Carmel combines laid back with classy



The Lone Cypress along 17-Mile Drive is more than 250 years old. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

CARMEL-BY-THE-SEA – Nine wineries in three days – all by foot. A 17-mile ride instead of a drive. Oh, and that big expansive body of water known as the Pacific Ocean.

Monterey County is one of California's premier wine regions. The climate varies depending on if one is close to the coast or more inland. And this means a variety of wines are produced in this region.

While it's possible to visit the different tasting rooms by vehicle, it doesn't have to be that way.

The visitor’s center in Carmel sells Carmel Wine Walk by the Sea tickets for $65. (We paid $50 for nine wineries Memorial Day weekend; the price has gone up and more wineries are expected to be added. Individual tastings are usually $10 each.) The ticket doesn’t expire, but we opted to taste all nine in the three days we were there.

The tasting rooms are actually storefronts dispersed along the streets of Carmel. So it was easy for the four of us – Sue, Pam, Tom and me – to peruse shops and window-shop in between the sipping.

One winery is next to a 40-year-old cheese stop. We buy some snacks and the winery lets us eat as we sample their wines.

Peter Figge is pouring tastings in a small area that is attached to an art gallery. He’s the winemaker for Figge Cellars and has been a vineyard manager since he was in college.

“You have 10 months to grow grapes and only six weeks not to screw it up,” Figge told us of the winemaker’s role in the finished product. “The expression of the fruit is more important than anything.”

To work off some of what we have been drinking we get on our bikes to pedal the famous 17-Mile Drive in Pebble Beach that has existed since 1881. We can ride there from Tom’s place at Carmel-By-The-Sea. Going on two wheels means free entrance.

Dressed inappropriately and not on high-end bicycles, we are still let in to the Lodge at Pebble Beach. We look around and decide if we stop to eat or drink this early we’ll never finish the loop.

We pedal on, but still there are more stops to take in the scenery. Endless pictures of the famous Lone Cypress are shot. The Monterey Cypress only grows in this area of the world. Some say this particular tree is more than 250 years old.

I think this is the first time I've been on these 17 miles of private property as an adult. As a kid my parents took endless guests here and I was stuck in the backseat. I had zero appreciation for what I was seeing. It's nice to grow up to be able to embrace and appreciate the natural wonders that spill forth.

The sea air; those crashing waves; wind blown trees; sea creatures; and iconic landscape – it's everywhere on this bike ride.

We stop at Spanish Bay to sit outside with a cocktail before we complete the circle. Cycling was the perfect way to see this famous stretch of California coastline.

I marveled at the pristine tennis courts at so many of the resorts. I'm sure most people were mesmerized by the exquisite greens and fairways of the golf courses.

Pam and Tom extend the ride and take us along other parts of the coast that are just as scenic, but less rugged.

Then there are the hours than can be spent walking on the beach as surfers attempt to catch a wave and people throw balls for their dogs or just sit listening to and watching the ocean.

Another morning Sue and I take in the Monterey Bay Aquarium. It's another must-do while in this part of the state.

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