

# family getaways

## Carmel-by-the Sea

## Go Ahead, Make My Weekend

‘C an we live here forever?’ my 4 year old asked. I wanted to say yes. And not just to appease my pleading son. The one-square-mile seaside city where street numbers just don’t exist and quaint shops are devoid of neon, had charmed me too. (My husband even glanced somewhat seriously at the “Businesses for Sale” listings in a realty office window.) The pine and cypress trees towering majestically by the boulder-lined ocean didn’t hurt either. To us, Carmel-by-the-Sea offers the beauty of the beach and the tranquility of a mountain retreat, all rolled into one. Heck, Carmel even tamed tough guy, and former mayor, Clint Eastwood.

Cool weather (I loved it!) prevails for most of the summer: October is actually one of the best months to visit Carmel if you want sunny days to outnumber foggy ones. Our late-May stay made jackets and long pants *de rigueur* for walks on the beach, but lack of sunshine didn’t keep my kids out of our hotel’s well-heated pool. We stayed at the historic 75-room La Playa Hotel, an elegant Mediterranean-style former villa located at the corner of Camino Real and Eighth Street, a few short blocks from the beach or downtown Carmel. Besides the recently updated, traditionally decorated guest rooms, the hotel offers five “Cottages-by-the-Sea”: Ranging from one to three bedrooms, each has a unique architectural style (ours was a Craftsman bungalow), all with full kitchens, fireplaces, patios and daily hotel services.

Most meals we ate in our cozy cottage or around town (the concierge was a font of information) but our most memorable dinner was right at La Playa. The hotel’s gourmet—yet casual—restaurant, The Terrace Grill offers heated al fresco dining on, of course, the terrace. Seated at a table overlooking the award-winning hotel gardens in full bloom, glimpsing the ocean at sunset, we dined on chili grilled prime rib (his),

angel hair pasta with grilled prawns (mine) and hamburgers (theirs). The meal and ambiance somehow managed to provide romance and family togetherness at the same time. (Restaurant open daily from 7:30 a.m. to 10 p.m.)

A family trip to the Carmel area is not complete without a visit to the spectacular Monterey Bay Aquarium, about half an hour away. The aquarium, with over 100 exhibits—including a three-story-high kelp forest and a Touch Pool—showcasing 6,500 specimens, is open daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tickets: \$11.25 adults, \$5 for 3 to 12 year olds; call (408) 648-4888. Rooms at La Playa start at \$110 per night, cottages from \$300 per night. For reservations call (800) 582-8900. For more information on events and accommodations, call the Carmel Business Association at (408) 624-2522.

— Vivien Santana Hughes



Family-friendly lodgings at La Playa include five separate cottages, each with unique charm like “Loghaven” (above).



A member of Historic Hotels of America, La Playa Hotel in Carmel-by-the-Sea retains the elegant stone and stained glass entrance from the original 1902 mansion.

