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Travel

Marin County

Magnificent seven

*From a hunting lodge to a historic post -
a week's worth of unique stays. Page 16*



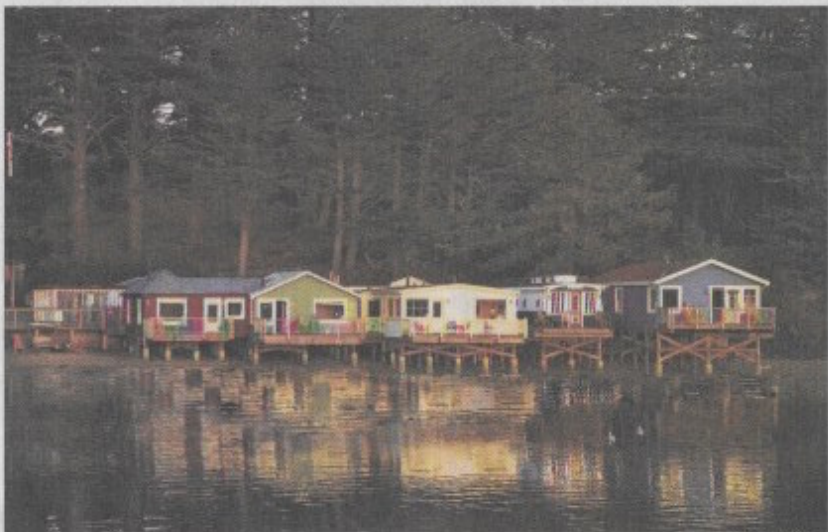


NICK'S COVE AND COTTAGES

The setting: Small-town Marshall is best known for two things: the fresh oysters from Tomales Bay, which hugs the tiny enclave, and Nick's Cove & Cottages, a lodging and dining establishment known as much for its cult following as its scenic waterside setting. This mostly agrarian part of West Marin County feels a million miles from San Francisco, yet it's barely more than an hour's drive from the Golden Gate Bridge. The restaurant is the gathering spot for tourists and locals (Marshall's sign boasts a population of 50), and overnight guests book one of the 12 cottages — famous for their knotty-pine charm, wood-burning fireplaces and cozy interiors. Five perch directly over the water.

The backstory: One of the last remaining historic settlements along the coastline, Nick's Cove got its name from its original owner, Nick Kojich, who built several houses atop wooden pilings over the beach at Tomales Bay and opened a seafood restaurant for locals. The restaurant and cabins became a destination for tourists, who began flocking to Marin after the completion of the Golden Gate Bridge. The property stayed in the family for more than 40 years, until Alfred and Ruth Gibson bought it and worked tirelessly to improve the property — and the buzz. The current owners of Nick's Cove have preserved the cottages' vernacular style while providing modern updates and the amenities.

The appeal: People come here to disconnect — cell phone service is spotty at best, and guests seem to appreciate unplugging.



Francine Images

The cottages at Nick's Cove combine old-time style with updated amenities.

The most coveted seats in town are in the Boat Shack, a rustic structure at the end of a 400-foot pier that has a direct line to the restaurant. Waiters will put logs on the fire and deliver drinks to the Shack, which boasts a communal table, a piano and unobstructed bay views. Tomales Bay is the attraction, and hiking, bicycling, kayaking and fishing are the main activities. And the surrounding area is a food-lover's paradise, with some of West Marin County's top fish, meat and dairy purveyors within a 12-mile radius.

The extras: Up the hill from the

cottages sits the Croft, a 2-acre kitchen farm and chicken coop that takes hyper-local cuisine to the next level. Guests can meet the chickens and roam around the garden, where the restaurant harvests everything from herbs and lettuces to fresh strawberries. There's even a bocce ball court. In the morning, warm house-made pastries, French press coffee and fresh fruit are delivered to your doorstep. In the evenings — weather permitting — staff will build a bonfire on the beach. Blue Waters Kayaking offers a tour package that takes guests out onto the water in the

evening to see the bioluminescent dinoflagellates that light up Tomales Bay. For those who don't care to leave their cozy abodes, in-room massages can be arranged.

Good to know: Bandit's Bungalow and Big Rock are the biggest and most family-friendly cottages. All but five of Nick's Cove Cottages are pet-friendly (a \$50 cleaning fee applies). Dog towels and treats included.

Details: Cottages from \$349; 23240 Hwy. 1, (415) 663-1033, www.nickscove.com.

— Paige Porter Fischer

SPEND YOUR DAY

From Dena Grunt, president, Nick's Cove.

Perfect afternoon: Have the lodging staff at Nick's Cove arrange for a rental (or bring your own) stand-up paddleboard or kayak and get out into the pristine waters of Tomales Bay. Explore the stingrays and jellyfish, take an up-close peek at Hog Island, and then find your way back to our waterfront lounge for some bubbles and oysters.

Picnic provisions: We like to go to Tomales Bay Foods in Point Reyes Station and pick up an assortment of cheeses, all by local dairies, and some salumi, bread and fruit. And I always have to get just a little something yummy from Bovine Bakery! Tomales Bay Foods: 80 Fourth St., Point Reyes Station; Bovine Bakery: 1315 Hwy. 1, Point Reyes Station. www.thebovinebakery.com.

Hit the trail: Abbott's Lagoon. It's achievable for all athletic abilities, and the views are stunning.

Sail into the sunset: Sunset cruises by sailboat are my favorite. Bring along a bottle of wine and a cheese platter and you are all set. Some nights the water is so still, it's like a lake. The peacefulness of Tomales Bay is incredibly relaxing.