

Monterey

Named by the Spanish merchant and explorer Vizcaino in 1602, MONTEREY was not colonized until 1770, founded as the military and administrative center of a territory that extended east to the Rockies and north to Canada (with a non-native population of less than seven thousand). By the mid-nineteenth century era of the US takeover and the Gold Rush, Monterey had become a forgotten backwater, hardly affected by the fresh waves of California immigration. Impressive vernacular colonial buildings now stand unassumingly in the compact town center, within a few blocks of the tourist-thronged waterfront.

A loosely organized Path of History connects the 37 sites of the Monterey State Historic Park. Most can't be entered unless you're part of a ninety-minute guided historic walking tour (daily 10am-3pm; \$5), leaving hourly from the park's Stanton Center.

The best place to get a feel for life in old Monterey is the Larkin House, on Jefferson Street a block south of Alvarado (entered only as part of the walking tour), home of the first and only American Consul to California.

The New England-born Thomas Larkin, who was influential in persuading the Californians to turn towards the US and away from Mexico, is credited with developing the now-common Monterey style of architecture, mixing adobe walls, balconies of Greek Revival Southern plantations and a Yankee taste for ornament.

The house, the first two-story adobe in California, is filled with millions of dollars' worth of antiques and memorabilia, and is surrounded by gorgeous gardens as well.

The Stevenson House, a short way east at 530 Houston St (entry as for Larkin House), is filled with memorabilia of Scottish author Robert Louis Stevenson, who passed through in 1879 and foresaw that Monterey's Mexican-influenced lifestyle was no match for the "Yankee craft" of the "millionaire vulgarians of the Big Bonanza."

At the foot of the otherwise tacky Fisherman's Wharf, the Colonial Revival Pacific House (daily 10am-5pm; \$2) has been a courthouse, rooming house and dance hall since its construction in 1847, and is now the best of the local museums, with displays on Monterey history and a pretty fair collection of Native American artifacts.

While in the area, wander by the historic balconies of the Customs House (daily 10am-5pm; free), the oldest governmental building on the west coast, with portions built by Spain in 1814, Mexico in 1827, and the US in 1846 though it hasn't collected duties for 135 years.

A bike path runs the two miles to Pacific Grove, along Cannery Row named after John Steinbeck's literary portrait of the rough-and-ready workers of its fish canneries. During World War II some 200,000 tons of sardines were caught and canned each year, but the stocks were exhausted by 1945. The abandoned canneries reopened in the 1970s as malls and restaurants, and now teem with tourists instead of fish.

The engaging Monterey Bay Aquarium, 886 Cannery Row (daily 10am-6pm, summer opens at 9.30am; \$15.95, kids 312 \$7.95; tel 831/648-4888 or 1-800/756-3737, www.mbayaq.org), is reputed to have one of the largest displays of underwater life in the world. Book tickets well in advance and allow a day for your visit. Highlights include a 335,000 gallon Kelp Forest tank, a touch pool where you can pet bat rays, a two-story exhibit devoted to sea otters, and a "Drifters Gallery," with striking, multicolored jellyfish dipping and swirling before your very eyes.

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