

By: Krista Minard
September 2009

Dream Weekends

Northern California teems with opportunities to have the getaway of your dreams.



* MENDOCINO COUNTY: Way Up North

Where to Stay: The Inn at Schoolhouse Creek—With North Coast charm, this collection of rooms and cottages invites every type of traveler—romantic, family-focused, solitary. The inn rambles down a hillside toward the ocean, and two cottages perch cliffside offsite in Albion. 7051 North Highway 1, Little River; (800) 731-5525; schoolhousecreek.com; \$175–\$399

Dream Weekend: For romance, reserve an offsite cliffside cottage; for the family, Pacific View is perfect with two stories, a full kitchen and close proximity to the property's donkey pen. Disconnect from the trappings of modern life—given the spotty cell and Internet coverage up here, you may have no choice—and instead spend your days exploring the windswept beaches and tiny towns along Highway 1.

Cure the Hurt in the Yurt: Indulge in a massage in the yurt at The Inn at Schoolhouse Creek and find yourself lulled to sleep by the wind rustling the canvas around you.

Dine Behind the Gas Station: Seven tables, two seatings a night, four nights a week, five courses—at La Petite Rive in Little River, you choose only your entrée (choices include innovative takes on seafood, lamb, pork, duck) and the rest (appetizer, bread, amuse bouche, soup, salad) comes with. Reservations: required. Attire: casual. Ocean view: spectacular. Food: phenomenal and relatively affordable at approximately \$30 a meal.

Life's a Beach: At Van Damme and Big River beaches, driftwood means big climbing logs. Sea-tossed rocks litter the sand and kids of all ages can find plenty of nature's toys to occupy them.

Light Up Your Night: Through mid-September, reserve a spot on Catch-a-Canoe's Saturday night sunset-till-dark Bioluminescence Tour. The Big River glows with green sparkles, thanks to dinoflagellate organisms' phosphorescent defense mechanisms. Huh? Take our word: It's very cool.

Cape Cod Charm: No trip to the North Coast is complete without spending an afternoon browsing the shops and galleries in Mendocino proper. The Gallery Bookshop, Déjà Vu Hats, Golden Goose, The Highlight Gallery, Mendocino Garden Shop, Out of This World . . .

Weird, Wild Side Trip: An hour down Highway 1 in Point Arena, B. Bryan Preserve runs feeding-time tours of its wildlife preserve. Climb in the Range Rover and bounce safari-style across grasslands devoted to housing and breeding endangered species of zebra and antelope. Owners Judy and Frank Mello charge \$20 for the tour, and they make it worth every penny.

Avoid a Nightmare: Prone to carsickness? Do not attempt to access the Mendocino coast from the goat path that is Highway 20 out of Willits.

*** CLOVERDALE: Romance on the Ridge**

Where To Stay: Ravenridge Cottages—Two separate cottages perched on a ridge in eastern Mendocino County command guests to park their backsides for a few days, get out the binocs and dream about rural life. The smaller, Woodhaven—a spacious, concrete-floor studio with a galley kitchen—is perfect for a couple. Hillview, a one-bedroom house with a full kitchen and separate living room, would work for a family. 39975 Highway 128, Cloverdale; (707) 894-7320; ravenridgecottages.com; \$225

Dream Weekend: Make it a twosome, stop in Cloverdale for provisions and home in at Ravenridge. Watch the sunset from the deck, glass of Anderson Valley chardonnay in hand. Flip through the onsite coffee table books glorifying seasonal decorating and rural life, and imagine. Cook dinner together. Talk.

Swaying in the Breeze: Climb into the hammock—a sturdy one strung between two wind-kissed trees—crack a book you've been dying to read and wait for the deer to amble by. Or just close your eyes, listen to the breeze, and dream.

Grocery Stop: Ray's Food Place in Cloverdale. Pick up meat and veggies for the grill at Ravenridge, some stiff sourdough bread, salad stuff, wine and breakfast items. Why is Ray's special? It's the only grocery store in town.

An Invitation to Accept: If Ravenridge proprietors Gerald Reis and Kurt Feichtmeir invite you up to their home to enjoy a glass of wine in their organic garden—as they often do on weekends—take the opportunity. Their garden will inspire you to come home and farm your own yard, and Reis' woodworking barn, with Feichtmeir's Martha Stewartesque garden shed on one side, will prod you to reorganize your priorities. Their sleeping porch will just make you jealous. As will their awe-inspiring view across the mountains toward the coast.

Sparkly: A remote wine country, the Anderson Valley is home to vintners who pour tastes free of charge. One favorite: Scharffenberger Cellars, where generous pourings of sparkling wines will lighten your mood.

The Boonies: About 20 miles along Highway 128 toward the coast, the town of Boonville sits in the midst of the Anderson Valley wine country. Meander through the shops, grab lunch at Lauren's Cafe, taste beer and play disc golf at the Anderson Valley Brewing Company.