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*The Orchid Inn Hotel & San Simeon, CA*

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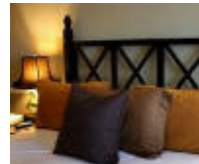
## European Gems along the Californian Coast, By Szilvia Gogh

The dramatic coastline along Highway 1 near San Simeon, California has a reputation as one of the most scenic drives in the world.



Last weekend I decided to explore my current home, California, to a greater extent than just walking thru Downtown Los Angeles, Venice Beach or Hollywood. I opted for a road trip along the Pacific Ocean, heading north. Soon after leaving the noisy and smoggy city I found myself surrounded by nature. Turning my head to the right, my eyes set on Big Sur's foot. The mountains along the coast were covered with vividly-colored fall flowers and emerald-green pine trees. On my left was a picturesque ocean vista. The surface of the Pacific Ocean was mirror-like. The sun reflections seemed to stroke the water with its beams. The calming dance of the lights was enhanced by avid surfers and lazy elephant seals at the breakwater.

San Simeon is just a few minutes north of Cambria on California Highway 1 offering accommodations minutes away from Hearst Castle. I stayed at a cozy boutique hotel, the Orchid Inn. The hotel is ideally situated along the majestic California coastline. My accommodations couldn't have been any better. I arrived at the Orchid Inn late in the evening, settled in,



and proceeded to unwind in my beautifully appointed room. In a matter of several minutes I was out like a baby. I don't know if it was due to the sound of the ocean, or due to the comfortable goose down feather comforters, or the combination of both. As the morning arrived I looked out on my window from my bed and was greeted by the spectacular coastline. The hotel staff delivered a breakfast basket filled with a baguette, jam and cheese. The cozy atmosphere, and attention to detail, were reminiscent to European Inns I've often visited. The lounge had a casual atmosphere overlooking the swimming pool, the lobby was equipped with a backgammon table and a full bar with a variety of local wines. The hotel arranged my tour to Hearst Castle.



This year the Hearst Castle was one of 150 buildings that were compiled on a list by the American Institute of Architects. For the AIA's 150<sup>th</sup> birthday the members and the public voted on the 150 favorite buildings of the USA. The castle, designed by Julia Morgan, ranked 41<sup>st</sup>. The castle, and the three square-mile property, was once owned by one of the most successful American businessmen, William Randolph Hearst. Our tour guide, Michael Passarelli, kept the tourists engaged with great stories about Mr. Hearst, and his frequent guests. He told a colorful stories about every section of the grounds. He told stories about the rose garden, guest houses, and the movie theatre. Outside, the Spanish- Moorish inspired buildings were covered with artwork. To me, it seemed like every major style was represented, from Roman, to Baroque, to Egyptian. I found the terrace the most impressive. I wished that I could drink my coffee in the mornings sitting there. It has the most amazing view. It felt like being at the top of the world.

Driving down the rolling mountain I witnessed zebras and cows sharing the grass and local woman picking lemons from the trees not far from them - all in piece with each-other. This rugged beauty along the California coastline allowed me to escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life in the big city, even if it was just for a weekend. San Simeon is an ideal place to step out of the routine.

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