

HALF MOON BAY

A QUINT COASTAL TOWN WITH SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

By Kristin Conard



Above: View of Half Moon Bay from Sam's Chowder House. Left: A quiver of kayaks ready for rentals at Half Moon Bay Kayaks.

If you've driven between San Francisco and Santa Cruz along scenic Highway 1, you've passed through Half Moon Bay. Chances are, you were on your way to somewhere else, and your experience was that of stop lights and fast food restaurants along a congested main thoroughway. But Half Moon Bay is so much more than what meets the eye as you pass through, for just off Highway 1 is the heart of Half Moon Bay, and it's worth taking some time to explore this quaint beach town.

WILD HISTORY AND CLAIMS TO FAME

Up to 50 separate Ohlone native groups once lived along the coast in what is now Half Moon Bay, and Highway 1 and Highway 92 both follow former trails created by these Native American people. Later, during Prohibition, rumrunners used the inlets, coves, and dense fog to help get booze into San Francisco.

Historic downtown has been the site of settlement since 1869, and the area has become known as the site of the wildly impressive and dangerous Mavericks surf contest at the break a couple miles offshore from Pillar Point Harbor.

Half Moon Bay is also known for its free annual art and pumpkin festival (pumpkinfest.miramarevents.com). This year's 45th event, October 17 and 18, boasts the tagline "World Pumpkin Capital of Half Moon Bay Pays Homage to the Great and Almighty Gourd." You can get pumpkin in just about everything from coffee to beer and spa treatments and check out pumpkins the size of small cars.

HORSES TO HIKING OR BIKING

On the water, you can wander along Johnson Pier at Pillar Point Harbor and look for signs or use the FishLine app to see which boats have fresh fish to sell. For a closer look at the harbor, Half Moon Bay Kayak Company (620-773-6101, hmbkayak.com) offers kayak and SUP tours and rentals.

Riding a horse along the beach feels free and natural, and it gives you a unique perspective on the world. Sea Horse Ranch (1828 Cabrillo Hwy N, 650-726-9903, seahorseranch.org), offers guided trail rides along the beach and bluffs.

Head into the hills for hiking and biking. With the construction of the Tom Lantos Tunnels on Highway 1 between Pacifica and Montara, the section of highway known as Devil's Slide is now closed to vehicles, but open to hiking and cycling. It's a relatively short stretch (1.3 miles) with incredible views and restrooms and parking lots at each end. Another former highway enjoyed by hikers and cyclists is the Old San Pedro Mountain Road by which you can access other trails in McNee Ranch State Park.

You'll need a mountain bike for this one while a road bike would work for Devil's Slide.

Another nearby trail destination is Purisima Creek Redwoods Open Space (openspace.org). With 24 miles of trails and up to 1,600 feet of elevation gain, you'll enjoy a beautiful mix of hardwood forest and coastal scrub, plus some views of the coast.

DOWNTOWN DESIGN

Garden Apothecary (gardenapothecary.com, 329 Main Street) is packed with a variety of air plants and stylish garden tools. You'll love the heavenly scented selection of handmade, organic bath products made by the owner like balsam, lavender, and lotus bath salts and cacao and cardamom massage oil.

Another design happy store is Abode (417 Main Street, abodehalfmoonbay.com), a light and airy shop with jewelry, candles, furniture, and more. Many of the items are inspired by nature and made by local Bay Area artists.

Odyssey Inside Shop (617 Main Street, odyssey.com) is an "interactive retail shop" with natural history style curiosities. Kids and adults alike can enjoy different rotating events in the garden outside—dig for hidden treasure, break your own geode, make a mason jar lantern, and rent an electric bicycle to ride around town.

BREAKFAST, LUNCH, AND DINNER

Half Moon Bay Bakery (514 Main Street) may be small, but it's filled with deliciousness featuring a range of sweet and savory treats like artichoke bread and old-fashioned donuts. Other popular spots for breakfast are the Moonside Bakery and Café (604 Main Street, moonsidebakery.com) and the 3-Zero Café (3zerocafe.com) at Half Moon Bay Airport.

At the northern end of Main Street is Pasta Moon (315 Main Street, 650-726-5125, pastamoon.com). Most of the ingredients at this Italian restaurant are locally sourced, and could be from a farm just five minutes away. Portions are large and they make their own pasta and sausage in-house.

For more fresh and local ingredients, try It's Italia (401 N Main Street, 650-726-4444, itsitaliarestaurant.com). Enjoy courtyard dining, dishes like roasted squash blossoms and mesquite grilled steak, and some of the softest, tastiest pre-dinner bread that you'll ever have.

You may have to park along the highway at Sam's Chowder House (4210 Cabrillo Hwy N, 650-712-0245, samschowderhouse.com), since the lot fills up quickly because of the restaurant's fresh fish and ocean views. The large restaurant has patios

with fire pits, live music on Fridays and Saturdays, and a menu with options from hamburgers and meatballs to its famous lobster roll. The ice cream topped with olive oil and sea salt? Definitely better than it might sound.

Another beachfront dining destination is Half Moon Bay Brewing Company (390 Capistrano Road, 650-728-2739, hmbbrewingco.com). With ten of their own beers on tap year-round plus a rotating seasonal selection, they take their beer seriously. And you can enjoy your brew out on the dog-friendly patio.

At La Nebbia Winery (12341 San Mateo Road, 620-726-09463, lanebbiawinery.com), you're just outside of town with views of the hills, and you can play bocce ball with a glass of wine or debate which of the five wines in your tasting flight is the best. Half Moon Bay Art Glass (hmbartglass.com), located at the winery, offers glass-sculpting classes where you can make and take home your own glass pumpkin or jellyfish lamp. It's hot, a bit intense, and thoroughly awesome to create your own piece of art out of molten glass, and you're guided safely through the process.

HOSTELS TO HIGH-END

Point Montara Lighthouse Hostel (8800 Cabrillo Hwy, 650-728-7177, norcalhostels.org/montara), just north of Half Moon Bay, was originally a fog signal station built in 1875, and you can book a bunk or private room for \$27 and up.

Half Moon Bay Inn (401 Main Street, 650-726-1177, halfmoonbayinn.com) is in the center of downtown, and it's a Spanish Revival style building built in the 1930s. Each room in the boutique hotel is uniquely decorated with a focus on eclectic elegance and comfort. The inn is dog friendly and rooms run \$140 and up.

Perfect for a romantic and memorable once in a lifetime style getaway, The Ritz-Carlton, Half Moon Bay (1 Miramontes Point Rd, 650-712-7000, ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/HalfMoonBay) is perched on a secluded bluff just south of downtown and boasts a worldclass spa. Their hot herbal poultice treatment with herbs like camphor, turmeric, and lemongrass, helps work out your kinks and knots, so with less pain and inflammation you'll be able to hit the trails harder the next day. Rooms from \$455. 



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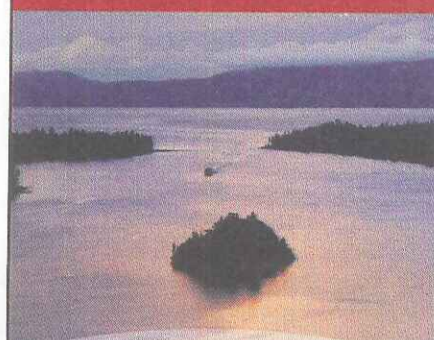
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