

An Amazing Day in Coastal California

If you've already hit the wineries and San Francisco, or you're looking for a single-day trek within easy reach of the studio that includes a wide variety of beautiful and amazing sights, check out my "amazing day" itinerary.

This delightful day trip can take 4 – 8 hours, depending on your pace and how many stops you make along the way. I strongly recommend you read ahead on this, since some comments may not be laid out in the exact order you might make driving decisions. I also recommend you take a map of the area (Sonoma County with some detail especially on the western side).

Depending on your choices along the way, highlights of your outing can include:

- The [Russian River](#), with possible swimming or tubing
- A walk in majestic Redwood forest ([Armstrong Woods](#))
- A drive along the famous, scenic [CA Highway 1](#)
- Touring California's stunning Pacific coast
- Possible whale and/or sea lion sightings
- Tide-pooling, fishing or sight-seeing in [Bodega Bay](#)
- The town of Bodega (not Bodega Bay), where [Alfred Hitchcock's movie "The Birds" was filmed](#)
- The towns of [Guerneville](#), Bodega Bay, Bodega and [Sebastopol](#)
- Stops for savory fish tacos, great clam chowder, fabulous coffee drinks, micro brewery, antique shopping, local arts and crafts and more.

Weather

Keep in mind that weather can affect your ability to enjoy the outdoors, and the climate and temperature vary considerably from Santa Rosa's at points on this itinerary. Strongly suggested: **take warmer clothing along**, even if it's warm and sunny in Santa Rosa. The Redwood forest can be damp and cool on some days, and the coast can be breezy and much cooler than you might expect on some days.

The Route

To begin, drive north on Hwy. 101 around 4 ½ miles.

Exit on River Road / Mark West Springs Road. Turn left off the ramp onto River Road. Head west around 15 miles to Guerneville.

What to do in Guerneville

- You can see the Russian River, which flows westward along River Road and through Guerneville. It's pretty low in the summer (especially in drought), but you can swim at points where they dam it for swimming holes, and you can even float down the river on tubes.
- As you enter downtown Guerneville, watch on your right for Armstrong Woods Drive. Turn right, it's only a few short minutes to the park. The silent beauty of Armstrong Woods and the ancient majesty of these incredible trees is truly awe-inspiring. A 30-60 minute walk is probably enough.
- As you make that right turn, Coffee Bazaar is on your right. This spot, which is a favorite for locals, serves great coffee, coffee drinks and REALLY TASTY baked goods.
- Before or after your visit to Armstrong Woods, you can find a funky little restaurant for breakfast or lunch.

Driving the California Coast

- From Guerneville, continue west on River Road until it intersects with California's State Highway 1, also known as Coastal Highway. At this intersection, you can go right (north) to the tiny town of Jenner. Or, you can turn left and head south, which is the recommended drive on your day trip.
- The scenery can be breathtaking, although it's hard to drive and watch at the same time, since the road is full of sharp curves. There are vista pullouts along the way.
- One particular recommended vista stop is Goat Rock Overlook, which is part of the Sonoma Coast State Park. You can do a brief hike along with trail here, all the while overlooking Goat Rock, an amazing formation in the surf. Sometimes you can see whales and/or sea lions from here.
- The drive down Highway 1 is probably around an hour including a couple vista stops.

Town of Bodega Bay

- Eventually you will come to the town of Bodega Bay, which features a couple beaches, areas for tide-pooling, fishing boats, some seafood restaurants and a view you don't want to miss.
- Just north of Bodega (before you arrive from the north), a highly recommended stop is [Bodega Head](#), a land formation where you can stand high atop a bluff overlooking the ocean. The view is wonderful, and you may see whales and/or sea lions from here. There are trails, although it doesn't require much of a hike for the views.
- To get to Bodega Head from Highway 1, turn right on Eastshore Road shortly after you pass the Bodega Dunes Campground. When this deadends into Bay Flat Road, turn right

and follow that around the bay. It becomes Westshore Road and takes you to the park with the overlook.

- If you like great clam chowder, you can stop at [Spud Point Crab Company](#) along the way to Bodega Head or on the way back from it as you pass the Spud Point Marina area. It closes at 5:00 pm, however, so keep this in mind if you were thinking dinner.

Town of Bodega

- Continue south on Highway 1. Once you leave Bodega Bay, watch for the turnoff on your left for Bodega Highway heading east toward Sebastopol.
- Follow this a few miles. You will come to the tiny town of Bodega, which features a few small shops, coffee and the town's claim to fame: it was the scene of Hitchcock's movie, "The Birds." Even if you don't want to stop, you can see the church and school featured in the movie on the hill to your right as you continue through town.

Freestone

- On the way back on Bodega Highway, you will pass a tiny borough on your left called Freestone. Watch carefully for it or you will miss it. Turn left on Bohemian Highway to enter Freestone.
- The notable stop here is the [Wild Flour Bakery](#). It's got an amazing and well-deserved reputation for incredible baked goods. Highly recommended for bread and your choice of fresh sweet goods. Open Friday through Monday 8:00 am – 6:00 pm.

Sebastopol

- Eventually Bodega Highway will bring you into the town of Sebastopol.
- This town, once famous for its Gravenstein Apple industry, is now a charming, quirky community known for its large population of hippies. It also features interesting shops, some cafes and [the Barlow](#), a combination retail and event space covering multiple blocks with everything from a brewery to a distillery, organic restaurant, wine tasting, specialty products and more.
- Exit Sebastopol by heading east on Highway 12, which is the continuation of Bodega Highway that brought you into town. It's a quick 10-minute drive from Sebastopol back to Santa Rosa.

We welcome suggestions to expand this itinerary for future guests, so please forward them to me after you have given this amazing day a whirl.