

FOOD & WINE

7 Scenic Culinary Destinations Along California's Central Coast

Pair California's Central Coast with creative farm-to-table dining.

By Sharon McDonnell | October 1, 2024

Rugged coastal landscapes and farm-to-table food define California's Monterey Peninsula, and each town has a distinct personality. [Carmel-by-the-Sea](#) is an upscale village of manicured beauty, fairytale cottages, more than 60 restaurants (the peninsula's only two with Michelin stars included), and 80 galleries, a throwback to its bohemian art and writer colony origin. [Big Sur](#) is famous for hairpin curves on Highway 1, the dramatic Bixby Bridge, and counterculture history, while [Pacific Grove](#) is where thousands of Monarch butterflies start to descend in October (plus Victorian inns). [Monterey's](#) long-lost sardine-canning industry and working-class history was immortalized in John Steinbeck's *Cannery Row*.

Things change. But “a whole breed of new creative couples is now here, on the super-local food and arts scenes — I call them the ‘new Bohemians.’ We have more restaurants than ever before,” says Amy Herzog, executive director of Visit Carmel. Here's where to eat and stay to experience this scenic slice of the Central California coast.

Sierra Mar

Seemingly in the clouds, 1,200 feet high at the edge of a cliff, your view of the sunset (and ocean, if it's not foggy) from this glass-sided restaurant in the luxury [Post Ranch Inn](#) is unforgettable. The menu is dotted with Asian influences, from mushrooms and cashews two ways (roasted maitake mushrooms in XO-mushroom sauce, plus crumbled cashews in cashew cream), halibut in a green curry sauce (that uses mint, basil, cilantro, and jalapeño instead of the usual Thai ingredients) to yellowfin tuna with togarashi mayo, ponzu, and avocado. The 136-page wine list is France- and California-focused.



Post Ranch Inn on the Big Sur coastline. PHOTO: KODIAK GREENWOOD

Post Ranch Inn

A modernist masterpiece of wood cottages with staggering ocean views and “living” roofs of plants, treehouses on stilts, and infinity pools at edges of cliffs high above Big Sur, [Post Ranch Inn](#) is a [Michelin Three Key hotel](#) (one of just 11 in the U.S. in Michelin's first hotel ratings from April 2024). Marvel at the Milky Way from your spacious terrace, day bed, and slate-floored bathroom; snuggle next to the wood-burning fireplace in your ocean-view cottage; and walk forest trails on the steep hillsides of the former Post family ranch, where the hotel opened in 1992.