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OFF THE BEATEN TRACK | APRIL 21, 2009





Point Reyes, Calif.

Reporter Nicholas Casey visits this peninsula about an hour's drive north of San Francisco.

By NICHOLAS CASEY

What to do: The Point Reyes National Seashore occupies a wide peninsula sandwiched between the Pacific Ocean and Tomales Bay. Most of the area is owned by the U.S. National Park Service, but a number of tiny hamlets have popped up over the past century: Olema (population 55), Point Reyes Station (pop. 818), Marshall (pop. 400) and Inverness (pop. 1,421). Hiking trails abound in Point Reyes -- most aren't too strenuous and cover open pastures where dairy cows mingle with tulle elk and wildflowers. Consider a trip out to the western edge of the peninsula to the Point Reyes Lighthouse, which was built in 1870 and still boasts a 6,000 pound "fresnel" lens. (Open Thurs. through Mon. 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) On a sunny day, try surfing Drake's Bay or stroll Limantour Beach, a three-mile sand spit where sea lions gather and clothes are optional.

Where to eat: Founded in 1909, Tomales Bay Oyster Company (tomalesbayoysters.com; Tel:  415-66...) on Highway 1 in Marshall is one of the state's oldest shellfish farms. Buy an oyster knife, some limes and learn to shuck them yourself on the beach for about \$1 an oyster. For refined dining, try the ever-changing menu at Olema Inn, with items like fresh Pacific fish and local lamb (Tel:  415-66...). Drake's Beach Cafe, near the Drake's Beach parking lot, offers a \$48 fixed-price menu for dinner on Fridays and Saturdays with views of the cliffs glowing at sunset (reservations required; Tel:  415-669-1297).


Where to stay: Ten Inverness Way is a cozy bed and breakfast in a craftsman house surrounded by a garden. The innkeepers offer wine and cheese in the evening and afternoon tea and cookies (teninvernessway.com; Tel:  415-669-1648 ; rooms from \$162) Manka's Inverness Lodge is among the area's upscale choices, with individual rooms and small cabins (mankas.com; Tel:  415-669-1034 ; rooms \$215 to \$615). Frugal travelers should check into the rustic Point Reyes Hostel (\$22 per night; Tel:  415-663-8811 ; norcalhostels.org/reyes) or camping run by the National Park Service (\$15 per night; Tel:  415-663-8054 ; nps.gov/pore/planyourvisit/camping.htm).

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