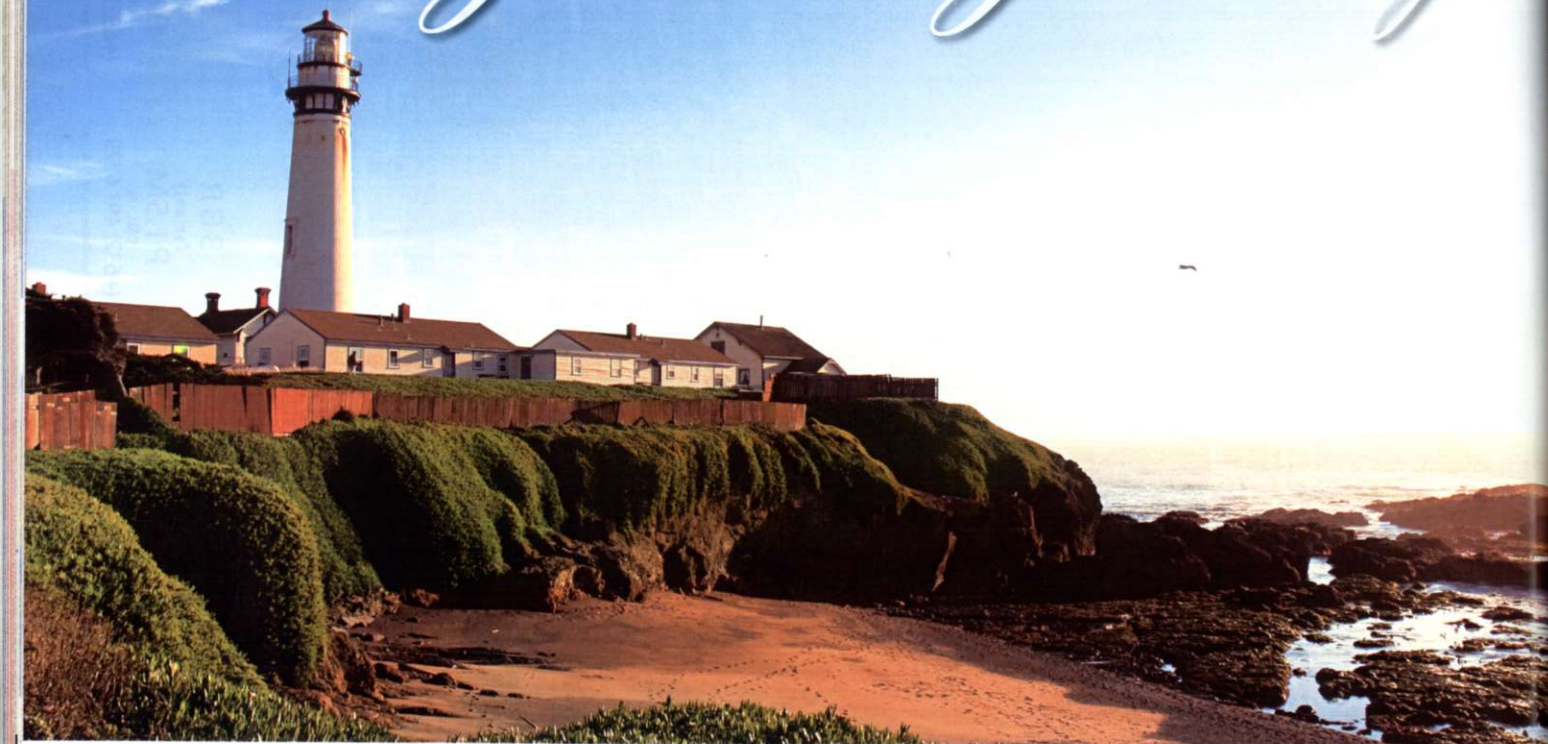


# California's Golden Gateway



While coasting through Highway 280, you can pull over anywhere and witness a dreamy scene of fogs creeping in. Pigeon Point (opposite photo), serves as the perfect focal point for San Mateo's picturesque shoreline.

Photos by Marc Aviles

More than just a jump-off point, San Mateo County is a destination in itself. GARY SINGH takes the time to wander around this suburban area for its idyllic and historical charms

In Half Moon Bay, you can literally stop and smell the flowers or simply just take in the awesome vista.



The San Francisco International Airport (SFO) sits right on the edge of the bay, in San Mateo County, about 15 miles south of the main city. With crisscrossing runways jutting out into the bay and providing a spectacular view when one lands, the airport is one of the most popular in all of North America. Unfortunately, upon arrival most visitors head from the airport directly to San Francisco while ignoring the vast expanses of San Mateo County, which stretches from the bay all the way west to the Pacific Ocean.

Locals refer to this part of the Bay Area as "the peninsula," and although most wouldn't think of San Mateo County as a destination in itself, the area presents a variety of alternative choices for anyone who needs to escape San Francisco for a few days. Whether it's renowned Northern California coastlines and laid-back beach communities like Half Moon Bay, mountain wineries and luxurious estates, or the forested edges of high-tech Silicon Valley, the peninsula is, in a strange way, both "overall" and "in-between"—a macrocosm and a microcosm at the same time. As a county, San Mateo can be an entirely separate vacation destination.

By far the most popular and idyllic destination in the county is the small oceanside town of Half Moon Bay, right on the famous Pacific Coast Highway (Hwy 1). From SFO, exit on Highway 101 south from the airport and then take Highway 92 straight over the mountains to the ocean. It's only a 30-minute drive. If you hang out in this part of California long enough, the coastal lifestyle will envelop all aspects of your existence and you'll hear countless stories—in the restaurant bars, the hotels, the farms, the woods or the beaches—of people who arrived years ago looking for something to do and just never left. Half Moon Bay functions

as a perfect home base and jump off point for all the activities that make coastal Northern California what it is: Sea life, wild life, surfing, beachfront retreats, hiking, driving tours, open space preserves, isolated enclaves, eclectic retail shopping, golf, romantic getaways, or just wandering around and doing absolutely nothing.

For an even more remote locale, Pigeon Point features one of the largest functional lighthouses in all of the US. Twenty miles south of Half Moon Bay on Hwy 1, and you're there. A popular spot for whale and seal watching, Pigeon Point even includes the popular Pigeon Point Hostel (Tel. +1-650-879-0633; <http://www.norcalhostels.org/pigeon>) with a hot tub and free WiFi.

Towards the middle of San Mateo County, between the Pacific Ocean and the San Francisco Bay, one finds many isolated mountain drives. Situated just off the 280 freeway in the affluent community of Woodside and near Crystal Springs Lake, Cañada Road takes visitors to the 654-acre Filoli Country Estate (Tel:+1-650-364-8300; [www.filoli.org](http://www.filoli.org)), a must-see historical site of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Surrounded by meticulously kept gardens as far as the eye can see, the Georgian Revival mansion features 43 rooms encompassing 36,000 square feet. Tours, exhibits, weddings, as well as jazz and classical music concerts take place from February to October. Scenes from quite a few films were shot at Filoli, including *Heaven Can Wait* with Warren Beatty. The original owners, Mr. and Mrs. William Bowers Bourn, were wealthy heirs to a huge mine during the Gold Rush years and first moved into the estate in 1917. The name Filoli comes from Mr. Bourn's favorite credo: "Fight for a just cause; Love your fellow man; Live a good life."



Clockwise from top left: From seagull sightings in tide pools, biking through scenic coastal trails, to relishing exquisite wines at Fogarty, San Mateo County offers you a variety of leisure options.

Just a few miles from Filoli on Skyline Boulevard (Highway 35), one finds the **Thomas' Fogarty Winery and Vineyard** (19501 Skyline; tel. +1-650-851-6777; www.fogartywinery.com), right at the northern end of the Santa Cruz Mountains Appellation and one of the peninsula's most renowned wineries. Perched atop the mountains at a 2,000-foot elevation, the property boasts some of the most dramatic views of the entire Bay Area. An appellation known throughout the world as a first class wine region, the area perfectly suits Fogarty, which is known for its complex and robust Pinot Noirs.

This part of San Mateo County is also a spectacular place in which to explore the unbroken redwood forests of Northern California and many of the mountain roads in this area carry their own stories, dating back decades. For example, right where Skyline Blvd. crosses the ultra-winding Highway 84 en route to the mountain town of La Honda—the legendary "Four Corners" intersection—sits a famous eatery called Alice's Restaurant (17288 Skyline Blvd; tel. +1-650-851-0303; www.alicesrestaurant.com). Inspired by the 1967 Arlo Guthrie album of the same name, plus the resulting movie, Alice's Restaurant is a legendary road stop for motorcycle riders who often traverse these mountain roads.

Finally, motoring south along Highway 280 will eventually bring one to the southern edges of San Mateo County, where it fades into Santa Clara County along the boundaries of cities like Palo Alto and Menlo Park. Both of these cities were key players in the birth of hi-tech Silicon Valley; they were the roots from which everything else branched out.

Menlo Park is home to the legendary Kepler's Books (1010 El Camino Real; tel. +1-650-324-4321; www.keplers.com), one of the longest-running independent bookstores in the Bay Area, and one with quite a revolutionary history. Throughout the volatile '60s, Kepler's functioned as a counterculture Mecca for anti-war protestors and radicals of all sorts. According to Grateful Dead historian Dennis McNally, the band originally got to know each other while hanging out at Kepler's in the early '60s. Today, both Menlo Park and Palo Alto are affluent neighborhoods with tree-lined streets, suitable for strolling, shopping and dining.

## STAY

**The Four Seasons Silicon Valley** (2050 University Avenue; tel. +1-650-566-1200; www.fourseasons.com/siliconvalley/) and its restaurant, Quattro, are hotspots for major rendezvous and corporate meetings, but tourists with money to spend will fit in just fine.

**The Sofitel San Francisco Bay** (223 Twin Dolphin Drive; tel. +1-650-598-9000; www.sofitel.com) sits on the edge of the bay in Redwood City and features a stylish bar with an outdoor patio overlooking the water.

On the coast side of the county, the brand new **Oceano Hotel & Spa Half Moon Bay Harbor** (280 Capistrano Road; tel. +1-650-726-5400; www.oceanohalfmoonbay.com) is the only certified green hotel in San Mateo County and features 95 luxury suites with fireplaces, private balconies, and unparalleled views of the Pacific Ocean.

## DINE

Just up the Pacific Coast Highway is the **Moss Beach Distillery** (140 Beach Way, Moss Beach; tel. +1-650-728-5595; www.mossbeachdistillery.com), a famous oceanside restaurant where customers can bundle up around fireplaces on the outdoor patio overlooking the cliffs and the water.

In Half Moon Bay proper, **Cetrella** (845 Main Street; tel. +1-650-726-4090; www.cetrella.com) is one of the most legendary romantic restaurants on the entire Pacific Coast, while **Cameron's Restaurant and Inn** (1410 South Cabrillo Hwy.; tel. +1-650-726-5705; www.cameronsinn.com) is a local British pub with a smoking section inside a double-decker bus in the parking lot.

 *PAL flies between Manila and San Francisco daily. Swingeround tour packages are available. For more information, call PAL reservations office (+632 855 8888 and +632 855 7777) or log on to www.philippineairlines.com.*

