

UNIQUE LUXURY & BESPOKE EXPERIENCES OF TASTE, ELEGANCE & ADVENTURE

# CAVIAR AFFAIR

Holiday Travel Issue

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CARMEL-BY-THE-SEA

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DELVE INTO DECADENCE  
AND DISCOVER THE  
WORLD'S POSHEST PARADISES

# destinations



The beautiful La Playa Carmel was originally designed as a private home by artist Christopher Jorgensen for his Ghirardelli heiress wife. Its coastal modern design and elegantly generous spirit draws visitors from worldwide.

**Boasting a new multi-million dollar restoration, Carmel's La Playa seaside getaway charms with its gorgeous gardens, spectacular views, and unparalleled hospitality.**

Story by Milla Sukonik; Photos by Peter Sukonik

## Carmel's Grand Dame

NO WONDER LA PLAYA CARMEL IS CALLED "GRAND DAME OF CARMEL." This gem in a dazzling setting is like a step back in time to old-world European charm.

Envision an elegant English country manor amid luscious, flower-filled English gardens overlooking a turquoise pool that the Cote d'Azur would envy. Its shimmering ocean views and panoramic sunsets might suggest the west side of Italy, yet you're basking in the glow of a longtime artists' colony on California's scenic northern coast.

Beyond its serene beauty, the vibe is right for La Playa Carmel by -the -sea. It was built by an artist in 1905 as a mansion for his wife, whose family owned Ghirardelli Chocolate Company, founded in nearby San Francisco.

A home built for chocolate lovers – we’re there!

Of course, a lot’s changed since then – and lately. A hotel since 1916, the 75-room luxury boutique finished a multi-million-dollar renovation in 2012. And the restorers knew what they were doing; property manager Classic Hotels & Resorts also recently transformed the Arizona Biltmore to its original grandeur.

Extensively upgraded from white-washed rooms to sleek bathrooms, La Playa also modernized its lobby, lounge, library and bar, but without losing their old-California charm – a charm which, for nearly a century, has made this a haven for

artists, romantics and even business. (Steve Jobs held early Apple retreats here while he and his staff developed the Macintosh. Swift move on his part: How can you not be inspired by such beautiful R&R?)

Much of that charm owes to La Playa’s staff, which will heed your needs with cheerful thoroughness and genuine care. When a beloved earring goes missing, they’ll even dismantle a vacuum cleaner to look for it. And the gardener will take time to identify the gorgeous blooms, from dahlias and black-eyed susans to hydrangeas and kinnikinnicks.

More lovely touches include apples and cookies at the front desk, coffee, tea and sparkling water in your room, nighttime chocolate on your pillows, wine tasting at 5:30 p.m. and fresh baked cookies and milk later in the evening. Brush up on your chess skills with the life size chess set on the patio.



A Wood fire pizza oven is the heart of Cantinetta Luca in Carmel-by-the-Sea.



An assortment of Cantinetta Luca’s delicious appetizers” Below right: The elegant and relaxed atmosphere at Cantinetta Luca”



Forget continental breakfasts. La Playa’s famed Champagne Breakfast Buffet teems with croissants, top-tier French cheeses, prosciutto, bread pudding, waffles, yogurts, omelets and more. Its setting? A breakfast lounge which could’ve been snatched from a St. Tropez mansion, with dish-adorned walls and taffeta ivory-and-ice blue-striped stuffed chairs. While beholding La Playa’s lush gardens, you can hear the Pacific’s waves caressing the shore. And all this luxury is part of the room rate!

Back in your cozy room, you’ll have views of the ocean, the gardens or the estate, thus sealing the deal that makes La Playa serenity at its best.

But don’t worry: It’s also not far off beaten paths. Just two short blocks away are the sandy beaches of Carmel, also called Carmel-by-the-Sea. And just as close are the pleasures of “downtown” Carmel (population: 3,807), whose residents have included actress Doris Day, photographer Ansel Adams and Oscar-winner Clint Eastwood, once its mayor.

With its tiny-town pace, this longtime artists’ colony makes for mellow vibes. So chill out and explore your immediate area



## WHERE TO DINE

### CANTINETTA LUCA, CARMEL-BY-THE-SEA

[cantinettaluca.com](http://cantinettaluca.com)

Stumbling into this special find on Dolores Street brings you right back to the best secret family-style restaurants in Rome. Locals and visitors enjoy delicious pizza, baked in an authentic, Italian, no gas, wood-burning pizza oven. Do not miss the salume and fresh handmade pasta. Simple and rustic at its best.

### GRASINGS

[grasings.com](http://grasings.com)

A longtime beloved Carmel-by-the-Sea foodie destination, Grasings serves well-prepared coastal cuisine such as perfect Dungeness Crab cakes and delicate local red abalone with easy sophistication. A highlight is their wine list dotted with special choices from Narsai David's impressive cellar.

Just two blocks from the beach, Carmel La Playa's main building boasts colorful private gardens surrounding a heated outdoor pool.



for shops, art galleries, restaurants or wine tasting rooms, either by foot, via resort shuttle or on bicycles you can rent – along with picnic baskets – at the concierge desk.

By foot, wear flats or tennies. Carmel actually has an ordinance against wearing high heels, to skirt lawsuits from falls on its irregular pavement. Talk about charm!

Feeling adventurous? Just 15 minutes from Monterey Airport, La Playa Carmel is a two-hour drive from scenic San Francisco. Even closer, drive to area wineries, legendary Pebble Beach Golf Links, Monterey Bay Aquarium or ruggedly scenic Big Sur, with its towering Redwoods. This is, after all, majestically beautiful Northern California, so take advantage.

Did we say wine? So does Carmel's Chamber of Commerce, which offers a

Wine Walk By-the-Sea Passport, a self-guided, self-paced stroll among nine tasting rooms to sample locally made still and sparkling wines. The \$90 value includes waiving corkage charges at participating restaurants for bottles bought on the Wine Walk (one bottle per visit).

Feeling like some zen? Find it at the Refuge, [refuge.com](http://refuge.com). Surrounded by hills and replete with cold waterfall plunges, cedar sauna and a zero gravity recliner and a eucalyptus steam room, this firepit dotted, well-manicured oasis revitalizes, energizes and cocoons.

And back in your loving-it nest, La Playa Carmel hosts a Wine Hour each day at its rooftop bar.

Clearly, it's time for sips, scenery and serenity – by the sea. [Laplayahotel.com](http://Laplayahotel.com) ❖