

CALIFORNIA COAST / SEVEN DAY ROAD TRIP

California Highway 1 in Seven Days

Your complete nature first San Francisco to Los Angeles road trip itinerary

BY RANJIT | RANJIT'S NATURE QUEST | ranjitsnq.com

A practical companion to my seven day video. The original Day 2–6 graphics appear inside; the stop sequence is transcribed below for easier use. Printed times are illustrative, not live driving estimates or reservations.

The seven day journey

Day	Journey	Night
1	Arrival in San Francisco	San Francisco
2	San Francisco and coastal nature	San Francisco or Pacifica
3	Pacifica to Monterey	Monterey
4	Monterey to Cambria through Big Sur	Cambria
5	Cambria to Ventura via Gaviota	Ventura
6	Ventura to Los Angeles via Malibu	Los Angeles
7	Departure	—

Take it easy. Travel easy. Disconnect from the world—and reconnect with nature.

Editorial edition: September 2026 | Recheck access, prices and hours before departure.

Start here: how to use this itinerary

Route promise

Day 1 is arrival and Day 7 is departure. Days 2–6 retain the stop sequence in the supplied graphics. Access, weather, traffic and reservations may require skipping a stop or changing the timing. Distances and times printed on the graphics are planning estimates.

Practical trip frame

- Fly into San Francisco and out of Los Angeles or Orange County when the total airfare and one way rental cost make sense.
- The north to south direction generally places the ocean to your right; use designated safe pullouts.
- Eat a substantial breakfast; pack water, fruit, snacks and sandwiches; plan dinner after exploring.
- Give quiet viewpoints more time when you can, and do not drive tired to meet a printed schedule.

Road and booking checks that matter

Check Caltrans for the live Big Sur Highway 1 status before and during the trip. As of September 25, 2026, Caltrans lists one way traffic control at Rocky Creek Bridge; that status can change. Recheck Point Lobos entry and hours, and reserve a Getty Villa entry slot in advance if visiting.

Day 1 / Arrival in San Francisco

Suggested night: [San Francisco](#)

Keep arrival, car collection, check in and rest together on this day. Do not force a sightseeing schedule after a long flight.

Day 2 / San Francisco and coastal nature

Suggested night: San Francisco or Pacifica

DAY 1

- Land in San Francisco

DAY 2 QUICK INFO

- Driving distance: 45 miles
- Driving time: about 2 hours 30 minutes
- Stay at: San Francisco or Pacifica
- Visit: San Francisco

	Time / Activity	Miles	Drive Time
1	8am to 9:30am: Panoramic Views at Twin Peaks	8	26 min
2	9:30 to 11am: Crissy Field (Walk to bay looking at Golden Gate & Alcatraz)	7	30 min
3	11am to 12pm: Golden Gate Bridge North Vista Point	5	15 min
4	12pm to 12:30pm: Headlands Lookout	7	20 min
5	12:30pm to 2pm: 4 Lookout Points driving down from Headlands Lookout towards Golden Gate	3	10 min
6	2pm to 3:30pm: Baker Beach	4	15 min
7	3:30pm to 5pm: Lands End Lookout	3	15 min
8	5pm to 7:30pm: Dinner & walk at Fisherman's Wharf	8	35 min

- Relaxed Scenic City Day - | Take it easy • Travel easy

Original supplied day graphic; its stop order appears below. All times and distances are illustrative.

Timing and stop order

Time	Stop in original order
8:00–9:30	Twin Peaks — panoramic city, bay and ocean views
9:30–11:00	Crissy Field — waterfront walk and Golden Gate views
11:00–12:00	Golden Gate Bridge North Vista Point
12:00–12:30	Marin Headlands Lookout
12:30–2:00	Four lookout points on the way down toward the bridge
2:00–3:30	Baker Beach
3:30–5:00	Lands End Lookout
5:00–7:30	Fisherman's Wharf — dinner and walk

Important note for this day

The original plan estimates 45 miles and roughly 2½ hours of driving. Marin Headlands and bridge traffic can take longer. The north vista and Headlands are distinct stops; use legal parking and remain flexible.

Carry a packed lunch and water for a flexible nature day; enjoy dinner after the drive.

Day 3 / Pacifica to Monterey

Suggested night: Monterey

DAY 3 QUICK INFO

- Driving distance:** 117 miles
- Driving time:** about 2 hours 45 minutes
- Stay at:** Monterey
- Route:** Drive to Monterey

	Time / Activity	Miles	Drive Time
1	8:00 to 9:00 a.m.: Devil's Slide Trail — Walk to the coastal overlooks and enjoy the elevated Pacific views	18	30 min
2	9:10 to 9:40 a.m.: Gray Whale Cove State Beach — View the dramatic cove and surrounding cliffs	3	6 min
3	9:50 to 10:35 a.m.: Pillar Point Harbor & Mavericks View Area — Harbour walk, fishing boats and coastal scenery	6	10 min
4	10:50 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.: Half Moon Bay State Beach & Coastal Trail — Relaxed beach walk and early lunch near Francis Beach	6	12 min
5	12:30 to 1:15 p.m.: Pescadero State Beach & Marsh — Rocky shoreline, sandy coves, wetlands and birdlife	17	25 min
6	1:30 to 2:15 p.m.: Pigeon Point Lighthouse — Walk around the lighthouse grounds and coastal cliffs	9	12 min
7	2:55 to 4:30 p.m.: Natural Bridges & West Cliff Drive, Santa Cruz — Natural rock arch, ocean overlooks and Steamer Lane	27	35 min
8	5:25 to 7:30 p.m.: Monterey Waterfront — Cannery Row, coastal walk, Fisherman's Wharf and dinner	45	55 min

Pacific Coast Scenic Drive | *Take it easy • Travel easy*

Original supplied day graphic; its stop order appears below. All times and distances are illustrative.

Timing and stop order

Time	Stop in original order
8:00–9:00	Devil's Slide Trail — coastal overlook walk
9:10–9:40	Gray Whale Cove State Beach
9:50–10:35	Pillar Point Harbor and Mavericks viewing area
10:50–12:00	Half Moon Bay State Beach and Coastal Trail
12:30–1:15	Pescadero State Beach and Marsh
1:30–2:15	Pigeon Point Lighthouse grounds
2:55–4:30	Natural Bridges and West Cliff Drive, Santa Cruz
5:25–7:30	Monterey waterfront — walk and dinner

Important note for this day

The original plan estimates roughly 2 hours 45 minutes of pure driving. This is a full day with eight stops, walking and dinner. Be selective if coastal traffic or parking adds time.

Carry a packed lunch and water for a flexible nature day; enjoy dinner after the drive.

Day 4 / Monterey to Cambria through Big Sur

Suggested night: Cambria

SEPTEMBER 2026 ACCESS NOTICE: Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park is closed until further notice due to fires. It remains visible in the original Day 4 graphic. Do not enter the park. Check Caltrans for the road and California State Parks for all park access before driving.

DAY 4 PLAN
Monterey to Cambria Through Big Sur

DAY 4 QUICK INFO

- Driving distance:** 118 miles
- Driving time:** approximately 3 hours 10 minutes
- Stay at:** Cambria
- Route:** Drive to Cambria

	Time / Activity	Miles	Drive Time
1	8:00 to 9:15 a.m.: Point Lobos State Natural Reserve — Begin with dramatic cliffs, turquoise coves, cypress trees and ocean viewpoints	9	20 min
2	9:30 to 10:15 a.m.: Garrapata State Park & Soberanes Point — Take a relaxed bluff walk with views of Big Sur coastline	8	15 min
3	10:25 to 10:50 a.m.: Bixby Creek Bridge Viewpoint — Photograph the iconic bridge and coastal cliffs	5	10 min
4	11:15 to 12:30 p.m.: Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park — Walk among the redwoods, enjoy the Big Sur River area	13	25 min
5	12:55 to 2:00 p.m.: Partington Cove Trail — One-mile round-trip walk through a historic tunnel to a rocky coastal cove	14	25 min
6	2:55 to 3:40 p.m.: Ragged Point Overlook — Enjoy grandest elevated views of the southern Big Sur coastline	39	55 min
7	4:00 to 4:45 p.m.: Piedras Blancas Elephant Seal Rookery — Watch elephant seals from viewing platforms	15	20 min
8	5:05 to 7:00 p.m.: Moonstone Beach & Cambria — Walk the boardwalk, enjoy the evening ocean views and dinner in Cambria	15	20 min

Big Sur Scenic Drive | Take it easy • Travel easy

Original supplied day graphic; its stop order appears below. All times and distances are illustrative.

Timing and stop order

Time	Stop in original order
8:00–9:15	Point Lobos State Natural Reserve
9:30–10:15	Garrapata State Park and Soberanes Point
10:25–10:50	Bixby Creek Bridge viewpoint
11:15–12:30	Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park — CLOSED as of September 2026; do not enter
12:55–2:00	Partington Cove Trail, if open and safe
2:55–3:40	Ragged Point overlook
4:00–4:45	Piedras Blancas elephant seal viewing area
5:05–7:00	Moonstone Beach and Cambria — walk and dinner

Important note for this day

Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park is closed until further notice due to fires as of September 2026; the original graphic is historical for this stop. The rest of this day is access sensitive. The graphic estimates 118 miles and about 3 hours 10 minutes of pure driving, which excludes parking, trail time and road controls. Check the full Monterey to Cambria route before leaving Monterey; if it is closed, the printed same day sequence cannot be driven through. Do not enter a closed trail or stop on the roadway at Bixby Bridge. Start Point Lobos when the reserve opens.

Carry a packed lunch and water for a flexible nature day; enjoy dinner after the drive.

Day 5 / Cambria to Ventura via Gaviota

Suggested night: Ventura

DAY 5 QUICK INFO

Driving distance including scenic detours:
about 195–200 miles

Driving time:
approximately
3 hours 45 minutes

Stay at:
Ventura

Route:
Drive to Ventura
via Gaviota

DAY 5 PLAN

Cambria to Ventura via Gaviota

	Time / Activity	Miles	Drive Time
1	8:00 to 9:00 a.m.: Morro Rock & Morro Bay — Walk beside the harbour, enjoy Morro Rock	21	25 min
2	9:25 to 10:35 a.m.: Montaña de Oro State Park — Visit Spooner's Cove and walk a short portion of the Bluff Trail for rugged cliffs, beaches and open-ocean views.	12	25 min
3	11:15 to 12:15 p.m.: Pismo Beach Pier & Waterfront — Walk the pier, relax beside the beach.	27	40 min
4	1:20 to 2:00 p.m.: Gaviota State Park & Coastal Viewpoint — Enjoy the secluded coastline, train trestle, hills and the point where US-101 reaches the Pacific Ocean.	62	1 hr 5 min
5	2:20 to 3:00 p.m.: Refugio State Beach — Take a peaceful beach walk among the palms and coastal hills.	17	20 min
6	3:30 to 5:00 p.m.: Santa Barbara Waterfront & Stearns Wharf — Walk the waterfront, West Beach and Stearns Wharf, with views of the harbour and mountains.	22	25 min
7	5:25 to 5:55 p.m.: Rincon Point or Carpinteria Coast — Make a short coastal stop for waves, surfers and a quieter ocean view before reaching Ventura.	20	25 min
8	6:15 to 7:30 p.m.: Ventura Pier & Beachfront Promenade — Finish with a relaxed evening walk, ocean views and dinner near the historic pier.	15	20 min

California Coastal Scenic Day | *Take it easy • Travel easy*

Original supplied day graphic; its stop order appears below. All times and distances are illustrative.

Timing and stop order

Time	Stop in original order
8:00–9:00	Morro Rock and Morro Bay
9:25–10:35	Montaña de Oro State Park — Spooner's Cove and short Bluff Trail section
11:15–12:15	Pismo Beach Pier and waterfront
1:20–2:00	Gaviota State Park and coastal viewpoint
2:20–3:00	Refugio State Beach
3:30–5:00	Santa Barbara waterfront and Stearns Wharf
5:25–5:55	Rincon Point or Carpinteria coast
6:15–7:30	Ventura Pier and beachfront promenade — dinner

Important note for this day

The supplied plan estimates about 195–200 miles including detours and about 3 hours 45 minutes of pure driving. The eight visits make it a long day; treat the listed times as anchors and shorten stops to leave enough daylight for Ventura.

Carry a packed lunch and water for a flexible nature day; enjoy dinner after the drive.

Day 6 / Ventura to Los Angeles via Malibu

Suggested night: Los Angeles

DAY 6 PLAN

Ventura to Los Angeles via Malibu

DAY 6 QUICK INFO

Driving distance:
about 78 miles

Driving time with Coastal Traffic:
approximately 3½ hours

Stay at:
Los Angeles

Route:
Drive to Los Angeles

	Time / Activity	Miles	Drive Time
1	8:00 to 9:20 a.m.: Point Mugu Rock & Sycamore Cove : Begin with the dramatic meeting of the Santa Monica Mountains, Pacific Ocean and coastal highway.	27	35 min
2	9:30 to 10:20 a.m.: Leo Carrillo State Beach : Walk along the rugged shoreline and explore the rock formations, coastal caves and tide-pool areas when safe.	8	15 min
3	10:35 to 11:20 a.m.: El Matador State Beach : Enjoy one of Malibu's most photogenic coves, with sea stacks, cliffs and elevated ocean views.	8	15 min
4	11:35 to 12:35 p.m.: Point Dume Headlands : Walk toward the headland overlooks for expansive views along the Malibu coastline. During migration seasons, this can also be a good whale-watching viewpoint.	8	15 min
5	12:50 to 2:10 p.m.: Malibu Lagoon, Surfrider Beach & Malibu Pier : Walk beside the lagoon, watch surfers and stop for lunch around the pier.	7	15 min
6	2:30 to 3:50 p.m.: Getty Villa Museum & Gardens : Enjoy the Roman-style architecture, gardens and ocean-adjacent setting. Admission is free & closed Tuesdays	10	20 min
7	4:10 to 5:40 p.m.: Palisades Park & Santa Monica Pier : Walk along the elevated park for coastal views before visiting the pier and beach.	7	20 min
8	5:55 to 7:30 p.m.: Venice Canals & Venice Beach : Finish with a peaceful walk around the canals, then continue to the beach or boardwalk for evening light and dinner.	3	15 min

Malibu Coastal Scenic Drive | *Take it easy • Travel easy*

Original supplied day graphic; its stop order appears below. All times and distances are illustrative.

Timing and stop order

Time	Stop in original order
8:00–9:20	Point Mugu Rock and Sycamore Cove
9:30–10:20	Leo Carrillo State Beach
10:35–11:20	El Matador State Beach
11:35–12:35	Point Dume Headlands
12:50–2:10	Malibu Lagoon, Surfrider Beach and Malibu Pier
2:30–3:50	Getty Villa Museum and gardens, if reserved and open
4:10–5:40	Palisades Park and Santa Monica Pier
5:55–7:30	Venice Canals and Venice Beach — dinner

Important note for this day

The graphic estimates about 78 miles and roughly 3½ hours of driving with coastal traffic. The Getty Villa requires a free timed entry reservation, has paid parking and is closed Tuesdays. If you prefer more time by the ocean, skip that optional museum stop while keeping the rest of the southbound sequence.

Carry a packed lunch and water for a flexible nature day; enjoy dinner after the drive.

Day 7 / Departure

Suggested night: Flight from Los Angeles or Orange County

Leave the departure day free of required sightseeing. Allow generous time for traffic, car return and airport procedures.

Where to stay and how to manage costs

Night	Suggested base	Why
1	San Francisco	Supports the next day's southbound sequence.
2	San Francisco or Pacifica	Supports the next day's southbound sequence.
3	Monterey	Supports the next day's southbound sequence.
4	Cambria	Supports the next day's southbound sequence.
5	Ventura	Supports the next day's southbound sequence.
6	Los Angeles	Supports the next day's southbound sequence.

This seven day plan normally means six hotel nights. Choose the last night around your actual departure airport and car return point.

- Compare total airfare, one way rental and drop fee, fuel, parking and six hotel nights rather than one headline price.
- Compare Monterey, Big Sur and Cambria hotel costs. A suggested overnight base is not an instruction to backtrack.
- Some California State Parks charge vehicle day use fees. Check the current fees and any same day receipt acceptance.
- Do not buy every attraction automatically. Spend on the experiences you value most and keep time for quiet coastal stops.

Before you go checklist

- Check the entire Highway 1 route, traffic control and alternatives on Caltrans.
- Verify state park hours, trails and current day use fees.
- If visiting the Getty Villa, check Tuesday closure, timed entry and parking.
- Download offline maps; carry fuel, water, packed food and a light jacket.
- Keep clear of surf and unstable cliff edges; give wildlife ample space.
- Compare hotel and rental cancellation terms with your flights.

Official planning links

Caltrans highway conditions — <https://roads.dot.ca.gov/?roadnumber=1>

Caltrans QuickMap — <https://quickmap.dot.ca.gov/>

California State Parks — <https://www.parks.ca.gov/>

Point Lobos reserve — https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=571

Pfeiffer Big Sur access — https://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=570

Getty Villa visit — <https://www.getty.edu/visit/villa/>

About your guide

I'm Ranjit. After approximately 14 drives on different Highway 1 sections, I still value the ocean, redwoods and quiet pauses more than a checklist. For a trip tailored to your pace, visit ranjitsnq.com.

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