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COURTESY • CARMEL VALLEY RANCH

Hole 13 at Carmel Valley Ranch, which treats golfers to some dramatic tees.

Eclectic, picturesque Carmel is a ‘must visit’

BY JEFFREY WEIDEL
VIEW CORRESPONDENT

Situated in picturesque Monterey County, Carmel is one of those places people designate as a “must visit.”

Of course, the main lure is the ocean views. Stunning might not be descriptive enough to characterize the rugged coastal scenery that makes Carmel and Monterey two of the most alluring destinations worldwide.

Downtown Carmel, roughly a one-square-mile village, features small cottages, modest homes, upscale art galleries, plus both trendy and home-spun restaurants.

And if you care to do some star gazing, drop by the Hog’s

CARMEL VALLEY RANCH ACTIVITIES

- Golf, 18-hole, Pete Dye-designed course
- Guided or unguided hiking trails that double as running and walking trails
- Tennis courts, featuring seven hard courts and two clay courts
- Cooking classes
- Salt-water swimming pool (adults only)
- Separate family area, includes swimming pool, basketball courts, Bocce ball area
- Huge fitness/spa center
- Harvesting honey
- Organic garden area to explore
- Kids Camp
- Free S’mores every evening

Breath Inn for a possible glimpse of famed Hollywood actor Clint Eastwood, its owner. He’ll be the guy sipping on a beer or glass of wine, maybe even sitting next to an empty

chair, having an imaginary chat with President Obama!

One more thing about eclectic downtown Carmel — it has no street numbers. Its early occupants were mainly artists

who built their homes and preferred naming them rather than having numerical addresses.

Ocean Avenue is the appropriately named main drag in downtown Carmel. Follow it heading west and eventually one winds up staring face-to-face at the gorgeous green-blue waters of the Pacific Ocean.

Although rarely referenced, the official name for Carmel is Carmel-by-the-Sea, which seems pretty ridiculous. We get it, Carmel is by the ocean!

Obviously the most well known and frequented areas of Carmel are its ocean enclaves. But there’s actually a much less-traveled area of this famed California city that’s also a great

tourist destination.

The ‘other’ Carmel

Literally tucked away in the majestic forests of the San Lucia Mountains is the Carmel Valley, a 20-minute drive from Monterey. Unlike the costal weather, which is often over-cast and ensconced in a sun-blocked marine layer of clouds, the Carmel Valley receives approximately 300 days of sunshine and the temperatures are naturally warmer.

To totally escape the masses, visitors can choose one of the many lodges, garden inns and small accommodations that reside just off scenic Carmel Valley Road.

If the goal is finding a

luxurious accommodation, that can be accomplished at Carmel Valley Ranch, a beautiful 500-acre upscale getaway. It's one of those places where you can park the car upon entering and never drive it again until check-out day.

One of the great things about a stay at the "Ranch" is it's a great spot for numerous activities or it can be a location to simply relax and be pampered.

Scenic golf course

For golfers, the par-70 course is short (6,117 from back tees) and the mostly flat-land front 9 is an exercise in target golf with some penalizing holes. However, the hilly backside is a major treat, featuring dramatic, elevated tees on three holes, including the 141-yard par-3 at No. 13.

Carmel Valley Ranch is a fun track overall, that's tight on the front side, but opens up on the back, where every hole is unique. A bonus is the frequent deer sightings, which on this October day included several dozen on the nature-preserved, tree-lined back 9.

Guests pay \$145 and \$85 for afternoon tee times.

Upscale lodging

The resort has 139 guest



COURTESY • CARMEL VALLEY RANCH

Enjoy a pool designated for adults and one for families at Carmel Valley Ranch.

suites that are spacious (average 800 square feet) and were upgraded during the \$39 million resort renovation that took place two years ago. Most of the suites feature a sizable outdoor balcony with gorgeous views, thanks to their hillside locations. There are fireplaces, separate living rooms, flat-screen TVs, and large bath-

rooms. One thing lacking is kitchen facilities.

The lodging is not cheap, ranging from \$425 to \$800 per night, plus \$25 a night resort fee. Bring a pet and it's another \$100 for the duration of the stay.

Fine dining

No kitchen facilities in the

condos means breakfast, lunch and dinner must be consumed at the lodge or a poolside snack. And that's not a bad thing, considering the delectable menu selections and the beautifully laid-out dining room and spacious outdoor area with fire pits.

Executive chef Tim Wood may even come out to your

table and discuss the menu selections, which are very diverse. He's a hands-on chef who often makes his own trips to purchase from area fishermen, farmers and organic growers. The Lodge Restaurant is definitely a farm-to-table cuisine.

Wine tasting

Although there is no real need to leave the Ranch, a pleasant escape is visiting Carmel Valley Village, a six-mile drive. This quaint area, located off scenic Carmel Valley Road, has 17 wine-tasting rooms and is a noted Pinot Noir region. Wineries include Talbot, Boekennoogen, Bernardus and Figge.

The Village also includes a number of shops, galleries and restaurants, most of them with outdoor seating.

For more information on Carmel Valley Ranch, visit www.carmelvalleyranch.com or call (855) 687-7262.

Unique activities

The Ranch starts harvesting honey from its colony of Italian honeybees in early June. Guests can receive a hands-on experience, putting on protective suits for this educational experience about the habits of bees.