

sactown

Fall is in full swing.

Post-summer-vacation deadlines are piling up at work and you're shuttling the back-to-school kids from soccer games to piano lessons. Not to mention the always stressful holiday season that sits on the horizon. You need serenity—*now*.

Time to get in your getaway car and zip out to Tomales Bay. The dramatic coastal estuary in Marin County and its surrounding small towns—Pt. Reyes Station, Olema, Inverness and Marshall—make for one of the country's most naturally pristine regions. With some 80 miles of unspoiled coastline and 32,000 acres of wilderness, the sheer size and scope of its serene beauty makes it hard to believe you're just a short drive from civilization. And the fall months are ideal for leisurely exploration: The hills have turned green again and the summer crowds have slowed to a trickle. Weather-wise, afternoons are typically sunny enough for shorts and a T-shirt, but mornings and evenings are cool and crisp as the coastal fog creeps back and forth over the hills, blanketing the area with a quieting calm. Tomales Bay is also a recreational smorgasbord, attracting kayakers, bikers, and hikers from around the globe. But if you'd rather have mussels than muscles, you won't be left wanting: this spot is a foodie paradise, a sanctuary of farm-fresh cheeses and straight-from-the-water shellfish.

But whatever your pleasure, we've got your escape route all mapped out. So just drop that to-do list and get going. Nature calls.

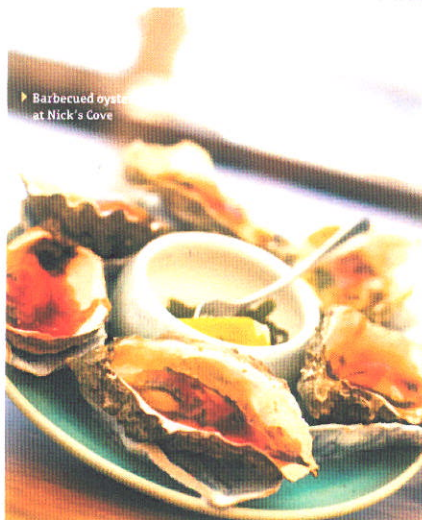


WHERE TO EAT

NICK'S COVE

Just as he did for the rest of the resort when it relaunched in July, co-owner and noted restaurant designer Pat Kuleto breathed new life into this eatery, where once upon a time salty fishermen and road-weary travelers found comfort in a cold beer and a plate of barbecued oysters. Without fussing too much with the time-tested rustic décor at Nick's Cove (he left the stuffed deer heads on the walls and refurbished the beautiful marble oyster bar), Kuleto—designer of such culinary destinations as Farallon and Jardiniere in San Francisco and Martini House in St. Helena—teamed with chef Mark Franz (also of Farallon) to revive the 100-year-old retreat. Now, whether inside or outside on the deck, nearly every table in the restaurant offers sweeping views of the bay, while convivial waitstaff hurry out plates of local oysters. Otherwise, classic dishes at Nick's are given gourmet touches—from delicately battered fish and chips, to wispy-light clam chowder, to a fresh-ground cheeseburger on house-made bread. There's also a big-city wine list that will appease even the choosiest oenophiles.

▶ 23240 HIGHWAY 1, MARSHALL. 415-663-1033. NICKSCOVE.COM
DINNER ENTREES \$16-\$55. OPEN FOR DINNER 5-9 P.M. DAILY. LUNCH
THURS., FRI. & MON. 11 A.M.-3 P.M. BRUNCH SAT. SUN. 11 A.M.-3 P.M.



▶ Barbecued oysters at Nick's Cove

WHERE TO STAY

NICK'S COVE AND COTTAGES

Since you ate (and ate great) here, you might as well stay. Recently renovated and currently expanding, the Nick's Cove features unique accommodations comprised of five cottages perched above the water (seven more are being built on the east side of the highway). The rooms were given contemporary amenities, such as flat-panel TVs, XM Radios and iPod docks, but charming touches like pot-bellied stoves, marble bath tiles and fireplaces remain. With its new shimmer, Nick's Cove gives even the most seasoned coastal road-trippers a new reason to visit Tomales Bay. Nick's offers guests the chance to indulge in—and, occasionally, jellyfish. Highly recommended, the trips are limited to small groups to avoid disturbing the wildlife. (Reservations are necessary; try to book at least a few days in advance. \$88 per person for half-day trips 9 a.m.-1 p.m.; \$99 per person for full-day trips 9 a.m.-3 p.m.).