



Doggone good time in **CARMEL-BY-THE-SEA**

A gourmand's getaway agenda

STORY AND PHOTOS BY KAREN NELSON

Like many inspired ideas, it came to us after a few glasses of Estate Pinot Noir in the garden at Folktale Winery. My husband, dog and I have always loved Carmel. Over the years we have curated a list of our favorite activities — beach walking, wine tasting, wood-fired mushroom pizza at La Bicyclette — yet we knew there was so much more than we could fit into a weekend.

Our wine-soaked inspiration: rent a storybook cottage for a month! By the end, our favorites hadn't changed, but simply expanded.

So consider this my curated advice on a “choose your own adventure” weekend. All you need is an empty stomach and a glass waiting to be filled. (The chocolate Labrador Retriever named Rusty is optional.)

Start your morning at Mad Dogs & Englishmen Coffee Bar with one of their signature single-origin coffees or a hand-whisked matcha (or, in Rusty's case, the free dog biscuits), then head down Ocean Avenue to stroll along Carmel Beach, enjoying the stunning ocean view and the local dogs out for their morning romp.

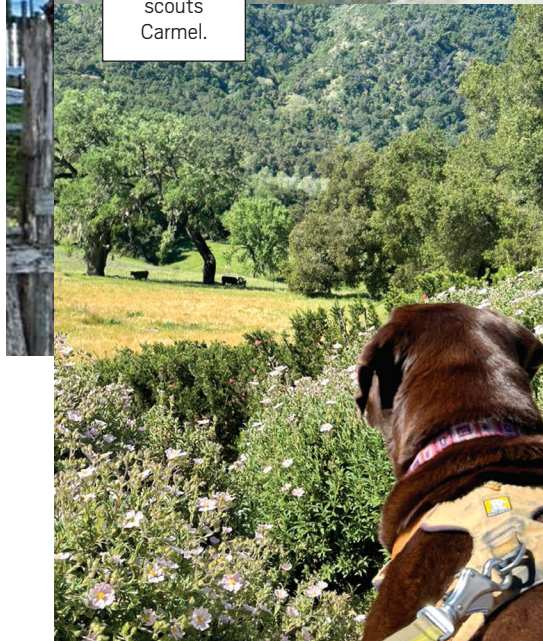
For a longer walk, wind your way south along the aptly named Scenic

Drive, keeping an eye out for sea otters floating in the kelp forests. Rusty recommends a sip of fresh water at the #carmeloggbar before heading back to town for a well-earned breakfast of cheese blintzes and Swiss-style pancakes at the local favorite Little Swiss Cafe.

If brunch or lunch is more your style, the one restaurant we always visit is La Bicyclette. The seasonal menu changes weekly, but the house-made spinach gnocchi à la Parisienne, baked in a Parmesan cream sauce, is a staple for a reason. And the wood-fired pizzas will become your new craving. Pair these dishes with wine from their well-



Rusty
scouts
Carmel.



curated collection, and you're well on your way to a perfect afternoon.

With 17 tasting rooms within walking distance of each other in downtown, the most difficult decision is where to start. (Pro tip: download the Carmel-by-the-Sea Wine Walk app and take advantage of the specials offered including 2-for-1 tastings, extra pours and bottle discounts.)

Pull up a stool at Carmel's first wine tasting room, the cowboy-themed Galante Vineyards, to sample their reputable Cabernet Sauvignon, as well as estate-grown Malbec, Petite Sirah, Merlot and several red blends.

At Dawn's Dream, a woman-owned winery, wine tasting is a win-win proposition. You enjoy sipping an excellent array of Burgundian-style wines, and the proceeds from your visit

supports one of Dawn's hand-selected nonprofits. Rusty recommends the white blend with the dog on the label. For every bottle sold, the winery donates \$5 directly to the Animal Friends Rescue Project.

Windy Oaks Estate has tasting rooms in both downtown Carmel as well as out in the valley. Regardless of which location you choose, their world-class Pinot Noirs are worth a trip. For more classic regional Chardonnays and Pinots, visit Albatross Ridge. If you're a live music or trivia fan, head over to the cozy De Tierra tasting room for their special evening entertainment. (It should be noted that Team Rusty took first place due to our ability to properly identify all of the 1980s TV show theme songs.)

If it's cocktails you crave, the roof deck of Vesuvio is the place to be for inventive creations alongside classic Italian aperitifs. You can sample the decadent local staple, the McSuvio Burger, or if you didn't have the gnocchi at La Bicyclette (or even if you did) try the popular baked gnocchi tossed with truffle sauce. If an Irish pub is more your style, head to Brophy's Tavern and make sure to order the fish and chips. Rusty, however, gives both a paws down, as neither are dog-friendly.

Another great option for comfort food is the bustling Nora's, which has a very popular and lively outdoor patio. For a romantic splurge, Casanova is a charming restaurant with a French-inspired menu, as well as the physical table where Vincent Van Gogh ate his daily meals while boarding at the Auberge Ravoux in France. Rusty did not find their *Attention! Chien Lunatique* sign amusing, but he did

appreciate getting pampered.

Finish your night with live music in The Living Room at the elegant and dog-friendly Cypress Inn for timeless classics, or at Mission Ranch for a sing-along piano bar experience we find ourselves returning to again and again.

If you're feeling extra adventurous, pull on your boots and head to Saturday Night Line Dancing at the Hacienda Hay & Feed in Carmel Valley. But trust me, don't follow our dance lead.

Begin your Sunday with Yoga in the Vines at Folktale Winery on your way out Carmel Valley road. After the all-level class, indulge in their wine-pairing brunch, which often features live music; or continue up the valley to the Corkscrew Cafe to feast on charcuterie, salads and pizzas in a shaded garden setting.

Sneak out the back gate directly into the Cowgirl Winery tasting garden where they invite you to "put your boots up," sip some wine and play corn hole. From there, cross the street to Georis Winery and tuck into a cozy corner of their own lush grounds (or, in Rusty's case, make yourself comfortable on the outdoor couch). Both Georis and Cowgirl also offer takeout from the Corkscrew Cafe to enjoy in their respective gardens.

There's no shortage of wineries to choose from in Carmel Valley, and many are located within skipping distance of each other. Two standouts are Bernardus, where they are known for their deeper Bordeaux blends, and Holman Ranch, which combines French techniques with holistic agriculture. Both provide Rusty-approved dog treats.

After all this decadence, there is really only one place left to visit. The Refuge is an award-winning, silent, technology-free, co-ed spa. Guests complete "thermal cycles" that begin in the sauna, steam room or thermal pool, followed by a cold plunge (just do it), then time spent lounging by the fire pit while taking in the view of the Santa Lucia Preserve.

This I promise: Your mind relaxes during the first cycle. By the third you will feel rejuvenated, and by the fifth complete cycle, your body and mind will be fully reset. (Rusty, however, recommends a good nap at home, sleeping off all those dog treats and dreaming of running free on Carmel Beach.)

:: carmelcalifornia.com
:: carmelchamber.org