



Northern California



THIS EDITION WRITTEN AND RESEARCHED BY

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PLAN YOUR TRIP

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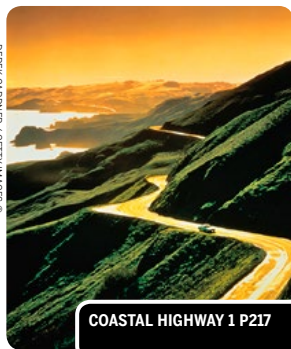
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Itineraries



1
WEEK

San Francisco, Marin County & Wine Country

This classic NorCal itinerary explores San Francisco, then heads north up the rugged coast, and inland to Wine Country. **San Francisco** begs exploration – its hills, cable cars, glorious bay and dynamic culture are unique in the world. Wander hidden alleyways in Chinatown, see Beat-poet hangouts in North Beach and ascend Telegraph Hill beneath flocks of wild parrots. Head to Golden Gate Park for gorgeous gardens and thrilling museums, then get off the beaten path in the Mission District to find colorful murals and great cheap eats. Cross the Golden Gate Bridge to the **Marin Headlands** and hike cliffs rising straight from the Pacific. Or wander among redwoods – the world's tallest trees – at cathedral-like **Muir Woods National Monument**. For a full-day trip, go whale-watching on the rugged coast of **Point Reyes National Seashore**. Stay the night.

Explore Sonoma Coast State Beach, near **Bodega Bay**, then cut inland to tiny **Occidental** and Wine Country to spend another night. Recharge in thermal springs and mud baths in **Calistoga** before sampling famous California vintages in the surrounding Napa Valley. Head to **Napa** and return to San Francisco via **Sonoma** to explore historic sights between visits to wine-tasting rooms, and picnic on the state's largest town square.



Up the Coast

The serpentine stretch of Hwy 1 (and Hwy 101) between San Luis Obispo and the Oregon border is among Northern California's most epic road trips, connecting cute beach towns, rugged coastline and majestic redwood forests.

From the college town of **San Luis Obispo**, head straight to jaw-dropping **Hearst Castle National Historic Monument** (reservations essential). Here begins one of America's most famous drives: the **Big Sur** coast, 1000ft above the Pacific. Spend at least one night between Hearst Castle and Santa Cruz. Choose your adventure: a romantic hideaway in Big Sur, the West's best aquarium at **Monterey**, or a classic beachside amusement park, complete with boardwalk and bone-rattling wooden roller coaster at **Santa Cruz**. Or combine them over several days.

Get an early start for **San Francisco**, the thrilling urban centerpiece of the trip – spend at least two days exploring the City by the Bay. Then continue north for a day to **Point Reyes National Seashore** and **Sonoma Coast State Beach**, where you can stop for picnicking, tide-pooling and whale-watching. Here the coast gets wild again, with windswept bluffs and nary a traffic light. Spend a couple of nights in a seaside cottage near **Gualala** and dawdle on hidden beaches; or book a B&B in moody **Mendocino** to gallery-hop, explore rocky headlands and fall asleep beside a crackling fire.

Highway 1 cuts inland and joins four-lane Hwy 101 at the **Lost Coast**, the North Coast's premier backpacking destination. Leave the main highway to follow the parallel-running **Avenue of the Giants**, flanked by towering redwoods. Most people turn around after the Avenue, but to see the depth of the redwood forests, keep going north. Detour from the main road for lunch in the cute-as-a-button Victorian village of **Ferndale**, or the wildly progressive college town of **Arcata**. Spend two days exploring the magnificent ancient groves of **Redwood National & State Parks** before returning south.



Northern California Classics

To see Northern California's most spectacular scenery, plan to make a loop around the entire region. Begin with a dose of big-city culture in **San Francisco**. Get a taste of the California food scene at the Ferry Building market, then hop on a ferry to notorious Alcatraz. Plan to ride a cable car, wander the waterfront, and discover the spectacular gardens and museums of Golden Gate Park. Head north over the famous Golden Gate Bridge to **Marin County** and the windswept coastline of Point Reyes National Seashore. California's most famous grapes grow nearby in Wine Country – leave time to explore the over-the-top wineries of **Napa Valley** and historic **Sonoma**. If you've extra time, get lost on back roads in the **Russian River Valley**. Wine Country meets the boondocks in hidden **Anderson Valley**, on the way north to coastal **Mendocino**, a picture-perfect New England-like village on rocky Pacific headlands above the roaring surf.

Work your way north, past **Leggett**, where Hwy 1 cuts inland and joins Hwy 101; here begins the Redwood Coast, home to the world's tallest trees. In **Humboldt Redwoods State Park** drive beneath towering redwoods along the Avenue of the Giants. Stop for a night in conservative **Eureka**, with its pretty waterfront and candy-colored Victorians; or let your hair down with the college kids in Eureka's left-leaning neighbor, **Arcata**. Turn east on Hwy 299 for a mountainous scenic drive toward Gold Rush-era **Weaverville**, skirting the lake-studded Trinity Alps. Head north on I-5 to gape at stunning **Mt Shasta**, then head southeast on Hwy 89 to **Lassen Volcanic National Park** (p32), that hellishly beautiful volcanic landscape in the Cascade Range. Keep trucking southeast on Hwy 89 to **Lake Tahoe**, a four-season mountain resort. Spend a couple of nights. Afterward, cut south down the Eastern Sierra and Hwy 395 to the back-door entrance into **Yosemite National Park**, via summertime-only Tioga Rd.

If you've time, tack on a drive down spectacularly scenic Hwy 395, which passes between the highest and lowest points in the contiguous US: **Mt Whitney** and **Death Valley**. Otherwise, after a night or two in Yosemite Valley, go south to **Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks** and wander groves of giant sequoias – the world's most massive living things.

DAVID SARANDY / GETTY IMAGES ©



Top: Golden Gate
Bridge (p72)

Bottom: Lassen
Volcanic National Park
(p277)

QUAN YUAN / GETTY IMAGES ©



California: Off the Beaten Track

**LOST COAST**

Tackle an epic backpacking route, take a day hike to Punta Gorda Lighthouse, or beachcomb in utterly remote Shelter Cove, an overnight escape. (p248)

SMITH RIVER NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

The state's last remaining undammed waterway tumbles out of the Siskiyou Mountains, into Redwood National and State Parks. Plan to hike or raft. (p266)

LAVA BEDS NATIONAL MONUMENT

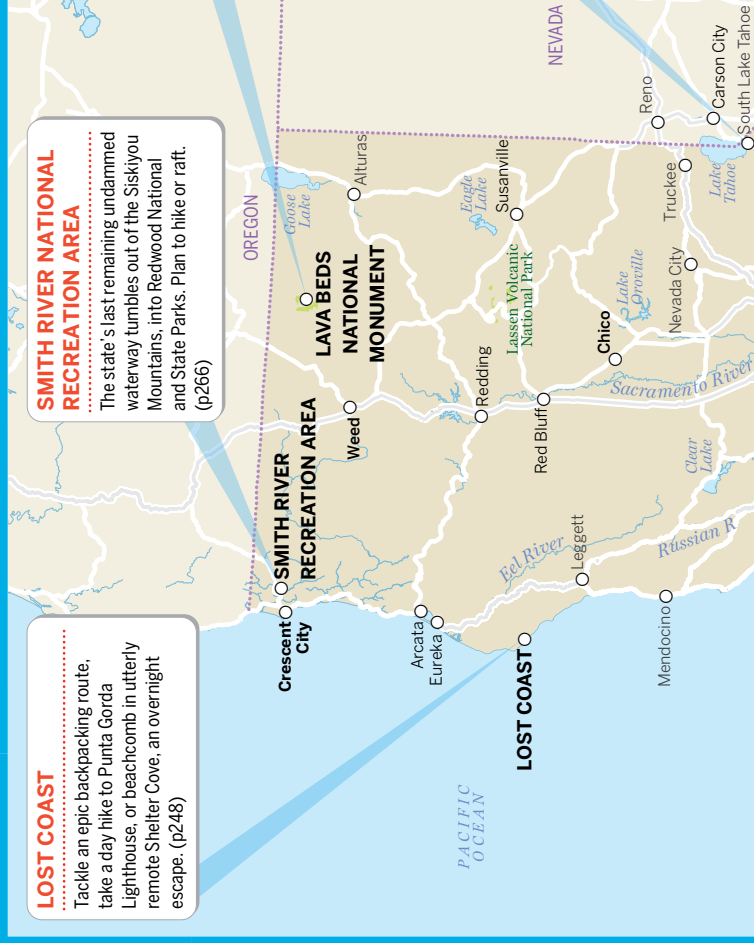
A geological wonderland of lava flows, spatter cones, shield volcanoes and craters. Strap on a helmet and clamber inside two dozen lava tubes. (p297)

AMADOR COUNTY WINE REGION

Explore one of California's oldest but least-known wine countries up in the Sierra Nevada foothills, where old Zinfandel grapevines thrive in mineral-rich soil. (p320)

BODIE STATE HISTORIC PARK

High above Mono Lake, this Gold Rush-era mining camp has become a ghost town where 200 buildings stand eerily frozen in time. (p405)



SACRAMENTO-SAN JOAQUIN RIVER DELTA

Dawdle lazily beside waterways and wildlife wetlands, taste farm bounty, and cruise one-stoplight towns with yesteryear saloons and colorful historical sites. (p491)

SAN FRANCISCO PENINSULA

In their rush to reach Monterey, most drivers skip seeing the coast between San Francisco and Santa Cruz, despite the many state beaches, parks and family farms that line the route. (p148)

PINNACLES NATIONAL PARK

On the way to nowhere, petite Pinnacles is worth a big detour for a chance to see endangered California condors soaring above spiring rock formations. (p468)

ANCIENT BRISTLECONE PINE FOREST

Speeding along Hwy 395 between Mammoth Lakes and Lone Pine, drivers often miss the turn-off to the world's oldest trees – don't be one of them. (p421)

MINERAL KING VALLEY

Forget overcrowded Yosemite Valley. Head south to Sequoia National Park, where this wildflower-strewn basin shaped by glaciers beckons, with hiking trails to unspoiled alpine lakes. (p398)



PACIFIC OCEAN

grounds, hike snowy peaks, find petroglyphs in caves, be awed by redwoods and seduced by the wild coast. Find out more about Celeste at www.celestebrash.com.



Tienlon Ho

[Sacramento & Central Valley](#), [Gold Country](#) An Ohioan by birth but a Californian at stomach, Tienlon Ho has walked, run, climbed, crawled, tumbled, fished, swam, and eaten her way around the state enough times to say California is huge, and spectacular. Besides writing guides and books for Lonely Planet, she writes about food, environment, and technology for a number of publications. Follow her

travels and more at tienlon.com and @tienlonho.



Beth Kohn

[Marin County & the Bay Area](#), [Lake Tahoe](#), [Yosemite & the Sierra Nevada](#), [California Wildlife](#), [Best Hikes of the Sierra Nevada](#) A lucky long-time resident of San Francisco, Beth lives to be playing outside or splashing in big puddles of water. For this guide, she hiked and biked Bay Area byways, backpacked Yosemite and Lake Tahoe in winter and soaked in myriad mountain view hot springs. An

author of Lonely Planet's *Yosemite*, *Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks* and *Mexico* guides, you can see more of her work at www.bethkohn.com.



OUR STORY

A beat-up old car, a few dollars in the pocket and a sense of adventure. In 1972 that's all Tony and Maureen Wheeler needed for the trip of a lifetime – across Europe and Asia overland to Australia. It took several months, and at the end – broke but inspired – they sat at their kitchen table writing and stapling together their first travel guide, *Across Asia on the Cheap*. Within a week they'd sold 1500 copies. Lonely Planet was born.

Today, Lonely Planet has offices in Franklin, London, Melbourne, Oakland, Beijing and Delhi, with more than 600 staff and writers. We share Tony's belief that 'a great guidebook should do three things: inform, educate and amuse'.

OUR WRITERS



John A Vlahides

Coordinating Author, Napa & Sonoma Wine Country John A Vlahides co-hosts the TV series *Lonely Planet: Roads Less Travelled*, screening on National Geographic Channels International. John studied cooking in Paris, with the same chefs who trained Julia Child, and is also a former luxury-hotel concierge and member of Les Clefs d'Or, the international union of the world's elite concierges. He lives in San Francisco, sings tenor with the Grammy-winning San Francisco

Symphony, and spends free time biking SF and skiing the Sierra. For more, see JohnVlahides.com, twitter.com/JohnVlahides.

Read more about John at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/johnvlahides



Sara Benson

Central Coast After graduating from college, Sara jumped on a plane to California with just one suitcase and \$100 in her pocket. After driving tens of thousands of miles to every corner of this state, she settled in a little beach town halfway between San Francisco and LA. She's an avid hiker, backpacker, cyclist and all-seasons outdoor enthusiast who has worked for the National Park Service in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The author of more than 65 travel and non-fiction books, Sara is the lead writer for Lonely Planet's *California*, *California's Best Trips*, *Coastal California* and *Los Angeles, San Diego & Southern California* guides. Follow her latest adventures online at www.indietraveler.blogspot.com, www.indietraveler.net, @indie_traveler on Twitter and indietraveler on Instagram.

Read more about Sara at:
lonelyplanet.com/members/Sara_Benson



Alison Bing

San Francisco Over 10 guidebooks and 20 years in San Francisco, author Alison Bing has spent more time on Alcatraz than some inmates, become an aficionado of drag and burritos, and willfully ignored Muni signs warning that "safety requires avoiding unnecessary conversation."



Celeste Brash

North Coast & Redwoods, Northern Mountains Celeste's ancestors moved to Northern California in 1906 and this is the region she will always consider home. After 15 years in French Polynesia she now lives in the Pacific Northwest and was thrilled to head south to explore and imbibe the treasures of her old stomping

OVER MORE
PAGE WRITERS

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