

Monterey Tides awash in ocean splendor



Monterey Tides' selling point is its location right on the ocean. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

MONTEREY – From the moment a guest enters the front lobby, waves of serenity and relaxation beckon.

This is how one knows the power of place.

In the case of staying at Monterey Tides, the 180-degree view of the crashing surf onto the beach just below makes it an ideal spot for ocean lovers and families seeking recreation and rejuvenation together. Being there is reflective of knowing that the ebb and flow of life's ups and downs will roll away – if one adapts and learns how to go with the flow.

Location, location, location. The Tides, a Joie de Vivre hotel since 2015 when it ceased to be a Best Western, is nestled right on the beach off of Sand Dunes Drive. The 196-room boutique hotel comes with the distinction of being the only one smack dab on Monterey Bay. The views are out of this world.

"It's a best kept secret," said one hot-tubbing guest who returned for spring break with her Napa family. They rotate

their time between the beach and the pool patio.

A San Jose woman used her time at the pool to reminisce about coming there as a little girl with her mother.

“They did a lot of renovation. The rooms are good now,” she said.



The bar area at Monterey Tides is family friendly; offering stellar views of the ocean. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The San Francisco-based hotel chain immediately embarked upon a \$12 million renovation when it took over. The pool area of the hotel grounds is notable as it is warm, inviting and improved. This includes having a new privacy wall that serves as a windbreak from the parking lot. The chaise lounges have special cushions adjustable for either the back or head. Composite decking, the hottest, new surface combining wood and plastic, covers the patio. In early April, the heated pool may be a little too nippy for some – except if you’re comparing the water temperature to the ocean or you’re 10 years old and

don't care.

A few guests tried out the ocean with boogie boards in their wet suits before rinsing off with the convenient outside shower. Most guests opted for the welcoming hot tub at a comfortable 100 degrees considering the air temperature in the mid- to upper 50s can be pervasively chilling.

And that's why staying at the Tides is highly recommended for May-June and September-October. The summer can be chilly with the inland heat drawing the fog in on the Pacific Coast.

Upgrades are most notable in the lobby and adjoining Bar Sebastian as well as the Vizcaino Waterfront restaurant.

New windows in the rooms should be added to the "to-do" list. The single-pane windows make it impossible to turn off the roar of the ocean and keep the room on the cool side. Or maybe it was just an inefficient heating system that had the thermostat perpetually turned to 80 degrees to maintain a livable room temperature.

As for the mechanical, two-layered blinds they were wonderful. They allowed guests to watch the ocean, but no one could see in.

Escaping the cold dampness from the room requires good timing. Most who ventured into the bar next to the lobby had jackets on. But the lobby with its cushy seating and floor-to-ceiling full frontal view of the ocean is the place to be. One never knows when a seal, dolphin or even whale might cruise by.



The ahi tuna at Monterey Tides is highly recommended. Photo/Susan Wood

Seeking a higher-level of culinary experience

The views continue to impress upstairs at the remodeled Vizcaino Waterfront Food + Drink, which made its debut on the fourth floor this year. Vizcaino was named after the Spanish explorer Sebastian Vizcaino, who in addition to Monterey's extensive historical pedigree sailed into Monterey Bay in the early 1600s. The restaurant's Spanish heritage was inspired with a tasteful décor, larger-than-life ocean view and one of its own at the kitchen helm – Chef Jose Velasquez.

“Chef started at the restaurant over 30 years ago and worked his way from dishwasher to the head spot in the kitchen. He brings his passion for the hotel and the food that he loves to cook to this exciting, new restaurant,” General Manager Brent McNally said.

The restaurant offerings for breakfast, lunch and dinner are innovative, influenced by the chef's upbringing and, according to Monterey diners, attracts a local clientele.

The ahi tuna was perfectly seared and was delicious with the butternut squash lemon grass puree. And even for a red, the locally-grown Belle Glos Meiom Pinot Noir paired well with

the hardy tuna the server recommended.

The restaurant staff seems a bit rough around the edges, though.

Six interesting cocktails top the beverage menu, but the restaurant ran out of ingredients for two of them. What? Isn't this Monterey? How about sending out a runner from the numerous staffers watching the open front door?

When asked about vegetarian options, the waiter's response was: "I don't know" – a cardinal sin to any restaurant. Apparently, for all the creative oomph the chef gives to the restaurant, he couldn't have been asked to come up with a vegetarian dish thrown together at the spot? The 12-year server consequently pointed to the one vegetarian item on the appetizer list – the Jicama tacos. Albeit interesting with a beer-battered veggie tempura, they crumbled into a tray that a diner would question whether to eat off of.

At the start of the meal, it's a nice touch the guacamole served with house made tortilla chips was made at the table – and came in a plentiful batch. Otherwise, the veggie-only diner at the table might have gone away hungry.

However, out of nowhere more than halfway into the meal, someone delivered bread to the table as if it was afterthought. Also forgotten was the beet salad – crisp and tasty – but heavier on the strawberries and lettuce than the main ingredient.

At the end of the meal, try dessert. The crème brûlée hit the spot for two.

A disorganized wait staff aside, the ocean view, décor adorned with old-style barn wood and quiet atmosphere add to pleasantries.



The Monterey area – even Pebble Beach – caters to dogs at hotels, parks and restaurants. Photo/Susan Wood

Monterey: It's a dog's life

Four-legged friends are not only welcome at the Monterey Tides, they thrive in and out of the hotel.

First, a welcome board with water and treat bowls for canines is set up near the front entrance. It's definitely a sign of the times as more and more vacationers seek opportunities to travel with their pets.

Dogs at Monterey Tides have two playgrounds – one out the front door and another out the back. For the latter, watching a dog romping in the sand dunes is like returning to one's childhood beach experiences.

Out front – which is situated next to Seaside State Beach, a pet area has been established for guests staying at Monterey Tides.

On the other end of the property, a ridgetop bike path that's ideal for pedestrians giving their pet a change in scenery may

take a walker south into town where a host of fun places to go and things to do await a Monterey visitor.

First on the list for a typical tourist is Monterey's famed Cannery Row with Fisherman's Wharf, named after its historic industry.

(Note: At Cannery Row, eat out at Louie Linguini's for a tasty, pleasurable meal and feel free to take your pet.)

For those who appreciate the fine wines of Monterey County, venture into A Taste of Monterey for a flight of tastings by Cassie – who knows a multitude of varietals and wineries like the back of her pouring hand.



Several Monterey restaurants have outdoor dining with great views. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Out and about on the Central Coast

Beyond the world-renowned Monterey Bay Aquarium, many choices await a Monterey County visitor seeking activities besides

eating, drinking and lounging.

Among them, cycling off Carmel Valley Road is always a favorite – with its scenic rolling hills dotted with barns, vineyards and quaint villages. If you're without your bike, there's no need to worry. Just call Bay Bikes Carmel off Carmel Valley Road, and they'll accommodate you with a supply of road, mountain and cruiser bikes for reasonable rental rates.

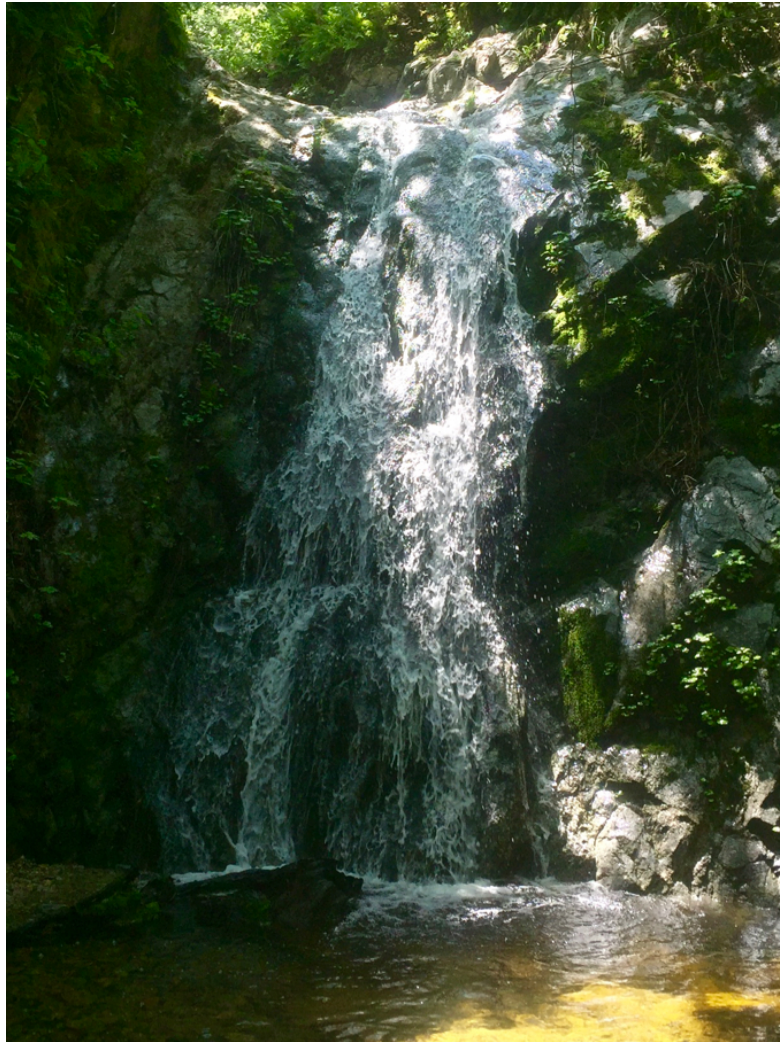
Hiking is all the rage in the county. And this year's wet deluge has made checking off waterfalls a sport. Fern Falls at the eastern edge of Garland Ranch Regional Park off of Carmel Valley Road to narrow, winding Hitchcock Canyon Road sets the scenario for one's sense of adventure. (Note: You must register for a permit two days before from the Monterey Peninsula Regional Park District to enter the easiest way from the privately-owned Hahn Ranch trail easement.)

The 25-foot fall drapes the head of the box canyon and fills a small, crystalline pool at the foot of the cliff. Along the way, look out for newts, as the signs say they may be crossing. A babbling brook runs alongside most of the half-mile trail.

This spring's other notable quests with the wet winter are the wildflower hunts – with Monterey County write-ups promising a grand season.

Also at the midpoint of Garland Ranch, lupines abound on the 1.4-mile loop named after the colorful, purple flower.

The 3,464-acre park provides beautiful views and various terrains at the northern tip of the Santa Lucia Range. Terrain ranges from riparian forest to grasslands. Along the 50-plus miles of trails, historic landmarks such as farming and logging remains as well as homestead ruins dot the landscape.



Fern Falls at Garland Ranch Regional Park. Photo/Susan Wood

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If you go:

- Monterey Tides is located two hours south of San Francisco off Highway 1 at 2600 Sand Dunes Drive; call 831.394.3321.
- Garland Ranch Regional Park is located 15 miles east of Monterey and Carmel off Carmel Valley Road; call the Regional Park District at 831.372.3196.