A scenic view of a rugged coastline. In the foreground, a forested hillside with green and brown trees slopes down towards a rocky beach. The beach is composed of light-colored sand and large, dark rocks. The ocean is a deep blue, with white waves crashing against the shore. In the distance, a range of mountains with green and brown slopes stretches across the horizon under a clear blue sky. The overall atmosphere is serene and natural.

ventana inn & spa  
**Experience Guide**

*The Essence of Big Sur*

**VENTANA**<sup>®</sup>  
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The Essence of Big Sur  
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**DESTINATION**

**DISTANCE FROM VENTANA**

Carmel River State Beach .....	28.3
Point Lobos State Reserve .....	26.4
Garrapata State Park .....	19.1
Bixby Bridge.....	15.2
Point Sur Light Station Gate.....	9.8
Andrew Molera State Park .....	6.8
Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park .....	2.3
Pfeiffer Beach.....	1.1
Ventana Inn & Spa .....	0
Henry Miller Library.....	1.0
Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park.....	8.8
Esalen Institute.....	12.0
Limekiln State Park .....	23.9
Sand Dollar Beach and Jade Cove .....	31.1
Hearst Castle.....	61.9



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### LEGAL DISCLAIMER

Please note that some of the trails presented in the Ventana Inn & Spa Experience Guide may be dangerous due to changing seasons and weather conditions. Please be cautious when navigating trails; be prepared and wear proper attire and shoes. For other useful information, see pages 20–21. Ventana Inn & Spa is not liable for accidents or injuries that may occur on any of the trails featured in the Experience Guide.

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# History

Welcome to Ventana Inn & Spa, your window to Big Sur—a name that evokes superhuman geographical dimensions as well as layers of American lore interspersed with stories as intriguing as the land that witnessed them.



Coastal views from Ventana Inn & Spa

Once called *el país grande del sur* by Spanish settlers, “the Big Country of the South” referred to the unexplored and unmapped wilderness along the coast south of Monterey. The name evolved in the early 1900s when residents petitioned the government to call the post office “Big Sur.” Today, Big Sur has come to denote a region that encompasses a 90-mile stretch between Carmel to the north and San Simeon to the south. Situated between the Santa Lucia Range to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west, Big Sur’s 300 square miles

are predominantly comprised of state parks, national forests and unincorporated public land. There is no downtown—only miles of staggeringly beautiful coastline, ocean cliffs, steep ridges, jagged peaks, deep gorges and two rivers: Big Sur and Little Sur. The lay of the land allows for innumerable hidden gems, whether these are natural or man-made. This guide is meant to help you access these gems. Yet it is only a starting point for a life-long journey, as the more you visit Big Sur, the more you discover how large and diverse the region can be.

## The Evolution

Geologically, Big Sur is a youthful region. The Santa Lucia mountain range has taken its shape in a mere five million years through the collision of tectonic plates and the compression of massive faults. The story of the rocks that make it, however, begins 130 million years ago, with sediments from an ancient mountain range 1,800 miles southeast in present-day Mexico. The hard crystalline rocks that constitute the high peaks of the Santa Lucia Range, such as the Ventana Double Cone and Pico Blanco, are made of various types of granite, marble, schist and gneiss. These rocks formed over millennia through the solidification of sandstone, siltstone and limestone—all sediments deposited by westbound rivers flowing from the Sierra Nevada.

Today, Big Sur bridges the flora and fauna of Northern and Southern California, while differing markedly from both regions' Mediterranean climate due to the sheer topography of the Santa Lucia Range. The result is a diverse array of ecosystems, including coastal scrub extending along the coast, chaparral particularly in the Ventana and Silver Peak Wildernesses, redwood forests, riparian (riverside) woodlands, grasslands along the slopes of the Santa Lucia Range, oak woodlands and mixed evergreen forests nestled along deep, dark canyon floors and atop the Santa Lucias' dry, rocky slopes.

## Spanish Roots

Thousands of Native Americans lived in the Big Sur region prior to the arrival of the Spanish explorers in the 16th and 17th centuries. They belonged to three separate coastal tribes, each with different languages, religious beliefs and cultures. The Ohlone, also known as the Costanoans, spanned from San Francisco to Point Sur. The Esselen occupied the area between Point Sur and Big Creek and inland to the upper Carmel River and Arroyo Seco watersheds. The Salinan lived



Canyon Falls, Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park

from Big Creek to San Carpoforo Creek. The three tribes were mainly hunter-gatherers, relying on a diet of acorns and fish from the ocean and nearby rivers.

Even though Spanish expeditions of California started with Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo in 1542, and continued with Sebastian Vizcaino's visits to Carmel and Monterey in 1602, Big Sur remained protected from the Spanish until Gaspar de Portola's second expedition in 1770. It was then that Father Junipero Serra established Mission San Carlos at present-day Carmel River State Beach, along with two other missions east of the Santa Lucia range: Mission San Antonio in the San



Mouth of Big Sur River



Sand Dollar Beach



Soberanes Coastline

Antonio Valley and Soledad in the Salinas Valley. The Spanish brought Ohlones, Esselens and Salinans into the missions, and drastically altered native life in the region.

When Mexico won its independence from Spain in 1821, California became a Mexican state, with Monterey remaining the state capital. The vast mission lands were secularized and divided into livestock “ranchos.” Any law-abiding Mexican Catholic was now eligible to receive land grants. These ranchos still shape land-use patterns around Big Sur: Andrew Molera, Garrapata, and Point Lobos State Parks, and the lands of San Antonio and Nacimiento Reservoirs were carved out from larger ranchos.



Bixby Bridge

After years of tension between Mexican ranch owners, or Californios as they called themselves, and American pioneers immigrating west through the Sierra Nevada, conflict erupted at the outset of the Mexican War. In 1846, the United States seized California. In 1849, gold was discovered at the foothills of the Sierra. On September 9, 1850, California statehood was declared, making it the 31st state in the nation.

Two land grants spanned Big Sur: the 8,984-acre Rancho El Sur, owned by Juan Bautista Alvarado, and the 8,876-acre Rancho San Jose y Sur Chiquito. The 1862 Homestead Act successfully enticed settlers to the Arroyo Seco and Big Sur valleys. Early Homesteaders were self-sufficient: they ran cattle and horses, hunted, made cheese, kept bees, planted orchards and raised poultry, hay and vegetables. They married into already existing Indian and Spanish coastal residents, thus mixing the heritage of the old settlers. Their names and legacies are still present down the coast: Soberanes, Molera, Cooper, Pfeiffer, Castro, Burns and Gamboa.

### The Post Legacy

Among Big Sur’s early pioneers, the most remarkable is William Post. In 1848, 13-year-old boy Bill Post arrived in Monterey. A native of Connecticut, he was the son of a retired sea captain, and was himself in love with the sea. Bill had sailed the Atlantic as a cabin boy on *The Brooklyn* before he came ashore at Magdalena Bay with a friend. The next morning, the two

lads found their vessel gone, so they walked barefoot to La Paz, where they got onto *The Mizzen Top*, a government ship heading to Yerba Buena (San Francisco). The boys disembarked at Monterey. Penniless, Bill fished in the bay with an old fisherman, trading his fish in town for a dollar. In 1849, the gold rush started and Bill followed everyone to Sacramento. However, when he returned to Monterey, Post was just as poor as he had left.

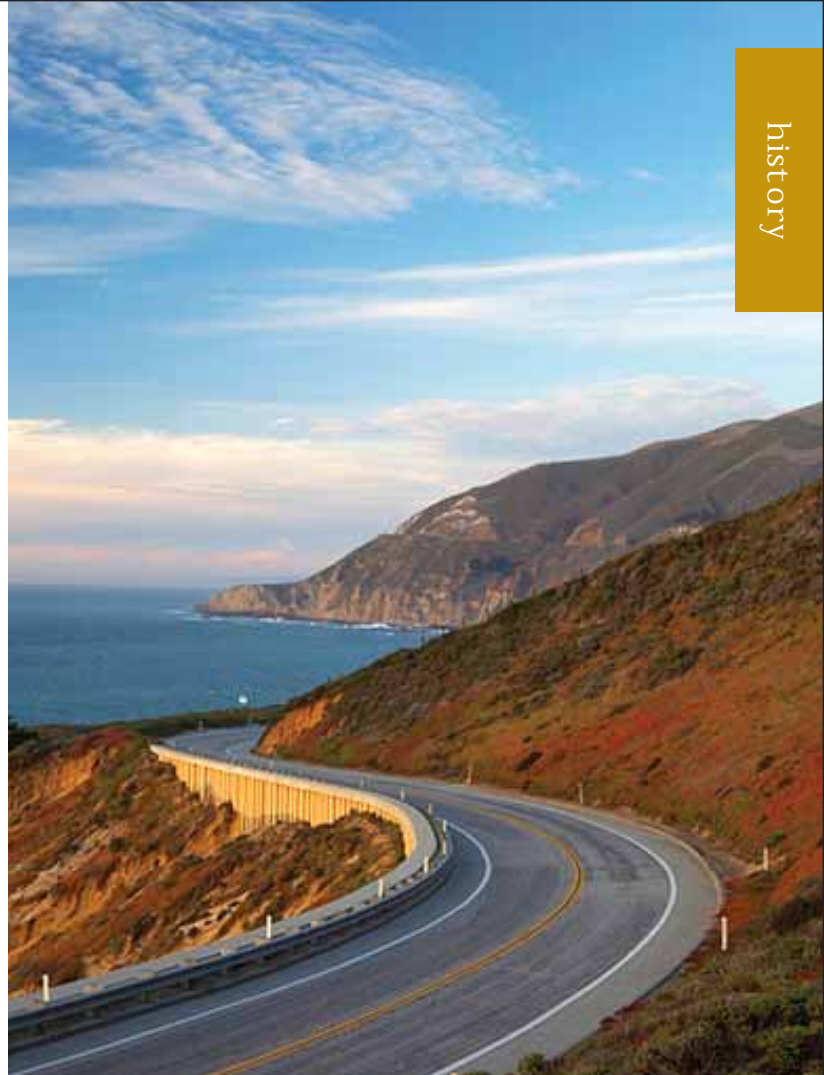
In 1858, he married Anselmo Onesimo, a Rumsen Indian girl from the Carmel Valley. Together, they found a piece of land at Soberanes Creek and decided to head to Big Sur. On March 1, 1859, Charles Francis Post was born in the cabin his father had just finished building. The Posts then had Joseph W. Post in 1862, and later two daughters, Mary and Ellen. Today, the Post legacy is integral to Big Sur. The Post House, located on the Ventana Inn's highway turnoff still remains. The Post Ranch Inn, across on Highway One, is built on Post land.

### Beatniks & Hippies

In 1937, Highway One brought the 20th century to Big Sur. Built by convict laborers, the highway paved the way for Big Sur's modern culture of artists, beats, hippies, tourists and yuppies. Henry Miller moved to Big Sur in 1944, and his 1958 *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch* inspired a generation of Beat writers to follow in his foot steps. The Hippies followed the Beatniks in the 1960s, thus contributing to Big Sur's bohemian counterculture. While the 1960s are no longer, the culture of New Age Mysticism and experimental psychotherapy still thrives to make Big Sur an all-American haven of modern eclectic nature-attuned spirituality.

### Big Sur Today

It wasn't until the early 1950s that electricity arrived in Big Sur, and it still doesn't extend to some of the more remote areas. The region is sparsely populated with about 1,000 inhabitants



Highway One

who are an eclectic mix: descendants of the original settler and rancher families, visitors who never left, wealthy homeowners, artists looking for inspiration and writers seeking tranquility. The mountainous terrain, limited property available for development and environmentally conscious residents have kept the “Big Country of the South” predominantly unspoiled—allowing it to remain a romantic, frontier mystique.



Garrapata Beach



Pfeiffer Beach