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The Essential Road Trip Itinerary for California's Highway 1

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A view of Bixby Bridge and the Pacific Coast

Photo: Courtesy of Christina Liao



When Pfeiffer Canyon Bridge collapsed earlier this year, Big Sur came to a bit of a halt. California's crown jewel was now divided into what the locals referred to as the north and south, indicating which side of the overpass you were on. In order to get from one end to the other, residents had to hike up and down a steep trail; vehicular access was cut off, and so was Highway 1. Regarded as not only one of the best road trips in the United States but also in the world, the coastal cruise down this major State Route is on many a bucket list. After eight months, the bridge reopened on October 13, and with most of the freeway now clear, the prodigious drive is calling your name.

The key is to start in San Francisco and head down to Los Angeles so that you're riding along the Pacific Coast. Plus, it also makes it easier to pull over at viewing points and take those FOMO-inducing Instas. To

help you embark on this adventure, we've put together a comprehensive itinerary on where to stop along the way as well as mini guides to the major cities you'll be passing through.



The dining room at The Battery

Photo: Douglas Friedman / Courtesy of The Battery



Day 1

If you can, nab a flight that'll get you to San Francisco by noon to make the most of your first day. Head straight from the airport to The Battery, a chic member's club that also doubles as a hotel. With only 15 accommodations, it's intimate and, thankfully, quiet. Once you've dropped off your bags, go down the street to Hog Island Oyster Co. and pick up some fresh (and sustainable) mollusks for lunch. For dessert, venture over to their neighbor Humphry Slocombe for a scoop of Blue Bottle Vietnamese coffee ice cream or Golden Gate Bakery in nearby Chinatown for egg tarts that rival those of Hong Kong (just make sure they're open; the owners have a very sporadic vacation schedule) before you make a beeline to Alcatraz. After you've toured the famed former federal penitentiary, wander over to Fisherman's Wharf where you'll see hundreds of sea lions at Pier 39, but skip the touristy shops and head back to your room to recharge and freshen up before a stellar dinner at Sons & Daughters. This 28-seat restaurant sources seasonal

ingredients from local farms for their ever-changing nine-course tasting menu. Make sure not to skip out on their bread and butter—both house-made, both incredible. And if you've still got some energy before you call it a night, enjoy The Battery's cozy courtyard with a tippie from the bar.



Golden Gate Bridge

Photo: Courtesy of Scott Chernis Photography © 2013



Day 2

Kick off the day with some delicious dim sum at [Lai Hong Lounge](#), a better and much more authentic option than another glitzier establishment in the city. But if you're not a fan of the Chinese small plates, run over to [Mama's](#) for some classic breakfast offerings, but be prepared to wait as there's always a line out the door. Then, if you've never been, make your way over to San Fran's famous winding Lombard Street to snap a few photos before venturing over to the famous Golden Gate Bridge, followed by a stroll around [Golden Gate Park](#), the [California Academy of Sciences](#), and a visit to the row of pastel-color Victorian and Edwardian homes known as the Painted Ladies.

Otherwise, fill your time with a little shopping (yes, there's more to this techie city than hoodies and jeans). Up first: [Hero Shop](#), the brainchild of former *Vogue* editor [Emily Holt](#). It's certainly the city's coolest concept store, carrying designers like [Rosie Assoulin](#), [Creatures of the Wind](#), and [Of Rare Origin](#). Follow that up with a trip to [Veer & Wander](#) (if you want a quick snack on the way, swing by [20th Century Café](#)

for a slice of fluffy Russian honey cake or [Salt & Straw](#) for some inventive ice cream), where the beauty salon has a brilliant selection of products for purchase, [Le Point](#) for another well curated clothing boutique, and [Taylor Stitch](#) for great shirting and basics.

By now it's time for lunch and you won't want to miss out on [La Taqueria](#), a no-frills eatery serving up some of the best burritos in San Francisco. Walk it off in the eclectic Mission District and keep your eyes peeled for vibrant murals (Balmy Alley and Clarion Alley are two great places to start). Afterward, venture back to Hayes Valley for an aperitif at new champagne bar [The Riddler](#) before dinner at [State Bird Provisions](#), where dim sum-style plates of modern Californian fare with an Asian influence are carted around the dining room, ready for your taking.



Carmel Valley Ranch
Photo: Courtesy of Carmel Valley Ranch



Day 3

Pick up your rental car early in the morning and drive over to [Tartine Manufactory](#), where bread is made in-house daily and a breakfast sandwich is the perfect way to start your day, before you hit the road for Monterey (preferably by 8:00 a.m. at the very latest). Your GPS will tell you to take 280 or 101 for the

fastest route, but don't forget you're here for a reason, and that's to take the longer, much more scenic Highway 1. It'll take you anywhere between two to three hours before you hit the seaside town that has been made even more famous on the HBO hit *Big Little Lies*. Take in harbor views at Fisherman's Wharf and, if you want to check out marine life on land, take a spin around the Monterey Bay Aquarium. And while the 17-mile drive through Pebble Beach (where the Lone Cypress resides) passes through an exclusive neighborhood with gorgeous homes and offers great views of the coast, it doesn't quite warrant the admission fee given what you have in store ahead. Instead, scoot on down to Carmel-by-the-Sea and drive along their beach before dropping by Il Grillo for lunch, a small casual Italian restaurant dishing out rustic plates. (Their homemade pasta is obviously a must.)

Now it's time to head inland, where you'll check into the sprawling Carmel Valley Ranch. Spread over 500 acres, accommodations are spacious and there's plenty to keep you busy. An 18-hole golf course, eight tennis courts, and multiple pools (one of which is adults-only and overlooks the property's vineyard) are at your disposal in addition to a long list of activities including beekeeping, a variety of fitness classes, visits to the organic garden and goat pen, and nightly s'mores by the fire pit. Once you've traipsed around a bit, go back into town for dinner at Cantinetta Luca for more impeccable Italian fare, or just snuggle up in your quarters with room service.



An aerial view of Highway 1
Photo: Courtesy of SeeMonterey.com



Day 4

Now it's onto the good stuff: You're going to Big Sur today! The route from Carmel to California's forest gem is perhaps the best stretch of the drive, warranting multiple stops along the way. Grab a bite at the hotel before you check out or head back into town to favored bistro [La Bicyclette](#) for a croissant and coffee before pulling into [Point Lobos State Natural Reserve](#). With several trails to hike and panoramic vistas of the Pacific Ocean, you don't want to rush your time here. Take in the limestone rock formations, rugged bluffs, and coves dotted with seals and sea lions while peering out into deep blue waters, keeping an eye out for spouting whales.

Continue on, and you'll find that there are a number of pull-over spots along the highway for you to step out and take photos of the undisturbed coastline. One in particular is right before Bixby Bridge, an architectural marvel (one of the tallest single-span concrete bridges in the world) that acts as a gateway to Big Sur. Shortly after you'll come across [Point Sur State Historic Park](#), home to the still-functioning Point Sur Lighthouse. But before you step into [Big Sur Bakery](#) for a quick bite, make sure to drive down to Pfeiffer Beach, where tide pools and a natural arch known as Keyhole Rock await. (Note: You might lose cell service along the way, so make sure you have directions saved elsewhere just in case.)



The Big Sur Suite at Ventana Big Sur

Photo: Courtesy of Ventana Big Sur



By now it's late afternoon and you'll want to retire at the newly renovated [Ventana Big Sur](#). Reopened on October 20, the 160-acre hotel grounds have transformed into an Alila property, with the brand's

namesake spa, two outdoor pools, Japanese bath houses, and an upcoming glass art gallery. Its 59 revamped cabin-like rooms are spacious, each with a private balcony or patio looking out on the soaring redwoods. (They've also got a glamping option should you *really* want to connect with the great outdoors.) Opt for a Big Sur suite, furnished with a woodburning fireplace, a hammock on the deck, and a stone bathroom with a large soaking tub for two, and make sure to grab an alfresco table at the resort's restaurant for some delectable coastal cuisine by Chef Paul Corsentino.



McWay Falls
Photo: Courtesy of SeeMonterey.com



Day 5

Wake up early and try to hit the road by 8:00 a.m. Your first stop will be a short 20-minute drive down to Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park, where you'll hike a short distance to the McWay Falls overlook and set your eyes on 80 feet of cascading water. If you want to stretch your legs some more, check to see if the other trails are open, otherwise, enjoy the rest of the coastal drive ahead. While we wait for the Mud Creek area to recover from a recent landslide, you'll have to turn off of Highway 1 onto Nacimiento-Fergusson Road to continue south, which actually sets up the perfect opportunity to visit Paso Robles and San Luis Obispo. The former is home to a number of vineyards and distilleries, but the one to visit is Re:Find, where handcrafted spirits are made from saignée (free run juice from wine grapes). They offer a \$15 tasting that includes all of their wine and liquor offerings; in the summer go for a refreshing cucumber vodka, while the

fall calls for a tangy kumquat liqueur. To assuage a rumbling stomach, drive 40 minutes to SLO and dine at [Thomas Hill Organics](#), where seasonal ingredients come in the form of light and healthy dishes, while others are more indulgent, like their thick-cut fries cooked in duck fat.

After you've had your fill, jump back in the car and head straight to L.A. It'll take you between three to four and a half hours depending on traffic, landing you in Beverly Hills by late afternoon. The renowned neighborhood plays host to some of the finest hotels in the city, such as [Viceroy L'Ermitage Beverly Hills](#), [Montage Beverly Hills](#), [Beverly Wilshire](#), and the brand-new [Waldorf Astoria Beverly Hills](#). Check into your luxurious temporary home and grab a snack at [The Blvd](#)—a creative take on a classic dessert by pastry chef Chris Ford will do just the trick—while looking out onto Rodeo Drive.



Gwen

Photo: Ray Kachatorian / Courtesy of Gwen



Once you've recharged, do a little shopping on Melrose Place, popping into Cassandra Grey's cult beauty shop [Violet Grey](#) and Vanessa Traina's chic retail concept store [The Apartment by the Line](#) before heading off to dinner at [Gwen](#). As it's a butcher shop-meets-restaurant, there's no question that meat is the name of the game here. Go for the five-course tasting menu and enjoy the finest charcuterie plate in the city, but make sure to supplement your main course with a tender, mouthwatering steak (the Wagyu New York strip

is the way to go). End the night at No Vacancy, a speakeasy-esque bar with a secret entrance (we won't ruin the surprise) inside a restored Victorian home. Sip on craft cocktails in the courtyard and enjoy live entertainment (live bands, burlesque, tightrope walkers, oh my!) by the Baroque fireplaces as you unwind.



Bestia

Photo: Courtesy of Bestia



Day 6

Sleep in. No, really, it's okay. After a packed several days, it's well deserved. Skip breakfast and head over to A.O.C. for lunch, where a seat in the ivy-lined, exposed brick patio awaits. Make sure to start off with a cheese plate (they even carry Pantaleo from Sardinia) before you dive into a brilliantly composed salad or, if they have it—the menu is constantly changing—the grilled sea bass, where the skin is crispy and the meat is moist, topped with a lemon labneh that adds the perfect amount of acidity to the dish. Then head on up to the Hollywood Hills and drop by Jerome C. Daniel Overlook for sweeping vistas of the City of Angels before heading over to Griffith Observatory for even more exceptional views.

Once you're done with your jaunt in the hills, make your way downtown and stop by The Broad, where Yayoi Kusama's *Infinity Mirrors* is on display from October 21 until January 1. Continue the gallery hopping at Art Share L.A. to check out the works by emerging local artists, then head off to dinner at Bestia, where the multiregional Italian cuisine has been receiving accolades year after year and is one of the

hottest seats in town. And before you head back west to check out [Chris Burden's *Urban Light* installation at LACMA](#) and crash in your comfy bed, drop by [Spire 73](#), the highest rooftop bar in the United States, at the new [InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown](#) for a quick nightcap.



Venice Beach Skate Park

Photo: Courtesy of Christina Liao



Day 7

If you can swing it, book a flight that doesn't leave until early evening so that you'll still have plenty of time to explore on your final day. Start off with breakfast or brunch at [République](#), a French eatery that makes all of their bread and pastries on-site with a great juice and smoothie menu to boot. Afterwards, drive over to Santa Monica to walk around the carnivalesque pier and savor your final moments at [Venice Beach](#), paying a visit to the skate park and ogling at all of the amazing tricks. If you happen to be leaving on a Sunday, track down the [Guerrilla Tacos](#) truck between these two spots for some unique takes on the Mexican favorite, otherwise, a trip to In-N-Out (there's one right by the airport) will definitely hit the spot and end your trip on a high note.