

# Dreamy Days in Cambria

Central California coast offers serene getaway

Story & photos by Tracy Beard

except Hearst Castle photos

Famous Carmel, California, is no longer the quiet coastal town it used to be, but you can still enjoy secluded beach walks, glorious gardens, succulent farm-to-table food, and boutique shopping, further south in Cambria, California. It's an elegant and serene place to escape for a few days any time of year. The town offers a variety of restaurants, local history, and plenty of outdoor activities.

I left home, met with my friend Connie in the Bay Area, and we drove together to Cambria, where we found ourselves in paradise.

Cambria is reminiscent of Carmel in days gone by. It is smaller and less crowded but still parades a beautiful coastline, quaint shops, a plethora of restaurants, and some of the most amazing, colorful gardens.

## Morning muffins

We arrived early in the morning at Creekside Gardens Restaurant to enjoy breakfast. The aroma of fresh baked goods greeted us at the door. The restaurant features a variety of innovative muffins each day. I savored a warm and crunchy pecan apple muffin, while Connie indulged in the fruity essence of one made with pineapple.

My hearty breakfast of hot, lean, bacon, crispy hash browns, two eggs cooked sunny side up, and a cup of coffee on the side filled me for the morning. Connie enjoyed the restaurant's "Country Brown" plate, a mountain of layered roasted house potatoes, vine-ripened tomatoes, spring onions, melted cheddar cheese, medium-hot salsa, sweet red peppers, and a fried egg, all under a few dollops of sour cream.

After breakfast, we journeyed about 30 minutes down the coast to Morrow Bay to browse the shops. On the way back, we stopped in the little town of Cayucos for lunch. After eating, we walked onto the pier and gazed out into the ocean while watching surfers catch the waves along the coastline (top photo).

In the afternoon we checked into Cambria Pines Lodge. The suite featured a gigantic bedroom with a king bed, side patio, and a huge bathroom boasting a Jacuzzi tub and shower. The living room, furnished with a Murphy bed, couch, chairs, table, desk, and fireplace, completed the suite. The varying shades of green and brown, mixed with the overstuffed couch and refined chair, made for a well-balanced motif and comfortable ambience in the suite. We unpacked and changed clothes for dinner at Robin's Restaurant.



Surfers near Cayucos.



The gardens at Cambria Pines Lodge, typical of many in the area. Below: Quaint boutiques also abound.



The roomy garden venue, country-style nooks and crannies, and a working fireplace fashioned a cozy atmosphere. The culinary staff works to bring together sumptuous meals using the abundance of fresh produce, local meats, a variety of cheeses, and delicious wines from the area. Owners Robin and Shanny Covey said their establishment features one of the largest assortments of vegetarian dishes along the coast of California.

Connie and I shared a plate of crunchy Brussels sprouts gently sautéed, tossed in walnut vinaigrette and sprinkled with blue cheese, pinenuts, and sliced radishes (at



right). My entrée of succulent short ribs braised in red wine harmonized flawlessly with the risotto, which was dotted with English peas and Parmesan



cheese (bottom photo). The grilled asparagus rounded out the plate to perfection. I paired my dinner with a glass of Pessimist by Daou, a beautifully bold blend of Syrah, Petite Syrah, Zin, and Tannat, produced in nearby Paso Robles, California.

Connie partook of a vegetarian dish, Thai Red Curry with Tofu, made with local vegetables and bathed in curry-spiced coconut milk.

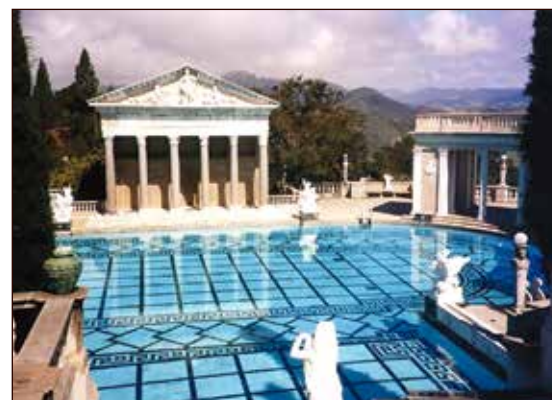
Cashews added crunch, and tiny pieces of pineapple sweetened the dish. She also enjoyed the cucumber salad, which is great for cooling the palate after a spicy curry. "We should bring half of the entrées back to our room and put them in our refrigerator for tomorrow," Connie said. The meal was so big and so delicious that we determined to relish the culinary delights again the next day for lunch.

## On to San Simeon

The next morning, we drove 10 miles to Hearst Castle. The tour began with a movie at the visitor's center featuring the life of William Randolph Hearst, the famous newspaper publisher of the San Francisco Examiner. The movie discloses the story of how William's father built his financial success and depicts William's early travels as a boy with his mother. It

reveals how he created his own financial

cont page 20



The Neptune Pool at Hearst Castle was rebuilt three times to suit its owner's tastes. Its centerpiece is the facade of an ancient Roman temple Hearst imported to California.



**Cambria** *from page 19*  
 empire, and exposes his obsession with building the perfect estate on the very spot where he camped and spent his summers as a child.

A shuttle bus transported us to the castle. Riding up the hill, we were blasted with an explosion of color as we experienced our first views of the castle grounds. Gardeners groom the trees, bushes, and flowers to perfection while statues from various eras speckle the gardens, bringing a sense of life to the scene. Mr. Hearst collaborated on the castle from 1919 to 1947, working with well-respected architect Julia Morgan who, according to Wikipedia, is responsible for designing more than 700 buildings in California. Millions of visitors have passed through the doors of this 165-room Mediterranean revival estate since opening to the public as a California State Park in 1958.



Inside the castle is an overwhelming display of Mr. Hearst's eclectic taste. Art and antiques from a multitude of countries saturate each room in a mosaic of color and style. Hearst's tapestry collection, set out for all to see in the great dining hall, covers each and every wall of the room, and the expansive movie theater appeared to me as if it could hold 100 guests. The prominent tennis courts appear pristine, and I could easily imagine myself luxuriating in the indoor Roman pool.

Though formal and stuffy in appearance, the castle was once the home of a man who loved to entertain, and entertain he did. This stanch museum accommodated wild parties. Famous people of all types spent their weekends at the castle. Guests presented spontaneous plays, participated in fierce tennis matches, and lounged quietly by the pools. The private airport required rebuilding three times over the years to accommodate larger and larger planes for more and more guests.

**Elephant seals**

Nearby is Piedras Blancas on the shores of the Central Coast of California, home to a rookery. Elephant seals venture here twice a year to breed, molt, give birth, and rest. *The E-Seal News* describes current seal activities for each month of the year. In April, the seals molt and sleep; during the summer months juveniles and larger females leave. Adult males depart in August and September, but some large males continue to camp out on the beach and participate in sparring behavior over the summer months. In December, the beaches are most alive with males fighting as they try to establish dominance and the winner gets his pick of the ladies. We watched the elephant seals and then headed a short drive away over to Moonstone Beach.

Gusts of wind accentuated the cool, dreary day at the beach. We donned our raincoats and walked the one-mile wooden boardwalk along Moonstone Beach. The trees appear to reach inland, attempting to escape the wild winds and sea. Soon chilled, we ducked into a nearby restaurant and warmed up with a Spanish coffee. Now toasty from the inside out, we prepared to cruise the boutique shops in Cambria where various artists live and sell their masterpieces in local shops.

We returned to the lodge and toured the grounds. Cambria Pines bursts with an assortment of gardens. Produce from the kitchen garden supplies the lodge with herbs and vegetables throughout the year. The white garden, comprised of a manicured lawn with green hedges, showcases an abundance of white flowers sprinkled throughout, just perfect for weddings. The rose garden demonstrates an excess of color, and the gazebo is the perfect centerpiece for any wedding ceremony.

Take some time off this year and travel to Cambria like I did. The sea, tranquility and dreams are just awaiting your arrival, whether by plane, Amtrak's Coast Starlight or car.



**If You Go**

**Cambria Pines Lodge**

2905 Burton Drive  
 Cambria, CA • 800-966-6490

**Hearst Castle**

750 Hearst Castle Rd  
 San Simeon, CA • 800-444-4445

**The Rookery**

4 miles north of Hearst Castle on Highway 1

**Robins Restaurant**

4095 Burton Dr.  
 Cambria, CA 93428  
 (805) 927-5007

**Coast Starlight Amtrak**

Kelso/Longview Station (KEL)  
 501 South 1st Ave, Kelso, WA  
 Departs 12:29pm, (Portland 2:25pm), arrives SLO 3:20pm next day

San Luis Obispo Station (SLO)  
 1011 Railroad Ave  
 San Luis Obispo, CA  
 Departs 3:43pm, arrives Portland 3:40pm, (Kelso 5:14pm) next day

**Car Rental in San Luis Obispo:**

Enterprise Rent-A-Car  
 2989 Broad St • 805-546-6270  
 Budget Car Rental • 2800 Broad St



*Egyptian remnants at the Hearst Castle.*  
 Photo by Stan Shebs, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=123645>

*Top photo: The mile-long wooden boardwalk at Moonstone Beach. Bottom photo: "The Flower Bed" at Cambria Pines stars an old bed chockfull of colorful flowers.*



*Vancouver resident Tracy Beard (at left) loves food, wine, exploring solo and with friends and family. She writes travel and adventure stories for several publications. Read more about her at [tracybeardwrites.com](http://tracybeardwrites.com).*

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