

By Jaime O'Neill

HALF MOON BAY - One of my favorite getaway destinations is **The Beach House in Half Moon Bay**, a delightful oceanfront hotel that has the added advantage of being pretty easy to get to from here in Butte County, an easy three-hour drive from door to door if you manage to miss the worst of the Bay Area traffic. And, once there, it's really like another world, feeling more remote than it is, and more bucolic than you might think.

For years, I did what most people around here do when they want to get a little ocean fix; I headed for Mendocino and Fort Bragg. And I still go every

## Half way around the world in Half Moon Bay



Sunset at Half Moon Bay



Elephant Seals at Ano Nuevo State Reserve

chance I get, but the drive over there is a bit grueling, so when the ocean calls, I'm more likely these days to head for Half Moon Bay.

Mendocino is a more charming town, and the rugged north coast is more dramatic, but for walking on the beach and taking in those expansive Pacific Coast sunsets, Half Moon Bay makes a solid claim all its own. The old downtown is charming, with some very inviting and interesting restaurants, and there's just something soothing about the sound of the surf and the briny smell of the sea air.

**The Beach House** offers reasonable rates, great views, and proximity to one of the more inviting coastal towns in Northern California. They did a little renovating since the last time I stayed there, and it shows. Plus, the fact that Half Moon Bay is just south of San Francisco is another lure because it makes it easy to stop off in the city on the way to or from a Beach House stay.

The hotel is situated right next to Sam's Chowder House, a seafood place justly famous for crab. When we were there a year ago, we hit the height of Dungeness crab season, and the crab dinners we had were, to cop a cliché, to die for. And Sam's is justly known for the house specialty, a lobster roll that really can't be topped anywhere. Other must-try restaurants in Half Moon Bay

include Pasta Moon and the Bella Vista, a place that's a little out of the way, but offering great views and very good food.

If you're feeling a little stuffed after that, there are bikes to rent, and kayaks, too, not to mention charter boats that'll take you out to watch whales or catch fish, if you're not content to just hole up by the fireplace and read books with the cries of the gulls to remind you that you're not, for the moment, in Butte County, tending to your regular routines.

Best of all is the three miles of beach and shoreline to be found at Half Moon Bay State Park, where you can find sea lions basking in the sun on most any day you decide to take a walk.

Now it's entirely possible that my affection for this getaway destination is influenced by the fact that it's becoming a family tradition to go there when my daughter comes home for one of her periodic visits from her own home in France. Inevitably, those returns to the states are joyous events.

My kid, pardon the parental pride, is one of the most interesting people on the planet, a woman of enormous curiosity who embellishes any experience, whether we're traveling, or just sitting in the living room talking. Because she's self-employed, working as a freelance translator, she is able to come visit her parents for stays that last up to a month, visits that always include little trips hither and yon. This year, we had three days at the **Beach House Hotel**, and as in the past, it was grand.

With gas prices bolting upward, and the cost of airline tickets zooming to stratospheric heights, it's good to know there's a place that seems so far away so near at hand.

Surf, sand, and sunsets, all within the range of a tank of gas.

