dry sauna, fitness facility, two outdoor swimming pools (one clothing-optional), and Wi-Fi. You can really pamper yourself at the spa, which offers a rich array of facial and body treatments, private yoga or tai chi sessions, and astrology readings. Workshops include art, photography, hiking, and more. The onsite dining room serves the highest caliber, locally sourced California cuisine at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. There are 59 rooms and suites scattered throughout the 243-acre property in about a dozen buildings, their sun-bleached cedar exteriors blending into the surroundings. Private decks are standard, many have ocean views, and you can choose other amenities like a private outdoor hot tub,

extra-large soaking tub, or fireplace, \$585–\$2,800, midweek and other discounts available, [www.VentanaInn.com](http://www.VentanaInn.com). Ventana also offers a tent-only **campground** in a 40-acre redwood canyon. Each of the almost 80 sites has a fire ring and picnic table. Water faucets and three modern bathhouses are also available, \$55–\$75, 48123 Hwy 1, 831-667-2331 or 800-628-6500, [www.VentanaCamping.com](http://www.VentanaCamping.com).

I retain fond memories of **Deetjen's Big Sur Inn**, having stayed there often. Keep your eyes peeled or you'll miss the low wooden sign as you drive by. It's definitely not for everyone, and that's all right with the folks at Deetjen's; luxury-seekers have the Ventana or Post Ranch. Breakfast or dinner here is a treat though, no matter where you stay. In the 1930s, "Grandpa" Deetjen started construction of the inn in the style of his native Norway, using local wood; he kept adding additional rooms until the 1960s. Some have shared baths and all are rustic, small, and not soundproofed, although that doesn't stop people from engaging in *amour très chaud*—very hot love—as you'll discover when you peruse the journals in your room. Decades of revelry emerge from pages where past guests have described their experiences at Deetjen's. Kiss your





Left to right: Artist Edmund Kara sculpted the Phoenix Bird from the old oak tree that used to shade the patio outside Nepenthe Restaurant; The Point Sur Lighthouse is now a State Park accessed year-round via guided tours; Deetjens' warm and cozy restaurant is a beloved Big Sur icon.

TV, internet, and phone good-bye while here and snuggle up by your fire or walk through the dense redwood forest around the inn, \$105-\$290, 48865 Hwy 1, 831-667-2378, [www.Deetjens.com](http://www.Deetjens.com).

My new fave, **Glen Oaks Big Sur**, offers a fabulously revamped 1950s motor lodge and a collection of cabins and cottages nestled in a thick forest of redwood, oak, and sycamore that draws you out to

explore. Relax in a chair beside the Big Sur River or get another perspective from the pedestrian bridge high overhead. The buildings' exteriors of rustic wood contrast with interiors that feature eco-friendly, mid-

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182, 205, 206, 207, 210



Cessna 120, 140, 170,  
170A, 170B



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century modern décor by designer Steve Justrich. This "homegrown modernism" includes some of the most creative decor I've seen—inside and out. Kitchenettes, cozy nooks, and ultra-modern bathrooms with warm floors make this a place you may never want to leave. Extensive photography on their website helps you choose your perfect hideaway, \$275–\$600. The onsite Big Sur Roadhouse offers locally sourced, seasonal California cuisine plus more great design, 8 a.m.–2:30 p.m., 47080 Hwy 1, 831-667-2105, [www.GlenOaksBigSur.com](http://www.GlenOaksBigSur.com).

The 62-room **Big Sur Lodge** is located within Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. Take the 1.4-mile roundtrip hike through redwood groves and along Pfeiffer Big Sur Creek to the 60-foot Pfeiffer Falls. Or drive three miles south to Pfeiffer Beach with its unique purple sand, parking \$5. The onsite restaurant serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Cottage-style rooms each have their own porch or patio; some have kitchenettes and/or fireplaces, \$224–\$395, 47225 Hwy 1, 800-424-4787, [www.BigSurLodge.com](http://www.BigSurLodge.com).

## Where to Eat

During a coastal road trip in 1944, Orson Wells and his then-wife Rita Hayworth bought a cabin on impulse, although they never stayed in it. In 1949, it was converted by Bill and Lolly Fassett into the **Nepenthe**

restaurant, which became a Big Sur icon and is still operated by the family. Enjoying a glass of wine, an Ambrosia Burger, and a piece of pie on the wide terrace with a view of the coastline and Pacific below you is the quintessential Big Sur experience. At dinner, savor the Nepenthe Steak, a filet mignon with Cabernet demi-glace, walnut-crusted Point Reyes blue cheese crouton, portabella mushroom, and garlic mashed potatoes, along with a delicious sunset. Lunch entrées run \$14.50–\$22, served 11:30 a.m.–4:30 p.m.; dinner \$16.25–\$47.50, served 5–10 p.m., 48510 Hwy 1, 831-667-2345, [www.NepentheBigSur.com](http://www.NepentheBigSur.com).

The **Big Sur Bakery & Restaurant** is best known for their breads, including chocolate-chip banana or pumpkin (when in season) and sourdough rye, among others. They also serve sandwiches and dinners in a casual setting, bakery open from 8 a.m., dinner daily 6–9 p.m., brunch Sat–Sun 10:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m., 47540 Hwy 1, 831-667-0520, [www.BigSurBakery.com](http://www.BigSurBakery.com).

The **Big Sur River Inn** has lodging with a pool (\$150–\$375) and a cute little gift shop, as well as a restaurant where country-style breakfasts, lunches, and dinners are served in a room dominated by a giant rock fireplace or on the deck overlooking the Big Sur River. There's live entertainment on Sunday afternoons, and you can join the

other patrons who are sipping drinks while relaxing in Adirondack chairs out in the river, 8 a.m.–8 p.m., 46800 Hwy 1, 831-667-2700, [www.BigSurRiverInn.com](http://www.BigSurRiverInn.com).

## Transportation

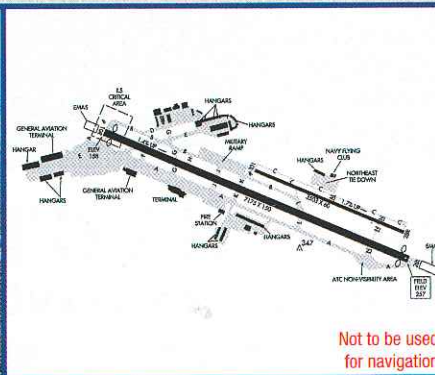
To explore Big Sur you'll need a **rental car**. Several rental car offices are located in the baggage claim area of the main terminal; companies include Avis, 800-352-7900, Enterprise, 800-736-8222, and Hertz, 800-654-3131; typical rates range \$38–\$55 for a compact. You can also reserve a car through either FBO (see *Flying There*) with special crew rates (\$35–\$44) for Enterprise cars, although they work with the other companies as well.

For nearly a century, Big Sur has been a haven for artists, writers, and thinkers from all walks of life. You know you've reached the Big Sur state of mind when the rest of the world falls away, your thoughts and senses are tuned to the present moment, and your heart finds peace. Sit on the beach and align your breathing with the ocean waves or rest your head against an ancient redwood tree as you reflect on life. Expand your horizons at an Esalen workshop or simply indulge your senses at some of California's finest spas and restaurants. You'll soon agree: Big Sur can be habit-forming, in the best of ways. ■

# MRY

## Monterey Regional Airport

Monterey, CA • N 36° 35.2' W 121° 50.6' • Elevation: 256 ft.



**Sectional Chart:** San Francisco  
**Pattern Altitude:** 1,756 ft. MSL  
Right Traffic Rwy 28L & 28R

### FREQUENCIES

ATIS:	119.25
Tower:	118.4
Ground:	120.875
NorCal Approach:	127.15
CInc. Del:	135.45
Oakland FSS:	122.6
Unicom:	122.95

### NOTES:

When tower closed, contact NorCal approach on 133.5 MHz for IFR clearances and cancellations and at 916-361-3748 for clearance delivery. Rotary aircraft expect to follow fixed-wing pattern to runway landing. On departure, no turns below 900 feet unless ATC-directed. Noise abatement procedures in effect 11 p.m.–7 a.m. Avoid flights over residential areas north & south of field. Contact airport operations for procedures. Aircraft with wingspans greater than 65 feet are prohibited on Twy B, between Twy E and D.

### CAUTION:

When tower closed, Rwy 10L/28R is unlighted. Rwy 28L PAPI unusable beyond 2 degrees of runway centerline. Twy A East holding bay is ATC non-visibility area.

### RUNWAYS:

10R/28L 7,175 x 150 ft. Asphalt. Grooved. REIL Rwy 10R, activate HIRL, 4-light PAPI, Rwy 10R/28L, REIL Rwy 28L, and MALSR Rwy 10R PCL 118.4 MHz.  
10L/28R 3,503 x 60 ft. Asphalt. Fair condition. MIRL Rwy 10L/28R.

### SERVICES:

**Del Monte Aviation.** Tiedowns: Single \$10, Twin \$20. Handling fees: Single \$45, Twin \$55 (waived with 15-gallon and 25-gallon fuel purchases). Hangars: Single \$30, Twin \$50. Courtesy car, rental cars, pilot lounge, pilot supplies, flight planning. Fuel: 100LL \$5.89 (full-serve), Jet A \$5.78 (full-serve). Open 6 a.m.–10 p.m. Callout fee of \$200 after 10 p.m., 831-373-4151, [www.DMA-MRY.com](http://www.DMA-MRY.com).  
Unicom 122.95 MHz, ASRI 131.5 MHz.

**Monterey Jet Center.** Tiedowns: Single \$10, Twin \$20. Handling fees: Single \$45 (waived with minimum fuel purchase), Twin \$55 (waived with 25-gallon fuel purchase). Courtesy car (until 9 p.m.), rental cars, pilot lounge, pilot supplies, flight planning. Fuel: 100LL \$5.90 (full-serve), Jet A \$5.77 (full-serve). Open 5:30 a.m.–9:30 p.m., 831-373-0100, [www.MontereyJetCenter.com](http://www.MontereyJetCenter.com). ARINC 129.775 MHz.

### PHONES:

Airport office: 831-333-2321, ASOS: 831-642-0241.