

CALIFORNIA DREAMING

The Pacific Coast Highway—or “PCH,” as it’s often called—is known around the world for its surf-skirting curves and breathtaking bridges. Last year, California Highway 1 celebrated the 80th anniversary of its completion, a massive feat of engineering.

Motoring northwest from Los Angeles, I spend an evening in the pretty seaside city of Santa Barbara, touring and sampling the flavours of Old California on a Taste Santa Barbara Food Tour. We check out the city’s compact and bustling Public Market, eat chips and salsa at Cielito, and sip some of the finest Pinot Noir in the country at the tasting room for Cebada, a local vineyard. But the PCH calls, so I head for the California 1, which narrows to just two-lanes after skirting the broad Pacific beaches at Morro Bay.

Just north of the town of San Simeon, I stop to see the area’s resident colony of elephant seals. Lining the crescent-shaped beach at Point Piedras Blancas, these beasts lay in the sun and wade into the shallow water in pairs, baring their stubby teeth while play-fighting. A docent with the Central Coast Friends of the Elephant Seal explains that these are juvenile males making a test run for a journey later in life, when they’ll return to this rookery for mating season. “They’re learning to defend the castle,” she says.

I continue north, hugging the coastline on the undulating highway as Bob Seger sings about twisting, turning roads on “Roll Me Away.” I stop for a glass of wine at Nepenthe in Big Sur, a restaurant that clings to the edge of a cliff. I see a waterfall plunge to the beach at Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, and marvel at Bixby Bridge, an oft-photographed single-span arch that carries drivers more than 80 metres high across a seaside chasm. I roll into Monterey feeling giddy, browsing along Cannery Row (a spot made famous in the John Steinbeck novel of the same name) and taking in ocean wonders at the town’s aquarium. And then onwards, to San Francisco, where, to the tunes of Bob Seger, I make it to the end of the road. — *Tim Johnson*

IF YOU GO This road trip can take 9 hours or a week, but three days and nights allows for tourist stops and exploring—and some leisurely Seger-listening. Here’s where to stay along the way.

- LOS ANGELES** Le Parc Suites Hotel, in West Hollywood; leparcsuites.com
- SANTA BARBARA** Hotel Santa Barbara; hotelsantabarbara.com
- MONTEREY** Portola Hotel; portolahotel.com
- SAN FRANCISCO** The Fairmont San Francisco; fairmont.com/san-francisco

#1 COASTAL DRIVE



INTO THE COUNTRY



View to Picton Bay from Claramount Inn.

Norah Rogers and I meet in the parlour room of the Waring House, a country inn on the edge of Picton in Prince Edward County. She arrives slightly out of breath, coming straight from her private practice as a family doctor in town. But Rogers is no stranger to multi-tasking. As co-owner, with her veterinary husband Chris Rogers, not only of The Waring House, but the nearby Claramount Inn and Picton Harbour Inn, they operate many businesses, along with both having full-time practices.

This soft-spoken woman, her hair pulled back neatly in a bun, speaks confidently about what inspired her to combine careers in business and medicine (see page 38 for more on the doctor’s life and travels).

get-away

“Both Chris and I are really interested in business and love music and I love antiques and interior decorating. . . A medical practice can be very confining—very time-consuming, [making it] difficult to expand your interests.”

As well as her work having variety, she also contributes to the community by employing as many as 170 to 230 employees at one time: having a respectable job gives people a sense of well-being, it nurtures their self-esteem, Norah says.

Norah and Chris first moved to the County in 1981, and then bought The Waring House in 1995. Once a fine dining restaurant, they added four rooms upstairs in the Main House, “had guests in the first summer, and then no one from Labour Day to Christmas,” she says. Now it’s open all-year round, has 49 rooms, a pub with live music, a conference centre, a cooking school, a fine dining restaurant and many antique furnishings—much of them from an antique store she also owns. Norah stands up to give me a quick tour of the many well-loved antiques in the room—a Bartlett print of the Picton Bay, a china plate from the 1850s, and portraits of Prince Albert and Queen Victoria in frames from the 1860s.

Her love of antiques, she explains, is about a love of history, about learning the origin of things, and going about the long process of restoring them, imbuing them not just with a function, but a new life.

In 2001, the couple bought the Claramount Inn, a stunning colonial revival mansion from 1906. They then devoted the next three years to renovating it, using the original architectural plans for the building they found at the archives at Queen’s University as their blueprint. Since then, they’ve added the first spa in Canada based on the Kneipp model, a German philosophy that incorporates water, movement, botanicals, nutrition and therapies that promote mental well-being. The spa has an infrared sauna, a heated pool and outdoor Jacuzzi and quirky services like the “wet socks” treatment, which involves layering wet and dry socks as a way to stimulate metabolism.

And the future? Although 65, Rogers doesn’t seem in any rush to retire. She says she wants to further restore the spa at the Claramount and do dietary work with people who are morbidly obese, and help people recuperate after cosmetic surgery. Some kind of psychotherapy work might also be another career direction.

When I ask for her email address at the end of the interview, Norah sheepishly tells me that she doesn’t have one. But for that she can be forgiven. Her energies have been devoted to other more worthwhile projects. — *Diana Ballon*

IF YOU GO Enjoy the heyday of autumn in Prince Edward County at: **THE WARING HOUSE** waringhouse.com **CLARAMOUNT INN** claramountinn.com