



Flying With Faber

PACIFICA, CALIFORNIA A SECRET THAT MUST BE REVEALED

Miles and miles of verdant green meadows nestled between a twisting highway and isolated beaches, bluffs and coves. Occasionally, a village. Then, additional expanses of lonely meadows interrupted by columns of redwood trees that, for centuries, have stood at attention while guarding the seacoast.

A sign, “scenic vista” beckoned us to stop our car. We glided across the parking lot, the gravel surface emitting a tune as it crackled beneath the tires. “Scenic vista” hardly described what met our eyes. A remote sandy beach. Giant rocks stood as bookends on the edges of the beach. The waves relentlessly splashed against the rocks, hoping to frighten them away. But the intrepid rocks stood their ground.

We glanced from side to side. Desolate meadows and pastures as far as the eye can see. Hardly a building or person in sight. A few cattle chomping away. The waves, not giving up their assault against the rocks, are the only sound. Except for a songbird. Or a hawk. Or a pocket gopher scurrying through the grass to avoid the hawk’s ravenous attention.

Rancho del Oso and Waddell Creek in northern Santa Cruz County provide bountiful coastal habitats. This region is home to many birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. Further north is Ano Nuevo State Park, which in December and January, is home to large numbers of Elephant Seals. From Monterey to Pacifica in San Mateo County, you might spot harbor seals and sea otters, Brown pelicans often ascend overhead. Brandt’s and double-crested cormorants can be often seen claiming ownership of a rock or soaring over the water. Western and herring gulls often mistakenly lumped together as “sea gulls” are everywhere. Or, if you are lucky, you may even spot a whale.

We always detour a few miles off the



*Olallieberry Pie. Duarte’s Tavern
(Stuart J. Faber)*

highway to visit the quaint village of Pescadero. Duarte’s Tavern, 202 Stage Road, is our mandatory stop for cioppino – chock full of fresh seafood. On this trip, we also sampled a slice of olallieberry pie. Olallieberries, grown in Oregon and Northern California, are a sweet, tart fruit that make an excellent pie filling.

Resuming our journey, we approach one of my favorite waypoints – Half Moon Bay Airport. We pause to have a look. Pilot Light Restaurant where it has endured for decades against the tide of disappearing airport diners. Several aircraft, including a few attractive home-built varieties, parked just feet from the restaurant. Groups of pilots recounting hangar stories.

As our journey progresses, we are met by stands of giant ancient redwoods, carpets of wildflowers, an occasional vineyard and winding hiking paths, all of which serve as a welcoming committee to Pacifica.

Pacifica

Many folks driving from Southern California to San Francisco have rarely, if ever, taken a side trip Pacifica. That included me. However, we discovered this coastal gem several years ago. Now, we wouldn’t think of a drive to San Francisco without a detour off Highway 101 for a visit to this village. Comfortable, inexpensive hotels, family-owned restaurants serving down-to-earth outstanding cuisine fashioned from local ingredients, an historic fishing pier and plenty of places for beachcombing, surfing, skateboarding and nature walks – all within less than a half hour from San Francisco – how could we forgo this treasure?

Pacifica, a surfer’s paradise, is nestled within several small valleys spread between Sweeney Ridge in the east, Montara Mountain to the south, and the Pacific Ocean’s rocky bluffs to the west.

Pacifica has numerous mountain biking destinations with many trails crossing the hillsides that surround the city, including Pedro Mountain Road, Sweeney Ridge, and areas of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

Pacifica is also a popular place to hike. Numerous trails wind along the beaches and bluffs, including Mori Point,



Pacifica Coastline (Stuart J. Faber)

San Pedro Valley County Park, the Sanchez Adobe, Milagra Ridge, and the privately-owned Pacifica quarry. For live local theater and performing arts, Pacifica Spindrift Players is a local and popular favorite. Pacifica Performances provides both musical presentations and performing arts as well. Pacifica is also home to the Sharp Park Golf Course, which was designed in 1931.

Inn at Rockaway, 200 Rockaway Beach Ave, Pacifica, CA 94404, 650/359-7700, www.innatrockaway.com.

This pet-friendly hotel, just a stone’s throw from the ocean and adjacent to Nick’s, one of my favorite restaurants in California, has recently completed a top-to-bottom renovation. The huge, tastefully decorated rooms are inviting and comfortable. Free wi-fi, plenty of USB outlets and complimentary fresh coffee, day and night, make this ideally located hotel a perfect choice.

Vallemar Station, 2125 Pacific Coast Highway, Pacifica, CA., 650/359-7411, www.vallemarstation.com.

We approached an historic building, which served as a railroad station from 1905-1920. We knocked on what is now the door to the restaurant.

After several knocks-knocks, the door cracked open. A grumpy face appeared. With a voice, equally as grumpy and slightly gravelly, we were greeted with, “No credit cards today – the machine is broken.”

“I’ve got cash,” I eagerly replied.

Grumpy face notwithstanding, nothing was going to prevent me from repeating what had previously been one of the memorable breakfasts of my life.

As we were ushered in, I exclaimed, “I’ve been thinking about this place for weeks.”



**Stuart J. Faber
and Aunt Bea**



*Chicken Fried Steak at Vallemar.
(Stuart J. Faber)*

“I’ve been trying *not* to think about this place for the past 26 years,” was her terse rejoinder.

I ordered chicken fried steak with eggs and hash browns. Unequivocally, the best I’ve ever had. Cheryl ordered the French toast. Cheryl takes her French toast seriously. She devoured every morsel with gusto.

The restaurant also serves lunch and dinner. Burgers, sandwiches, steaks, chicken and fish are all out of this world. Once again, we proclaimed the Vallemar experience to be one of the greatest breakfasts of our lifetime.

Grumpy Denise began to mellow. Her tone grew warm and friendly. The daughter of one of the owners, she told us about the difficult times during COVID. She praised the hundreds of loyal locals who came by for take-out. But for them, Vallemar never would have survived. We plucked down the cash and parted with hugs and tearful eyes. On our way out, we stopped by a table occupied by four guys, about my age.

“We have been meeting here every Sunday for decades,” they proudly announced. We engaged in a dialogue about Pacifica’s many qualities – a city just minutes from San Francisco. I thanked these guys for supporting Vallemar and we said our goodbyes. Denise, her grumpy face supplanted with a warm smile, thanked us as she accompanied us to our car.

Continued on Page 30

Flying With Faber

Continued from Page 29

Nick's Seafood Restaurant, 100 Rockaway Beach Ave, Pacifica, CA 94044, 650/359-3900, info@nicksrestaurant.net.



Nicks. Rockaway Beach, Pacifica.
(Stuart J. Faber)



Linguini and Clams at Nicks.
(Stuart J. Faber)

If we lived in Pacifica, I have no doubt that we would dine at Nick's at least once a day. Owned and operated by the same family since 1927, Nick's is a down-home place with genuine, tasty homemade cuisine. Seafood is all fresh, much of which is locally harvested. Try the crab sandwich for lunch. Or fish and chips, petrale sole, sea scallops, lobster

tail or prawns. The hand-cut New York steaks or filet mignon are remarkable. The roasted half chicken is delicious. And don't pass up the prime ribs of beef.

I love linguini and clams. Nick's is the best. The clams are supple and corpulent. The pasta is cooked to a perfect al dente. I could drink the sauce as a soup. I prepare this dish at home. But Nick's version has humbled me for life. I could never duplicate their texture and flavor.

On weekends, Nick's provides live music and dancing. On Saturday night, the joint was jumping as if COVID never existed.

The Pier



High Waves at Pacifica Pier
(Stuart J. Faber)

I have a warm spot in my heart for fishing piers. During the Wisconsin summers, we made daily trips to the Lake Michigan pier. We always returned home with buckets brimming with yellow perch.

Pacifica Pier offers fishing and Dungeness crabbing. No fishing license required. We visited the pier on a blustery morning. The waves were so high, they flooded the streets. I marvel at the perpet-

ual motion of the tide and waves. Nature moves them with a force and consistency that man, with his machines, could never duplicate. The waves create a musical refrain and a consistent undulating rhythm. The movement captured our eyes. We were compelled to stare and listen as the waves saturated the sand, then retreated and returned again and again. Surfers seek to conquer them. But the waves invariably prevail.

The catches of bass, salmon and crab were abundant. Many folks took coffee and breakfast breaks at the Chit Chat Café, which has stood for decades as a sentry to the venerable pier.

Suggested Itineraries

I have two suggestions for a trip along the Northern California coast. If you are flying your plane, the first option is to land at Monterey Regional Airport, (KMRY). Runway 10R/28L is 7,100 feet long at an elevation of 158 feet above sea level. Del Monte Aviation, 831-373-4151, has rental cars and the best gas prices. I suggest renting a car, paying a visit to the Hofsas House Hotel, just down the road in Carmel, then arising in the morning for a delightful continental breakfast and spectacular drive along Highway 1. A stop for lunch at Duarte's Tavern and a stroll through the village are an extra treat.

If you prefer less time on the road, consider Half Moon Bay Airport (KHAF). Runway 12/30 is 5,000 feet long and 66 feet above sea level. The field is about 30 minutes from Pacifica. You will have to arrange in advance for a rental car.

The best bet is to fly into Monterey, stay at the Hofsas House and enjoy the glorious drive along the California coast.

Hofsas House Hotel, Between 3rd & 4th Ave on San Carlos Street. Carmel-by-the-Sea, CA 93921. 831/624-2745. www.hofsashouse.com.



Hofsas House.
(Courtesy Elite Photography)

Pet friendly, traditional European elegance, free parking, complimentary continental breakfast and just steps from Carmel's main shopping street and the beach, Hofsas House is our favorite hotel in Carmel.

Family-owned for decades, the Hofsas House is located three blocks north of Ocean Avenue, eight blocks from the picturesque white sand Carmel Beach and one block from the child-friendly City Park. There is plenty of off-street parking. We enjoyed walking everywhere in Carmel from the inn.

Dutch doors appoint each cozy room, allowing guests to take in the fresh ocean air. Selected rooms and most suites have fireplaces, private balconies, wet bars or kitchens.

Other amenities include a heated swimming pool, dry saunas, view deck areas, HD cable TV and free Wi-fi access. You will feel right at home at the Hofsas House Hotel.

This was our inaugural post-COVID excursion. It was a journey and an adventure that we will cherish forever.