

Guide to Monterey for SCUBA Divers

version 2

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created Thursday, 21 July 1994
updated Saturday, 31 August 1996

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Acknowledgements

Thanks go to (in no particular order) Robert Read, Jonathan Pynchon, and Michael Young for their suggestions and comments.

Special thanks go to my dive buddies: Steve Glaiser, Matt Carey, Ronda Madden, David Brown, Däg Bjarvin, Cary Vaughn, and others.

Contents

1	Introduction	2
1.1	The Guide's Life-Cycle	2
1.2	The Guide's Habitat	3
2	Dive Sites	3
2.1	General	3
2.1.1	Sharks	3
2.2	Del Monte Beach	4
2.3	Breakwater	4
2.4	McAbee	5
2.5	Lover's Cove	5
2.6	Otter Cove	5
2.7	Coral Street Beach	6
2.8	Monastery Beach	6
2.9	Point Lobos State Reserve	6
3	Dive Shops	7
3.1	Air One	7
3.2	Aquarius	7
3.3	Bamboo Reef	7

4	Hotels	7
4.1	Days Inn	7
4.2	Lighthouse Lodge	8
5	Restaurants	8
5.1	Captain’s Gig	8
5.2	Vivolo’s Chowder House	8
6	Other Attractions	9
6.1	Monterey Bay Aquarium	9
7	To Do	9
7.1	,	9

1 Introduction

This guide is probably hugely out of date. I haven’t made a dive in Monterey since about 1996. This guide is no longer maintained, since I don’t live anywhere near Monterey any more. I’m placing it on my web site as an electronic & writing equivalent of, say, bronzing one’s baby shoes. *Gene Michael Stover, 20 May 2003*

This is an informal and incomplete guide to Monterey. I have been to most—but not all—dive sites in this guide.

I was inspired to create a FAQ by the not uncommon post to `rec.scuba` in which someone from way out of town asks where to dive in Monterey. There is precious little I can contribute to `rec.scuba`, so I thought it would be a good idea to contribute this little bit that I can.

After I wrote this paper, I realized I had created a hitchhiker’s guide rather than a FAQ, so that’s why what you are reading is a guide, even though it was conceived as a FAQ.

I hope this guide is of use to you when you plan a dive trip to Monterey, whether it be your first trip, your bizillionth, a day trip, or an entire vacation.

1.1 The Guide’s Life-Cycle

As I stated in the first version, I intended to make periodic updates.

Sadly, I now live in Tennessee, and Monterey is a long, long, way off.

This version of the guide, version 2, was under construction when I moved. Some of the information is now outdated. There’s at least one new dive store—Monterey Dive Center, and there have been extensive modifications to the facilities at the Breakwater. I’ve even been to more restaurants; I love the London Bridge Pub on Wharf 2.

In any case, it’s not convenient for me to complete the modifications to version 2. I’ve decided to release it as is and to ask for interested persons who are willing to inherit and update this guide. If you are interested, contact me.

1.2 The Guide's Habitat

Here are some ways you can obtain a copy of this guide to Monterey.

1. From either of my web sites: <http://CyberTiggyr.COM/gene/><http://cybertiggyr.com/gene/>, or <http://lisp-p.org/http://lisp-p.org/>.
2. From a friend who has a recent copy. Conversely, please feel free to distribute copies at no charge.

Also, please feel free to pass it around and upload it everywhere. Tell everyone about it.

2 Dive Sites

This is not a complete list. If I haven't been diving at a site, I specifically say so in its entry. Also, not all the sites are technically in the city of Monterey. Some are in Pacific Grove, but I think they are all in an area that can be loosely considered "diving in Monterey".

No comment I make about the difficulty of a site should be taken as more than my informal and possibly erroneous impression. What I consider easy or difficult may bear little resemblance to your perception of diving at the site or to reality. Also, I cannot be held responsible if someone is injured by diving at a site because I recommended it.

2.1 General

Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary
telephone 408-647-4201

Diving in Monterey is diving in cold water. Expect temperatures under 65 degrees Fahrenheit; about 55 degrees is usual. A dry suit or six millimeters of neoprene is appropriate. You'll want a hood and gloves, too.

Visibility varies throughout the year, inversely proportional to the plankton population that increases during the summer months. In other words, visibility is best in the Winter because there's less plankton. Fifteen to twenty-five feet is usual, and ten to fifteen feet isn't bad, though it depends a lot on the dive location.

2.1.1 Sharks

Since version 1 of the *Guide*, I have seen one shark. It was a leopard shark at least five feet long, sleeping on the bottom in about thirty-five feet of water at Hotel Beach. My buddy and I watched for almost five minutes before it woke

up and swam away. It was the most beautiful thing I had seen underwater at that time.¹

I don't worry about sharks, and I've met few divers who do. Nevertheless, if the possibility of shark attack concerns you, you should take appropriate actions or precautions, including not diving if you feel that strongly about it.

2.2 Del Monte Beach

With its flat, sandy bottom, Del Monte Beach is good for seeing rays at night. I've seen one electric ray during the day.

There isn't much kelp, and the dive is usually quite tame, but once, two buddies and I had a wonderful time by swimming in a straight line from behind the laundromat towards the end of Wharf 2. The visibility was good (rare at Del Monte Beach), and the isolated patches of kelp were pretty. I was especially impressed with the foot-high rock plateaus we found. There must have been three or four of them, and they were about 50 yards apart².

Other attractions of Del Monte Beach include an armored personnel carrier and a yacht (underwater, where divers can see it). I've seen each one once. The personnel carrier is creepy.³ I've looked for them several times, but except for that once, I've never been able to find them. I'm not sure they are still there, but then again, who would want to move two heavy blobs that are underwater?

2.3 Breakwater

32 Cannery Row
Monterey, CA

Also known as the Coast Guard Wharf, the Breakwater is at the south-eastern-most end of Cannery Row.

The beach entry is shallow for a long distance, which can be a pain. Conditions are usually calm. This beach is used frequently by classes, and it's almost always crowded with student divers.

There are rest-rooms with showers (very cold), a restaurant, a general store, and a pay phone. Aquarius dive shop (next to the pay phone) provides air refills. There is a boat launch here, too.

There's a field or two of sand dollars out there. I looked for them for a couple of months with no luck, then a buddy and I descended right on one of the fields during a night dive. Talk about luck.

If you want to see California sea lions, come here. Even if you don't want to see them while you're diving, come here and take a walk on the wharf. They're all over the place.

¹One week later, I saw a large ray (not sure which type) swimming vertically out to sea in 100 FSW off the Monastery wall. It's still the most impressive thing I've seen under the surface.

²Note that I'm **really** bad at estimating distance underwater.

³Hell, anything man-made and underwater is creepy.

There is metered parking on Cannery Row in front of the beach and above it, but most parking is next to the breakwater and in two parking lots between Foam Street and Cannery Row. The two parking lots require permits that you can buy on the spot from one of two vending machines. It costs 1.50 dollars for two hours, and 6 dollars for all day.

There used to be plenty of parking in these two lots, but recent modifications have reduced the amount of spaces. Now, the place fills up quick.

Even if you don't plan to dive the Breakwater, it makes a good place to meet your buddy if you arrive in Monterey in separate cars. You can smell the air, watch other divers, and check out the conditions at various beaches on a white-board in the Aquarius shop.

2.4 McAbee

Nice place. Fun dives. Lots of rocks and kelp. Check it out.

2.5 Lover's Cove

I've been at Lover's Cove only at night. That's right: I've never seen under the surface during the day.

It's a nice night dive. The entry and exit are easy, and I get a cozy sort of feeling threading through the kelp-covered rocks at night.

I haven't been diving here during the day because it is frequently very crowded, and, as luck would have it, usually a good place to surf when I've seen it during the day.

Lover's Cove sports a restaurant, restrooms, and a grassy park with shade trees.

2.6 Otter Cove

This is one of my favorite beaches in Monterey. Sure, you have to swim, crawl, wade, roll, or otherwise propel yourself through or over a lot of grass, and the tons of rotting kelp on the beach creates a stink, but there's quite a bit to see, and few people dive here. Also, once you get used to dealing with the grass on entry and exit, it's not difficult at all.

When you enter the water, swim out and to the right. You want to keep the two big boulders (one boulder when the tide is high) to your left. There's a relatively deep channel this way, which makes it easier to swim out.

The maximum depth is about fifty feet. There are lots of rocks and some kelp. I've seen nudibranchs, sea hares, and fish.

The July 1994 issue of *California Diving News* has an article about Otter Cove.

Warning! Despite what the name implies and the otherwise really good article in *California Diving News* says, there are no otters at Otter Cove. At least I've never seen a single otter there in the umpty-umph number of dives I've made

at Otter Cove. So: Otter Cove does not imply otters. (I have been buzzed by a few sea lions at Otter Cove, though.)

2.7 Coral Street Beach

Coral Street Beach is located in Pacific Grove at the intersection of Coral Street and Ocean View Drive.

I've never been diving at Coral Street Beach. Whenever my buddy and I check it out, it's completely unmanageable. Of course, whenever I check it out on my own, it's glass. (These are times when it's good to sit on one of the park benches at this beach and write a dive guide on your laptop.)

I've been told there is little to see if you dive from the beach but lots to see if you anchor a boat a few hundred yards off shore and dive from there.

2.8 Monastery Beach

Like Coral Street Beach, Monastery has always been crappy when I'm around. It's generally a rough beach, as is apparent because the grains of sand at this beach almost qualify as pebbles, but it's supposed to be a groovy dive. There's a wall out there somewhere that goes and goes and goes. By all accounts except mine, it's highly recommended. I intend to add my account to the rest real soon now.

If you dive Monastery Beach, you might be interested that I've seen T-shirts that say "I did the Monastery crawl" at the Aquarius dive shop on Del monte Avenue. I don't know for sure that they still have those t-shirts, and I'm certainly not saying that no other store has them. I'm just saying I saw them there.

2.9 Point Lobos State Reserve

Route 1 Box 62
Carmel, CA 93923
telephone 408-624-4909

Wow! Dive here if you can!

Point Lobos is a state reserve. I believe they allow any number of divers on the weekdays, but on the weekends, they sell a maximum of fifteen tickets for each day. Each ticket allows one to three divers to enter for the day. Point Lobos requires you to dive with a buddy, so a ticket effectively allows two or three divers in the park.

Purchase your tickets through Mistix (800-444-7275).

All entries are made at the cement boat ramp at Whaler Cove. You can swim out from here and hit a bunch of great dive sites right in Whaler Cove, or you can launch your boat and dive at another location (which I've never done).

In Whaler Cove, I've found a maximum depth of about 65 feet, and there's a lot to see.

3 Dive Shops

3.1 Air One

telephone 655-1611

Air One is a truck that fills tanks. Very convenient when you need a fill between dives, but you are wet and sandy and your car has velvet seats.

3.2 Aquarius

There are two Aquarius dive shops.

Aquarius Dive Shop
2240 Del Monte Ave.
Monterey, CA
telephone 408-375-1933

Aquarius Dive Shop
32 Cannery Row, Unit 4 (Breakwater)
Monterey, CA
telephone 408-375-6605

The Aquarius at the Breakwater proves convenient for refills between dives. They've also got fresh-water dip tanks in front of the store. I have rented gear from Aquarius at the Breakwater several times upon arriving in Monterey and learning that my buddy forgot some vital piece of equipment.

3.3 Bamboo Reef

614 Lighthouse Ave.
Monterey, CA
telephone 408-372-1685

I haven't been to Bamboo Reef, but I've walked past it, and it looks big. Gets lots of recommendations from divers I know.

4 Hotels

4.1 Days Inn

Seaside, CA
telephone 408-394-5335

A good value and popular among divers because of it. They even have a hose so you can rinse your gear, and they don't mind if you put your wetsuit on the railing outside your room to let it dry.

The rate for a room with two beds varies during the year. They have a bunch of discount clubs, including the "Diver's Connection" for SCUBA divers

(which means you). This reduces the rate a bit and gets you a coupon for two free air-fills from Aquarius and two free continental breakfasts. You have to ask to join the club, and you don't get your free stuff until the next time you stay there.

The Days Inn isn't in Monterey. In fact, you have to drive from it to get to any of the dive sites in Monterey or Pacific Grove, but the Aquarius dive shop on Del Monte is conveniently placed between the Days Inn and Monterey.

The only disadvantage with the Days Inn is that they seem intent on placing divers in upstairs rooms, but this isn't too bad. Maybe they want to make sure you get your exercise by carrying your gear upstairs, or maybe they want to make sure you have a room with a railing in front so you can hang up your wetsuit to dry. (When you look at it this way, maybe an upstairs room isn't bad.)

4.2 Lighthouse Lodge

Lighthouse Ave.
Pacific Grove, CA
telephone 800-858-1249

Nice sort of rustic ambiance that's been watered-down in the same way honeymoon resorts in Yosemite have. All in all, I like it.

They usually require a stay of two nights on the weekends. Price varies over the year. Free continental breakfast in the mornings and tea in the afternoons.

5 Restaurants

I love food.

5.1 Captain's Gig

No. 6 Fisherman's Wharf
Monterey, CA
telephone 408-373-5559

Fish-n-chips. They've got other stuff, too, but I think I've only ordered fish and chips. Ya can sit out in the sun on a section of wharf behind the restaurant and see the boats in a marina. If you choose to sit inside, you can look at some cool maps under varnish on the tables. My favorite map is the one that includes Morro Bay; it's on one of the tables nearest the back door.

There's an ice cream store next door, which comes in handy on hot days.

5.2 Vivolo's Chowder House

Central Ave.

Like the name says, they've got chowder, and you can order it in a hollow loaf of bread with a bread lid incrusted with garlic and cheese. Makes me hungry just thinking about it.

They have other stuff to eat, too, and everything I've tried is really good. I was especially impressed with these little soft-shell crabs they had for their special once. They've got a good beer selection, too, including Anchor Steam, but that doesn't concern you because you shouldn't drink and dive.

6 Other Attractions

6.1 Monterey Bay Aquarium

886 Cannery Row
Monterey, CA 93940-1085
telephone 408-648-4800

By all means, see the aquarium! It's wonderful. Lots of exhibits and shows. My favorites (and probably everyone else's) are the tall tank that simulates an over-populated kelp forest and the otter tank. Gotta love them otters.

The aquarium is located at the north-western-most end of Cannery Row. It's a pleasant walk (about fifteen minutes, I'd say) from the Breakwater.

Currently, the aquarium opens at 10:00 AM on most days, and at 9:30 AM on holidays and other special occasions. General admission is about 12 dollars, and the line gets long really fast, so come early.

You can also become a member of the aquarium. There are various and sundry rates that depend on the number and relationships of the group of people who are becoming members. Membership has the main benefit of immediate and free (because you've already paid) entry. That's right: No long line.

The members's entrance is on the south end of the building on Cannery Row. You can ask one of the ushers who stand near the main entrance to point out the members's entrance for you.

7 To Do

Create a command or environment for expressing addresses. For the most part, it just allows you to specify a few lines that are not indented. Maybe they could be separated by double back-slashes. Maybe the section names could also be the addresses of the places they describe.

Create commands for specifying dive sites, restaurants, hotels, and stores. Currently, all these are

7.1 ,

but it might be different in the future.

5th Street? Is it a real dive site? Check it out.

17th Street? Is it a real dive site? Check it out.
Phone number for the payphone at Breakwater.
Phone numbers for police and other emergency services in Monterey and Pacific Grove.
Talk about steam beer under Vivolo's Chowder House.
Dive site behind Monterey Bay Aquarium that I've dove from a boat.
Dive site where the kayaks live, between the hotel and an old building.
Stress that Monastery is dangerous, but no rumors about diver deaths.
(Remember: Never print a rumor.)
New regulations for Lover's Point Cove. See page 31 of California Diving News, August 1994.
Restaurant; Mark Thomas's Outrigger; 700 Cannery Row; Monterey, CA 93940; 408-372-8543; Free entertainment Friday and Saturday evenings.
Restaurant, Japanese food; Sakura; On lighthouse. On the block next to Bamboo Reef.

References

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- [4] Rich Gibson, "Monterey trip report, solo diving and philosophy". Usenet, *rec.scuba*, Tuesday, 21 June 1994.
- [5] Robert Irion, "Monterey Bay: A Sanctuary For Life". Obtainable via a *Veronica* search for "monterey".
- [6] Steve Rosenberg, *Northern California and the Monterey Peninsula, second edition*. Pisces Books, Houston, Texas.

End.