



Guide to Visiting the

GOLDEN GATE

National Recreation Area

GOLDEN GATE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

Think San Francisco and you think the Golden Gate Bridge. The area in and around the famous landmark comprises the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. You will be pleasantly surprised how extensive this National Recreation Area is, comprising history, seashore, mountains, forests, forts, and more. Plan to take plenty of time to see it, or to return often. Take your time, take your camera, and take it all in.

There are nineteen different ecosystems with over two thousand plant and animal species within the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Suit your own tastes whether you take a hike, take in the view, take time for a picnic, or take the broad expanse of history. It spans California's indigenous cultures, Spanish colonialism, the Mexican Republic, United States military presence, and the transformations of the city of San Francisco.










The Bridge is the centerpiece and symbol of the entire Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Head for the Bridge Pavilion, located at the Golden Gate Bridge viewing area at the south end of the bridge. There, you can see models about the building of the bridge and obtain information about the bridge. Naturally, it is also a great vantage point for photography.

Let's take a deeper dive into visiting the sites of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Note that all sites' visitor centers and restaurants are closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day, though you can generally access the outdoor areas any day. And remember, as with a visit to any natural area, leave no trace behind. Let's start exploring!





Jay Dalles is a writer living in Central Florida with his wife Judy. They enjoy traveling by car and seeing what is just around the next bend. Jay normally chooses to go the scenic route. Antiquing is a lifelong avocation, so anytime a sign says "Antiques" his car tends to veer off in that direction. His approach to life is this: "What are we going to do interesting next?"

PAGE	ATTRACTION
1	 Alcatraz Island
3	 Fort Point
5	 Crissy Field Center
6	 The Presidio
9	 Land's End Lookout
11	 Fort Baker
13	 Marin Headlands
16	 Muir Woods
19	 Point Reyes



ALCATRAZ ISLAND

For many years, Alcatraz Island was one of the most famous prisons in the world. If it were still the same, we would prefer to be “just visiting” this place, nicknamed The Rock, a mile and a quarter from land in the middle of San Francisco Bay.

History of Alcatraz

The history of the twenty-two-acre island is fascinating. The island was named by Juan Manuel de Ayala in 1775. His chart of the San Francisco Bay called it “La Isla de los Alcatraces.” This means “The Island of the Pelicans.” And today the tidal pools still attract bird colonies.

Getting to Alcatraz Island is pretty straightforward. Since Alcatraz Island is a US National Park, you must book a trip there through the park service. Alcatraz Cruises is the only authorized tour company. It can be found near Fisherman’s Wharf, at Pier 33. Plan, book your trip several months in advance online. The boat ride to the island takes about twenty minutes. It can be very chilly, so layer accordingly.

In the early days of California statehood, Alcatraz became the site of the first lighthouse. It was also the first US-built fort on the West Coast. During the 20th century, it was the infamous federal penitentiary long off-limits to the public. In addition, it was home to notorious criminals including Al Capone, Machine Gun Kelly, and Creepy Karpis.

The island retains many signs of the eighteen-month protest and occupation by Indians of All Tribes that brought to national attention the rights of Native Americans. Today, you can find evidence of each of these eras, if you pay close attention.

ALCATRAZ ISLAND

Self-Guided Tour

The tour of the island is self-guided. You can see every prominent feature of the island including the Stark Recreation Yard. You can also see the long stretch of cells on both sides of "Broadway." Plan to spend three to four hours there.

While food is not available for purchase on the island, you can bring a picnic with you. There is limited snack food on the boat. A free map and an audio tour are part of your admission price. The main audio tour brings the story of the island alive, including voices of some of the people who were imprisoned here. The gift shop offers a broad range of interesting souvenirs and books.

Visitor Information

You can access Alcatraz Island
Thursday through Monday,
8:45 a.m. to 8:30 p.m. and
Tuesday and Wednesday
8:45 a.m. to 6:15 p.m.
Passes often sell out early,
and you can buy yours
up to 90 days in advance.

Make tour reservations at
www.alcatrazcruises.com
or in-person at Pier 33.



FORT POINT & CRISSY FIELD CENTER

Located underneath the south approach to the Golden Gate Bridge, Fort Point is an impressive fortification. The fort was built during the Gold Rush days and was used during the Second World War. The fort was transformed into a museum with exhibits about its history and the building of the Bridge. The soaring arch of the Bridge was created specifically to protect and preserve the fort.



FORT POINT & CRISSY FIELD CENTER

History

Fort Point is a masonry fortification situated at water's edge on the south shore of the Golden Gate. It commands the entrance to San Francisco Bay and pre-dates the Golden Gate Bridge by three-quarters of a century. The fort was constructed between 1853 and 1861. The U.S. Army Engineers built it to serve part of a group of forts created to guard San Francisco Bay. Located directly underneath the south approach to the Golden Gate Bridge, Fort Point is an impressive fortification. The span of history that the fort represents is impressive; it was built during the Gold Rush days and was used during the Second World War.

History & Design

When it came time to build the Golden Gate Bridge, the fort was still considered to be important architecturally, if somewhat outmoded, militarily. So the design of the bridge was influenced by the fort. The huge supporting arch curves dramatically over the fort. The soaring arch of the Bridge was created specifically to protect and preserve the fort. It is also a feast for the eyes. Old movie aficionados will tell you that the fort serves as one of the many evocative locations for Alfred Hitchcock's classic film, "Vertigo."

Exhibits

The fort has been transformed into a museum, filled with exhibits about its history and the building of the Bridge. You will enjoy how truly stunning the setting is. In addition, you are directly beneath the Golden Gate Bridge, and you have a 360-degree view from the top. Entry to the fort is free; there is a fee for the audio tour.

FORT POINT & CRISSY FIELD CENTER



Crissy Field Center

Crissy Field was once a U.S. Army airfield, historically part of the Presidio of San Francisco. Due to many considerations including the frequent fog, Crissy Field closed as an airfield after 1974. Crissy Field Center and its old airfield have been restored to a wonderful natural open space, with sweeping views of the Golden Gate Bridge, a great place for a picnic. There is a pathway along the beach as well as a walkway and cycling trail set back from the beach.

Spend some time strolling and enjoying the view of the Golden Gate Bridge and San Francisco Bay, including Alcatraz Island, and Sausalito. On a clear evening, it's the perfect location to watch the sunset.

This Crissy Field Center is among the most technologically advanced, energy-efficient buildings in the city. The Center features a café, a science lab, an art room, administrative spaces as well as high-performance classrooms.

Visitor Information

Fort Pierce is open Thursday through Monday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. In the winter, it is only open Friday through Sunday.

You can access the outdoor areas of Fort Point and Crissy Field at any time.



THE PRESIDIO

San Francisco's Presidio National Historic Landmark has been the centerpiece of the city by the bay since 1776. When Spain colonized California, the Presidio (or fort) was established here for the purpose of guarding San Francisco Bay. Comprising 1,500 acres, the Presidio is a vast and varied park with plenty to do for everyone. This park stretches along the Bay all the way to the southern end of the Golden Gate Bridge. You can walk or bike the Presidio, but even better, two different free shuttles will give you a complete overview of the grounds.

THE PRESIDIO

Visitor Center

If you have not been to the Presidio before, begin at The William Penn Mott, Jr. Presidio Visitor Center. The Presidio Visitor Center is housed in a circa 1900 guardhouse in the heart of the Presidio. The center has a broad front porch, overlooking the Golden Gate Bridge. There is an interactive map, one of the most advanced in the National Park's System, as well as two floors of permanent and changing exhibits. The Visitor Center is a vibrant hub for enjoying the Presidio. Get a guide map while you're there.

Palace of Fine Arts

Visit the Palace of Fine Arts, a creation of the famous San Francisco architect Bernard Maybeck, whose works were always fanciful, romantic, and poetic. This attraction may be his most visited creation and is one of the iconic buildings of San Francisco. Maybeck designed it for the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition. While the precedents for the structure came from ancient Greece and Rome, the work is entirely original. With the beautiful arches, columns, oversized urns, and domes reflected in the pools, it provides aesthetic wonder. Graceful by day it is spectacularly lighted at night; at any time, it is an idyllic setting for photography.

Walt Disney Family Museum

See the Walt Disney Family Museum, all about the life and legacy of animation and theme park legend, Walt Disney. It is housed in a portion of the old red brick Preside buildings. The museum presents the story of the Disney Family and the way that Walt made still drawings come to life through his animation art. Most noteworthy, you will enjoy the models, maps, photos, and drawings. There are pictures of the Disney family, fascinating letters, and many tender personal effects, telling the tale of the man behind the mouse. Also, the museum shop has plenty of take-home treasures for visitors. Additional features of the Presidio that will appeal to families with children include the climbing gyms and trampoline parks.

THE PRESIDIO



Visitor Information

The Presidio is open 7 days a week, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Walt Disney Family Museum is open daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., except Tuesdays.

Lover's Lane

The one-mile walk called Lover's Lane is among the oldest paths in the Presidio, going back to when it was a shortcut for missionaries and Spanish soldiers to go from the Mission Dolores to the Main Post. Take a stroll and enjoy the cool weather.

San Francisco National Cemetery

In 1884, 9 acres were designated as San Francisco National Cemetery, which included the site of the old post cemetery. It is the first national cemetery on the West Coast. Those interred here include many Medal of Honor recipients, as well as Annie Fox, chief nurse at Pearl Harbor, the first woman to receive the Purple Heart in 1942 for "outstanding performance of duty" during the attacks, and Pauline Cushman, a Union spy during the Civil War.

The Presidio Chapel

The Presidio Chapel is a beautiful stucco and tile structure in an inspiring location. Built by the U.S. Army in 1931, the chapel's Spanish mission revival architecture includes arched stained-glass windows, a magnificent fresco, a high ceiling with redwood beams, wrought-iron chandeliers, and sturdy oak doors. In addition, the memorial garden is lined with flowers.

Art and Dining

In the Presidio, art abounds. Art lovers will enjoy finding the various art installations by Andy Goldsworthy. Most noticeable is his sculpture titled Spire, at 100 feet tall. There are three more Goldsworthy works to see: Wood Line, Tree Fall, and Earth Wall.

During your visit to the Presidio, plan to have lunch at the Arguello restaurant, which features Mexican cuisine. The décor is wonderfully evocative, with stucco and wood in an old California hacienda theme. The food is delicious. On fair days, plan to dine on the patio.

Other dining options include the Commissary in the Main Post, the Round House Café at the Golden Gate, the Warming Hut Café, and the Presidio Café at the circa 1895 Presidio Golf Course, in the Bernard Maybeck-inspired clubhouse.

LANDS END LOOKOUT

Lands End Lookout was created in 2012, on the ruins of the historic Sutro Baths, and it is part of the expansive Golden Gate National Park. Lands End Lookout offers wildlife viewing, picnicking, strolling, history, and other recreation activities.

The Visitor Center

Lands End Lookout's new "green" visitor center includes a museum store, educational exhibits about the natural landscape and cultural history of the site, and a small cafe that has delicious refreshments and good coffee. Also, you will also find information about native and invasive species, as well as habitat restoration and protection. Many native plants and wildflowers have been planted here during the past decade, to restore the bird habitat, minimize erosion, and augment the natural beauty at Lands End.

There's another bonus of stopping at the Lands End is the Visitor Center. The center itself is an award-winning architectural building. Unexpected materials are used in a pleasing design, including reclaimed redwood cladding. Lastly, look up, to enjoy the recycled cardboard ceiling with laser-etched graphics.

Hikers can find maps and tips about local hiking trails at the Visitor Center. There are hiking paths from Land's End Lookout that give you more great vistas of the Golden Gate Bridge. The hiking is relatively easy and can be done by kids and most dogs.

The spectacular views are the most noteworthy reason to visit. You'll find breathtaking panoramas of the Pacific Ocean, Marin Headlands, Point Reyes, and the Golden Gate Bridge. On a clear day, you can see thirty miles up and down the Pacific coast.

LANDS END LOOKOUT



Visitor Information

The Lands End Lookout Visitor Center, cafe, and gift shop are open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The Sutro Baths

The backstory of Lands End Lookout is fascinating. The Sutro Baths were opened to the public on March 14, 1896. They were the world's largest indoor swimming pool establishment, a massive structure under glass. They were much like a giant conservatory, along with the lines of the Crystal Palace in England.

Inside the glass-roofed expanse were six different huge swimming pools, five filled with saltwater and one with fresh water. There were grandstands for spectators. In addition, there was a museum, an amphitheater, and an ice skating rink. The Sutro Baths burned to the ground in 1966. Today, you can still see the ruins of the huge swimming pool from the Land's End Lookout. Some of the hiking paths bring you close to the ruins.

Wildlife Viewing

Want to see something magnificent? The whale migration season runs from mid-December through April, and you are going to have a treat spotting them from here. If you look closely, you can even see many of them playing in the ocean, without ever leaving dry land.

Classic Attractions

The Sutro Baths complex was located near other early San Francisco attractions: the Cliff House, the Camera Obscura, and Seal Rocks. All of them are still there to be seen today when you come to Lands End Lookout. In addition, there are several dining options at the Cliff House, though reservations are highly recommended. The Cliff House has two restaurants - the Bistro Restaurant for casual dining, as well as the more formal Sutro's.

The Camera Obscura is essentially a giant camera, based on a design by Leonardo da Vinci. It creates stunning live images of the area around Seal Rocks. The images are projected on a horizontal viewing table from a reflected image that comes into the room from the cupola at the top of the building. The view makes a complete 360° revolution in about six minutes. Admission is just \$3 for adults and \$2 for seniors and children and is worth a peek.

Lastly, Seal Rocks reminds us that the Spanish named Lands End's westernmost promontory "Point Lobos," after the "Lobos Marinos" (sea lions) that make these rocks their headquarters. At the rocks, you'll also see roosting shorebirds such as cormorants and oystercatchers.

FORT BAKER

Fort Baker is a dream-like collection of vintage white and red buildings situated at water's edge on the San Francisco Bay, on the Sausalito side of the Golden Gate Bridge. Part of California's Golden Gate National Recreation Area, it began as a fort and is now a remarkable place to see and to stay when you are in the San Francisco area. The buildings are clustered on several sides of a large parade ground which is open toward the Bay.

This park has all of the charms of a vintage village as if it had been magically set down in a small, sheltered gap. Surrounded by hills on all sides except for the Bay, it has all of the beauty and charm of a place that is truly set apart from the rest of the world. And yet, it is so close to the grandeur of the Golden Gate Bridge, the drama of the Marin Headlands, and the quaintness of Sausalito.



FORT BAKER

Visitor Information

As with other parks, you can access the outdoor areas at any time. However, if you need to get a map from the BADM, plan around their hours: Tuesday through Friday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Saturday & Sunday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. They are closed most Mondays and may also be closed on holidays.

A Peaceful Retreat

Photographers delight in the unusual perspective to be had of the Golden Gate Bridge from Fort Baker. Many say it offers the best views of the Bridge, as well as long sweeping views of the San Francisco skyline.

The relatively unknown park spans 335 acres and is home to historic buildings, gun encampments, and a parade ground. At the marina and harbor, you'll also find walking and hiking trails and a pier from which you can fish and crab.

Fort Baker offers upscale lodging at The Cavallo Point Hotel; many of the rooms are in former officers' residences, while others are in a contemporary building. The rooms are well appointed; some have large windows with views of the Bay and the Bridge. Cavallo Point's Murray Circle Restaurant, highlighting refined modern Northern California cuisine, is among the Bay Area's top culinary delights. The hotel also offers a free area shuttle within 8 miles



History of Fort Baker

Fort Baker began in 1850 when President Millard Fillmore set aside this location as part of the fortifications guarding the entrance to the San Francisco Bay. Situated on the northern side of the Golden Gate, the Army post remained active through World War II.

Want to take a deeper dive into the history? You can sign up for a Fort Baker cell phone tour. You'll just find a sign indicating a tour stop. Call the number on the sign and enter the stop number to listen to the tour. While the tour information is free, you'll be charged regularly through your cell phone carrier for the call.

You can get a map and more information about Fort Baker at the Bay Area Discovery Museum (BADM) or at the Marin Headlands Visitor Center

MARIN HEADLANDS

The Marin Headlands are to the north of the Golden Gate Bridge and is one of the best-kept secrets in San Francisco. It is well worth the journey when you're in the Bay Area. Let's look at the best way to experience the Marin Headlands.



MARIN HEADLANDS

The Conzelman Road Drive

To have a fun-filled visit to the Marin Headlands, plan a drive along Conzelman Road. You'll start at the north side of the Golden Gate Bridge, then drive all the way to Point Bonita and the Point Bonita Lighthouse.

Conzelman Road is a delightfully winding road through the Marin Headlands. It's a treat for any driver. As you begin your drive along Conzelman Road, you will have a great peek at San Francisco Bay, the Golden Gate Bridge, and the San Francisco skyline.

At the first pull-off on your left, stop at Golden Gate Bridge Vista Point. You'll be treated to the panorama views. Take the short stroll to Ridge Battery and on to Battery Spencer, where you'll feel as if you are right on top of the Bridge. Enjoy the breathtaking views of San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean. This is one of the not-to-be-missed views anywhere in the world.

Hike Kirby Cove

From Vista Point, you can hike the Kirby Cove Road. Kirby Cove is a dirt road that clings to the Pacific cliffs and offers dramatic views. The trail is easy and wide. There is a side trail that heads to Battery Wagner for more views. Another side trail provides access to the small beach at Kirby Cove, where you can see San Francisco framed by the lower towers of the Bridge. You can also pre-reserve one of the five camping spaces here at Kirby Cove Campground.

Retrace your steps to the Golden Gate Bridge Vista Point, cross the road, and head to the top of the hill. Here, you'll find a less-well-known vantage point even higher up. But if you are not a hiker, drive to the next pull off called Golden Gate View Point for another sweeping view. There are only seven parking spaces here. Conzelman Road continues to curve and climb up to another pull-off called Golden Gate Public View.

MARIN HEADLANDS



Visitor Information

The Marin Headlands Visitor Center is open year-round, 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., except for Thanksgiving (Thursday-Friday) and Christmas (December 25).

You can visit the Point Bonita Lighthouse Saturday through Monday, 12:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Drive to Hawk Hill

After Golden Gate Public View, you come to a roundabout. Take the second right to continue on Conzelman Road to Hawk Hill. The views here are pristine as well. There is plenty of parking here, so if you found the earlier overlooks too crowded to stop, this will make up for it. If you wish, hike the path up to Hawk Hill. At Hawk Hill, you will have another stunning view of the bridge and San Francisco.

After this point, the Marin Headlands Road is one-way as it clings to the coastline and dips down toward the Ocean. These views rival any coastal drive anywhere. You can stop at Upper Fisherman's Parking Lot and access the Black Sands Beach from here. Continue to Battery Rathbone and Clyde's Ridge, then down to the Marin Headlands Visitor Center to your right

The Marin Headlands Visitor Center

The Marin Headlands Visitor Center looks like a little white country church with a bright red roof and steeple. Here you can see exhibits about the natural history of the area, as well as its cultural history. There is a Miwok shelter where present-day Coast Miwok people talk about their lives. You will also enjoy the gift shop, offering books and field guides about the area.

Point Bonita Lighthouse

Retrace your route back via Field Road and head to the Point Bonita Lighthouse. The Lighthouse was built in 1855 and is still active. You reach it by a half mile trail from the parking lot, which is somewhat steep. Point Bonita Lighthouse is the only lighthouse in the USA that is accessible only by a suspension bridge. It is open during limited hours, but it is always a great photo op. You can visit Saturday thru Monday, 12:30 p.m. - 3:30 p.m. Point Bonita was the last manned lighthouse on the California coast.

Head back toward the Bridge via Bunker Road and its dramatic one-way tunnel. Or, if you want to avoid the tunnel, turn off Bunker Road at McCullough Road where you will return to Conzelman Road.

MUIR WOODS

Among the many great Golden Gate National Recreation Area destinations, you will want to be sure to visit the incredible forest north of San Francisco, Muir Woods National Monument. Muir Woods has been a National Monument since 1908 and is celebrated for its towering old-growth redwood trees.



MUIR WOODS

Start at the Visitor Center

The Muir Woods Visitor Center is about twelve miles north of the Golden Gate Bridge, near Mill Valley, California. The Visitor Center helps you get acquainted with the National Monument and obtain maps and other items that will help during your visit. Be sure to get your National Park Service passport stamped while you are there.

Muir Woods National Monument offers six miles of well-marked boardwalk or asphalt hiking trails. You can venture into the forest and see the wonderful trees close at hand. There is a half hour loop, an hour loop, and an hour and a half loop.

The Ben Johnson and Dipsea trails climb a hillside for views of the treetops. You'll also see the Pacific Ocean and Mount Tamalpais from nearby Mount Tamalpais State Park. The Ben Johnson Trail begins at the Muir Woods parking lot; it goes uphill to a grassy ridge, then goes down to old-growth redwoods in Redwood Canyon. The Dipsea Trail offers a more open environment for hiking.

See the Trees

Connect with the Bohemian Grove Trail on the canyon floor to see the best redwoods in the park. The Bohemian Grove Trail branches off the Redwood Creek Trail. In Bohemian Grove, you can see the tallest coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) in the monument, called "Tree 76". It tops out at 258 feet above the forest floor and is thought to be about eight hundred years old.

The nearby trees are almost as tall. Coastal redwoods as a species tend to grow even taller than the giant sequoias. As you travel to Bohemian Grove, you will go through Cathedral Grove, possibly the most inspirational part of the hike.

Enjoy a meal at the cafe at Muir Woods, which is run by the Muir Woods Trading Company. The Café has been highlighted on the Food Network. They serve local organic food. People make the trip especially to enjoy their tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwich combo.

MUIR WOODS

Visitor Information

Muir Woods has always been known to visitors as difficult to park and visit.

Beginning in 2018, reservations will be required to park your vehicle and shuttle to the monument. Visitors over 16 will also need to pay a park admission entrance fee. You can find out current pricing and reserve your spot by calling 1-800-410-2419 or visiting GoMuirWoods.com.

Early reservations are encouraged, as you can't purchase entry at the park, and they are likely to sell out.

A limited number of passes will be held to release 5 days in advance, but these will be very hard to get.

Also notable for your visit: there is no cell phone reception or Wi-Fi at Muir Woods. Be sure to download any directions or information you need ahead of time for offline use. Also, pets are not permitted.

Muir Woods Drive

If hiking is not your preference, you can enjoy dramatic views while driving in the area around Muir Woods. From the Visitors Center, take Franks Valley Road to the Shoreline Highway, California Route 1. It will take you down to the coast at Muir Beach and then along the Pacific Coastline. Take advantage of the various pull-offs to savor the views of the Ocean. Keep on going, and the road leads to the turnoff for the town of Bolinas - which is perhaps the best-kept secret community along the Pacific coast. Continue to reach Point Reyes.





POINT REYES

Are you looking to explore some of the scenic and historic Pacific Coast just north of San Francisco? From the north end of the Golden Gate Bridge, head up the Shoreline Highway (California Route 1) through Stinson Beach. The road runs so close to the coast that you'll feel like your toes are in the water. Take advantage of the pull offs that invite some out of car photography. You want to slow down and savor this drive.

POINT REYES

Bear Valley Visitor Center

Your first destination is the Bear Valley Visitor Center, a quarter-mile from Olema, on Bear Valley Road. Here you can find exhibits, books, indoor picnic tables, and the Morgan Horse Ranch. At the center, you can also find out about special events, beach access, and trail conditions. Drivers are in luck at Point Reyes, because you can take your car almost on to the sand at Drakes Beach, Limantour Beach, and the Great Beach (a fantastic 11 miles of unspoiled shoreline, accessible from the North and South Beach parking lots). Dog lovers are also welcome, since pets are permitted on portions of Kehoe, Limantour, and Great Beach; just keep them on their 6-foot leash at all times.

Pierce Point Ranch and Point Reyes Lighthouse

Leaving the visitor center, follow Bear Valley Road to Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, heading first toward Pierce Point Ranch and then toward Point Reyes Lighthouse. The drive will take you along Bear Valley Road to Boulevard, and then along Sir Francis Drake Boulevard to Inverness, where Tomales Bay runs along the San Andreas Fault. You will see beautiful water and gorgeous California Cypress in these impressive surroundings that are home to songbirds and birds-of-prey. Consider exploring more at Tomales Bay State Park. Drakes Estero is famous for birding, hiking, and beautiful scenery. Among the wildlife that frequents the area are bat rays, seals, egrets, and eagles.

Continue along Sir Francis Drake Boulevard as it winds northwestward. Take the right-hand road at the Y intersection, which is Pierce Point Road. Follow Pierce Point Road all the way north to Pierce Point Ranch, enjoying the magnificent sweeping views as you go. You will probably see the California subspecies of elk, called the Tule-Wapiti.

POINT REYES



Visitor Information

The lighthouse is open Fridays through Mondays, 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and the chamber containing the Fresnel lens is only open Fridays through Mondays, 2:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. These hours may change depending on the weather.

You can call 415-464-5100 to learn about operating hours. Also, there are no gas stations within Point Reyes National Seashore, so be sure to fuel up beforehand. You'll need enough gas to travel at least 40 miles within the park. Happy travels!

Fort Piece Ranch

You will come to Pierce Point Ranch, a dairy ranch dating back to the 1860s. From here you can take Pierce Point Road to the end parking lot and hike all the way out to Tomales Point, the northernmost point of land. Tomales Point offers stunning views in every direction. This is an enjoyable out-and-back day hike, of about nine and a half miles, and while the landscape is sweeping and windswept, there are always other hikers around. It takes you through the Tule Elk Reserve.

Point Reyes Lighthouse

Follow Pierce Point Road back to Sir Francis Drake Boulevard and turn right, continuing toward The Point Reyes Lighthouse. Park your car and take the 308 steps down to the 1870's vintage red-roofed Point Reyes Lighthouse. After you see the lighthouse, hike out to Chimney Rock. On your way back, turn right onto Drake's Beach Road to see the Sir Francis Drake Quadricentennial Plaque and the Kenneth C. Patrick Visitor Center. Drake's Beach is a great swimming and strolling beach, with nice flat sand and big impressive cliff formations.

From there, return to the visitors center via Sir Francis Drake Boulevard, stopping if you wish at the Oyster Farm and Estero, then follow Limantour Road down to Limantour Beach. Highlights of this drive include access to much more trailheads if you are interested in doing more hiking.

Hidden at the southern end of Point Reyes National Seashore is the town of Bolinas, perhaps the loveliest best-kept secret town in all of California. Their residents like to keep it that way - and the sign to the city mysteriously disappears from time to time. A place that time forgot, with a quiet beach and surfing vibe, Bolinas is a quaint getaway perfect for people with a poetic sensibility.

