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## JOURNEYS; 36 Hours | Mendocino, Calif.

By SUZANNE HAMLIN  
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A QUICK immersion in this Northern California coastal village, the picturesque hub of Mendocino County, is a chance to aerate body and soul. Mendocino is a stage set of pioneer California, a cluster of low white frame Victorian buildings and old water towers nestled in the curve of a cove high above the crashing waves of the cold Pacific.

Somewhere between a New England fishing village and an Old West frontier town, little Mendocino (population 1,200) looks much as it did in the 19th century, when it was a thriving logging town, shipping redwoods down to an expanding San Francisco. Today's visitors typically arrive after a drive through Sonoma and Napa Counties, with their vineyards, cheese- and snack-laden tasting rooms and many wines that cannot be found elsewhere. The last part of the drive to Mendocino is an exhilarating hairpin-turn coastal road through what remains of the ancient redwood forest, where huge evergreen trees obliterate the sky before opening suddenly onto a five-mile stretch of ocean road that leads directly into the village. The temperature hovers between 50 and 60 degrees year-round; sunny days are glorious; stormy days, memorably dramatic. SUZANNE HAMLIN

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Friday

6 p.m.

### 1) Start With a Massage

Going north on Highway 1, turn left onto Little Lake Road at the traffic light and park in Mendocino village. Reserve ahead for a massage (\$70 for an hour, \$98 for an hour and a half) at Sweetwater Spa (44840 Main Street; 707-937-4140), then follow it up with a soak in a communal or private hot tub (per person it is \$8.50 for a group soak with no time limit, \$14 for an hour in a private tub, \$16 for an hour in a private tub and sauna suite). Afterward, check in at your lodgings and call the Mendocino County Alliance (866-466-3636) for weather and information on seasonal tours, exhibitions and special themed weeks at the town's restaurants. (For instance, Wine and Crab Days are Jan. 24 through Feb. 2).

8 p.m.

### 2) Meet at MacCallum House

There is no better place to spend an entire evening than MacCallum House (45020 Albion Street, 707-937-5763), which reopens Feb. 14 after a winter break. This 1882 Victorian gingerbread house is now an inn and a three-fireplace restaurant with lots of cozy corners and a great bar where local artists, winemakers, farmers and entrepreneurs gather nightly. It's hard not to fall into conversation sitting on a tufted sofa amid an eclectic mix of Victorian furniture -- a little like being in Granny's parlor long after the old lady has gone to bed. The bar offers many terrific local wines. For a bar meal, try the Witty MacTwins, two baby burgers with white cheddar and gaufrette chips (\$8.95). Or you can book a table in the adjoining dining room for substantial entrees like medallion

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of venison and wild boar sausage with huckleberry-syrup sauce (\$28.95). The extraordinary after-dinner drink list of ports, Cognacs, grappas and small-batch bourbons includes a luscious chocolate and port tasting (\$7.50).

10:30 p.m.

3) Starry Night Stroll

The brightest late-night life in Mendocino may be the starry sky -- infinite, full of constellations and the perfect canopy for a star-gazing walk. Stroll slowly down Albion Street, turn on Lansing Street and follow the stars to Main Street, where the sky meets the ocean. Not too many competing streetlights and not many sidewalks, either; stroll in the street as the locals do.

Saturday

8 a.m.

4) Headlands Hike

Mendocino inns invariably include a serious breakfast, the best prelude to a wind-swept, sea-gulls-circling-overhead morning walk along the Headlands, where a few miles of coastal trails run along the curve of the village and its outskirts. The trails are part of Mendocino Headlands State Park.

11 a.m.

5) Art and Jewelry

Six blocks long and four blocks wide, Mendocino is filled with little shops and galleries. Several are housed in old wooden water towers, including Articles (611 Albion Street; 707-937-3891), where you'll find intriguing bits of jewelry and other trinkets, some made by the young artist owners, others by innovative California artisans, as well as paintings, sculptures and eclectic items. Striking silver jewelry can be found at Silver and Stone (45005 Ukiah Street; 707-937-0257) and fine, one-of-a-kind gold and platinum jewelry at Old Gold (6 Albion Street, 707-937-5005). Stop in as well at the Mendocino Art Center (45200 Little Lake Street, 707-937-5818), an art school with changing exhibitions by local artists.

Noon

6) A Museum, a Temple

Housed in an 1854 home on the ocean cliff, the tiny Ford House Museum (735 Main Street, 707-937-5397, open daily 11 to 4) focuses on local history, featuring a scale model of Mendocino in 1890. If the town knitters have been busy, there will be enchanting hats and mufflers for sale. And if you're a persistent caller, you probably will get through to the caretakers at the nearby Temple of Kwan Tai (45160 Albion Street, 707-937-5123), who will happily give you a private tour of this stunning Buddhist temple built in the 1850's. If you can't get in, you still have a street view; the building is a red-and-gold showstopper.

1 p.m.

7) Lunch in a Garden

The lunch spot that should be mandated for every town, the Moose Cafe (390 Kasten Street, 707-937-4323), has a lovely little garden, a cheerful staff, homey standards -- pasta, salads, burgers -- cooked with panache, and a new Vietnamese chef who has elevated the already renowned local crab cakes with a tart dipping sauce (\$12).

2:30 p.m.

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## 8) Biking Through Redwoods

Sure, you can spend the afternoon on the Skunk Train, between Willits and Fort Bragg (707-964-6371; www.skunktrain.com), wending through the redwoods as you passively gaze out, or you can activate your inner biker and wheel-bond with Mendocino. Rent a bike and map a custom route at Catch a Canoe and Bicycles Too! (44850 Comptche-Ukiah Road, 707-937-0273). Bikes are \$10 for an hour, with a two-hour minimum, or \$30 for a day.

5:30 p.m.

## 9) Cocktails In or Out

Many of Mendocino's inns have a free tea or cocktail hour for guests. If you're not staying in one of those, the comfortable lobby of the Mendocino Hotel on Main Street is a good place for drinks -- and so picturesquely Old Western, Miss Kitty could join you at any moment.

8 p.m.

## 10) New Wave California Dinner

Make a reservation at Cafe Beaujolais (961 Ukiah Street, 707-937-5614), to see for yourself what all the fuss is about. The original owners, Margaret Fox and Christopher Kump, turned a little frame house into a California dining destination in the first wave of local-ingredient, French-inspired cooking. Now under new ownership, the tiny dining room is the most formal in town: white tablecloths and candlelight and a seasonal menu that stresses organic produce, meats and Northwest seafood (entrees are \$21.75 to \$25). The wine list includes California and French wines with a few notable Mendocino wines. The cafe will reopen on Jan. 31 after a winter break.

10:30 p.m.

## 11) Join the Club

Just like the Irish pub it resembles, Patterson's Pub (10485 Lansing Street, 707-937-4782), is easy to love and hard to leave -- no problem since it's open until 1 a.m. Sometimes the locals perform live music; regardless, the locals are lively. All those mugs on the wall belong to Beer Club members, but no visitor is excluded from sampling the excellent local brews, like those by Anderson Valley Brewing, Mendocino Brewing and North Coast Brewing.

Sunday

8 a.m.

## 12) Gallop in the Surf

Don't worry if your equestrian skills are limited; drive 10 miles north of Mendocino to Ricochet Ridge Ranch (24201 North Highway 1, Fort Bragg, 707-964-7669; www.horsevacation.com) and its owner, Lari Shea, will match you with a compatible horse (English or Western saddle) and direct you to a glorious beach trot or gallop; invigorating no matter what the pace. Two-hour group or private trail rides are \$40 and \$60 per person respectively.

## THE BASICS

## Visiting Mendocino

The closest airports to Mendocino are in San Francisco, served by all major airlines, and in Oakland, which has several Jet Blue flights from New York every day. Both airports have major rental car agencies. Driving is the only way to get to Mendocino, about three and a half hours north of the San Francisco Bay area. There is no bus or train service.

Set back on a bluff, the Brewery Gulch Inn (9401 Coast Highway 1 North, 800-578-

4454), about a mile outside the village, is built largely of 19th-century redwood salvaged from the Big River. The 10 rooms, each different but all with luxurious linens, whirlpool baths and fireplaces, are \$150 to \$295 a night; breakfast is included.

The Albion River Inn (3790 North Highway 1, Albion, 800-479-7944) is spread along 10 acres of headland bluffs; many of the 20 rooms and cottages have ocean views, fireplaces and decks. There is an excellent restaurant. Rooms and cottages are \$200 to \$310 and include breakfast.

The Mendocino Hotel and Garden Suites (45080 Main Street, 800-548-0513) is a quirky collection of 51 Victorian rooms and cottages with up-to-date amenities and a garden restaurant; rooms are \$95 to \$275.

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