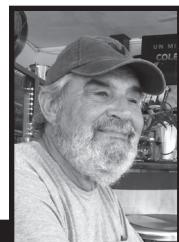


For the Love of Travel



Aaron Leventhal

Natural beauty found on North Pacific coastline

By Aaron Leventhal

On a recent trip along the 1,000 miles north along the North Pacific coastline of California and Oregon, my wife Beth and I escaped the hassle and hustle of urban America and enjoyed extraordinary natural beauty and the warm hospitality of the locals.

We purchased an economy fare for a five-hour direct flight on Southwest Airlines to Oakland, California and rented a Hyundai Sonata hybrid that averaged 40 miles per gallon, allowing more money for fabulous regional wining and dining.

A few hours northeast we connected with U.S. Highway 1, a two-lane road that hugs the coastline and slices dramatically through majestic mountain passes. We stayed at Sea Ranch Lodge on a bluff overlooking the Pacific and loved the rustic appeal of this small, secluded property on the Sonoma Coast. Our room had a striking ocean view, and a fireplace (a frequent

vintages of Laura Michaels Wines in the charming, rural community of Calistoga. We browsed the Oxbow Public Market, filled with artisan producers and purveyors, and the nearby Culinary Institute of America Greystone, which offers cooking classes and demonstrations, a restaurant and café. At the end of the day we indulged in rustic Italian fare at Bottega, Chef Michael Chiarello's award-winning restaurant in Yountville.

Several hours north we stopped at the picturesque village of Mendocino, perched on headland bluffs above the Pacific. We strolled past Victorian architectural gems and white picket fences along narrow streets crammed with specialty shops, art galleries, museums and restaurants. Of note, is the Mendocino Art Center, the 47-acre Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens and the historic Skunk Train. We enjoyed a delicious lunch

and an ocean view from the upstairs patio at Flow; dinner was at Wild Fish, known for local organic fare and fresh-caught fish. Our room at the Alegria Inn had an ocean-view deck overlooking a beautiful garden and the beach and included a delicious gourmet breakfast.

Along the Avenue of the Giants, about a four-hour drive north, we marveled at the colossal size and grandeur of the ancient redwoods. Taking short scenic nature trails into the forest, we found a spiritual quality to standing in the midst of a grove of a dozen gigantic



Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, 47 acres along the Pacific Ocean



Strolling along the Northern California coast at Sea Ranch Lodge.

trees, many 1,000 to 2,000 years old. We stayed at Myer's Country Inn, a comfortable, family-run bed and breakfast, originally an 1867 stagecoach stop.

Our last California stop was at The Historic Requa Inn, a woodsy country lodge overlooking the Klamath River. The inn is known for its family-style dinners and we got to meet our fellow travelers passing delicious dishes prepared by the chef using locally-sourced organic ingredients.

After crossing into Oregon we stopped in Pacific City for lunch at The Grateful Bread, serving delicious breads and pastries and made-to-order specialties. In Depoe Bay, Captain Gary Stephenson of Whales Tail charters took us for an exhilarating ride in his six-passenger Zodiac inflatable boat to spot dozens of gray whales.

Before heading to Portland for our flight home, we spent two nights in Cannon Beach at The Courtyard at the Cannon Beach Hotel, one of the oldest on the Oregon Coast with an excel-



Along the Avenue of the Giants in Humboldt Redwood State Park.

lent French-inspired cafe. With miles of scenic sandy beach and the iconic Haystack Rock, Cannon has been named "one of The World's 100 Most Beautiful Places" by National Geographic – the perfect ending to a memorable North Pacific Coast adventure.

For more information: VisitCalifornia.com, TravelOregon.com

Columbus-based travel writer Aaron Leventhal has organized a small group senior tour to the Traverse City Film Festival, July 27-31. Check it out at LeventhalTravel.com (614-506-9666). Photos by Beth Ervin Leventhal

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