

Trip 5 – Episode #7: Magnificent Monterey

After we finished our tour of Hearst Castle, we drove toward Monterey. On the way, we overnighted at a vineyard near Paso Robles, which is inland and slightly north of Morro Bay. We had to go that way to get up to Monterey, because the Pacific Coast Highway had been washed out by the torrential rains in January.

What a beautiful area. Clearly the rains hadn't caused much hardship here. We drove along a road aptly called Green Valley Road. We felt like we were in Ireland, though neither of us has ever been there.



Eventually the green gave way to vineyards, not yet showing signs of new life.



The patterns were mesmerizing.



How appropriate was this! We drove by on the day before Valentine's Day.



We didn't go into the town of Paso Robles, because we had booked a Harvest Host spot at a vineyard just north, in the town of San Miguel.



Harvest Host is an organization that brings together vineyard owners and RVers. The vineyards allow RVers to stay overnight for free, with the understanding that guests will sample and ideally buy some of their product. It's a perfect win-win situation that we've taken advantage of a few times (but not nearly enough!).

The winery we visited was Locatelli.



We sampled four wines, accompanied by a charcuterie plate and ended up buying a bottle of their wine.



And then we settled in our spot amongst the vines and the setting sun. Not bad.







We dined on clams that I'd bought from the fish market in Morro Bay that morning, along with a fresh loaf of sourdough bread, and enjoyed a bottle of Locatelli's finest. Jim gave it all the thumbs up.



The next day, we continued north through more wine country, toward Monterey.



It was astounding how many vineyards there were, and how huge they were.



Eventually, we got into the Monterey area, where we would stay for the next 5 days. We had a good start. We managed to get into a local family restaurant, Monterey's Fish House, even though it was Valentine's Day.



We had a great meal, including grilled oysters, and a cannoli for dessert. Monterey was off to a good start.



The city of Monterey is lovely and seems like a great place to live. It's surrounded by forested hills on some sides, and water everywhere else. There are charming homes, and what seems like a lively community, and because it's winter in California, everything is lush. And there are lots of trees – especially those magnificent Monterey Cypress. There's even a little lake in town, not very far from the seacoast.







Right down on the waterfront is Fisherman's Wharf, which we drove past often, but never went into. We were warned that restaurants were over-priced and not worth it.



And of course, there's Cannery Row, made famous by John Steinbeck. Although it's also quite touristy, it has a fun energy.





We went there one evening for dinner and enjoyed walking around, thinking of Steinbeck.



This statue is a tribute to all the characters Steinbeck wrote about in his Cannery Row stories.

The men are
on one side...



The women on the
other.

For most of our stay, we camped in the Veterans Memorial Park Campground, which is up in the mountains above the city. Although there are no services, it's a great spot.



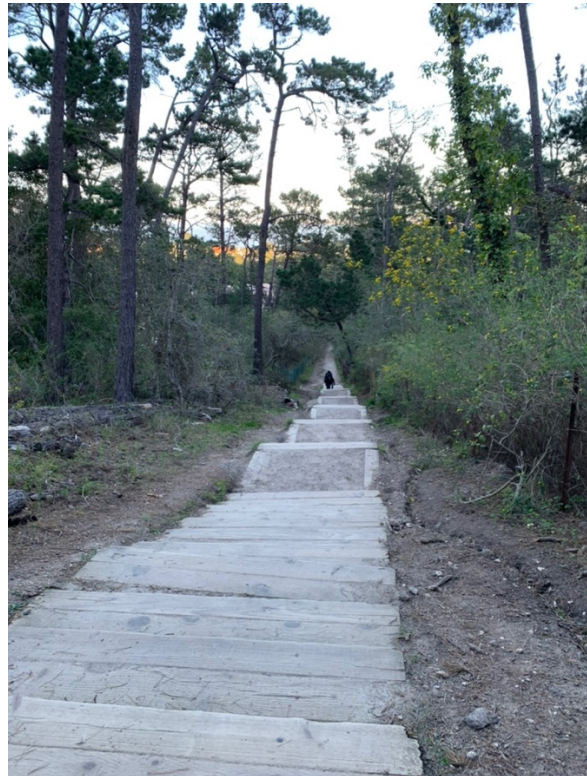
It's a real family place, so there are kids running around and playing out in the natural setting. Well, except for the bouncy castle. But at least they were outside and active.



One of the other things I love about campgrounds like this (and frankly almost every one we've been to) is that you feel completely safe here. This is our neighbours' site. Earlier, she had left her purse and phone out on the table and gone off to join the kids. There's never any concern that anyone is going to walk off with anything.



We were told there was a trail, and if we climbed to the top, we would get an amazing view of the city and the coast.



We'll just have to take their word that there was a great view at the top.



But the real attraction for us is Monterey's incredible shore, particularly south of the town. We spent most of our time just parked by the water, watching in awe. Every time we went, the views were different. Different skies, different energy, different rocks, different wildlife. As you can imagine, I took hundreds of photos. I'll try to cull.







In our eagerness to maintain our reputation for intrepidity, and to get better viewpoints, we did some rock-climbing.





And it was worth it.



We enjoyed watching this great egret fishing.



Gulls and cormorants perched on the rocks, as if enjoying front row seats.





This one beach was made up almost entirely of thousands and thousands of mussel shells.



Future
sand.



Best of all, were the otters. You can just make them out in this shot. All those little black dots are otters, surfing in the waves. They looked like they were having the best time!



It was also fun to see families exploring and enjoying nature.



This mother and daughter showed us a giant starfish they had found.



Jim points for frame of reference, showing just how giant it is.



And of course there were sunsets.







We did a few side-trips while we were in Monterey. But that will be for another blog. For now, I'll just leave you with a little Monterey bliss.

