

DRIFT AWAY IN BODEGA BAY

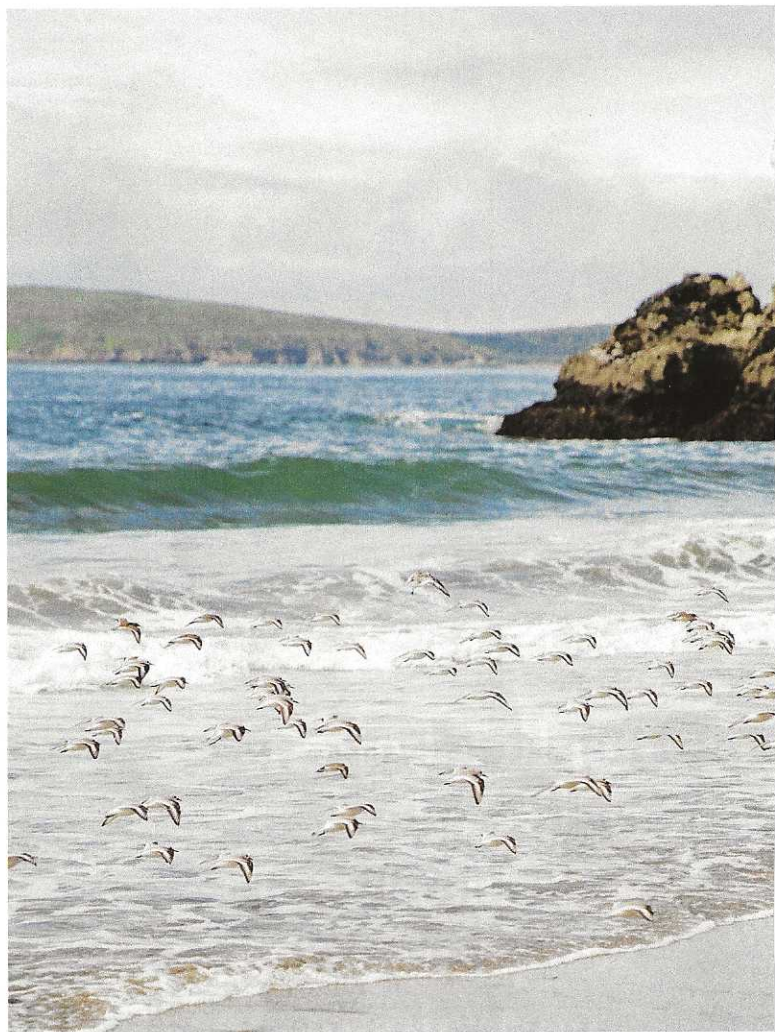
Bring on the birds, beaches, and boating on California's relaxed and rugged Sonoma Coast.

By Wolf Schneider

Climbing into the small kayak and seating myself at the narrow bow takes some doing, but luckily my travel buddy, M.K., is game for pushing the little vessel off the rocks and into Bodega Bay, then settling into the stern to steer. We navigate through tangled green seagrass into calm open water. "It's epic," promised Bodega Bay Kayak's Caspian when he rented me the tandem kayak. "Everyone can do it." Soon enough we get into the swing of it, paddling around Bodega Harbor in Northern California. Luckily, it's a windless morning with sparkling sun on blue water—a placid idyll for us as we share the space with cormorants, pelicans, seagulls, and ospreys.

The birds! They're everywhere in Bodega Bay, which is a little over an hour north of San Francisco and about an hour west of Napa, a little less to Sonoma, and just 20 minutes or so to a pinot tasting in Sebastopol. Here in Bodega Bay, the emphasis is more water than wine, more whale watching than wine tasting. But what might have immortalized the place in the public's imagination more than anything is the birds. Remember the violent bird attacks in *The Birds*? Alfred Hitchcock is said to have chosen Bodega Bay for location shooting for its foggy weather and rugged coastline. While the avian siege might have been exaggerated to the point of horror, many of the buildings from the movie—including the white church with its pointy steeple—were real and are still standing in nearby Bodega, a tiny hodgepodge of a town where you'll overhear locals discussing alternative realities and find racks of old LPs for sale at the antiques store, including several by Peter, Paul and Mary.

The vibe is coastal chill here in western Sonoma County. This is the wilder, windswept side of Sonoma—the serenity of fewer people and more nature. Think crystals, Pura Vida string-and-shell bracelets, and farm stands selling local Gravenstein apples (the "Gravs" preferring the area's cool summers). With



a population of only 1,100, Bodega Bay attracts visitors for kayaking, whale watching, fishing, surfing, biking, golfing, and horseback riding.

The ancestral land of the Bodega Bay Miwok, the area acknowledges the Coast Miwok—the original inhabitants here and the second largest tribe of California's Miwok people—in the occasional place name. There's a short strip of sand just north of town called Miwok Beach, and an hour south in Point Reyes National Seashore, there's a Coast Miwok sacred spot and replica village called Kule Loklo (meaning "Bear Valley"). In some of my all-amenity time here, there are moments when it strikes me that the Miwok would have combed for seafood and seaweed on the beaches here. And they would have hunted and gathered in the velvety hills of the open spaces where we now drive into town along the winding Highway 1 that slopes down to stands of cypress trees.

It's a different world at the luxurious Lodge at Bodega Bay where we're staying. There, the naming nods more toward Englishman Sir Francis Drake, who may or may not have landed in 1579 in a cove on the Point Reyes peninsula not far from here and possibly interacted with the local Coast Miwok, which would make the encounter one of the earliest instances of European contact. But this history is fraught with controversy—some maritime scholars say it never happened or happened off the coast of Oregon, Alaska,



LEFT: An hour and a half north of San Francisco, the rugged and dramatic Sonoma Coast has state and regional parks that offer beaches, hiking, fishing, camping, water sports, riding, and whale watching. **BELOW:** Five Brooks horse ranch leads scenic trail rides like the Eagle View Ride overlooking the Sonoma Coast with panoramic views of historic Bodega Bay.

British Columbia, or elsewhere along the California coast. Still, in 2012, Drakes Bay was designated a National Historic Landmark within Point Reyes National Seashore.

However apocryphal the landing story might be, it's Drake who gets naming rights back at the stylish inn. Nothing English nautical mind you. The philosophy here is all respite and sustainable, green indulgence. Set on four coastal acres with 83 wood-and-stone rooms, the hotel perches on a bluff at a prime location overlooking the ocean, bay, marsh, and harbor. Bee apiaries shelter honeybees, while nest boxes provide sanctuary for owls. No pesticides are used here in the beguiling landscaping, with its rosemary, artichokes, lemon verbena, pink hydrangeas, delicate lavender, wispy seagrass, wild blackberries, ferns, and flowering manzanitas. Firepits warm the casual dining patio, which fronts onto the bay. It's such an alluring setting, I'm there



TRUE RANCH COLLECTION

HISTORIC DUDE RANCHES

Across the American West

HISTORY | AUTHENTICITY | HOSPITALITY

VISIT OUR GUEST RANCHES

CIRCLE BAR GUEST RANCH — UTICA, MT
KAY EL BAR GUEST RANCH — WICKENBURG, AZ
RANCHO DE LA OSA — SASABE, AZ
TOMBSTONE MONUMENT RANCH — TOMBSTONE, AZ
POP-UP RANCH — THE WEST'S BEST WILDERNESS & HISTORIC LOCATIONS

520-365-0305
www.trueranchcollection.com





Perched on a bluff on the pristine Sonoma Coast, the Lodge at Bodega Bay invites relaxation and respite.



for breakfast and dinner both. (Try the popular onion dip and chips, the yellowfin tuna niçoise, and the steamed Tomales Bay manila clams, dug just a half-hour south of here.)

As for the rooms, they're furnished in neutral palettes with crisp triple sheeting. Most in-demand are the remodeled Ocean Club suites and Bodega Bay rooms with their hardwood floors, wood-burning fireplaces, and bayside views. In fact, most of the rooms possess wood-burning fireplaces and bayside views. To sleep with the terrace door flung wide open to the cool, salty air while a log crackles in your fireplace is the ultimate in invigorating coziness.

During my stay, the weather in Bodega Bay is transcendent. Morning comes misty with the marsh's outlines vaguely emerging out of the fog. Black birds carouse wildly overhead, swooping and fluttering with glee. They own the dawn. Instrumental music plays on the restaurant deck, where one morning I'm lucky enough to be the sole arrival at 7:30 a.m. A wooden sign beckons: "WELCOME TO BODEGA BAY LODGE. SEA THE MEMORABLE VIEW." As the sun slowly emerges, the mist separates into floating shards like fragments of another dimension. Later, as the afternoon slips away, the fog amasses again, turning the bay silvery and clouds golden.

We fill our days strolling in cool Pacific Ocean seafoam at Doran Beach; hiking the Bird Walk Coastal Access Trail where we

sight long-billed curlews overhead and tiny crabs in a tidepool; and frequenting the Sea Flower Cafe and Espresso Bar for its superb Bodega Fog Lattes with Earl Grey tea and lavender syrup. It's the good life. No surprise when a line of Ferraris speeds by the frilly Queen Anne's lace and wild yarrow along Highway 1. One afternoon, I indulge in an Ocean Shell Therapy Massage that chases away inflammation with alternating hot and cold shells. We even happen upon a commercial photo shoot at the hotel for the BYLT clothing line.

Our final morning, there's a sound-bowl meditation on the lodge's lawn. Accompanied by ocean surf and striking gongs on quartz bowls, we're guided through our chakras, wrapping up with the harmonious timbres from an orange crystal bowl representing the happiness chakra. It's divine—a mystical, quintessentially California experience in this glorious place where land, sea, sun, and mist intermingle to surface an ancient music of the soul.

Later, my Bodega Bay getaway moves me to look up some Coast Miwok words. Water—*liwa*. Sun—*hii*. By some serendipitous searching, I stumble on what I might really be trying to put into words: *uru-cu-wau-wau*. Song of happiness. ★

For more information, visit lodgeatbodegabay.com, visitbodegabayca.com, sonomacounty.com.