

beyond **L.A.**

Spring 2019

From the People Who Bring You **L.A. Parent**



KIDZ BOP
IN PUNTA CANA

VACAY
BY THE BAY

VINTAGE FUN
IN SANTA
YNEZ

PALM
SPRINGS
in Spring

SEA HORSE
RANCH

VACAY BY THE BAY



San Francisco and Half Moon Bay offer nature, adventure and family fun

Story and Photos By Margot Black

As a family, we always look forward to vacation, but as a busy working mom, I don't want to travel too far to get our fix of nature, adventure and inspiration. So, the chance to explore San Francisco, the Presidio national park and Half Moon Bay with my husband and son seemed too good an opportunity to miss. This northerly corner of California is a family-friendly mix of city and nature. It's an escape that is close to L.A. and - best of all for traffic-overloaded Angelenos - once there, you can ditch your car. Always a relaxing relief.

Ahead of our visit, I purchased **CityPASS booklets** (\$89 per adult and \$69 for ages 5-11), which offer discounts on all the tried and tested adventures and are good for nine consecutive days. They offer unlimited transportation on the historic trolley cars, cable cars and buses, as well as substantial savings on many activities and attractions, including the **Aquarium of the Bay** at Pier 39 and the **Exploratorium**, which we loved. We also took a wild 30-minute high-speed **rocket boat ride** around the bay. Our big adventure splurge, not included in the booklet, was a spectacular **America's Cup sailboat experience**. The boat, which sailed in the 2003 race, was filled with sailing enthusiasts, and I was delighted when they let the kids crew the ship.

We checked into the **Westin St. Francis Hotel** on Union Square, which is a beautiful landmark and centrally located. We were wowed by the historic Magneta Grandfather Clock in the lobby, built in 1856 and dedicated to the hotel in 1907. A vintage photo showing Shirley Temple with the clock hangs nearby. We loved how close the hotel was to shopper's paradise Union Square plaza, and that it was easy to hop on and off the trolleys.



AMERICA'S CUP
SAILBOAT



HARLEY FARMS
GOAT DAIRY



LODGE AT THE
PRESIDIO



TROLLEY CAR/
CITYPASS



SAM'S CHOWDER HOUSE



SAN FRANCISCO FOOD TOUR



For a tasty treat, I booked a two-hour **San Francisco Food Tour** exploring Chinatown and North Beach, which is their little Italy. We covered seven blocks, but it was an easy walk even if you have a stroller. We indulged in everything from delicious dim sum to pizza, which our 11-year-old son devoured. We also loved the **Wipeout Bar and Grill** on Pier 39 for its great diner food and cocktails. Strollers were lined up in the entrance lobby and the atmosphere was buzzing with families and fun. We felt very welcome and even spotted sea lions from our table overlooking the bay.

After two nights at the St. Francis, we relocated to the **Lodge at the Presidio**, which is set in the 1,500-acre national park. It's a true immersion in nature, and on the first night we sat by the fire pit soaking up the extraordinary view of the Golden Gate Bridge. This gorgeous boutique hotel is new, and its location enabled us to explore the park (once a military base). There are many bluffs and trails for all ages to hike and bike. We also visited the nearby **Walt Disney Family Museum**, learning about the history of the theme parks and enjoying the colorful memorabilia.

I wish we'd had longer to linger, but our next stop was Half Moon Bay, a coastal town 29 miles north of San Francisco, and I'm so glad we made it part of our itinerary. There, we explored the beauty of nature while gloriously unplugged from our devices. We stayed at the cozy **Coastside Inn** near Main Street, but there are many other hotel choices, including the **Comfort Inn** near the beach and the **Beach House Hotel**, which sits on a bluff.

Our nature immersion led us to the fabulous **Harley Farms Goat Dairy**. A family-run enterprise, this was the ultimate meet-a-goat experience, and we already plan to head back in the spring to feed the newborn kids. If you visit, you will also

see a llama named Dalai, cats, dogs and a donkey. We've visited many farms, but this was spectacular. We happily purchased award-winning cheese from the farm shop.

Another extraordinary highlight was an epic two-hour horseback ride along Poplar Beach, organized by **Sea Horse Ranch**. Riding a horse beside the ocean is rare in California, so this was a truly special experience. They cater to all levels of experience and Sea Horse co-owner Willa Chapman, our guide, shared a ton of knowledge with us before we set out. It's this kind of life-affirming activity that makes for everlasting family memories. We'll never forget taking in the scenery as our horses kicked up the sand.

We refueled at **Sam's Chowder House**, which has wonderful views of Point Harbor. Their lobster roll was a divine treat for me and my husband, while our son enjoyed a huge hamburger. After a coastal trail walk the next day, we ate at the superb **Half Moon Bay Brewing Company**. After tucking in to fish and chips, we shared a delicious root beer float for dessert. My husband particularly enjoyed sampling the handcrafted beer, so it ticked all the family boxes. All too soon, it was time to head home.

As an escape from L.A., this trip offers you the chance to ditch your car, explore another city and take an extraordinary dip into nature. We were inspired to try new things, bond with animals and appreciate the ocean. Arriving home and feeling regenerated, we decided as a family to hike and visit our own part of the ocean more often.

What more could you want from an escape from L.A.? ◆

Margot Black is a storyteller with more than 15 years of experience, and an L.A.-based traveler, wife and mom.



WIPEOUT BAR AND GRILL, PIER 39