

North Coast



Forget the sun-drenched vision of the Beach Boys' California – in lieu of bikinis and bright, sunny skies the North Coast has banks of spectral fog, towering redwoods and cliffs that drop into a menacing roar of surf. Forget the jammed freeways of Southern California; the northern stretch of the coast is traveled mostly on winding two-lane blacktop, where the biggest traffic problem is encountered behind a dawdling Winnebago. The further north you travel, the more dominant the landscape becomes; interrupted only by two-stoplight towns that are departure points for the wilds surrounding you.

Here, you don't have to go too far off-track to feel like you're in an overgrown set of *Land Of The Lost*. Sun dapples the forest floor beneath towering redwoods, lighting up bristly ferns and shaggy beds of moss. Sea lions and elephant seals laze upon crags jutting out of the Pacific, barking and braying; beneath them sea cucumbers, starfish and anemones cling to the rocks, despite the relentless surf. In winter, migrating whales breach offshore while eagles, falcons and vultures arc overhead.

Best of all, you're likely to have the place mostly to yourself. There's a libertarian spirit on the North Coast that only begrudgingly accepts interlopers, with weed farmers and hippies staking out territory next to logging companies, and though they don't get along, they cut each other a wide swath. Mostly though, this is a place to get lost, and in doing so, find the majesty of California's untamed coast.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Standing in the shadow of trees over 40 stories high at **Redwood National Park** (p145)
- Watching the parade of tree-huggers, lumberjacks and college students around the **Arcata** (p138) town square
- Rolling the Chevy through the belly of a redwood at the **Chandelier Drive-Thru Tree** (p124)
- Navigating the tide charts to hike the black sands and ghostly beauty of the **Lost Coast** (p127)
- Renting a bicycle and pedaling the North Coast's best ride along the **Avenue of the Giants** (p129)



FAST FACTS

- **Temperature range at Redwood National Park** 40°–60°F, year-round
- **San Francisco to Mendocino via Hwy 1** 170 miles, four hours
- **San Francisco to Crescent City via Hwy 101** 355 miles, six hours
- **Bodega Bay to Leggett via Hwy 1** 151 miles, four hours
- **Ukiah to Crescent City via Hwy 101** 241 miles, 4½ hours

Getting There & Away

To make your way north fast, take Hwy 101, the inland route; Hwy 1 meanders along the coast then cuts inland and ends at Leggett, where it joins Hwy 101.

If you aren't traveling by car, Amtrak (p292) operates the *Coast Starlight* between Los Angeles and Seattle, with connecting bus services to several North Coast towns including Leggett, Arcata and Garberville. Note that the train runs inland, not along the coast. Alternatively, Greyhound (p289) operates a cheaper bus service up Hwy 101 from San Francisco to Santa Rosa. This trip takes about two hours and costs \$19, stopping in several towns all the way up the coast.

In Santa Rosa, the regional transit hub for bus services, **Golden Gate Transit** (☎ 707-541-2000, 415-923-2000; www.goldengate.org) is the way to get up the coast on public transportation – which isn't speedy, but possible. Bus 80 goes to and from San Francisco's Transbay terminal for \$9.25 one way, and the trip takes about 3½ hours. Bicycles are allowed. **Sonoma County Transit** (☎ 707-576-7433, 800-345-7433; www.sctransit.com) serves Sonoma County. **Sonoma County Airport Express** (☎ 707-837-8700, 800-327-2024; www.airportexpressinc.com) operates buses to the Bay Area's SFO and OAK airports.

The **Mendocino Transit Authority** (MTA; ☎ 707-462-1422, 800-696-4682; www.4mta.org) operates key long routes along the coast and to cities along Hwy 101 with reliable service and friendly drivers. It's possible, though hardly convenient, to use the MTA to travel all the way between Santa Rosa and Fort Bragg (3¼ hours) and many points between. The key long routes (once daily each way)

are the 65 (between Fort Bragg and Santa Rosa) and the 95 (connecting Point Arena and Santa Rosa, about one hour). If you're visiting Mendocino, the county's main attraction, you can use the MTA to visit Fort Bragg multiple times a day. All buses have racks for bicycles. No municipal transportation continues north from Fort Bragg.

North of Mendocino County, the **Redwood Transit System** (☎ 707-443-0826; www.hta.org) operates buses Monday through Saturday between Scotia and Trinidad (about two hours), stopping en route at Eureka and Arcata. **Redwood Coast Transit** (☎ 707-464-9314; www.redwoodcoasttransit.org) runs two buses a day, Monday to Saturday, between Crescent City, Klamath and Redwood National Park, with numerous stops along the way. The best deal going is the 'Redwood Rider' pass, which offers unlimited rides for five days between Eureka and points north for \$35.

For those stout-hearted souls considering a visit via bicycle, the region is especially inviting, with a plethora of state camping facilities and drivers who are accustomed to cyclists. For detailed information about routes, visit the Caltrans website (www.dot.ca.gov) and search 'bicycle tourism,' which leads to printable PDFs of elevation and detailed maps.

COASTAL HIGHWAY 1

The coast between Bodega Bay and Fort Bragg is on the gorgeous, jagged edge of the continent, where cows graze on cliffs above the frothing, frigid roar of the Pacific. The metropolitan charms of San Francisco, only a few hours south, feel eons away. The snaking route that Hwy 1 takes along the North Coast is challengingly remote and real: white-knuckled drivers pass farms, fishing towns and hidden beaches, pausing on roadside pullouts where gusty cliffs overlook migrating whales. The drive takes four hours of daylight driving without stops. At night, and in the fog, it takes steely nerves and much longer.

In the 1960s, there were plans to turn the winding road into a four-lane freeway and subdivide the surrounding land into 2-acre parcels. Can you imagine? It would have become another Southern California-