

THIS PHOTO Big Sur nature walk.



California

WHERE ON EARTH

CALIFORNIA EDIBLE HIGHWAY 1

by LAURA SUTHERLAND

...I always leave the Big City hungry so I can start eating just a few miles down the highway...

ON CALIFORNIA'S QUINTESSENTIAL ROAD trip — coastal Highway 1 between San Francisco and Los Angeles — you can sample a cuisine inspired by the bounty of place and limitless culinary creativity. This part of the world grows more organic fruits and vegetables and raises more organic livestock and dairy products than anywhere else on the continent. So many cuisines and cultures have collided here that like many things about California, there are simply no rules — only inventive cooking using the freshest possible ingredients.

I like to start in San Francisco and drive from north to south so I'm on the ocean side of the road. And I always leave the Big City hungry so I can start eating just a few miles down the highway.

The cool misty salt air and rich soil of this first stretch of highway yields the world's most perfect artichokes, and deep-fried artichoke hearts and cream-thickened artichoke soups are easy to find at local roadside cafes, especially in Pescadero and Castroville, the self-proclaimed Artichoke Center of the World. But for a sophisticated take on artichokes, I always go for the braised and baked artichokes stuffed with feta, baby spinach and garlic at **Café Gibraltar** in El Granada. Their garlic and lemon sautéed calamari is also a winner — truly the most succulent squid I've ever sampled.

A few miles down the road, **Barbara's Fishtrap** in Princeton-by-the-Sea serves up artichoke hearts dipped in tempura batter and fried in rice oil, so they come to you piping hot, feather light and buttery soft. I love their simple crab sandwiches, too — just a soft roll piled sky high with a lusty heap of Dungeness crab.

Beach after beautiful beach is right out your window along the road south, and all of them are worth a stop to walk barefoot in the sand — but wait to take a dip until you get to the warmer, safer waters of surf-crazy Santa Cruz.

Here, like in many towns in the American West, tempers flare over taquerias. In New Orleans it's about the gumbo, in Texas it's about the BBQ, but in this part of the world, emotions run high about where to find the best *authentic* tacos and burritos. There are three terrific taquerias within a mile of one another along Highway 1 as you enter town, and my favourite is the one that comes first — **La Cabana** — where students, surfers and families line up to order fresh salmon soft tacos that spill over with chunks of silky pink meat, heated up in a juicy sauce of sautéed onions, tomato chunks, cabbage slivers, jalapeno peppers and cilantro.

Santa Cruz is a casual beach town with a historic boardwalk, so it's no surprise that old-fashioned corn dogs are found here. Local charcuterie **El Salchichero**, in the chic new industrial wine-tasting area just off the highway, makes an artisanal version of this state-fair staple with local, sustainably raised beef. **Santa Cruz Mountain Brewing** around the corner serves them up hot with homemade mustard. Sip a beer among the locals, who are often accompanied by their real dogs, and feast on a pure beef frank wrapped in organic corn meal mixed with buttermilk, herbs and a little duck fat and deep-fried in fresh lard rendered by the charcuterie.

The Gayle of **Gayle's Bakery and Rosticceria** in nearby Capitola is a Chez Panisse alum who ate her way through Europe to help inspire the pastries, breads and savoury dishes made here. You can take out or eat in — it's been a regional food lovers' destination for decades for good reason.

Meanwhile, down the road, I can't decide which I like best — the playful sea otter pups, psychedelic jellyfish or reedy seahorses in the Monterey Bay Aquarium, situated at the edge of one of the largest underwater canyons on earth. The Aquarium's Seafood Watch program has had a worldwide impact in educating people about seafood choices to make for healthy oceans. As you would expect, its newly designed restaurant, **Cindy's Waterfront**, features sustainable seafood in a menu created by Cindy Pawlcyn, a celebrity chef with a big following at her Napa and San Francisco restaurants.

If you plan to stop in Carmel-by-the-Sea and want to sit on the beach with a sandwich, swing by **Salumeria Luca**. Its artfully crafted »



SERVES 2

BLACK COD WITH SIMPLE SUMMER SALSA

THIS VIBRANT SALSA will dress up any white fish and makes a lovely dish for simple summer entertaining.

Black Cod 1 lb
Lime Juice 2 Tbs
Olive Oil 2 Tbs
Garlic 2 cloves, minced
Cumin ¼ tsp
Salt and Pepper to taste

SALSA

Grape Tomatoes halved, 1 cup
Avocado 1, diced
Corn Kernels 1 cup
Red Onion chopped, 3 Tbs
Jalapeno 1 small, minced
Cilantro chopped, 2 Tbs
Lime Juice 1 Tbs
Salt ¼ tsp

- 1 **COMBINE** the marinade ingredients in a Pyrex dish. Add the fish, cover and refrigerate for 20–30 minutes.
- 2 **COMBINE** the salsa ingredients and toss.
- 3 **GRILL** or pan-fry the fish about 4 minutes on each side. Spoon the salsa on top of the fish and serve.



...The terrace of Nepenthe restaurant is one of the most stunning settings in the world...

«cured Italian salumis and prosciuttos are integrated into paninis made with a particularly sensuous California flair.

Gnarled and twisted cypress trees signal that you're leaving the manicured world behind for the wild and windswept cliffs and misty coastal redwood forests of bohemian Big Sur. It's my philosophy that you should nosh with a view whenever possible here, and the terrace of renowned **Nepenthe** restaurant is one of the most stunning settings in the world.

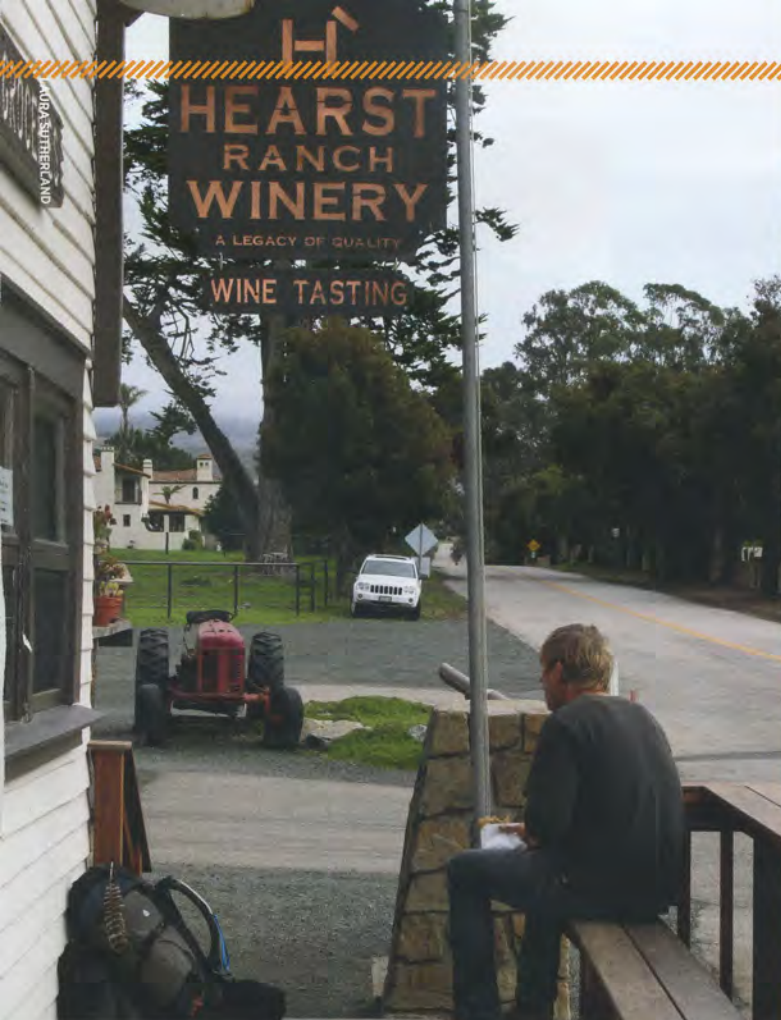
Just up the highway, Post Ranch Inn's extraordinary **Sierra Mar** restaurant is perched 1,200 feet above the Pacific with floor-to-ceiling windows, and its superbly inventive cuisine is just as spectacular as its view. Staying overnight is a recommended once-in-a-lifetime experience, but at the least, splurge for lunch or dinner. An inspired four- or nine-course prix fixe 'Taste of Big Sur' dinner menu changes daily. Among my favourite dishes were the 'roe roe roe' tastings of three indigenous

caviars and the rose geranium roasted quail with ras el hanout, the exotic spice blend from Morocco. For dessert, it was oak-smoked chocolate cremeux.

The stomach-dropping twists and turns in the road and steep cliffs of Big Sur eventually mellow out and the terrain changes to classic California — all rolling hills and majestic oak trees. Sandy beaches reappear where long-nosed elephant seals rest their massive bodies in unspoiled sandy coves. Just north of Hearst Castle, pull off the road at Point Piedras Blancas State Park, take a short walk and witness the comical antics of these clumsy giants.

Even if you don't tour Hearst Castle, you can taste a piece of history in Old San Simeon at **Sebastian's**, part funky sandwich shop and part fancy wine bar. The Hearst family has raised cattle on the hills surrounding the castle since 1865 and Sebastian's serves grass-fed Hearst Ranch beef in its sandwiches. The full-flavoured, delectably juicy hamburgers are especially worth waiting in line for.

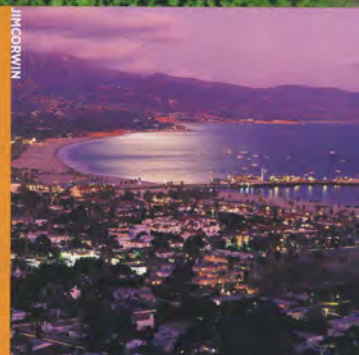




SANTA CRUZ COUNTY CIVIC FRANK BALTHIS

THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
Old San Simeon Hearst
Ranch Winery and
backpacker; Truck in
Santa Cruz County field;
American Riviera.

FACING PAGE Cannery Row,
immortalized by local
novelist John Steinbeck,
at twilight.



JIM CORWIN

Now you're entering Paso Robles wine country, just one of Central California's many up-and-coming wine regions that rival Napa in quality and output. In the quaint village of Cambria, tucked into a tiny pine forest along the coast, **Robin's Restaurant** has a good selection of the local pinots and chardonnays. Owner Robin has to send someone in his place to farmers' markets throughout the week — too many locals followed him around to see what he was planning to cook. I especially like his clean, bright Asian-fusion dishes and his rich, award-winning salmon bisque.

Then turn off the road in tiny Cayucas and dash into the **Brown Butter Cookie Company** for a couple of packages of their homemade cookies (conveniently bite-sized) in flavours like coconut lime, espresso and gluten-free cocoa.

Out on the docks of active fishing town Morro Bay, visit **Giovanni's Fish Market** for smoked local salmon, mussels and other seafood. My favourite is the smoked black cod — fished right off the coast, tossed into the smoker on the docks and carried a few feet to the shop. You can picnic near Morro Rock where pelicans and harbour seals hang out or motor down the road to **DePalo & Sons** in Shell Beach to add to your lunch. Eighty nine-year-old Don DePalo makes fresh mozzarella every morning and the deli case overflows with seasonal fresh fruit and vegetable salads.

The road south meanders through gentle valleys thick with vineyards and along the coast until you get to sunny

Santa Barbara, a laid-back but well-heeled beach town with a whitewashed Spanish flair in its architecture and a rabid Italian passion for fresh food and fine cooking. My favourite place to stop for breakfast or lunch is the sunny patio of **Scarlett Begonia**, where innovative menus change weekly and feature dishes such as a California spin on the classic Caesar — strands of tender kale, avocado, bacon, pine nuts, house-baked croutons and a perfectly balanced dressing.

To get the inside scoop on how these farm-to-fork chefs come up with their menus, sign up for the 'Foodie Stroll' with Chef Greg Murray of **Bouchon Restaurant**. At the Farmers' Market he'll show you the best asparagus or bok choy to buy and tell you what he plans to do with what he selects in the three-course dinner that you'll taste later that evening. Bouchon's wine list is six pages of carefully selected wines grown and crafted within an hour's drive of the restaurant.

With California's strong south-of-the-border influence, someone was bound to offer pan-Latin inspired cuisine, and **Cielito Restaurant** especially draws inspiration from Peru, with its European, Asian and native influences, as well as the chef's homeland of Mexico. The raw bar features lots of *ceviche*, of course, and much of the menu consists of *antojitos*, or small plates to share. Don't miss *Ostiones Asados*, a Latin twist on Oysters Rockefeller. Before you hit the road again and head to LA, have a toast to the coast with one of their signature Margaritas. 

Cook

Visit

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www.elsalchichero.comSanta Cruz Mountain Brewing
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www.gaylesbakery.comMonterey Bay Aquarium
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www.scarlettbegonia.netBouchon
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www.cielitorestaurant.comBarbara's Fishtrap
281 Capistrano Road
Princeton-by-the-Sea, CADePalo and Sons Deli
2665-L Shell Beach Road
Shell Beach, CASebastian's Store
442 Slo San Simeon Road
San Simeon, CA

SERVES 2

CHILLED AVOCADO SOUP WITH SHRIMP AND LIME CREAM SAUCE

COOL, DELICATE AND DELICIOUS, this beautiful soup captures the essence of California cuisine.

AVOCADO SOUP

Chicken Stock 1 cup

Ripe Avocado 1 medium, peeled and chopped

Fresh Cilantro chopped 1 Tbs

Fresh Lime juice of 1

Salt a pinch

Freshly Ground Black Pepper to taste

- 1 BLEND all ingredients in blender or food processor until smooth. Thin with a little water if necessary. Chill immediately.

LIME CREAM

Nonfat Greek Yogurt ½ cup

Lime Zest of 1 lime

Freshly Ground Black Pepper to taste

- 2 COMBINE all ingredients in a bowl, stir, cover and chill.

SEARED SHRIMP

Medium Shrimp ½ lb, peeled and deveined

Ground Cumin ½ tsp

Turmeric ¼ tsp

Freshly Ground Black Pepper ¼ tsp

Salt ¼ tsp

Jalapeno Pepper ½, finely chopped

Corn Kernels ½ cup

Red Onion finely chopped, ¼ cup

Garlic 2 cloves, finely chopped

Fresh Lime Juice 1 Tbs

Olive Oil 2 Tbs

- 3 SPRINKLE shrimp with spices, salt and pepper and set aside.
- 4 HEAT 1 Tbs oil in a pan large enough to hold all shrimp in one layer over medium-low heat.
- 5 ADD the onion and jalapeno and cook for 2 minutes or until soft.
- 6 ADD the shrimp with the spices and cook for 2 more minutes without moving them and then flip them.
- 7 ADD the corn and half of the lime juice, and cover.
- 8 STEAM the shrimp for two minutes, covered, or until just cooked through.
- 9 REMOVE from heat and toss with the remaining lime juice.
- 10 SPOON the chilled soup into two bowls.
- 11 TOP with the shrimp and corn mixture and the lime cream.

LAURA SUTHERLAND is a travel writer based in Northern California. 