Big Sur is located along Scenic Highway One approximately 150 miles south of San Francisco and 300 miles north of Los Angeles. Historically, the name Big Sur was derived from that unexplored and unmapped wilderness area which lies along the coast south of Monterey. It was simply called el país grande del sur, the Big South Country. Today, Big Sur refers to that 90-mile stretch of rugged and awesomely beautiful coastline between Carmel to the north and San Simeon (Hearst Castle) to the south. Highway One winds along its length and is flanked on one side by the majestic Santa Lucia Mountains and on the other by the rocky Pacific Coast.

Although there were two Mexican land grants awarded in the 1830’s, which included most of the area north of the Big Sur Valley, neither grantee settled on the land. It was little more than a century ago when the first permanent settlers arrived in Big Sur. In the following decades other hardy persons followed and staked out their homesteads. The landmarks bear the names of many of those early settlers — Mt. Manuel, Pfeiffer Ridge, Post Summit, Cooper Point, Dana Ridge, Partington Cove and others. Some of their descendants still live in Big Sur.

At the turn of the century Big Sur sustained a larger population than it does today. A vigorous redwood lumbering industry provided livelihoods for many. The Old Coast Trail, which had been the only link between homesteads, was still little more than a wagon trail. Steamer transported heavy goods and supplied and harbored at Notley’s Landing, Partington Cove, and the mouth of the Little Sur River.

Navigation was treacherous, and in 1889, the Point Sur Lighthouse began sending its powerful beam to protect ships from the hazards of the coastline.

In 1937, the present highway was completed after eighteen years of construction at a considerable expense even with the aid of convict labor. The highway has since been declared California’s first Scenic Highway, and it provides a driving experience unsurpassed in natural beauty and scenic variety.

Electricity did not arrive in Big Sur until the early 1950’s, and it still does not extend the length of the coast or into the more remote mountainous area.

The proximity of the Pacific Ocean provides for a temperate climate. Winters are mild, and rainy days are interspersed with periods of bright sunshine. An average rainfall of over 50 inches fills the many streams that flow down the redwood-lined canyons. Coastal fog cools the summer mornings, but it usually lifts by early afternoon.

It is wise to include both warm and cold weather clothing when packing for Big Sur. A damp, foggy morning can be followed by a warm afternoon. In the interior valleys of the Wilderness Area, the temperatures are more extreme; the fog bank seldom crosses the coast ridge, so the days are likely to be hot and the nights chilly.

The scenic qualities and the natural grandeur of the coast which result from the imposing geography, the rich vegetative compositions, and the dramatic meetings of land and sea are the area’s greatest single attraction to the public. Big Sur has attained a worldwide reputation for its spectacular beauty. Hiking, backpacking and scenic driving are major recreational activities.

Highway 1 through Big Sur is a designated American National Scenic Byway and California Scenic Highway, an honor reserved for highways that are so distinctive they are destinations unto themselves. For more information visit www.byways.org.

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How to handle Big Sur with care

Big Sur is a very special place to many people. To help keep it that way and to help ensure your own safety, please observe some simple rules and follow these basic safety tips.

FIRES — Our biggest concern during the dry season is wildfire. Please extinguish cigarettes in your ashtray. Be extra careful, making sure that your fire is safe and legal. Be sure to extinguish your fire when you leave.

COLLECTING — Plants, animals, rocks and artifacts of Big Sur’s cultural and natural history are protected by law and should not be disturbed. Rockhounding and collection of driftwood and firewood may be allowed in certain designated areas. Collectors should contact the nearest ranger station for specific information.

RECYCLE — Most businesses have blue recycling bins. Please treat Big Sur gently and with respect so that it will remain the beautiful place we all love.

PRIVATE PROPERTY — Please be mindful of the property rights of others. Most of the land adjacent to the highway is posted private property, and trespassing laws are strictly enforced.

ROADSIDE CAMPING — Roadside camping is prohibited along Highway 1 from the Carmel River to the Monterey-San Luis Obispo County line. This does not apply to tired motorists stopping for a temporary rest.

POISON OAK — This toxic plant is found in Big Sur in abundance. Exposure to the plant can be spread by hands, clothing, pets, or equipment which has come in contact with the plant or from the smoke generated when burning it. Much of the reactive substance can be removed by immediate washing with cool water and soap. Look for the triple leaf pattern, with prominent veins and a shiny surface. During the summer and fall, the leaves take on reddish hues. Try to avoid this plant.

PUBLIC RESTROOMS — All State Parks have public restroom facilities and do not charge day use fees to use the restroom. This includes Monastery Beach, Garrapata, Andrew Molera, Pfeiffer Big Sur, Julia Pfeiffer Burns, Limekiln State Park and the Big Sur Ranger Station. See map for locations. Please keep the roadway clean!

DRIVING TIPS FOR HIGHWAY 1 State Highway 1 through the Big Sur Peninsula is one of the world’s most beautiful highways. It is also one of the most maintained highways in America. No Camping along Highway. Keep these tips in mind when you travel this route:

1) Drive defensively! You never know what hazard may be around a blind curve.
2) Buckle up! It’s the law.
3) Keep your eyes on the road — if you want to enjoy the scenery, please use turn-outs.
4) Maintain your speed and abide by the posted speed limit which is 55 MPH unless otherwise posted. Slower traffic should pull over.
5) When pulling over, avoid quick stops on the unpaved turn-outs and shoulders.
6) Watch for touring bicyclists.

Preserve our scenic beauty for generations to come
Help us keep Big Sur and all of its surrounding landscape memorable. In Monterey County we understand the importance of traveling responsibly and treating our destination with care. Read the tips on this page and on our website for ideas on how you can experience a sustainable vacation with truly unforgettable moments. Find out more at SeeMonterey.com/Sustainable.

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Driving tips for Highway 1 State Highway 1 through the Big Sur Peninsula is recognized internationally as one of the world’s most beautiful highways. It is also one of the most maintained highways in America. No Camping along Highway. Keep these tips in mind when you travel this route:

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2) Buckle up! It’s the law.
3) Keep your eyes on the road — if you want to enjoy the scenery, please use turn-outs.
4) Maintain your speed and abide by the posted speed limit which is 55 MPH unless otherwise posted. Slower traffic should pull over.
5) When pulling over, avoid quick stops on the unpaved turn-outs and shoulders.
6) Watch for touring bicyclists.
The climate is mild. Precipitation falls primarily from more than 100 inches annually along the Big Sur coast from November to April and ranges along the rocky coast open to the public. As a part of the Big Sur coast for over 125 years, the lighthouse buildings inspire an aura of mystery and haunting beauty, continuing to be an important landmark to modern day mariners as well as travelers along Highway 1.

Construction of the lighthouse began in 1887 and was completed two years later. At that time Point Sur was one of the more remote light stations. In place of Highway 1 there was a horse trail—the Old Coast Road—which made trips to Monterey long and infrequent.

Pt. Sur remains an active US Coast Guard Lighthouse, although the last keepers left the Light Station in 1974. The U.S. Department of the Interior gifted the majority of the light station to the California Department of Parks and Recreation in 1984. The lighthouse itself and remaining parcels were gifted to State Parks in 2004. Restoration work began in 1985, and today, classified as a State Historic Park, weekend and Wednesday tours all year.

For information regarding guided tours, check the interpretive notices posted in the state parks, or call (831) 625-4419 for more information. Trained volunteer docents provide an informative and pleasurable tour to the visiting public, and provide access to the Point Sur Lighthouse. Visit us on the web at www.pointsur.org

**Tours Available at Historic Point Sur Light Station**

The Point Sur Light Station, located on the Big Sur coast 19 miles south of Carmel, sits 616 feet above the surf on the seaward brow of a large block of volcanic rock. This rugged promontory has long been regarded as a navigational hazard. Prior to construction of the lighthouse (1887-1889), the area was the site of several disastrous shipwrecks.

Designated as a State Historic Landmark in 1980, Point Sur contains all the buildings necessary to maintain a self-sufficient 19th-Century lighthouse facility. It is the only intact light station along the California coast open to the public. As a part of the Big Sur coast for over 125 years, the picturesque buildings inspire an aura of mystery and haunting beauty, continuing to be an important landmark to modern day mariners as well as travelers along Highway 1.

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**Big Sur Offers a Bounty of Hiking Trails**

The Ventana Wilderness owes its name to a dramatic mountain peak known as Ventana Double Cone. Legends relate that at one time the unique notch at the mountain's top was roofed over by a rock bridge. Because of this legend, the early Spanish inhabitants named the outcrop “Ventana,” which means window in Spanish.

The Ventana Wilderness contains 240,026 acres straddling the Santa Lucia Mountains south of the Monterey Peninsula and is part of the Los Padres National Forest. Los Padres National Forest encompasses nearly two million acres in the beautiful coastal mountains of central California. The forest stretches across almost 220 miles from the Big Sur Coast in Monterey County to the western edge of Los Angeles County.

A unique area of rugged coastal mountains, the Ventana Wilderness is managed by the United States Forest Service.

Topography in the wilderness is characterized by steep-sided, sharp-crested ridges separating V-shaped valleys. Elevations range from 600 feet, where the Big Sur River leaves the wilderness, to about 5,862 feet at the wilderness at the summit of Junipero Serra Peak. Most streams fall rapidly through narrow vertical-walled canyons flowing on bedrock or a veneer of boulders. Waterfalls, deep pools and thermal springs are found along major streams.

The climate is mild. Precipitation falls primarily as rain from November to April and ranges widely from more than 100 inches annually along the Coast Ridge to less than 30 inches only a few miles inland. The cool marine influence does not extend past the coastal ridges, thus most areas east of the divide are hot and dry during the summer and early fall.

Much of the wilderness is covered by chaparral. Contrast annual grass meadows and open pine stands may be found throughout the wilderness. The deep canyons cut by the Big Sur and Little Sur rivers support virgin stands of coastal redwoods. Scattered stands of the endemic Santa Lucia Fir are found in rocky outcrops and rugged slopes at higher elevations. This rare, spire-like tree is only found in the Santa Lucia Mountains.

Hikers and backpackers can find solitude while enjoying the diverse natural features of the Santa Lucia Mountains. The 237 miles of trails provide access to the 55 designated trail camps.

The Pine Ridge Trail provides visitors to the Big Sur Valley with one of the most popular portals into the Ventana Wilderness. The trailhead at the Big Sur Station has excellent parking, plenty of water, and clean restrooms. The Nature Station Store, which is located at the Big Sur Station, provides hikers with maps and other literature associated with the natural history of the Big Sur region. Pine Ridge Trail and Sykes Hot Springs are closed throughout 2018 for trail repairs.

When hiking the trails please refrain from entering any campground section of the State Parks. Try to keep your impact to a minimum by practicing Leave No Trace Principles, including proper waste disposal, pack it in, pack it out for all trash, leftover food and litter. Deposit solid human waste in catholes dug and buried 6 to 8 inches deep and at least 200 feet from water, campsites and trails.

For all campfire and stove use in the backcountry, you must have a valid California Campfire Permit in your possession and know and comply with all current fire restrictions that may be in effect. You can fill out and print your campfire permit online on our hiking page. You can also pick one up at the Ranger Station if they are open. To be safe, all water from backcountry sources should be boiled, filtered or treated in some fashion.

**Hiking Trails**

For local Big Sur trail information call (831) 667-2315 or visit our website at www.bigsurcalifornia.org/hiking-trails.html

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Ventana Wildlife Society California Condor Recovery Program

In 1997, VWS began reintroducing California condors to the Big Sur coast, and the population has steadily risen each year. Condors are now breeding again in the wild and are feeding on their own on marine mammal carcasses and other large dead animals, including whales! The California condor is North America’s largest land bird with a nearly 10-foot wingspan. They almost went extinct when at one time there were only 22 birds alive in the world. They remain highly endangered today but can be frequently seen along the Big Sur coast. Ventana Wildlife Society leads once-in-a-lifetime wildlife tours, including viewing opportunities for condors. Call (831) 455-9514 to find out more and sign up for tours. If you see condors on your own, please report your sightings to www.mycondor.org. You can also watch Big Sur condors in the wild through “Condor Cam” which is live, streaming video located at the VWS condor sanctuary.

While in Big Sur, visit the Discovery Center at Andrew Molera State Park to see the in-depth story of how condors are being saved. Condors in Big Sur are sometimes poisoned when having ingested lead fragments from spent ammunition in the carcasses they eat. Since they eat only dead animals, lead fragments are unfortunately often ingested which is a significant threat. If you hunt or know someone that does, please use nonlead ammunition. Also, trash is becoming a big problem for wildlife. Some condors, as well as other bird species, mistakenly feed their chicks small pieces of trash, which can kill the young birds before they can even leave the nest! Please be careful and discard all of your trash, no matter how small, in an appropriate way. Litter can harm condors and other wildlife and it fouls the beauty of Big Sur.

Ventana Wildlife Society is the only non-profit organization in California releasing the condor to the wild. Mission: to conserve native wildlife and their habitats through research, education, and collaboration. Contact us at 9699 Blue Larkspur Lane, Ste. 105 Monterey, CA 93940. www.ventanaws.org

Henry Miller In Big Sur

One of America’s most famous and controversial authors called Big Sur: “The face of the earth as the Creator intended it to look.” From 1944 to 1962, he also called it “home.” Nestled in the redwoods on Highway 1, between Nepenthe and Deetjen’s you will find the Henry Miller Memorial Library. Like many things in Big Sur it is a place out of place and out of time. Not content to be a library or memorial, it is a place where you can still get free coffee or tea, or just relax among the towering redwoods that are an oasis for the weary traveler or hungry heart. Summer brings occasional Open Mic, Thursday night film screenings, Sunday night modern storytellers, live music, poetry, art and the eclectic with events every week. A sculpture garden to picnic or relax in, a wonderful bookstore, and no less than two free public restrooms, makes you want to skip that trip to Hearst Castle. With its extensive archives it also pays homage to the many other great artists and writers who called Big Sur home like Jeffers, Ferlinghetti, Kerouac, Watts, Brautigan and dozens of others.

A 501(c) 3 non profit, HML champions the works of its namesake and also advocates the support of art, the creative life, and freedom of expression everywhere. Simple, unadorned and irreverent, this is the place to get away from what Miller called The Air Conditioned Nightmare, a place where you can still Stand Still Like the Hummingbird or simply Smile at the Foot of the Ladder. Open daily 11am-6pm, ph. 831.667.2574

Do Nothing in Big Sur!

Evenings offer the opportunity to dine in restaurants from fanciful to exquisite. Relax in lodging that ranges from rustic to ultra-luxurious. Camp out in the many well equipped campgrounds. Luxuriate at the health spas. And of course, one of the favorite ways to pass the time in Big Sur is to simply Do Nothing.
Art Galleries & Gift Shops

BIG SUR GARDEN GALLERY Features small-batch crafts and one of a kind art pieces drawn primarily from local artisans. Handcrafted keepsakes include jewelry, sculpture, soaps and perfumes; clothing and accessories; cards; prints; and original fine art painting and photography. 10:00am - 6:00pm Closed Tuesday. (831) 667-2000 bigsurgardengallery.com

BIG SUR LODGE GIFT SHOP An array of eclectic gifts, State Park souvenirs, jewelry, pottery & the largest selection of T-shirts & sweatshirts in the area. 8:00am - 9:00pm daily. (831) 667-3108 bigsurlodge.com

FERNSWORLD GIFT SHOP & CAMP SUPPLY STORE Provides incoming gear, clothing and outdoor equipment. Maps & backcountry information, books, bicycle repair equipment. Everything you need! (831) 667-2422 fernsworld.com

HAWTHORNE GALLERY Representing the work of Gregory Hawthorne and six additional talented members of the Hawthorne family & ten other nationally known artists in contemporary painting, sculpture, blown glass, ceramics and cloisonné. Located across from Nepenthe. Open daily 10:00 am - 6:00 pm. (831) 667-3200 hawthorne.com

HENRY MILLER LIBRARY a non-profit organization championing the works of Henry Miller. A treasure of fine books, art and history of the area. Rare books. Available for special events. (831) 667-2574. henrymiller.org

LUCIA LODGE STORE General store and gift shop. (831) 667-2391 lucialodge.com

NEW CAMALDOI HERMITAGE Located near Lucia we offer an combination of art, paintings, gifts, and fine religious and spiritual books. Open 7 days a week. Features art created by members of our community and local artists. Jewelry, cards, candles, and more, including our Holy Granola and famous brandy-dipped fruitcakes and date nut cakes. (831) 667-2456 X 105 contemplation.com

PHOENIX SHOP is a unique gift shop featuring exceptional merchandise from around the world as well as from local artisans. Handcrafted fine jewelry, home décor and furniture, boutique clothing, books, toys, textiles, ceramics and personal care products are just some of the wide array of creative items for sale. The Phoenix is proud to feature Erin Gaffli’s plein aire oil paintings & Kaffe Fassett’s one-of-a-kind items for sale. The Phoenix is proud to feature Erin Gaffli’s -

Real Estate Services

A BIG SUR HOME Nancy Sanders - Sotheby’s International Realty, abighsurhome.com (800) 779-7967

BIG SUR COAST PROPERTIES Hillary Lipman (831) 596-4607 bigsurcoastproperties.com

Additional Services

BIG SUR GUIDES & HIKING Stephen D. Copeland (831) 594-1742 bigsurguides.com

BIG SUR TOURS & MORE, Customized tours of Big Sur, Monterey, Pebble Beach, Carmel and in a luxury automobile. Ideal for 2-4 people. (831) 241-2526 bigsurtoursandmore.com

MONTEREY COUNTY BANK (831) 694-4600 montereycountybank.com

MONTEREY COUNTY FILM COMMISSION is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to inspire and facilitate film and media projects that can drive creative and economic impact. It was established by the Monterey County Board of Supervisors in 1987. (831) 646-0910 FilmMonterey.org

PINNEY CONSTRUCTION Design, building and planning and permit solutions for custom home construction, remodeling, repairs and improvements. (831) 667-2584

VENTANA WILDERNESS ALLIANCE Our MISSION: Protect, preserve, and restore the wilderness qualities and biodiverse values of public lands, especially the Southwestern Santa Lucia Mountains and Big Sur coast. VWA is composed of people from all walks of life who share a love of Wilderness and a goal to ensure it remains wild for perpetuity. (831) 423-3191 ventanawild.org

Public Service Announcement

BIGSURISGURU.COM is a free service provided by more than 4 million visitors each year. Please help us maintain the stunning beauty of this coastline by using the trash and recycling stations provided at the businesses throughout Big Sur. Public restrooms are provided at all State Parks. Day use fees are waived for the short period of time it takes to use the restrooms. PLEASE DO not discard cigarettes along Highway 1. Californian condors are known to pick them up and take them back to their nests and this road trash can be deadly for a condor chick. With your help we can improve the visitor experience for everyone. CAMPING PROHIBITED ON COUNTY ROADS.
Ancient Redwoods thrive along the Big Sur Coast

Redwood, also known as Coast Redwood, grows in a very narrow strip along the coast of California from the extreme southwestern corner of Oregon to 150 miles south of San Francisco in the Soda Springs drainage of Big Sur. This area is about 500 miles long and rarely more than 20 or 30 miles wide in a region of frequent thick summer fog, moderate year-round temperature, and considerable winter rainfall. Redwood does not grow naturally beyond the belt affected by this combination.

Redwood is a rapidly growing tree, and some individual trees have been measured at more than 360 feet in height, making it the tallest measured tree species on earth. In favorable situations, trees 20 years old may average 50 feet in height and 8 inches in diameter. Average mature trees are from 200 to 240 feet high with diameters of 10 to 15 feet at 4 feet 8 inches above the ground. Exceptional individuals sometimes reach a height of 350 feet, a diameter of over 20 feet, and an age of approximately 2000 years.

Redwood leaves are green, flat, and sharply-pointed. The brown cones are egg-shaped and only one-half inch in diameter. Their seeds average about 123,000 to a pound.

The soft, reddish-brown bark, six to twelve inches thick, is one of the Coast Redwood’s most distinguishing characteristics and, together with the wood, names the species. On older trees the bark has a grayish tinge, and is deeply furrowed, giving the tree a fluted appearance. Although the thick bark of older trees is relatively fire resistant, repeated fires can damage these trees considerably. The large hollows or “goose-pens” frequently found in the base of large trees give evidence of this fact. Fire also either seriously injures the young growth or kills it outright. However, redwood is exceptionally free from fungus diseases, and there are no insects which materially harm it. Human demand for lumber is responsible for most of the destruction of first growth Coast Redwoods.

Adjacent to the softball field at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park is one of Big Sur’s largest redwood trees. The size of this ancient tree, known locally as the “Colonial Tree,” is deceiving—due to lightning strikes, this majestic specimen’s top has been severed.

The summer months in Big Sur offer the traditional summer treats—warm weather, refreshing dips in the river and general good fun. What people don’t realize, however, is that the months of October through May offer a special experience in Big Sur and chance to enjoy the natural splendor at a more relaxed pace.

December through May is the time to watch for migrating Gray whales offshore as they travel to and from the warm lagoons of Baja California.

The spring months are a wonderful time to visit Big Sur if you have a love for greenery and wild-flowers. Wildflowers abound in March and April as lupines and poppies brighten the grassy hillsides.

May provides a great opportunity to enjoy the off-season peace and solitude before the summer season begins in June. Also, great camping weather.

Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park has been voted “America’s Top 100 Campgrounds.” Visit Big Sur during the off-season. You’ll be pleasantly surprised by the experience!

Big Sur Beaches — hard to reach, but worth the effort

While Big Sur’s beaches hardly resemble the vast stretches of sun-baked sand that dot Southern California’s easily-accessible coastline, they offer the visitor a wide variety of recreational possibilities.

Even during the summer, Big Sur’s beaches are subject to generally cool weather. Sunny days are sporadic as a blanket of seasonal fog often hags the coastline, dropping the temperature in the process. To be prepared, bring a change of warm clothes. Also, bring a pair of sturdy shoes — Big Sur’s beaches are often rocky.

Private property and Big Sur’s steep terrain makes most of its coastline inaccessible to the public. Fortunately for the visitor, however, several State Park and U.S. Forest Service beaches are open to the public all year. The following beaches are recommended due to easy access and breath-taking scenery:

PFEIFFER BEACH — Big Sur’s most popular coastal access point, the U.S. Forest Service’s Pfeiffer Beach is hard to find if you’ve never been to it before. The trick is locating unmarked Sycamore Canyon Road. Here’s a tip — Sycamore Canyon Road is the only paved, ungated road west of Highway 1 between the Big Sur post office and Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park. Once you find the turnout, make a very sharp turn. Then follow the road for about two miles until it ends. Drive carefully as this is a narrow and winding road unsuitable for trailer traffic. From a large parking area at the end of the road, a short, well-marked path leads to the beach. Cliffs tower above this breathtaking stretch of sand, and a large arch shaped rock formation just offshore makes for great photo opportunities and some of the most spectacular sunsets. Watch for the purple sand on the beach along the cliffs.

SAND DOLLAR BEACH — Just a mile south of the U.S. Forest Service Station in Pacific Valley and 14 miles north of the San Luis Obispo County line lies Sand Dollar Beach. From a large parking lot across the Highway One from the Pfeiffer Campground, a well-built stairway leads to a crescent-shaped beach that’s protected, like Andrew Molera State Park’s beach, from the wind by bluffs. Sand Dollar offers visitors the widest expanse of sand along the Big Sur Coast, and possibly the mildest weather. Standing on the beach and looking northeast, towering 5,155-foot Cone Peak is visible.

For an interesting side trip, visit Jade Cove, which is located two miles south of Beach Sand Dollar. Big Sur’s south coast is famous for its jade reserves. Jade Cove is a popular spot for beachcombers and rockhounds.

Other points of public coastal access in Big Sur include Garrapata Beach, Partington Cove, Mill Creek and Willow Creek. Visit us on the web for information about more local beaches. www.bigsurcalifornia.org