

Driving Along the Pacific Coast

West Coast, USA

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“ This itinerary takes you along the Pacific coast on the famous Highway 1 in California, from North to South. ”

Summary

2 nights: **San Francisco** for Golden Gate Bridge, Chinatown, and more.

1 night: **Monterey** for Carmel Beach, the world-class aquarium and downtown’s historic quarter.

0 night: **Big Sur** for stunning views of the Pacific shore along Highway 1.

1 night: **Santa Barbara** the “American Riviera”.

2 nights: **Los Angeles** for Malibu Beach, Venice Beach, Hollywood and more.

2 nights: **San Diego** for a Spanish and laid-back atmosphere, the Balboa park, its world-famous zoo and more.

General information

There is no best time of the year to travel in California as it has year-round sunny weather. As you will be traveling by car (don’t count on public transport here for such itinerary!), don’t forget your GPS.

¹<http://www.nps.gov/alca/>

San Francisco

Introduction

Start in **San Francisco**, the centerpiece of Northern California, well-known for its steep rolling hills, Victorian architecture, summer fog, liberal community, scenic beauty, and great ethnic and cultural diversity. It is no wonder many visitors have left their heart in San Francisco. I recommend staying here 2 to 3 days at least.

What to do

Within the city limit, don’t miss the iconic **Golden Gate Bridge**. There are many ways to admire it including riding a bike on it but the best spot definitely is Marin Headlands located on the Northwest side of the bridge (not to be confused with the Vista Point on the Northern side). You’ll get an amazing view with the city skyline in the background, best with the afternoon light. Check out the **Fisherman’s Wharf** and its sea lions on Pier 39. Fisherman’s Wharf is a broad area by the waterfront where you can wander and get your share of touristy shops. One of the best ice-cream spots is there in the Ghirardelli Square. From there, you can embark a boat toward the world’s most legendary prison **Alcatraz** (official website¹), once host to America’s most notorious criminals such as Al Capone. Note that you usually need to reserve your combined boat/entrance ticket to Alcatraz several days or weeks in ad-

vance. Visit **China Town** that has the largest Chinese community outside Asia and become immersed in a microcosmic Asian world, filled with herbal shops, temples, pagoda roofs and dragon parades. China Town is best visited by walking on Grant Avenue. San Francisco has a rich collection of top restaurants, whether it be in a chilled-out bar, at a gig or on a pulsating dance floor.

Other places in San Francisco to strongly consider in no particular order: the renowned gay district **Castro** featuring a giant rainbow flag and many shops and restaurants, the **Coit** tower from which you'll have an impressive view of the city, the beautiful **Palace of Fine Arts** reminiscent of Roman and Greek architecture, **Alamo Square Park** home to the Pink Ladies (a row of Victorian houses with the city skyline in the background), the crooked, curvy **Lombard Street** on Russian hill, the free **Cable Car museum** on Nob Hill, the **Ferry Building market** near the Financial district (especially on Sunday morning when it is surrounded by a huge farmer's market), **Union Square** the center of shopping and theater in the city, the **Golden Gate Park** where you'll find the acclaimed **M.H. de Young Memorial Museum** and **California Academy of Sciences** as well as the Japanese Tea Garden, and the **California Palace of the Legion of Honor** in Lincoln Park.

Just outside San Francisco, the **Napa** and **Sonoma** valleys are famous for their wine, and you should definitely go check out the giant redwood trees at **Muir Woods** just North of the Golden Gate bridge.

Next

Start your drive South on the beautiful Highway 1 to **Monterey**. It will take you 2h30 for this leg (and 30 minutes faster if you start by taking the I-280 road). As explained in the conclusion, if you have extra time, check out **Santa Cruz** that is on your way.

Monterey

Introduction

Monterey is all about the sea with its world famous aquarium, its abundant marine wildlife and the magnificent natural beauty of its shores. It also possesses some of the best preserved historic buildings from the Spanish and Mexican eras in California.

What to do

In the Monterey Bay, don't miss the world famous **Monterey Bay Aquarium** located at the northern end of the **Cannery Row**. Check out the nearby town of **Carmel-By-The-Sea** (simply called Carmel) known for its white sand beach, its friendly local and its great food. I also highly suggest spending about 1.5 hour at the scenic coastal area **Point Lobos State Natural Reserve** South of Carmel that features a variety of sea animals & wildlife, great hiking and diving. Note that Point Lobos is part of the Northern end of Big Sur and it could also be visited while you drive through Big Sur.

Next

Continue South on Highway 1 to drive through Big Sur where mountains rise abruptly from the Pacific Ocean. It will be one of your most memorable drive ever. Big Sur has no specific boundaries, but we say it starts just South of Carmel.

Big Sur

Introduction

Big Sur is a region on the Central Coast of California and contains vast wildernesses and breathtaking views as it stretches 90 miles (140 km) along the rugged Pacific Ocean.

What to do

Along the stretch, there are plenty of spots where you can take spectacular photography shots or/and walk short trails. The most famous spots from North to South are **Pfeiffer Beach**, **Bixby Bridge** and **McWay Falls**, but really, there are so many more amazing places in Big Sur.

Eat & drink

For a break, I definitely recommend stopping at **Nepenthe** that offers amazing views for both its bar with cheaper food and its fully-fledged restaurant.

Next

Driving through Big Sur and enjoying the scenery should take you about 4 hours. It will be one of your most memorable drive! Drive 2 more hours toward South to arrive in Santa Barbara.

Santa Barbara

Introduction

Santa Barbara is the Saint Tropez of California. Enjoy the pier, the beach and the wine trail! Santa Barbara is famous for its Mediterranean feeling and in addition to beautiful beaches, has an excellent urban wine trail in downtown.

What to do

Walk through **State Street**, its most famous avenue. Visit the **County Courthouse** that epitomizes the Spanish-Moorish architecture that is found across the city. Check out the **Old Mission** to glimpse at the city's Spanish origin. There are three beaches in Santa Barbara, the **East Beach** is the best stretch to get some sunshine without being mobbed by crowds. Santa Barbara is home to many excellent wineries and

has its own **urban wine trail** in downtown.

Next

Drive 2 hours South to Los Angeles.

Los Angeles

Introduction

Los Angeles, the legendary city known for its celebrity culture, warm weather and its initial L.A. I recommend staying here 2 days.

What to do

Plan the first day to visit the acclaimed **Getty Center**, chill at the **Santa Monica Pier** and walk or bike along the famous **Venice Beach** where you will experience the Southern California vibe. In the evening, go to the **Griffith Observatory** to admire the sunset over L.A. and learn about space at the public and historic observatory. The second day you can check the iconic **Walt Disney Concert Hall**, walk on the **Hollywood Walk of Fame** before heading out to Las Vegas! If you have one more day available: enjoy the **Universal Studios Hollywood** (everyone should go at least once in his life in a Universal Studios!).

Next

Drive to San Diego via Highway 1 and Interstate 5. It will take you in between 2.5 and 3 hours. You can optionally stop by Laguna Beach, a resort city known for its scenic beaches and its artist community or, just before getting to the center of San Diego, at La Jolla, the upscale beach community of San Diego with many shop-lined streets.

Conclusion

That's it for a roadtrip along the coastline! If

you have more time, I would definitely suggest to stop in **Santa Cruz** which is known for its youthful vibe and a certain bohemian feel. Santa Cruz has many great beaches too.