

# Monterey County's seasonal glow-up

By Jeanne Cooper

Whether you're looking for holiday festivities, boutique shopping or distinctive cultural events such as the Carmel Jewish Film Festival, the Monterey Peninsula provides plenty of excuses for a getaway in November and December. Here are some highlights from town to town:

## Carmel-by-the-Sea

**Nov. 22:** The 54th Annual Homecrafters' Marketplace creates a showcase for more than 50 producers of arts and crafts, soaps and body care products, jewelry and clothing, soaps, ornaments and other items selected by a jury for their originality, quality and price point. (9 a.m.-3 p.m., Sunset Center North Lot, Eighth Street between Mission Street and San Carlos. Free. 831-620-2020)

**Dec. 5:** Accompanied by the fanfare of the Del Monte Brass, Santa Claus' arrival in a fire truck marks the start of Carmel's free Holiday Tree & Menorah Lighting in Devendorf Park. The lighting of the menorah follows at 4 p.m., marked by singing, dreidel spinning and Hanukkah gelt (chocolate coins). The Holiday Tree Lighting Ceremony begins at 4:30 p.m. with music and dance by local artists and school choirs, followed by illumination of the tree about 5:30 p.m. Festivities then shift to Carmel Plaza, which offers visits with Santa and Martin the Magical Elf, along with free warm drinks, small bites, face-painting and other children's activities, until 7 p.m. (Devendorf Park, Ocean Avenue and Mission Street. Free. 831-620-2020, [www.carmelcalifornia.com/event/holiday-tree-and-menorah-lighting-ceremony](http://www.carmelcalifornia.com/event/holiday-tree-and-menorah-lighting-ceremony))

**Dec. 7:** Italian tenor Pasquale Esposito's fourth-annual Christmas at the Mission concert features holiday favorites at the Carmel Mission Basilica, with an optional four-course pre-show dinner with wine at Vesuvio restaurant. A portion of the proceeds benefits the historic mission. (7:30 p.m., Carmel Mission Basilica, 3080 Rio

Rd. \$55 general admission, \$160 VIP with pre-show dinner. 408-528-6308, <https://pasqualeesposito.com/tour/>)

## Carmel Valley

**Nov. 16:** The Carmel Jewish Film Festival concludes with the comedic documentary "Swedishkayt: YidLife Crisis in Stockholm," screened after an optional Swedish-themed lunch reception. (2 p.m. lunch, 3 p.m. screening, Congregation Beth Israel Social Hall, 5716 Carmel Valley Road. \$30 lunch, \$20 film ticket. [www.carmelbethisrael.org/cjff](http://www.carmelbethisrael.org/cjff))

## Monterey

**Dec. 5-Dec. 21:** Visit with Santa and enjoy live music and dance performances from 5 to 9 p.m. Fridays, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturdays and 1 to 6 p.m. Sundays at Old Fisherman's Wharf, decorated with a 23-foot lighted tree, giant tin soldiers and illuminated sea creatures. Other Christmas on the Wharf festivities include the Holiday Safety Afternoon on the Wharf, 1 to 4 p.m. Dec. 6, when Monterey police and fire department officers offer safety tips and giveaways, and the Brighten the Harbor Lighted Boat Parade, which passes by the wharf at 5:30 and 6:45 p.m. Dec. 7. (Old Fisherman's Wharf, 201 Washington St. Free. 831-238-0777, [www.montereywharf.com](http://www.montereywharf.com))

**Dec. 7:** A portion of proceeds from ticket and vendor sales at the Paws and Presents Holiday Market benefits Peace of Mind Dog Rescue, all the more reason to partake of the event's complimentary hot chocolate, hot cider and paela, browse boutique popups, take a photo with your pup in a holiday photo booth, sip on wine and listen to festive high-energy beats from a DJ. (1 to 5 p.m., The Club at Pasadera, 100 Pasadera Dr. \$25 adults, \$10 ages 5 to 12, free for children under 5.)

**Dec. 12-13:** Buy tickets now for the 41st annual Christmas in the Adobes, which offers a self-guided walking tour of luminaria-marked vintage buildings in and around



CARMELCALIFORNIA.COM

**Carmel Plaza brightens up during the annual Holiday Tree and Menorah Lighting celebration. Left: Rabbi Amichai Lau-Lavie in "Sabbath Queen," screening at the Carmel Jewish Film Festival.**



SABBATHQUEEN.COM

Monterey State Historic Park, some of which only open to the public for this event. Some also offer refreshments and live entertainment in addition to holiday decor. Ticket sales benefit the park's education programs and renovation of Monterey's First Theatre. (5 to 9 p.m., various locations downtown, \$30 ages 18 and older, \$45 for both nights; free for children 17 and younger. 831-718-7695, [www.mshpa.org/christmasintheadobes](http://www.mshpa.org/christmasintheadobes))

## Pacific Grove

**Nov. 15:** The penultimate screening of the Carmel Jewish Film Festival, "Sabbath Queen" follows Rabbi Amichai Lau-Lavie, a drag queen and experimental Jewish community founder, for over 21 years. (6:30 p.m. snacks, 7 p.m. screening, 8:45 p.m. post-film discussion, Center for Spiritual

Awakening, 522 Central Ave. \$20. [www.carmelbethisrael.org/cjff](http://www.carmelbethisrael.org/cjff))

**Dec. 1:** Choral music, caroling and refreshments accompany Pacific Grove's Holiday Tree Lighting at Jewell Park (4:30 to 7 p.m., Jewell Park, Grand and Forest avenues. Free. 831-373-3304)

**Dec. 4:** Illuminated floats, marching bands, horseback riders, dance teams and other contingents will shine on Lighthouse Avenue during the 22nd annual Holiday Parade of Lights, which typically awards prizes to a variety of participants. (6 to 8 p.m., Lighthouse Avenue between Fountain and Park streets. Free. 831-373-3304, [www.pacificgrove.org/events](http://www.pacificgrove.org/events))

**Dec. 7:** Santa Claus arrives by fire truck for Stillwell's Holiday Fun in the Park, which traditionally includes carriage rides, bounce houses, a petting zoo and other free children's activities and enter-

tainment. (11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Caledonia Park, Caledonia and Central avenues, Free. 831-373-3304, [www.pacificgrove.org/events](http://www.pacificgrove.org/events))

**Dec. 13:** All ages and dogs on leash are welcome at Run Rudolph Run, a benefit for the Arthritis Research Coalition that features a 1K Elf Run for children and an untimed 1K Fun Walk/5K Run and timed 5K Run for adults. The popular holiday tradition also includes a costume contest for people and pooches, photos with Santa and other kids' activities. (7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., Lovers Point Park, 631 Ocean View Blvd. \$27.50 Elf Run, \$43.50 Fun Walk/Untimed 5K, \$48.70 Timed 5K. <https://runsignup.com/Race/Events/CA/PacificGrove/RunRudolphRun>)

## Sand City

**Nov. 13:** The Carmel Jewish Film Festival presents "An Evening of Shorts" at the SandBox, including the documentary "Iron Ladies," about the Jewish women known as the 35s who supported Soviet refuseniks during the Cold War. (Doors open 6:30 p.m., showtime 7 p.m., 400 Ortiz Ave. \$20. [www.carmelbethisrael.org/cjff](http://www.carmelbethisrael.org/cjff))

# Old charm, new polish

By Jeanne Cooper

Even Monterey's most storied hotels aren't immune to the passage of time — or the need for a little reinvention. Across the region, notable properties old and new are sprucing up their spaces. Here's a look at several standout stays, from north to south, that have recently undergone renovations.

## The Sanctuary Beach Resort

With just 60 rooms spread across two-story clusters on 19 acres of the Marina Dunes Preserve, the Sanctuary Beach Resort has always provided some serenity to travelers. But the reimagined interiors and wellness programming introduced in 2024, 25 years after the property's debut, have made it an even better place to "disconnect to reconnect," noted General Manager Sylvain Briens.

New Orleans-based design team Farouki Farouki took inspiration from the coastal setting for a palette of saturated blues and natural hues, found in seagrass wall hangings, rattan light fixtures, woven rugs and white-washed wood paneling. While indoor fireplaces encourage curling up with one of the locally written books in the room, the binoculars and private terraces may tempt you otherwise. "This is a place to watch whales and dolphins, or to sit down with your loved ones and a bottle of wine," Briens said.

The new, second-floor Renewal Studio & Spa at the Sanctuary has a full menu of spa therapies and meditation, yoga, sound baths and other tranquility-promoting sessions. It can also deliver wellness amenities, such as a rejuvenating red-light mask, directly to your room.



SANCTUARY BEACH RESORT

**Sunset at Sanctuary Beach Resort in Marina, where redesigned interiors and new wellness programs invite guests to unwind in coastal calm. Right: Oceanfront rooms at the renovated Monterey Beach Hotel offer views of the bay.**

3295 Dunes Dr., Marina. From \$541. 855-693-6583, [www.sanctuarybeachresort.com](http://www.sanctuarybeachresort.com)

## Monterey Beach Hotel

Formerly the Monterey Tides, the Monterey Beach Hotel reclaimed its original 1967 name when it reopened after major renovations in August 2024. Now part of Marriott's Tribute Portfolio brand, the only beachfront hotel in greater Monterey also boasts more of a contemporary beach feel in its 192 guest rooms, restaurants and public spaces, thanks to Los Angeles-based design firm Indidesign. Contributions by local artists, such as marine scientist and illustrator Emily Hess' ceramic wall art and Jess Soriano's colorful murals, bring Monterey's natural beauty indoors.

Three new dining areas, all open, also emphasize sea views and/or seafood: the Lantern Room, the signature restaurant on the fourth floor serving daily breakfast and dinner; Tidewater, an outdoor beachfront bistro open 4 to 9 p.m. daily with fire pits and blankets to ward off the evening chill; and the Lobby Lounge, open 3 to 11 p.m. daily for craft cocktails, wine and a gourmet pub menu.



JEANNE COOPER

Complimentary e-bikes and a new, well-equipped stand-alone fitness center can help work off excess calories. An enclave of recently installed saunas and cold plunges in a garden area known as the Reset Lab, along with the outdoor heated pool and whirlpool, may help boost your circulation and recovery, or just feel good after a long day.

2600 Sand Dunes Dr., Monterey. From \$214. 831-394-3321, [www.marriott.com](http://www.marriott.com)

## Casa Palmero

Pebble Beach Resorts was quick to snap up the private mansion along its eponymous golf course's first fairway when it came on the market in 1994. The ultra-luxurious, Spanish Colonial-inspired Casa Palmero debuted in 1999, featuring a seamlessly added wing of 24 guest rooms and discreet access to the sought-after Spa at Pebble Beach.

A quarter-century later, the San Francisco office of Hirsch Bedner Associates oversaw a refresh of all of Casa Palmero's intimate interi-

ors that is similarly subtle, emphasizing earth hues, a variety of woods and other natural textures, and Mediterranean design elements such as wrought iron accents, plush wool rugs and artisanal tiles. Upholstered headboards, roomy seating areas, fireplaces and private terraces, some with outdoor whirlpool spas, add to the luxe residential feel. A new bar in the main house, converted from a former dining room, also blends rustic and elegant touches with wood paneling, blue-and-white tile and a welcoming variety of

armchairs, lounge chairs and banquettes from which to sip on complimentary nightly drinks. 1518 Cypress Dr., Pebble Beach. From \$1,865. 800-877-0597, [www.pebblebeach.com](http://www.pebblebeach.com)

## Cypress Inn

Built in 1929 by influential Carmel architect Michael J. Murphy, the famously dog-friendly Cypress Inn is currently undergoing a "light-touch renovation...not a complete change, just upgrading the feel of it," according to a statement by recently appointed General Manager Joseph Violi. One of the first phases to be completed is Terry's Restaurant + Lounge, named for the son of former owner Doris Day and long a popular watering hole for humans and pups.

Carmel designer Charles Gruwell has reinforced the lounge's existing Spanish Moroccan style, adding a tent-like ambiance to the front, a trompe l'oeil painting by local artist Lisa Haas and new patio furniture, umbrellas and heat lamps to the outside. While the inn will not close for any of the refresh, the living room that hosts live music Thursday through Saturday nights will be "totally redone," Violi noted. "It will have a big impact because every local knows it. It's a beloved space."

Gruwell is still deciding on the palette and furnishings for guest-room updates, but those will also be in keeping with the existing Iberian and Arabic touches, Violi promised. "The inn has such a storied history and our job is to bring it forward with a sophisticated approach," he said.

Lincoln Street and Seventh Avenue, Carmel. From \$409. 831-624-3871, <https://cypress-inn.com>

## MONTEREY

**Antoinette Santos**  
Vice President of Retail  
415-777-6122  
[Antoinette.Santos@sfchronicle.com](mailto:Antoinette.Santos@sfchronicle.com)

**Deb Wandell**  
Editor  
[deb.wandell@sfchronicle.com](mailto:deb.wandell@sfchronicle.com)

**Cover photo:** Sisters Bea Kun (left) and Thea Kun stand for a portrait at their restaurant Congo Go in Seaside. The restaurant's bold, aromatic Cambodian dishes satisfy the Monterey Peninsula's growing appetite for global flavors. **S11**  
Photo by Laura Morton