

Great Home Office Ideas

Sunset

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The Magic of Fall

Plugged-in pumpkins

Party treats

Scarecrows you can make

Best B&Bs for Hikers

Olive Harvest Feast





LITTLE DISCOVERIES await at Shell Beach on the Sonoma coast.

ROBERT HOLMES

A weekend retreat to Bodega Bay

Sonoma County's fishing village offers fresh seafood, hiking, bicycle rides, and great shops at land's end

BY RYN LEWIS

We were so clever that August, a family of holiday makers from smoggy Los Angeles bound for Bodega Bay. An entire month in a beach house for \$3,000? How could we go wrong? We crested the last hill, dreaming of warm sand and, to our astonishment, left blue sky for wet, cold, blustery fog. *When did it come? When would it go?* Locals shook their heads. August was *always* like that.

For a few hours every afternoon, the dense white stuff burned off and we rushed outside, ready to explore. We found brown hills as massive as the flanks of sleeping giants. They dropped off abruptly, creating cliffs and sandy bays, wild beaches and ice-blue water (turquoise in the shallows). Black sea-

stack sculptures, graceful as calligraphy, rose from the surf—spiky homes for sea stars, urchins, and anemones, the last of which suckled at my son's prying fingers. We craved long hikes, traced them on the maps with our fingers—but didn't dare. When the whiteness returned in the afternoon, it was as daunting as a blizzard. *We'll come back, we said, when skies are blue.*

We know now that the fog belongs to August. It's a thing of memory in winter and spring, when wild yellow mustard blankets the fields, the hills are washed in vivid greens, and 20-foot sea whips tangle on the beaches like so much knob-ended linguine. Even at Christmas, you can curl up in the bowl of a dune in a T-shirt and jeans.

There are *not* a million things to do in Bodega Bay, and that's the pleasure of it. You can pitch a tent in one of two excellent state campgrounds where you are mere steps from a primordial beach and you can watch a wide streak of lime green take over a salmon pink sky just before sunset.

You can hike Bodega Head, a glorious hunk of the otherwise submerged Pacific plate. Here fragrant footpaths edge breakneck cliffs, and forests of red kelp provide hospitality to battalions of California sea lions. In 1963, this wonder was nearly lost. PG&E attempted to develop a power plant run by a nuclear reactor in Campbell Cove, on the head's eastern edge, despite the fact



DEBRA LAMBERT

that the San Andreas Fault sliced through its excavation. The Sierra Club and local activists put the brakes on. You can still see the “hole in the head,” just around the back side of the cove.

Monarch butterflies overwinter in great numbers at the head, and gray whales pass by here from December to March on their way to the Baja lagoons. Throughout the year, this is a renowned bird-watching spot on the Pacific Flyway.

From the head, you can follow the Over Look Trail across the dunes. Sonoma Coast State Beach, 22 miles long, is extraordinary for its wilderness as well as its accessibility. Bluffs, slopes, and dunes support a hardy ground cover of native shrubs, grasses, and, in the spring, wildflowers. Kite-flying is big sport here, and not just for kids.

Swimming is tricky in Bodega at any time of year; the water is icy, and the surf is home to “sleeper” waves that annually sweep at least one person out to sea. The lagoon at Salmon Creek, where fresh water meets ocean, provides the solution for small children who *really* want to swim. Tidepooling at Shell Beach offers the perfect recreation for those who don't mind freezing feet: at low tide, anemones, boring clams, flatworms, sea urchins, sea palms, and sea stars provide a circus of amusements.

That's what *I* like to do in Bodega Bay—hike the head and walk on the beaches. There are times, however, when something officially recreational is on the docket, like taking Wil's Fishing Adventures' 56-foot boat out to sea at dawn to hunt rock cod and crab, or renting bicycles for a ride around the mouth of the bay. Three hundred commercial fishing boats, some of them crusty vessels dating from the 1920s,



THE OPEN SPACE that surrounds Coleman Valley Road offers room to ride and great views of the ocean.

A touch-tank and a jellyfish aquarium provide more traditional entertainment.

If you're a serious golfer, you'll want to play 18 holes at the open-to-the-public Bodega Harbour Golf Links, an unmerciful, but magnificent, course with a par of 70, designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr.—who must have been in a lousy mood. The starter offered my husband a warning about the vast insulated window on the house across the way: “You break it, you pay for it.” He missed—the green by a mile, the house by a couple of feet.

To find what Bodega Bay sorely lacks—a walkable street of shops and eateries—head to Occidental. Drive east on Bay Highway, which becomes Bodega Highway. You'll pass the tiny town of Bodega—sights include the Potter Schoolhouse, famous from Alfred Hitchcock's *The*

put in each night at Bodega Bay. This is a working fishing port, one of the few left, and proud of it. Don't miss the spectacle at 6 each evening when the daily catch unloads at Tides Wharf.

Should you desire an eco-tour, there are two possibilities. The Chanslor Wetlands Wildlife Project provides an intriguing and intimate tour of an interwoven network of ecosystems: salt marsh, wet meadow, riparian woodland, and vernal pool.

Or, any Friday you can visit the UC Davis Bodega Marine Laboratory. A volunteer docent will introduce you to the workings of this exceptional research facility. Here, in seawater pumped directly and continuously from the ocean, eggs are extracted from endangered winter-run chinook salmon to enhance genetic diversity, lobsters whose diets lack carotenoids grow up baby blue, and a bright green sea anemone bumbles happily in a tank with a decorator crab.

Birds, and St. Teresa of Avila, a sweet country church dating to 1860. Turn left onto Bohemian Highway and roll through Freestone, where you'll see Osmosis—home of the enzyme bath—and Freestone House and Garden (both worth a stop), then on through the dappled light of redwoods to Occidental. Here, you'll find shops, cafes, and the Inn at Occidental, a hostelry of remarkable luxury, charm, and sophistication.

Sunset is the time to return to Bodega Bay via Coleman Valley Road. Prepare for a stunning series of ocean-view switchbacks through open pastureland studded with cattle. On my last trip, one pearl-white Brahma bull knelt alone on a hillock, exuding pleasure, his rough nose raised toward the sun. I would not be surprised if he settled there every afternoon. For a moment, as I watched Bodega's green streak grow evident in the sky, I envied him.

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ROBERT HOLMES

YOU'LL BE A HIT with the kids if you drop by Candy & Kites.

BODEGA BAY TRAVEL PLANNER

Bodega Bay is about 65 miles northwest of San Francisco via U.S. Highway 101 and State 12. Be sure to book your accommodations well ahead; try the Bodega Bay Area Chamber of Commerce if you're having difficulty finding a room. The chamber is a helpful resource for all Bodega Bay activities. 5375 El Camino Bella, Bodega Bay; (800) 905-9050.

Area code is 707 unless noted.

Recreation

BODEGA BAY EXCURSIONS. Contact Teri Lyn Simi of Bodega Days. Half-day hiking outings from \$40, massages from \$65. 824-9491.

BODEGA BAY SURF SHACK. In addition to wetsuits and surfboards (\$12.95 for 24 hours) and kayaks (\$35 for 4 hours), you can rent bicycles (\$18 for half-day). Pelican Plaza, 1400 Hwy. 1; 875-3944.

BODEGA HARBOUR GOLF LINKS. From \$50 for 18 holes. 21301 Heron Dr., Bodega Bay; 875-3538.

CHANSLOR RANCH. Guided trail rides on Salmon Creek Beach, \$50 for 1½ hours, ages 8 and over. 2660 Hwy. 1, Bodega Bay; 875-3333.

WIL'S FISHING ADVENTURES. From \$50 for each passenger, half-price for ages 15 and under. 1580 East Shore Rd., Bodega Bay; 875-2323.

Tours

CHANSLOR WETLANDS WILDLIFE PROJECT. Call to arrange a visit. \$10, \$5 children. 2660 Hwy. 1, Bodega Bay; 875-3089.

UC DAVIS BODEGA MARINE LABORATORY. Guided tours 2-4 Fri, \$2, \$1 students. 2099 Westside Rd., Bodega Bay; 875-2211.

Shops and spas

BODEGA LANDMARK STUDIO COLLECTION. Don't miss Stephen McMillan's copper-plate etchings and Aryan Chappell's photography. 10:30-6 Thu-Mon. 17255 Bodega Hwy., Bodega; 876-3477.

CANDY & KITES. Great gifts to take home to the kids. 10-5 Mon-Thu, 9-7 Fri-Sun. 1415 Hwy. 1, Bodega Bay; 875-3777.

FREESTONE HOUSE AND GARDEN. A fine assortment of domestic items housed in a venerable restored hotel. 9-5 Thu-Mon. 306 Bohemian Hwy., Freestone; 823-3710.

GOURMET AU BAY. Wine tasting available, as well as a nice selection of items for the home. 11-6 daily. 913 Hwy. 1, Bodega Bay; 875-9875.

HAND GOODS. Where local artists show their work. 10-6 daily. 3627 Main St., Occidental; 874-2161.

OSMOSIS. Call in advance to arrange an enzyme heat treatment and blanket wrap (\$60) or massage (\$65). Beautiful, restful Japanese garden. 9-9 daily. 209 Bohemian Hwy., Freestone; 823-8231.

PASTORALE. Attractive, sporty clothing, woolenware, and accessories. 9:30-5:30 daily. 12779 Bodega Hwy., Freestone; 823-0640.

Lodging

BAY HILL MANSION. Be prepared for tourists ringing the bell of this simple but appealing Victorian to ask if it is the house of Hitchcock's *The Birds*. (It isn't.) From

\$95. 3919 Bay Hill Rd., Bodega Bay; (800) 526-5927 or www.bayhillmansion.com.

BODEGA BAY LODGE RESORT & CONFERENCE CENTER. Great views and fireplaces; cookie-cutter rooms. From \$150. 103 Hwy. 1, Bodega Bay; (800) 368-2468.

CALIFORNIA STATE PARK CAMPGROUNDS. On Sonoma Coast State Beach: Wright's Beach (\$20 per night) and Bodega Dunes (\$16 per night); (800) 444-7275.

BODEGA BAY AND BEYOND. House rentals from \$250 for two nights, discounts for longer stays. 1400 Hwy. 1, Bodega Bay; (800) 888-3565.

INN AT OCCIDENTAL. The best lodgings around, if you're child-free and looking for a romantic interlude in an antique-filled setting. Periodic winemaker dinners—call for newsletter. From \$145. 3657 Church St., Occidental; (800) 522-6324.

INN AT THE TIDES. Marriott-like accommodations, with dining and pool. From \$139. 800 Hwy. 1, Bodega Bay; (800) 541-7788 or (707) 875-2751.

SONOMA COAST VILLA. Very attractive Mediterranean setting, with pool and dining. From \$225. 16702 Hwy. 1, Bodega; (888) 404-2255.

Dining

BOHEMIAN CAFÉ. The essence of hip. Great food and drink served by the truly cool, under some thought-provoking art. Decent prices. 3688 Bohemian Hwy., Occidental; 874-3931.

BREAKERS CAFE. Reasonably priced and somewhat more adventurous than the Bohemian. Pelican Plaza, 1400 Hwy. 1, Bodega Bay; 875-2513.

DUCK CLUB. The best in town, with a ticket to match. Regional American cuisine, formal atmosphere. Bodega Bay Lodge, 103 Hwy. 1, Bodega Bay; 875-3525.

SANDPIPER DOCKSIDE CAFE & RESTAURANT. Good, wholesome food at sensible prices, situated among the charter boats on the way to the marina. 1410 Bay Flat Rd., off East Shore, Bodega Bay; 875-2278.

TIDES WHARF RESTAURANT & BAR. Recently renovated, and more attractive than most. Crab cioppino is the specialty. Great water views, oyster bar. 835 Hwy. 1, Bodega Bay; 875-3652. ♦