

Highway 1 Discovery Route Itinerary Includes Adventures for Everyone

First of all, breathe in the sea air. There's a lot to take in along during the [Season of Coastal Discovery](#) along the [Highway 1 Discovery Route](#). Every January and February, this stretch of fabled highway overflows with outdoor recreation, wildlife viewing and cultural gems from blue whales to coastal hikes to vineyard after vineyard. From surfing to sipping award-winning Pinot Noir, sea otters to elephant seals, a four-day sojourn from [Ragged Point](#) to [Edna Valley](#) is filled with a visual kaleidoscope of sights and a cornucopia of experiences. Here's one of many paths to take on your majestic march along the

Day 1 on the [North Coast](#): Elephant Seals, Art and Beaches

Morning

The day begins perched in Ragged Point high above waves crashing into the cove far below. You launch the morning with a classic California breakfast on the Ragged Point Inn and Resort restaurant's "hanging" terrace, where you can review your itinerary over a Big Sur omelet or Spanish frittata. Get your blood going via the half-mile Black Swift Falls Trail loop that leads to a black sand beach and amazing views of the hidden 300-foot Black Swift waterfall. After shooting a calendar's worth of photos, head south to the [Piedras Blancas Rookery](#), the most accessible elephant seal habitat in the world. January is the prime pupping season, and you're so close you don't even need binoculars to witness the spectacular. Scroll through more of your exceptional images over a glass of wine at the [Hearst Ranch Winery](#) patio overlooking the WR Hearst State Beach, the bay and the historic pier. The Ragged Point and San Simeon areas are known for their wide open spaces and [family-owned hotels](#).

Afternoon

It's time to add some culture to the day's walk, wildlife and wine tasting. Collect or download a [map](#) from the [Cambria Historical Museum](#), then stroll about the 28 sites that span from a diminutive Catholic chapel to a Prohibition-era hotel. These two ends of the morality spectrum help color this vibrant artistic community comprised of artisans, artists' galleries and independent restaurants. Be sure to stop by [Linn's Farm Store](#) for some famous olallieberry pie, then jot out among the pines by the sea to the [Moonstone Beach Boardwalk](#) while keeping an eye out for many species of shorebirds, brown pelicans and, further adrift, gray and other species of whale. Save time for a little tide pooling near [Leffingwell Landing](#), followed by a late afternoon snack at the [Moonstone Beach Bar and Grill](#) or [Robin's](#). You'll also find plenty of [B&Bs, hotels and vacation rentals](#) in Cambria.

Evening

The [Highway 1 Discovery Route](#) sparkles with seaside hamlets, and each gem shines in its unique way. Consider [Cayucos](#), the historic town that hugs the coast between Morro Strand and Estero Bluffs. Known for its California cool attitude, the mural-adorned village is a perfect

landing spot after a full day. Check into your [lodging](#), then step out onto the almost 150-year-old [Cayucos Pier](#) to look for whales at sea — and inspiration in the waves, should you choose to rent a surfboard from the [Cayucos Surf Co.](#) and hit the reliable break tomorrow morning. Tonight, it's sunset and dinner at [Ruddell's Smokehouse](#), [Schooners](#) or the [Sea Shanty](#), followed by a well-earned rest.

Day 2: Hiking, Whale Spotting and Water Sports

Morning

Grab a quick morning bite of house-made pastries at [Cayucos Coffee](#) or the [Top Dog Coffee Bar](#). Then head to the hills, or in this case [Estero Bluffs State Park Trail](#), where the sea breeze freshens your skin and the meadow habitat attracts a variety of resident and migratory birds. The four-mile one-way trail provides options for tide pooling in the cove below. Though never guaranteed, you're more likely to [spot whales](#) from the [Highway 1 Discovery Route](#) than anywhere else in the U.S. The Whale Trail Organization has placed 10% of their viewing sites in San Luis Obispo County — 10 in all, with six stops directly along Highway 1. The [Montaña de Oro Whale Trail](#) site is considered one of the best, an ideal perch to watch for spouting gray, blue and humpback whales, as well as sea otters, dolphins and a host of other marine life. If you want to get up close and personal, check out a hands-on [seaweed foraging tour](#).

Afternoon

After scanning the sea, keep cruising into Los Osos and Baywood, two lesser-known towns where you can wander through seascape-themed galleries, then collect a picnic lunch from [Celia's Garden Café](#). Spend the afternoon in the 32,431-acre [Montaña de Oro State Park](#), one of the premier parks in the vast California parks system. You can pick your peak here, choosing to climb 1,275 feet over 4.5 miles along the [Valencia Peak Trail](#) for stupendous 360-degree views or ascend the [Hazard Peak Trail](#), a six-mile loop. Both trails course through several habitats, promising a variety of bird and plant life. A less arduous walk awaits, as does a waterfall, on the [Islay Creek Trail](#). Slip into the [Baywood Ale House](#) or the [Laguna Grill](#) for a relaxed dinner. The villages offer plenty of [quaint hotels and bay-front vacation rentals](#).

Day 3 on the [South Coast](#): Adventure in Avila Beach

Avila Beach's reliably calm waters provide the perfect setting to visit [Avila Beach Paddlesports](#) and finally take up stand-up paddleboarding, share a kayak or just soak in the sun and sea. Paddlers don't want to miss kayaking or supping to the historic 130-year old [Port San Luis Lighthouse](#) or the sea caves at Fossil Point and Shell Beach. Catch a glimpse of a rare working wharf (and maybe some seafood) at the historic [Harford Pier](#). If you're instead ready for a soak and body treatment, don't miss visiting [Sycamore Mineral Springs Resort & Spa](#). [Avila Beach's](#) reputation as a culinary hub is well-deserved, given the credentials of [Blue Moon Over Avila](#) chef "Big" Steve Lucero and [Ocean Grill's](#) Michael Ray. After a day of marine play a mellow evening awaits in romantic Avila Beach is just what you need. Slide into the [Libertine Brewing](#)

[Company](#) patio for a signature “Wild Ale,” one of 12 taps, or take a wine tasting room saunter along 1st Street. Come night’s end, rest your head within easy earshot of the lapping Pacific at one of several [full service hotels and vacation rentals](#).

Day 4: Butterflies, Dunes and Wineries

Morning

There are many wonderful places to start your day while getting your morning sustenance: enjoy coffee and breakfast at [Fat Cats Café](#). After you’ve had your morning fill migrate south like the thousands of monarch butterflies you’ll likely discover at the 19-acre [Monarch Dunes Butterfly Habitat](#). Mid-winter is the peak time to observe these western monarchs, a subspecies that migrates thousands of miles between southern Canada and San Diego. Sixty thousand butterflies overwinter here each year in the blue gum eucalyptus trees. Butterflies are one of the scores of winged species that spend time in the [Oceano Dunes](#) area. After butterfly viewing, grab a late morning coffee at [Quintessa Coffee](#), sidle up to the patio at [Willow Kitchen](#) or enjoy some casual fare at [Efren’s Deli](#). [Oso Flaco Preserve](#) offers outstanding bird-watching, with a variety of wading birds, songbirds and other residential species. The two-mile [Oceano Dunes Preserve Trail](#) transects the 570-acre preserve, a great introduction to the living dune system. You can pick out a [small hotel or vacation rental](#) not far from the sand dunes.

Afternoon

As you survey the ocean for whales and other ocean life, watch the butterflies congregate and paddle in the ocean surf, it’s easy to forget that [Edna Valley](#), one of the [premier coastal wine regions in America](#), nestles behind the coastal hills just four miles away from the beach. [101 Wine Tours](#) is happy to take care of the driving as you explore the [Valley](#), beginning with the [Biddle Ranch Vineyard](#), a small batch winery that exemplifies this sublime region of distinct, aesthetically pleasing wineries. Over 30 wineries dot the region between [Edna Valley](#) and neighboring [Arroyo Grande Valley](#). You can gaze upon the Seven Sisters volcanic cones of Edna Valley from several winery tasting porches and terraces, perfect perches from which to plot your exploration into a winemaking culture that began when Father Junipero Serra, a Spanish monk, first planted grapes here in 1772. You can select a [vacation home](#) right in the heart of wine country. A visit to Edna Valley affords an excellent departing scene after your exhilarating [Season of Coastal Discovery](#) along the [Highway 1 Discovery Route](#).