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36 HOURS

36 Hours on the Mendocino Coast



Photographs by Pablo Abuliak for The New York Times

From left, Mendocino Headlands State Park; at Lost Coast Culture Machine, a collective founded last year by Brooklyn expats in Fort Bragg; at Ledford House, a French country bistro in Albion. More Photos »

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SINCE the ’60s and ’70s, when a flood of artists, hippies and back-to-the-landers brought the cosmopolitan counterculture to this corner of Northern California, the Mendocino coast has made appearances on too many television shows (“Murder, She Wrote,” most notably) and movies (“Overboard,” for one) to mention. Once a collection of working-class logging, fishing and ranching communities, the Coast — as it’s called by residents — has become a stand-in for California’s left-coast eccentricities. This series of hamlets, small towns and rural ridges is now widely known for its intoxicants — its celebrated wine, beer and marijuana. But what makes this stretch of oceanfront real estate so stirring is its profound natural beauty and fierce independence.

Mendocino Travel Guide

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Multimedia



Slide Show
36 Hours on the Mendocino Coast



Map
Mendocino, Calif.

Friday

5 p.m.
1) TINY TOWN

Take Highway 128 to the coast, passing through the Anderson Valley wine appellation and following the redwood banks of the Navarro River to Highway 1 and the turbulent Pacific. For local lore and a drink, pull up a stool at Beacon Light by the Sea (7401 South Highway 1; 707-877-3311), high on a hill near Elk, population 200. Part dive bar, part museum of oddities, “Bobby’s place” is run by the Greenwood Ridge fire chief Bob Beacon in a back room of his remote fire station. You’ll be greeted by a Great Dane and an aging grand piano. Afterward, take a sunset walk on Navarro Beach, where sand castles and driftwood sculptures litter the pebble-strewn shoreline, and bonfires burn on clear nights.

7:30 p.m.
2) ENCHANTÉ

For dinner, continue up the coast to Ledford House in Albion (3000 North Highway 1; 707-937-0282; ledfordhouse.com), a French country bistro in the new California style (local farms, local wines, international influences), with a deck and tall Pacific-facing windows. A husband-wife, maître d’-executive chef team turns out formidable renditions of classics like cassoulet ($26) and steak au poivre (filet mignon with roast tomato horseradish sauce; $29) in a homey dining room with live jazz nightly.

10:30 p.m.
3) WILD NIGHTS

For late-night boot-stomping and food until midnight, head for Caspar and the Caspar Inn (14957 Caspar Road, 707-964-5565; casparinn.com), a vintage roadhouse with a long bar, a low stage and a dance floor that welcomes all comers. One of the few coastal night clubs between San Francisco and Oregon, the Caspar attracts surprising acts, including the English Beat, Fishbone and international reggae bands. For those who enjoy themselves too much to make it home, there are 10 spare, shared-bath rooms upstairs (from $45, including show admission).

Saturday

8 a.m.
4) SUSTENANCE

Rise early to wander the Victorian-lined streets of Mendocino village. Walk the narrow footpaths along the rocky, wind-lashed headlands to the Blowhole. Nearby, there’s an imposing Tiki sculpture; do as the locals do and place an offering in the mouth of the carved Kahuna or watch the swells come ashore from the driftwood “Love Bench” above Portuguese Beach. For breakfast, linger over espresso and a house-made bialy ($1.50) at Thanksgiving Coffee Café and Espresso Bar (10485 Lansing Street; 707-937-0836; thanksgivingcoffeecafe.com). For a more substantial meal, head to Eggheads (326 North Main Street; 707-964-5005; eggheadsrestaurant.com) in Fort Bragg — a cramped, Wizard of Oz-themed diner where you’ll find Dorothy’s Revenge, a supremely rich Dungeness crab eggs Benedict ($17.99).

10 a.m.
5) SEAWORTHY

All who have witnessed the frothing Pacific know that its name — from the Spanish for peaceful — is a misnomer. Here, the sea is as violent as it is beautiful. Liquid Fusion Kayaking (32399 Basin Street, Fort Bragg; 707-962-1623; liquidfusionkayak.com) in Noyo Harbor teaches novices to ride the white water with a three-hour surf kayaking session ($100). For a more leisurely paddle, rent a Polynesian-style outrigger at Catch a Canoe & Bicycles Too (44850 Comptche-Ukiah Road; 707-937-0273; catchacanoe.com; $28 a person for three hours) and glide up Big River.

1 p.m.
6) TAKE OUT

At Jenny’s Giant Burger (940 North Main Street, Fort Bragg; 707-964-2235), a classic roadside stand with vinyl stools, order a Giant Cheeseburger ($5.35), fries ($2.20) and chocolate malt ($3.75), and drive north to MacKerricher State Park (24100 MacKerricher Road, Fort Bragg; 707-937-5804; parks.ca.gov) to eat beside cattail-lined, fish-stocked Lake Cleone. Then walk south along the former log-haul road to where the pavement disintegrates into the sand dunes at Inglenook Fen Ten Mile Dune Preserve. Or instead rent a bike in town and ride the length of the trail, crossing the nearly century-old Pudding Creek Trestle, an elegant lattice bridge that was reopened as a pedestrian and bike path in 2007.

3 p.m.
7) COASTAL COUNTERCULTURE

Climb the stairs to the Triangle Tattoo & Museum (356B North Main Street, Fort Bragg; 707-964-8814; triangletattoo.com), where Madame Chinchilla and Mr. G have compiled exhibitions dedicated to Maori tattoos from the 1800s, circus skin art and vintage ink machines. For contemporary installation art pieces and paper made from local invasive species — like pampas grass — and discarded textile scraps, visit the Lost Coast Culture Machine (190 East Elm Street, Fort Bragg; 707-961-1600; lostcoastculturemachine.org), a collective founded last year by Brooklyn expats. On the grounds of the former Preston mansion (of “East of Eden” fame), the Mendocino Art Center (45200 Little Lake Street, Mendocino; 707-937-5818; mendocinoartcenter.org) has six galleries and open studios where you can watch artists-in-residence at work.

5 p.m.
8) BEER COUNTRY

The North Coast Brewing Company’s Taproom (444 North Main Street, Fort Bragg; 707-964-3400; northcoastbrewing.com) has wooden booths, animal heads on the wall and a 12-beer sampler ($15) that includes the brewery’s flagship Red Seal Ale. For a wider selection of regional beers, plus excellent New York-style pizza, head to Piaci Pub and Pizzeria (120 West Redwood Avenue, Fort Bragg; 707-961-1133; piacipizza.com). Or travel south to the Wine Bar[n] at Glendeven Inn (8205 North Highway 1, Mendocino; 800-822-4536; glendeven.com), which pours 45 local wines by the glass each afternoon.

10) ALL THAT JAZZ

For live music and an after-dinner latte, go to Headlands Coffeehouse (120 Laurel Street; 707-964-1987; headlandscoffeehouse.com), a local institution with a monthly art show and a loyal following that’s helped revitalize Fort Bragg’s once-decaying downtown. Just across the alley, V’Canto (124 East Laurel Street; 707-964-6844) is an Italian restaurant-lounge with a welcoming bar and well-considered wine list. Live music acts on weekend nights.

Sunday

10 a.m.
11) GOING DOWNTOWN

The eclectic collection of shops in Fort Bragg’s compact downtown include the whimsical sock store Pippi’s Longstockings (123 East Laurel Street; 707-964-8071; pippisocks.com); Tangents (368 North Main Street; 707-964-3884), an emporium of kitsch, candles and silver jewelry; and the stylish consignment boutique, If the Shoe Fits (337 North Franklin Street; 707-964-2580). There are also three bookstores within two blocks, including the Bookstore (206 East Redwood Avenue, 707-964-6559), with a lovingly curated selection of used books.

12 p.m.
12) THE LONG ROAD HOME

Take Highway 1 out of Mendocino County, stopping for brunch at Queenie’s Roadhouse Cafe (6061 South Highway 1, Elk; 707-877-3285; queeniesroadhousecafe.com) for organic allspice-laced corned beef hash ($11.95) or waffles with fresh fruit and yogurt dressing ($10). Then continue south to Point Arena, stopping at the 115-foot Point Arena Lighthouse (pointarenalighthouse.com). Rebuilt in 1907 after the great San Francisco earthquake, it’s said to be the first steel-reinforced concrete lighthouse in the country. Three miles south of town, take the overgrown path to Schooner Gulch State Beach for one final walk along the water’s edge.

IF YOU GO

South of Mendocino, the Glendeven Inn (8205 North Highway 1, Mendocino; 707-937-0083; glendeven.com) is an eight-acre farmstead with in-room breakfasts and a farm-to-table prix fixe dinner three nights a week. From $167.

Opened in 2009, the Westport Hotel and Abalone Pub (38921 North Highway 1, Westport; 877-964-3688; westporthotel.us) rejects televisions, in-room phones and radios in favor of the growling Pacific. Downstairs, the Abalone Pub has haute-bordello style and excellent food. Rates from $140, including breakfast.

9) IN GOOD COMPANY

Until 2002, Fort Bragg was a company town with a coastline consumed by a sprawling lumber mill. The second story of the former company store, a redwood building with a cathedral-like interior, is now home to Mendo Bistro (301 North Main Street; 707-964-4974; mendobistro.com), a New American restaurant that serves dishes like barbecued lamb shoulder with cornmeal fried tomatoes, pickled onions and mint ($22) and pappardelle with pesto, cherry tomatoes, corn and black olives ($15).

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