



Linger longer in California

Heading to San Francisco? Here are 5 nearby Northern California escapes to book now

Some cities are just lucky. San Francisco not only looks good, it's also compact, relatively easy to get around, and it offers plenty to do.

But that's not all. The City by the Bay is fortunate to be surrounded by some of the most incredible natural landscapes in the West, perhaps in the whole country.

Yep, it's difficult, damn difficult, to deny the appeal. In fact, one might argue that when visiting the region, San Francisco is just the beginning — just one piece of the puzzle that makes this section of Northern California so special.

To illustrate our point, here are five excellent escapes — some of them a little unusual, all of them fresh and unique. Pick up a car (or rent/book a Zipcar — whatever you have to do) and go.

CLOSE BUT FAR Marin County

If you know San Francisco, you know that nature's never far away. Just across the Golden Gate Bridge, the Marin Headlands wilderness (part of the vast, many-segmented Golden Gate National Park) offers inspiring vistas, clean air and winding roads that are just perfect for making your back-seat passengers lose their clam chowder.

Must do Marin County — that's where you are now — has a reputation as an affluent suburban area, but that's only part of the story. Vast sections of the coastline and mountains are wild and open. Head down to the beach on Highway 1 and drive north past the oyster farms (stop and crack open a couple dozen) to the town of Marshall for drinks at Nick's Cove, a restored historic restaurant with rooms. The food's good, but not worth the prices. We do love the wine list, though, highlighting Marin's finest, along with bottles from other less-celebrated California names and places (23240 Highway 1, Marshall; [415] 663-1033).