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## Exploring the Mendocino Coast

By Fran Miller



Fort Bragg seaside cliffs Photo Dan Miller

Bucolic, tranquil, and scenic. These Mendocino County attributes lure travelers seeking to truly get away from it all, and two special Inns along the coast more than deliver. Fort Bragg's The Inn at Newport Ranch is located a roughly 3.5-hour drive from the East Bay; it is part of a 2,000-acre coastal cattle ranch featuring more than a mile of ocean front cliffs, three miles of ridge tops with panoramic coastal views, and 20 miles of world class hiking and biking trails threading through the redwoods. While children are welcome, it's worth noting that waivers are signed upon arrival due to the Inn's positioning along steep Pacific Coast cliffs.

Founder Will Jackson sought to replicate the spirit of 19th century westward expansion when he bought this land nearly 35 years ago. His desire to share the beauty and adventure of the topography culminated in his building of the sumptuous and intimate boutique Inn.

Stunning artisanal design that reflects the area's

shipping and logging heritage includes headboards and furniture crafted from enormous felled redwoods, a 20-foot-wide walk-in stone fireplace, and a building supported from base to cathedral-like ceiling by 24 individual redwood trees. Guest rooms, suites, and a complete ranch house (several with full kitchens and some with private hot tubs), are all uniquely decorated in various Craftsman-esque themes and furnished to provide the ultimate in comfort.

Hike, bike, and horseback ride on the Inn's many trails, or better yet, explore the entire property via a guided UTV (utility terrain vehicle) tour. Throughout the two-hour adventure, the Inn's pro driver/guide will whisk you through cattle-grazed pastures, to coastline, to shaded redwood forests. Few other California locations provide this topographical diversity, and it's breathtaking. Make sure though to set out on foot to discover the property's multiple driftwood benches, each perched perfectly to capture dramatic views of the seaside cliffs and caves.

A 6 to 7 p.m. nightly happy hour features appetizers as well as a choice of local wines, beers and delicious crafted cocktails made with premium spirits, and offers the opportunity to either commune with other guests or enjoy the solitude of a coastal facing view from the large covered porch. A three-course dinner, if desired at \$75/person, follows; currently, guests are socially distance-seated either within the large dining room with floor to ceiling sliding glass doors open to the fresh air, or outside at tables of two with heat lamps warding-off the coastal chill. A bountiful made-to-order breakfast is included with each stay and includes a choice of sweet or savory items.

Heading south on Highway 1 in the tiny town of Elk is the boutique Harbor House Inn & Restaurant, best known for its Michelin-starred cuisine. Beyond its shingled, Craftsman-style facade, guests find one of the most glorious views along the Mendocino Coast. Reopened in 2018 after an eight-year restoration project, the luxury getaway features 11 guest rooms, each adorned with original artwork: six in the main historical building, four cottage suites on the bluff, and the new Madrone Guest Cottage featuring a king bedroom, two full bathrooms, dining room, living room, and private kitchen.

Chef Matt Kammerer, a 2020 James Beard Award semi-finalist and 2019 Food & Wine Best New Chef, forages and harvests the ingredients for Harbor House's restaurant - the first and only Michelin-starred restaurant in Mendocino County. His exquisite, up-to-12 course tasting menus are each a hyperlocal, coastal experience focused on seafood and vegetables. Ingredients are sourced from across Mendocino County, including live fish picked up from local fisherman at the dock. He and his team even make their own crème fraiche, butter, vinegars, and naturally leavened breads. The property features its own chickens, and 15 raised vegetable beds, planted and cultivated by the kitchen crew.

In addition to the lovely accommodations and the gourmet cuisine, Harbor House offers a slow-paced haven, the focus of which is its stunning coastal view. Grab a good read and lounge in a hammock, or claim an Adirondack chair, perfectly poised toward the sparkling Pacific. It's quiet here, the peace interrupted only by the sound of the wind, the crashing waves, bird calls, and maybe a clucking chicken from the on-site coop. A visit is not complete without a hike down to the Inn's secluded black sand beach, sprinkled with shimmering abalone shells. The 272-stair climb back to the Inn gets the heart pumping, and makes every bite of your multi-course dinner that much more enjoyable.



Inn at Newport Ranch Photo courtesy The Inn at Newport Ranch

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[back](#)

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