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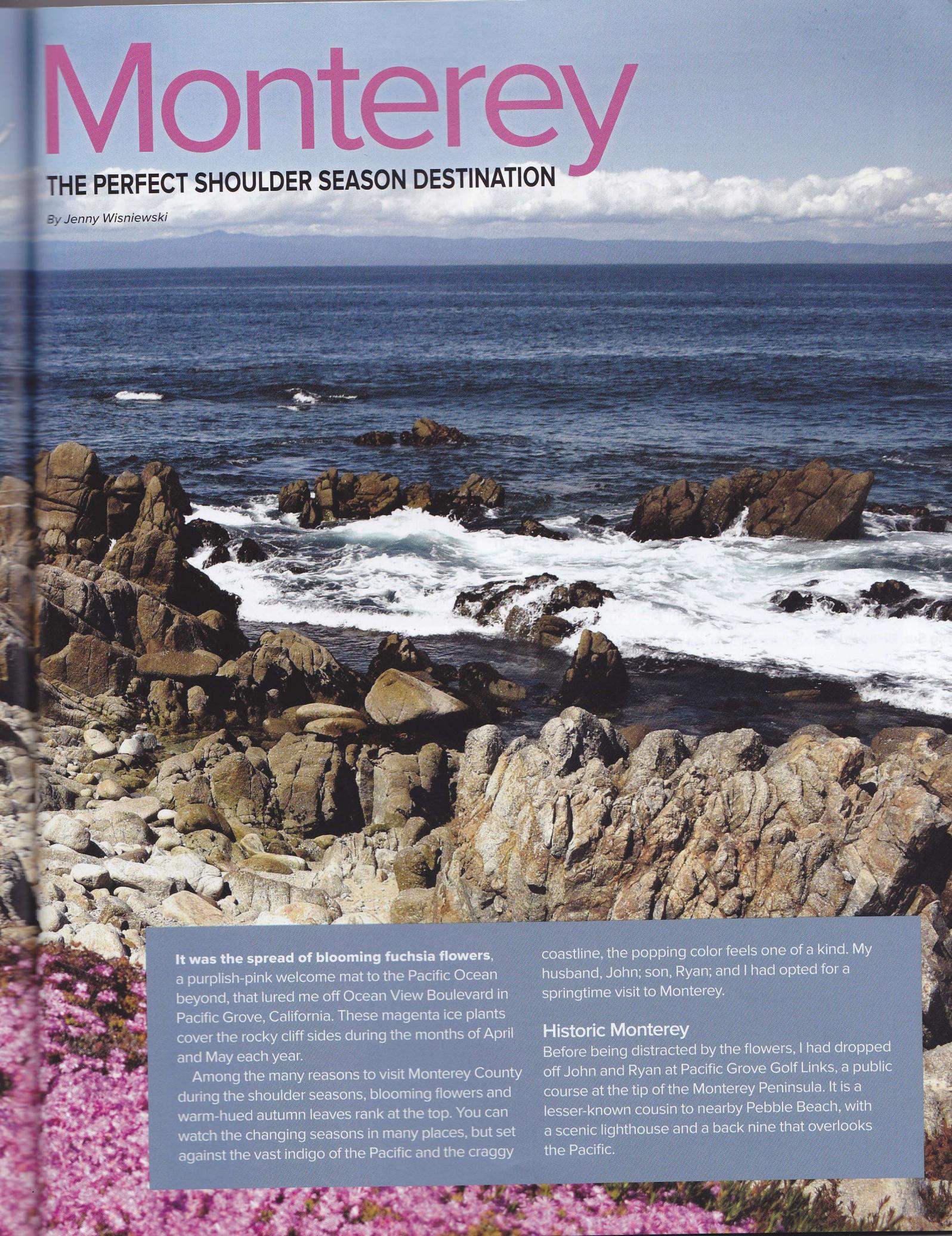
# Spring and Fall in



# Monterey

THE PERFECT SHOULDER SEASON DESTINATION

By Jenny Wisniewski



**It was the spread of blooming fuchsia flowers,** a purplish-pink welcome mat to the Pacific Ocean beyond, that lured me off Ocean View Boulevard in Pacific Grove, California. These magenta ice plants cover the rocky cliff sides during the months of April and May each year.

Among the many reasons to visit Monterey County during the shoulder seasons, blooming flowers and warm-hued autumn leaves rank at the top. You can watch the changing seasons in many places, but set against the vast indigo of the Pacific and the craggy

coastline, the popping color feels one of a kind. My husband, John; son, Ryan; and I had opted for a springtime visit to Monterey.

## Historic Monterey

Before being distracted by the flowers, I had dropped off John and Ryan at Pacific Grove Golf Links, a public course at the tip of the Monterey Peninsula. It is a lesser-known cousin to nearby Pebble Beach, with a scenic lighthouse and a back nine that overlooks the Pacific.

I was off to see a bit more of Monterey. It was easy to find my way around town without the summer tourists, which also meant lighter traffic. I took a stroll through Old Fisherman's Wharf and Cannery Row, and while both have all manner of tourist trappings, they also offer great views of the marina, historic architecture, and wildlife, such as sea lions and pelicans. Cannery Row is also the location of the Monterey Bay Aquarium, a popular attraction for good reason. The sea otters and jellyfish are most popular, but it also holds unusual species like the Japanese spider crab, which is the largest crab in the world.

By American standards, Monterey is an old city, founded in 1770. As such, it holds many of California's "firsts." This includes the state's first theater, built in 1848, and the first capital, while under Spanish control, in the 1770s. In Friendly Plaza, I got a close-up view of Colton Hall, the site of the state constitution signing in 1849. I also made a stop at the Cooper Molera Adobe, a National Trust Historic Site built in 1827. Now a gathering spot for locals and visitors, its buildings have been restored and house Alta Bakery and Cafe and Cella restaurant.

I could think of no better way to end the day than by eating in yet another historic building. Esteban's Restaurant, a part of the Casa Munras hotel, sits on what was originally the 20,000-acre Rancho San Vicente, built by Spanish diplomat Don Esteban Munras in 1824. The Spanish cuisine is a nod to Monterey's

Spanish history, too. The menu features paella and tapas, such as a tender grilled lamb plate and mussels steamed with a lager, chorizo, and onion.

### Seafood Eats

Wild Fish in Pacific Grove and Sea Harvest Restaurant and Fish Market in Monterey are great places to find tasty seafood. A neighborhood restaurant specializing in sustainably harvested seafood, Wild Fish serves creative dishes featuring what the fishermen bring in that day. And for those nights when you want to pick up some fish to grill at your campsite, Sea Harvest Restaurant and Fish Market is the place to go. Don't pass up the sand dabs or the sablefish if they're available.

### Driving the Coast

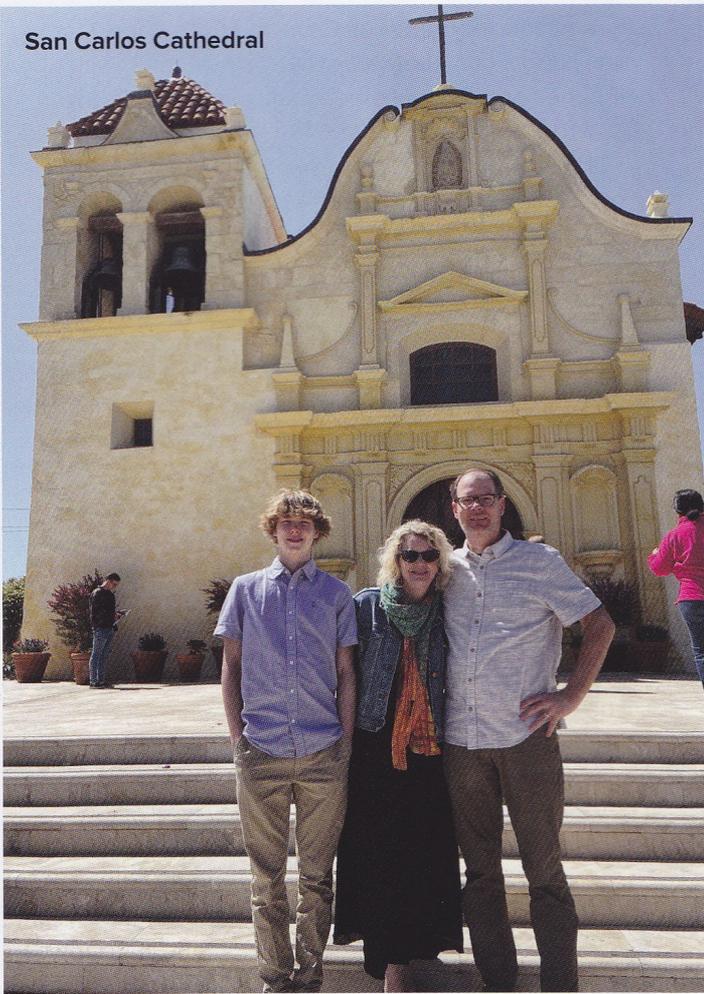
The Monterey area is known for its microclimates; it may be cool and foggy on the peninsula, but hot and dry a short drive inland. And a mild temperature in Monterey will feel cooler than you expect with the coastal breezes. The county's famed scenic drive on Highway 1 between Monterey and Big Sur takes about 45 minutes if you drive straight through, but few would recommend doing that.

We pulled over several times to view the jagged cliffs and enormous swells. A popular spot is the Bixby Bridge—its arches tower 260 feet above a canyon carved by the Bixby Creek. Of course, everyone wants

## Big Sur, Bixby Bridge and the Saint Lucia Mountains



San Carlos Cathedral



## Where to Stay

### RECOMMENDED HOTEL:

- **Casa Munras**  
700 Munras Ave.  
Monterey, CA 93940  
[hotelcasamunras.com](http://hotelcasamunras.com)  
Located in the heart of Old Monterey

### PRIVATE RV CAMPGROUNDS:

- **Marina Dunes RV Park**  
3330 Dunes Drive  
Marina, CA 93933  
[maridunesrv.com](http://maridunesrv.com)  
Includes access to Monterey Bay beachfront and Fort Ord Dunes State Park
- **Carmel by the River RV Park**  
27680 Schulte Road  
Carmel, CA 93923  
[carmelrv.com](http://carmelrv.com)  
Located on the Carmel River

- **Saddle Mountain Ranch, RV and Campground**  
27625 Schulte Rd.  
Carmel, CA 93923  
[carmelcamping.com](http://carmelcamping.com)  
Remote, wooded, and quiet

### NATIONAL PARK RV CAMPGROUND:

- **Pinnacles National Park**  
2400 Highway 146  
Paicines, CA 95043  
[nps.gov/pinn](http://nps.gov/pinn)  
Accessible only from the park's east entrance

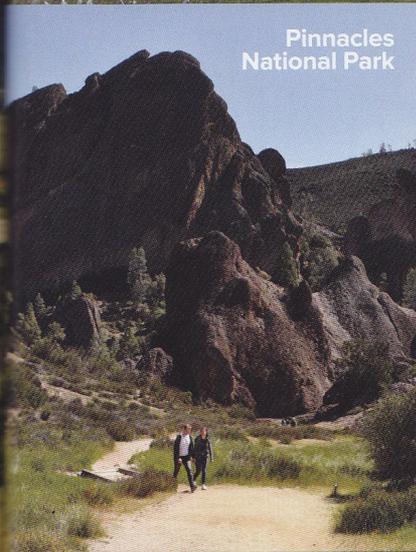
### STATE PARK RV CAMPGROUNDS:

- **Limekiln State Park**  
63025 Highway 1  
Big Sur, CA 93920  
[parks.ca.gov/limekiln](http://parks.ca.gov/limekiln)  
Located along Limekiln Creek and includes beach access
- **Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park**  
47225 Highway 1  
Big Sur, CA 93920  
[parks.ca.gov/pbssp](http://parks.ca.gov/pbssp)  
Located along Big Sur River

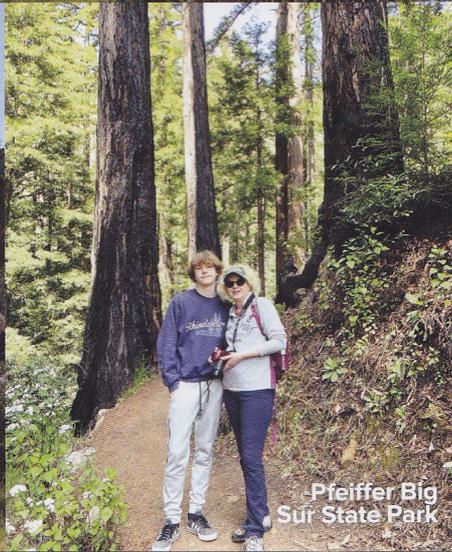
ighthouse at Pacific Grove Golf Links



Pinnacles National Park



Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park



a picture of this fantastic site, and traffic gets backed up during the summer.

We packed a picnic and headed to Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park, one of the seven state parks along the route. A parking pass costs \$10, and it is valid at any California State Park for the same day. After our picnic, we hit the hiking trails. On Pfeiffer Falls Trail, we meandered through a Redwood Grove en route to a 60-foot waterfall. On the Valley View Trail, we hiked up an incline to views of Point Sur and the Big Sur Valley, with the Pacific in the distance. An abundance of Steller's jays and acorn woodpeckers kept us company along the way.

## Heading Inland

Pinnacles National Park—the smallest national park in California—is one point of interest you won't want to miss. The western entrance on the Monterey County side is one of two entrances, and their roads do not connect. Still, you will have plenty to see and do if you opt to stay on the western side of the park.

The park's most distinct features are rock spires and talus caves, formed from fallen boulders from the surrounding cliffs that lodged between rock walls over time. The trek is a bit like hiking through slot canyons and involves climbing up and down a series of rocks and through narrow passageways. But while slot canyons open to the sky, talus caves do not.

We took the Balconies Cave and Cliffs Loop, leading us first to a darkened cave that we navigated with our iPhone flashlights and then to an overlook of canyon and rock formations. The 2.4-mile trailside was dotted with purple larkspur and yellow bush poppies, and we occasionally passed other hikers and birders searching for the California condors known to nest at the park.

## River Road Wine Trail

Chalone Vineyard is the first of seven wineries along Monterey County's River Road Wine Trail. Specializing in limited-release vintages, their tasting rooms are intimate, rustic, and laid back. Making a stop while dusty and dressed down from hiking or camping? You'll fit right in. The trail begins around Salinas, 20 miles east of Monterey, and winds its way south through the Santa Lucia Highlands.

We also stopped at Odonata Wines, one of the wineries a bit closer to Salinas, where we enjoyed the fresh air and views of the vineyard and the Santa Lucia Highlands from the patio. With a fire pit and cozy seating areas, I couldn't think of a more comfortable place to spend an afternoon or evening.

Visitors likely enjoy Monterey at any time of the year, but the shoulder seasons offer a little something extra. With ideal temperatures, light traffic, thin crowds, and vibrant colors, spring and fall beckon and then deliver on their promises. ■

See more from Jenny online at [jennywisniewski.com](http://jennywisniewski.com)

Cooper Molera Adobe, built in 1827



Odonata Winery

Old Monterey Jail in Friendly Plaza



Chalone Vineyard

