

San Francisco

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New ways out

Feature Travel May See, Go, Do

Short flight to a world-class meal

San Juan Islands, WA

I miss the coastal weekends of my childhood—small inns without phones, empty beaches, long walks in the woods—which was exactly why **Lummi**, the San Juan island without the tourist trade, was so appealing. A six-minute ferry ride whisked me from the coast town of Bellingham and onto Lummi's rocky beaches and mossy hiking trails. Locals waved as they drove by, and I quickly downshifted to the island's slow pace. That afternoon found me pedaling down roads so quiet, I was able to ride my bike like a kid—down the middle, without concern for traffic—as farmland and fishing shacks rolled by. That night, at the historic **Willows Inn** (Lummi's only lodging apart from a handful of rental houses), I took in the island's headliner: local flavors courtesy of Blaine Wetzel, one of the world's best chefs. Fresh off a stint at Copenhagen's famous restaurant Noma, and sporting a recent award nomination from the James Beard Foundation, Wetzel crafts island produce and seafood into swoon-inducing dishes. Salmon, oysters, and crab pulled from nearby waters are paired with foraged herbs, seaweed, and mushrooms and seasonal vegetables grown in the inn's gardens (here local is defined by blocks, not miles). Sipping wine as the sun sank into the ocean, one eye out for resident orcas that might swim past, I felt that my nostalgia had most definitely been rewarded. **Tara Austen Weaver** *The Willows Inn: 2579 W. Shore Dr., Lummi Island, WA, 360-758-2620, willows-inn.com, Rooms from \$165*

Ojai

The next outdoor playground

If I didn't know better, my view from high atop the Shelf Road bluffs could easily be of the Loire Valley. Instead, it's Ojai, a small town 40 miles southeast of Santa Barbara. Ojai's reputation used to be that of a fainéant celebrity refuge and spa retreat. But in the past few years, the townspeople have turned their outdoor passions into entrepreneurial adventures, transforming the surrounding valley into an active traveler's destination. You can saddle up at **Ojai on Horseback**, and owner Debbie Godfrey and Lil, her mare, will take you up to the bluffs at sunset or into the Ventura River Preserve, a 1,600-acre ecological sanctuary of streams, lilac fields, and oak and sycamore groves. Recently launched **Cloud Climbers jeep tours** takes you into corners of the the forest you wouldn't otherwise be able to see. And **Project Ride** lets you zip 2,000 feet down Sulphur Mountain trail by bike while taking in ocean views—and maybe spotting Reese Witherspoon or Larry Hagman, who both have homes in Ojai. More good news: Over the past few years, two new tasting rooms opened downtown (Ojai Valley Vineyard, Casa Barranca), and the valley hasn't ditched its luxury roots—the **Ojai Valley Inn & Spa** is as satisfying as ever. **Jenna Scatena** *Ojai On Horseback: 2295 E. Ojai Ave., 805-509-3991, ojaionhorseback.com, tours \$125–\$550. Cloud Climbers: door-to-door service from area hotels, 805-646-3200, ccjeeps.com; tours \$99. Project Ride: 445 W. El Roblar Dr., 805-798-5193, project-ride.com, rentals from \$25 per day. Ojai Valley Inn & Spa: 905 Country Club*

Rd., 805-646-1111, rooms from \$300



Sonoma County

Sun, water, and a liquid lunch

Earnest San Franciscans heading to **Healdsburg** and **Geyserville** say they're going to research the latest wines. Sure you are, you overachievers. Actually, you're dreaming of two things: lounging poolside and drinking Scott Beattie's latest chemistry projects. I managed to do both with very little effort other than a drive up 101 that took me to the new **Francis Ford Coppola Winery** and, eventually, to the also new **Spoonbar**, where Beattie is bar manager. My first stop: the winery. The place is a veritable movie set, complete with craft services from **Rustic**, the onsite restaurant with Mrs. Scorsese's lemon chicken on the menu, and an immense 3,600 square foot pool. With a \$75 day pass, a couple can rent a cabine (for changing and showering), bask beneath the rays, cool down under the water, commandeer a bocce court, listen to live music played under a Godfather-esque pavilion, and reel off Brando's best lines. Stop number two: Spoonbar at the h2hotel, where a daiquiri, then a bourbon Lion's Tail follow a Dark 'n' Stormy in quick succession, as do chef Rudy Mihal's housemade pastas and Moorish-style Gleason Ranch brick chicken. But never fear, eternal type As: Should you opt to overnight, guests at the soon-to-be-LEED-certified h2h can seek out the bike valet, who'll offer redemption from the lingering effects of spirits and sun in the form of SPF and a map highlighting the 3-, 18-, and 40-mile loops around the area. You'll still have plenty to brag about. **Elizabeth Varnell**
Francis Ford Coppola Winery: 300 Via Archimedes, Geyserville, 707-857-1400, franciscoppolawinery.com. Rustic: 707-857-1485. H2Hotel: 219 Healdsburg Ave., Healdsburg, 707-922-5251, h2hotel.com, rooms from \$255; Spoonbar: 707-433-7222

Tomales Bay

Return of the wild

The fresh-out-of-the-water oysters and salt air of Tomales Bay are rarely enough to lure me an hour's drive north, since our own bay is just a stone's throw from my city apartment. But this year's word that wildlife was flocking back to Tomales's southernmost tip did the trick. More than 500 acres of wetlands were restored in 2008, but only recently have bald eagles, ospreys, and blue herons shown up in droves. Early one morning, my boyfriend and I followed the windy Tomales Point trail past a secluded marsh, where blue herons jetted out of the bushes as we

padded by. John Granatir, owner of **Blue Water Kayaking**, was so inspired by the wildlife's return that he rerouted his bird-watching tour through the restored wetlands (March to August). After our hike, we gave it a try, putting in at the popular launching site, the White House Pool parking lot, and paddling into an area that was a cow pasture only a few years ago. As we crept up the shallow channel, Tomales Bay stretched out in front of us. Osprey hovered above, scouting for prey, and when we passed a partly submerged gate, a relic of the old dairy farm that used to operate there, egrets swooped by. **Jenna Scatena** *Trail info on nps.gov/pore. Blue Water Kayaking: 60 4th St., #C, Point Reyes Station, 415-669-2600, bwkayak.com*

Port Costa

A quick ride to the 19th century

You've driven past it a thousand times and didn't even know it was there. Next time, do as my wife and I did: Take the last East Bay exit off 80—where the lights of Crockett's century-old C&H factory still shine—and travel a few winding miles to one of the Bay Area's smallest towns (pop. 203). Pulling into Port Costa feels something like stepping into Gold Country circa 1850. Founded in 1879, the town grew into one of the country's busiest wheat-shipping ports, complete with a reputation for rowdiness. Today, that history is alive in the **Burlington Hotel**, a three-story crash pad rumored to be a former bordello, and the **Warehouse Café**, an unapologetic, rough-hewn restaurant and bar housed in the former grain storeroom. Naturally, we headed there first. Over a plate of cocktail shrimp (unshelled, served with saltines), we soaked up the time-capsule decor—memorabilia from a long-gone movie theater, a full-grown stuffed polar bear—while listening to a local tell ghost stories. Conversation flows easily here, and with more than 300 beers to choose from (you can tour the walk-in cooler to browse and choose), you may end up asking the barkeep if any of the Burlington's 18 rooms are open. (She'll know; back in the 1960s, the hotel owner made a deal with the bar staff that they'd take all reservations—and they still do.) Although the hotel hasn't been renovated since the '60s, new furniture, a new no-smoking rule, and a now-enforced midnight quiet hour make the hotel an option. And in the morning, the 21st century is only a freeway on-ramp away. **Nate Seltenrich** *The Burlington Hotel: 2 Canyon Lake Rd., Port Costa, no website, reservations through Warehouse Café, rooms from \$45.*

Warehouse Café:

5 Canyon Lake Rd., Port Costa, 510-787-1827, no website.

Gabilan Mountains

Finally, the pinnacle of excitement

The Pinnacles seem like a legend—could this exotic jumble of minarets, said to be hidden among the rolling hills between Salinas and nowhere, really exist? Ask any Bay Area native and he'll say, "Yeah, I've always wanted to take a day." But my wife and I just couldn't face the four to five hours of driving there and back until we: a) heard that the condors really are returning (30 birds are now flying free) and b) realized we could arrange a big reward for ourselves afterward. We chose our anniversary weekend, finally did that gorgeous morning drive into **Pinnacles National Monument**, climbed the steep trail toward the High Peaks, and, once at elevation, hoofed awestruck among the craggy rocks. The sun shone bright on the park's strange pink and tan towers; shadows cast by the capelike wings of massive circling condors raced across the rock faces; a sea of roadless ranchland surrounded us. As soon as we descended, we got on the road to Carmel (75 miles away) and our two-story pad at the **Hyatt Carmel Highlands** inn, with its king-size bed overlooking the sea. The views of the bay stunned us into silence, and the resort itself is sweet—it was recently refurbished. We breakfasted onsite at the **California**

Market, rode the free bikes through Point Lobos, and drove home, with the Pinnacles—finally, after our 26 years together in the Bay Area—in our rearview mirror. **Bruce Kelley** *Pinnacles National Monument: Off Hwy. 146, nps.gov/pinn. Hyatt Carmel Highlands Inn: 120 Highlands Dr., Carmel, 831-620-1234, highlandsinn.hyatt.com, rooms from \$349; California Market: 831-622-5450*



Portland, OR

Bay area, get a mouthful of this

Food carts on every corner, house-cured bacon on the menus, bearded bartenders, baristas with attitude—a Bay Area girl can feel right at home in Portland. On a rainy afternoon (I'm assured there are other kinds here, though I really wouldn't know), this city appears to be one big, happy kitchen—a place where everyone makes their own pickles and the parking lots downtown are filled with more food trucks than cars. It's easy to dismiss it all as fodder for a *Portlandia* sketch, but the truth is that the city has spearheaded plenty of trends that are only now making their way to San Francisco. Consider the barrel-aged Negroni that Jeffrey Morgenthaler, the bar manager at **Clyde Common**, poured for me. These smooth, mellow cocktails, which Morgenthaler has been mixing for more than a year, are just showing up locally at places like Zero Zero. And the tart barrel-aged sour beers with complex fruity flavors, like the ones at **Cascade Brewing Barrel House**, are much more to my liking than the over-the-top hoppy style embraced by so many Bay Area brewers. I only wish that we had a restaurant with an Alsatian menu like the one at **Grüner**, where I ate a tangy bratwurst with delicate ribbons of sauerkraut and chased it with a perfectly dry martini flavored with Douglas fir. I blamed that cocktail for my midafternoon stupor, but figured a shot of Portland's famous espresso would fix it. Indeed, at **Spella Caffè**, a slip of a coffee bar just a block from my hotel, the barista insisted I try a shakerato—a shot of espresso and a spoonful of sugar blended on ice in a cocktail shaker. That frothy, bracing drink snapped me back to attention. Blue Bottle, are you listening? **Jan Newberry** *Clyde Common: 1014 SW Stark St., 503-228-3333, clydecommon.com. Cascade Brewing Barrel House: 939 SE Belmont St., 503-265-8603, cascadebrewingbarrelhouse.com. Grüner: 527 SW 12th Ave., 503-241-7163, grunerpdx.com. Spella Caffè: 520 SW Fifth Ave., 503-752-0265, spellacaffe.com*



The Mission

Suburban teens, meet the hipsters

Who would have thought that cul-de-sac kids could be talked into a trip to the Mission to admire the work of earnest, brainy adults? Most teens would rather be in the Haight, pawing through kooky tees amid wafts of pot smoke. Yet there I was, bribing my two teenagers with a night in a fancy hotel in exchange for an afternoon of palling around with me in this neohipster art-and-craft mecca that might seem cool to them only in retrospect. The experiment worked: In a few hours, my son and daughter got into this not-a-mall urbanscape, relishing the intense Gen Y idealism the area exudes. Now, some advice for bridge-and-tunnel parents: Target a zone—we did from Mission to Dolores between 17th and 20th. Include a stop at **Thrift Town** or **Mission Thrift**, where there are lessons (in style, in socioeconomics) aplenty. **Paxton Gate** and its childishly detailed home-decor oddities will get the proverbial thumbs-up. (That means bemused shrugs.) Snack at **Bi-Rite Creamery**. Leave a lot of time, because you forget how spottily walkable even today's fast-developing Mission is until you try to navigate it with very lazy people. Then hop BART back to that fancy hotel. **The Four Seasons** is the plushiest hotel near Powell Station, and closest to a teenager's desires. When we arrived, waiting in my kids' room were the best cupcakes they had ever tasted. **Bruce Kelley Thrift Town**: 2101 Mission St., S.F., 415-861-1132, thrifttown.com. **Mission Thrift**: 2330 Mission St., 415-821-9560. **Paxton Gate**: 824 Valencia St., 415-824-1872, paxtongate.com. **Bi-Rite Creamery**: 3692 18th St., 415-626-5600, biritecreamery.com. **Four Seasons**: 757 Market St., 415-633-3000, fourseasons.com/sanfrancisco, rooms from \$355

Alamo, NV

Tranquillity north of the neon

There are few reasons to drive north on State Route 93. It's a desolate road seemingly to nowhere (you're more likely to see a lizard than another car), but I made the 90-mile trek from **Vegas** because I'd heard that an upscale bed-and-breakfast with the enticing name **A Cowboy's Dream** had opened in Alamo not long before. The place was easy to spot; it was the only building in this one-horse town that looked like it was built after the Eisenhower administration. More than that, it was set on seven welcoming acres, a true oasis in the desert (sorry—it had to be said). The two-story structure is both spacious and intimate, and blends

frontier ranch design with the elegance of an exclusive European getaway. The heartier guests headed out to go horseback riding, migratory bird-watching, and hiking through the natural wonders of the **Pahranagat Valley**. But I was content to soak up the rustic charm of my oversize room (each of the eight suites has a private porch and a bear-claw tub), listen to Phyllis Frias tell the lodge's story (she built it as an homage to her late husband, the philanthropist Charles Frias), and swap travel stories in the library with other guests who never figured they'd find themselves in Alamo, but who, like me, already knew the visit wouldn't be their last. **David Hofstede** 95 *Hand Me Down Rd., Alamo, NV, 877-885-2236, cowboysdream.com, suites from \$319*

Richardson Bay

Unplugged, on the bay, and in love

I just found the perfect outside-the-box solution for a romantic escape: Airbnb. With just a few clicks of your mouse, the fast-rising Bay Area startup connects you with people around the world (9,902 cities and counting) who rent out their personal properties. You can find everything from an igloo in Slovenia to a European castle to your own island in Fiji to the rental I tried, a boat anchored in Richardson Bay. My better half and I took in the cool night breeze as Clay Bell, the affable owner, motored us out to his 37-foot Chris-Craft Constellation, one of several boats he rents out. When we arrived, we were greeted by dozens of flickering candles scattered throughout the vessel. Romantic, yes, but Bell's reason was practical: There's no electricity on board, so lighting is candles and a lantern. The kitchen has a twin propane burner and plenty of utensils, but we took our sushi up on deck (my advice: don't forget the champagne). That night, the horizon provided the entertainment, as we drank in views of the city, the Bay Bridge, and the blinking lights of Sausalito before retiring to the king-size foam daybed below (the boat can sleep up to eight). The next morning, seals and their avian friends put on a show for us—the perfect send-off before heading back to shore. **Nic Buron** Airbnb.com: *For Nic's getaway, type "Sausalito yacht" in search box or contact Clay Bell, 415-879-5428, loveonthebay.com, rates from \$185*

Big Sur

Back to nature, by way of the luxury aisle

My idea of a getaway is more *Eat, Pray, Love* than *Into the Wild*, so the new duplex cabin at the ultramod **Glen Oaks Big Sur** provided my kind of "wilderness" experience. Our four-room cabin, the Riverview (the adjoining unit on the other side has a forest view), was tucked among towering redwoods, and from the outside it looked like a cottage built by an especially adept woodsman. Inside, though, all was 21st-century luxury: a feather duvet, an electric-powered fireplace, a heated bathroom floor, and a fully equipped kitchen. Yes, this was the rustic hideaway I'd had in mind. My friend and I settled in and passed the weekend sipping tea on our porch, dining on our tree-stump table, and walking 20 steps to the Big Sur River for a stroll along its bank. For two days, the only people we saw were our neighbors in the nearby cabins. Though we were tempted to remain there, wrapped in Pendleton blankets and playing board games, we pulled ourselves together for the three-mile drive to Andrew Molera State Park (one of three state parks a short drive from the inn) for ocean views—a perfect conclusion to our "backwoods" retreat. **Zaineb Mohammed** *Glen Oaks Big Sur: Hwy 1, Big Sur, 831-667-2105, glenoaksbigsur.com, cabins from \$155*

Marina del Rey

Combing a cozy beachtown

Typically, I hit the road with my fiancé and dog in tow. But for a while now, I've craved a solo outing, just me and my own schedule (or lack thereof). Destination: the newly remodeled **Jamaica Bay Inn** at Marina del Rey, a West L.A. enclave with an Annapolis-meets-Miami feel. The chic resort hotel reopened last November after a dramatic renovation, and it somehow manages to rock a bold island feel without coming off as kitschy. Situated on smallish **Marina Beach**, inside the harbor, the hotel practically dares you not to be active, offering kayaking, paddleboarding, and sailing excursions. I found my happy place renting wheels from the front desk and cruising the marina's bike path and the sidewalk of **Venice Beach**, then strolling the colorful neighborhood of **Venice Canals**. Evening was all about cocktailing and dining at the onsite **Vú** restaurant, which serves an inventive menu of microgastronomy. (Think small plates like lamb lollipops or lobster tail flanked by Fritos and surprisingly tasty popcorn Jell-O. Yes, popcorn Jell-O.) Later, while sipping A Vú to a Kill, a Bellini-style champagne concoction, by the fire pit, I paused to relish the solitude—just me, myself, and I. **Jen Jones** *Jamaica Bay Inn: 4175 Admiralty Way, Marina del Rey, 310-823-5333, jamaicabayinn.com, rooms from \$179; VÚ: 310-439-3033*

Point Reyes Station

Crash course in all things cow

I've got a thing for cows. Holsteins, in particular. I mean, I just want to stand in a grassy pasture and do nothing but graze. So driving up the winding road flanked by herds of cows into the **Giacomini Dairy**, home of the **Point Reyes Farmstead Cheese Company**, I was as excited as a 13-year-old girl spotting Justin Bieber. But I wasn't there just to gawk; I was there to see how their milk becomes California's only farmstead blue cheese and how that cheese can be transformed into creamy, dreamy dishes. The Giacomini family has been farming this beautiful land for more than 50 years, but only recently did they add their new culinary and educational center, **the Fork**, a totally decked-out professional kitchen—and window-walled dining room and patio—where chefs lead demo and hands-on seasonal cooking classes. A second, outdoor kitchen and a wood-fired pizza oven are in the works. The farm tour tells you many things you wanted to know about cows: Were you aware that a cow yields nine gallons of milk a day? Or that Giacomini generates 65 percent of its power from manure? Afterward, in the kitchen, you'll learn how to prepare dishes like lobster-and-Point Reyes Toma macaroni and cheese, a poached-celery salad with Original Blue, and one of the world's greatest grilled cheese sandwiches, all of which you'll enjoy around the communal table, thanking the cows you can see through the window for their generous contribution to the meal. **Rachel Levin** *The Fork: 14700 Hwy 1, Point Reyes station, 800-591-6878, theforkatpointreyes.com, classes from \$55. May 6, Mother's Day Brunch with chef Duskie Estes; May 21, Seasons in Wine Country with Cate Conniff; May 27, Beer and Cheese Social featuring Lagunitas Brewing Company*

Clear Lake

Boat up to the tasting room

I don't typically think of drinking and boating as going hand in hand. But at **Ceàgo Vinegarden**—a vineyard-farm tucked peacefully away on the north shore of otherwise buzzing Clear Lake—they do, thanks to three new Mediterranean-style casitas just steps from the water. Picture terra-cotta floors, over-size beds, double-headed showers and private patios, all surrounded by vines, olive trees, chickens, and sheep. My friends and I spent a hot summer day living up the lakefront life, zipping around in a bowrider (before wine, of course), then cutting the motor and easing into Ceàgo's private 340-foot pier. We strolled through fields of lavender, then

commandeered a courtyard table for some seriously good wine—Ceàgo's crisp sauvignon blanc and its spicy cab franc—paired with artisanal-cheese plates. (You can opt for a private catered lunch or dinner, if you like.) After dark, from the private patio of our waterfront casita, we lingered until stars lit up the sky and a skinny-dip beckoned. **Rachel Levin** *Ceàgo Vinegarden: 5115 E. Hwy. 20, Nice, 707-274-1462, ceago.com, rooms from \$285*

Mount Madonna

Camping, without the pain

For all the outdoor adventuring and camping I'd done, I'd never set foot in a yurt—until I caught wind of a new development at the verdant and under-the-radar **Mount Madonna County Park**. Since last summer, the park, located halfway between Watsonville and Morgan Hill, has installed seven of these neo-Mongolian abodes—the Bay Area's first. (Plans are under way to build a dozen more in several other parks.) The yurts are round; come in diameters of 16, 20, and 24 feet (sleeps 10); and are a cross between a cabin and a tent. On the rustic side, you have to bring your own sleeping bags and pillows, but you get a few amenities, as well: Our 20-footer had two bunk beds and a futon, plus a wood table just big enough for a lantern and multiple hands of late-night cards. Outside, each yurt has a fire pit and a grill, some boast a wraparound sun deck, and all have showers nearby. My favorite feature was the round skylight, a window to the redwood canopy and evening stars. Behind our yurt, a path dropped straight into the forest, connecting us to the park's 14 miles of hiking and equestrian trails. If all this is a ploy to bring more money to our struggling parks system (Mount Madonna's revenue has jumped by more than \$40,000 since the yurts opened last year), I'm game. In fact, next time, I'll stay two nights—and bring a bunch of friends. **Taylor Wiles** *Mount Madonna county Park: 7850 Pole Line Rd., Watsonville, 408-355-2201, gooutsideandplay.org, yurts from \$50*

Los Angeles

An art scene lives up to its billing

Art Dealer Jeffrey Deitch Takes the Helm at MOCA. LACMA Opens New Wing. Eli Broad Taps Diller Scofidio + Renfro for New Museum. The Los Angeles art scene hasn't been this hyped since the '60s, when Marcel Duchamp had a retrospective at the Pasadena Art Museum (now the **Norton Simon**). After reading reams of exclamatory press, I had to see if it was really warranted. It is. The combined catalog of major works in the permanent collections of the **Los Angeles County Museum of Art** and the **Museum of Contemporary Art** outstrips those of most other institutions. And their special exhibitions are both haute and hot. See the ethereal dresses of Cal grads Laura and Kate Mulleavy of Rodarte, as well as their Black Swan tutus, at **MOCA Pacific Design Center** (through June 5). Head to LACMA's new light-filled **Resnick Pavilion** in late May, when it'll become a goth fantasyland for a retrospective on filmmaker Tim Burton's skeleton-infested drawings and objects. As if that weren't enough, on the second Thursday of each month, **Downtown Art Walk**, the street party-cum-gallery crawl (near Edgar Varela Fine Arts, DRKRM, CB1, and a host of other venues) lures a massive crowd of revelers and food trucks (look for tacos from Border Grill or skip straight to Lake Street Creamery's doughnut-ice cream floats). Conveniently, all this exists less than 25 minutes in various directions from the recently opened downtown tower housing the **Ritz-Carlton, Los Angeles**. Book a pedicure at the Ritz's spa, followed by drinks and dinner at Wolfgang Puck's **WP24 Lounge** (on the 24th floor), where you can sup on sushi as the sun sets, secure in the knowledge that you've checked out a scene that lives up to its billing. **Elizabeth Varnell Norton Simon Museum: 411 W. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena, 626-449-6840, nortonsimon.org. LACMA: 5905**

Wilshire Blvd., 323-857-6000, lacma.org. MOCA: 250 S. Grand Ave., 152 N. Central Ave., L.A., 8687 Melrose Ave., West Hollywood, 213-626-6222, moca.org. downtown Art Walk: Spring and Main Sts. between 2nd and 9th Sts., downtownartwalk.com. Ritz-Carlton: 900 W. Olympic Blvd., 213-743-8800, ritzcarlton.com, rooms from \$299; WP24: 213-743-8824, wolfgangpuck.com

Sunol

A rocking good time

Too many visits to a climbing gym, and it's easy to forget what I love most about the sport: the feeling of being on real rock. But Yosemite's wonderland is too far away, and Berkeley's rock-strewn hills are too crowded. So one unscheduled afternoon, my boyfriend and I shot down 680 to **Indian Joe Caves**, a peaceful crag reported to have a few nice top-ropes, in the middle of **Sunol Regional Wilderness**—a 6,800-acre expanse of rolling hills flecked with lone oaks. From the trailhead, we hiked over a wooded streambed and up a gentle, grass-covered hill, spotting about a dozen cows (the park keeps a herd here) and what looked like a bobcat (note to self: next time bring Audubon guide). Fifteen minutes later, we landed near the base of some great one-pitch climbs. I made three moderate jaunts up the sunny southern face, and with no other climbers around sat down at the top to soak in the valley view. Eventually a family hiked by, en route to Abbott peak, and the kids gawked at us and yelled, "How'd you get up there?" I ran my hand over the solid rock and shouted, "I climbed!" **Taylor Wiles** *Sunol Regional Wilderness: 1895 Geary Rd., Sunol, 510-544-3249, ebparks.org/parks/sunol*

Mendocino County

Play in a Garden of tipsy delights

I'm no gardener. (Though growing basil is this summer's not-too-lofty goal.) But I know a gorgeous garden when I see one. And up in the middle of nowhere (aka the tiny town of Hopland, a 2.5-hour drive north of the city) is a 13-acre utopia overflowing with organic flowers and every edible under the sun. It's part of a sprawling vineyard-farm named **Campovida**, owned by Anna Beuselinck and her husband, Gary, who fled Oakland to open this new tasting room slash retreat center last September. Anyone is welcome to pop in to sample Mendocino County wines at the counter—but it's much more fun to plan an overnight and explore. Grab a glass (or a bottle) and follow Carhartt-clad Ken Boek into the garden for a low-key tour. He'll slice up strawberries, pluck peppermint leaves, and pick mustard greens for you to taste while you sip. You're also welcome to wander on your own—for a walk beneath archways of pineapple guava trees, or for a picnic in the Tuscan courtyard. Maybe even a snooze under the shade of a weeping willow. That is, in between playing rounds of bocce and sampling olive oil pressed onsite or helping harvest honey from resident bees. Best of all, you can skip the same-day drive home if you sign up for a farm dinner (next series June 3–5) or a summer outdoor movie night and then stay in one of 10 rooms just steps from the pool and your—er, Ken's—garden. **Rachel Levin** *Campovida: 13601 Old River Rd., Hopland, 707-400-6300, campovida.com, rooms from \$225*

Yountville

A reason to rise for breakfast

Until recently, I believed that life in wine country began at cocktail hour with a tasting-room flight, followed by an evening of high-minded farm-to-table cuisine. Then I spent the night at the new **Hotel Yountville** and realized there was reason to rise with the roosters: a breakfast unlike any

I've ever had, in the company of Adam Clark. Clark wears the toque at **Hopper Creek Kitchen**, the hotel's restaurant. Think convention busters like French toast soufflé with huckleberry and banana-pecan streusel, and Duck 'n Donuts, a crisp-skinned confit leg with quince agrodolce and yuzu-glazed beignets. His morning meals are a marquee draw at a hotel reinvented through ambitious upgrades. Among those: a fleet of renovated suites (poster beds, stone fireplaces) and a freshly christened spa with coed indoor whirlpools and tranquil treatment rooms with private gardens. Hopper Creek is open only to hotel guests, and breakfast is served only till noon. That's a change for Clark, a French Laundry veteran who now does the French Laundry for early birds. It also marks a change in my image of wine country: How nice to indulge in the region's bounty—and not have to drive home after dark. **Josh Sens** *Hotel Yountville: 6462 Washington St., Yountville, 707-967-7900, hotelyountville.com, Rooms from \$395*

Lake Tahoe

Wake up on the water

You know those megabucks mansions lining the beautiful, carefree, underpopulated stretch of **Tahoe** between Sunnyside and Emerald Bay—the ones with private beaches and piers, and huge picture windows framing views of the lapping, hallowed blue water? Yeah, I've always wanted one, too. Now, thanks to the newly reopened **West Shore Café and Inn**, I could at least pretend—for a few days, and for a fraction of the price. The intimate inn has a gorgeous, window-walled dining room and just six suites, all done up with warm wood-and-slate bathrooms, private balconies, and gas fireplaces; some even boast up-close lake views (from the bed!) that made me weep when I saw them. Leave your blinds open and rise with the sun to watch the glassy water sparkle and the sky turn straw yellow. At dusk, the Sierra peaks turn pink—and then even pinker, making sunset the prime time for reservations in the elegant-rustic dining room, where attentive waiters present pretty plates of locally sourced food. During the day, walk across the street for a hike in the woods at **Homewood** (in the winter, guests are treated to discounted lift tickets) or cycle three miles south on a bike path to the stunning beach at **Sugar Pine Point**; then return to the inn's private pier for hearty Bloody Marys, lunch, and, for those who come by boat, complimentary valet docking. **Rachel Levin** *West Shore Café and Inn: 5160 W. Lake Blvd., Homewood, 530-525-5200, westshorecafe.com, rooms from \$199*

Santa Cruz

Amusement, without the boardwalk

I'd long suspected that Santa Cruz had charms beyond its famous boardwalk. Not that I don't love a good roller coaster, but screaming kids and laser-tag arcades grow old fast. Still, convincing my husband and 11-year-old son that we could do without carnival rides just this once wasn't easy. But I held firm and insisted we make a left turn out of the driveway of the **Dream Inn**. We hit the brakes at the **Santa Cruz Surfing Museum**, where, through a collection of T-shirts and faded photographs, we learned about the city's long history as a surfing mecca and checked out vintage boards—including one that bore the imprint of a shark bite. Later, we petted a swell shark at the **Seymour Center**, which is set on a bluff above Monterey Bay. From there we saw the spray of a gray whale, otters bobbing in the surf, and a pair of dolphins doing Flipper-like leaps in a tank beside us. More nonboardwalk delights: Instead of corn dogs for dinner, we had smoked potatoes with aioli, fried brussels sprouts, roast squab with farro and beet confit, and a bottle of Bonny Doon's Le Cigare Volant at the **Cellar Door Café**. Afterward, we stopped at the new **Penny Ice Creamery**, where Bar Tartine alum Kendra Baker (who sat beside Michelle Obama at the State of the Union address) now makes her all-organic ice

creams in flavors like five-spice fried peanut and black-pepper cheesecake. Even my 11-year-old admitted Santa Cruz without the arcade is still pretty cool. Before we headed home, though, my resolve weakened: There was just no way I could leave without one spin on the classic wood-rail **Big Dipper**. **Jan Newberry** *Dream Inn*: 175 W. Cliff Dr., Santa Cruz, 831-426-4330, dreaminnsantacruz.com, rooms from \$350. *Santa Cruz Surfing Museum*: 701 W. Cliff Dr., 831-420-6289, santacruzsurfingmuseum.org. *Seymour Center*: 100 Shaffer Rd., 831-459-3800, ucsc.edu/seymourcenter.com. *Cellar Door Café*: 328 Ingalls St., 831-425-6771, bonnydoonvineyard.com. *Penny Ice Creamery*: 913 Cedar St., 831-204-2523, thepennyicecreamery.com

Phoenix, AZ

All you need is the hotel

I'm a serious (some say compulsive) planner, but I'd always secretly wanted to take a vacation that required no research, no scheduling, no organizing. My wish was granted at **Ocatilla**, the **Arizona Biltmore**'s newest wing. This 119-room "hotel within a hotel" offers over-the-top luxury and exclusive services—above the already high caliber of those of the Biltmore itself—and just like its namesake. (Ocatilla was the desert camp Frank Lloyd Wright built in 1929 as a retreat for architects; one of his students designed and built the Biltmore.) During my "unplanned" trip, I sank shoulder-deep into a granite-topped tub, woke to fresh coffee sent to my room, and ate decadently delicious food—like the sugar-crusted cactus-berry empanada I enjoyed in the resort's private lounge. The secluded pool is lined with shimmering royal-blue tiles, and lunch is served in the canvas cabanas on the weekend. In the evenings, California wines flow freely in the lounge, accompanied by flaky spanakopita and an addictive roasted red pepper spread, and once I'd settled into a plush chair next to the patio fire pit, I didn't move for hours. Of course, should you want to venture outside of the wing (or the hotel), Ocatilla's concierge guarantees reservations at the Biltmore's restaurants and spa and is more than happy to plan a day of sightseeing or museum-going in Phoenix for you. On my last day, she even printed out my boarding pass. Good thing—otherwise I might have stayed forever. **Nikki Ioakimedes** *Ocatilla Biltmore*: 2400 E. Missouri Ave., Phoenix, AZ, 602-955-6600, arizonabiltmore.com, rooms from \$169



Presidio

A Sleepover, 384 feet above the waves

For years, I explained my love for San Francisco by telling people you could pitch a tent in the woods in the middle of the city. Somehow, though, I'd never done it myself—and then I couldn't, because **Rob Hill Campground** closed. So when it reopened after a complete renovation, my husband and I shouldered our backpacks and left SoMa for an overnight nature escape. Previous campers, including the post-WWII vagabonds who used to frequent Rob Hill—at 384 feet, the Presidio's second-highest point—wouldn't recognize the spot. Groomed walkways now connect four spacious sites complete with fire rings, picnic tables, storage boxes, and grills, plus a sparkling restroom with hot running water. You can hike to the bridge or Baker Beach, follow trails deep into the woods, or read placards about how in 1776 the Spanish established the fort called El Presidio. Or do as we did: Sit and stare through eucalyptus at the ocean and discuss where you'll breakfast (our spot: Crissy Field, for bagels and coffee). When the sun set, we lit a campfire and roasted marshmallows. We could have been anywhere—Big Sur, Yosemite, a Tahoe forest—but then the foghorn blew, reminding us that we were, happily, at home in the city.

Michelle Hamilton *Rob Hill Campground: Central Magazine Rd. at Washington Blvd., 415-561-5444, open apr. 1–oct. 31, campsite \$100 for up to 30 people, reservations required, presidio.gov/experiences/camp.htm*

Walla Walla, WA

Food Worthy of the wine

Turns out, my worries about how well I was going to eat in Walla Walla, Washington, were blessedly unfounded. Walla Walla's famous red wine was the attraction, but I'm a snobby San Franciscan, and the miles of monotonous low-lying windblown hills surrounding this remote town of 30,700 suggest a Midwestern food desert. My mood improved after I checked into the majestic **Marcus Whitman Hotel** and stepped out into the Rockwellian downtown, all three blocks of which were packed with cafés and tasting rooms that glimmered with incongruous stylishness. I fueled two days spent slurping the area's lush cabernets and syrahs with succulent adobada from several of Walla Walla's revered fleet of taco trucks. In between tacos, other food finds sent me reeling, among them the heady Stumptown espresso at Brasserie Four and the perfect cannele cakes at the Colville Street Patisserie. Evenings began with a refreshing beer at downtown's Vintage Cellars, among the crowds of Blundstone-clad winemakers, followed by a stroll to dinner at places like Saffron Mediterranean Kitchen, a bistro filled with trim, good-looking millennials (fitness is a religion here—everyone seems to be a marathoner or a distance cyclist) for lamb tartare and tagines. A gastronomic oasis in a vast, windswept desert, tranquil Walla Walla proves that in today's America, great food and wine know no boundaries.

Jordan Mackay *Marcus Whitman Hotel: 6 W. Rose St., Walla Walla, WA, 866-826-9422, marcuswhitmanhotel.com, rooms from \$119. Brasserie Four: 4 E. Main St., 509-529-2011. Colville Street Patisserie: 40 S. Colville St., 509-301-7289, colvillestreetpatisserie.com. Vintage Cellars: 10 N. 2nd Ave., 509-529-9340, vintagewinebar.org. Saffron Mediterranean Kitchen: 125 W. Alder St., 509-525-2112, saffronmediterraneankitchen.com.*

Rancho Santa Fe

Work your body, rest your mind

Rancho Valencia's lush, Mediterranean-style resort (think overgrown bougainvilleas, courtyards with trickling fountains, and terra-cotta-hued villas) hardly looks like a place to break a sweat.

But don't let the relaxing atmosphere of the 49-suite SoCal hideaway fool you; hard-core workouts happen here. Blame it on the property's recent recognition as the nation's top tennis resort by *Tennis* magazine, which trumpeted its reputation as a premier go-to resort for fitness types. I jumped into a self-inflicted exercise binge with workouts that included vinyasa yoga and Pilates, but I also could have spent time on a basketball court, in a swimming pool, or at the fitness center (with cardio TRX). And this is no ordinary gym: The new Spinning classes come with a fitness butler who will adjust your settings; dutifully refill your water bottle; and deliver chilled towels, sports drinks, and slices of fresh fruit right to your bike. Of course there are tennis courts, 18 of them, with clinics for all levels. And leave it to an Auberge resort not to stop there: A circuit workout led by a British soccer pro is also on offer. By the end of my stay, I'd found a fitting rhythm: Work out, work out, work out. Eat a healthy persimmon-and-pear salad at the Brasserie. Take a tennis lesson. Relax in the spa's therapeutic pools (hot, warm, and cold). Get a sports massage. Sleep. Repeat. **Jennie Nunn** *Rancho Valencia: 5921 Valencia Cir., Rancho Santa Fe, 858-756-1123, ranchovalencia.com, rooms from \$490*

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