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Living The Good Life In El Dorado Hills

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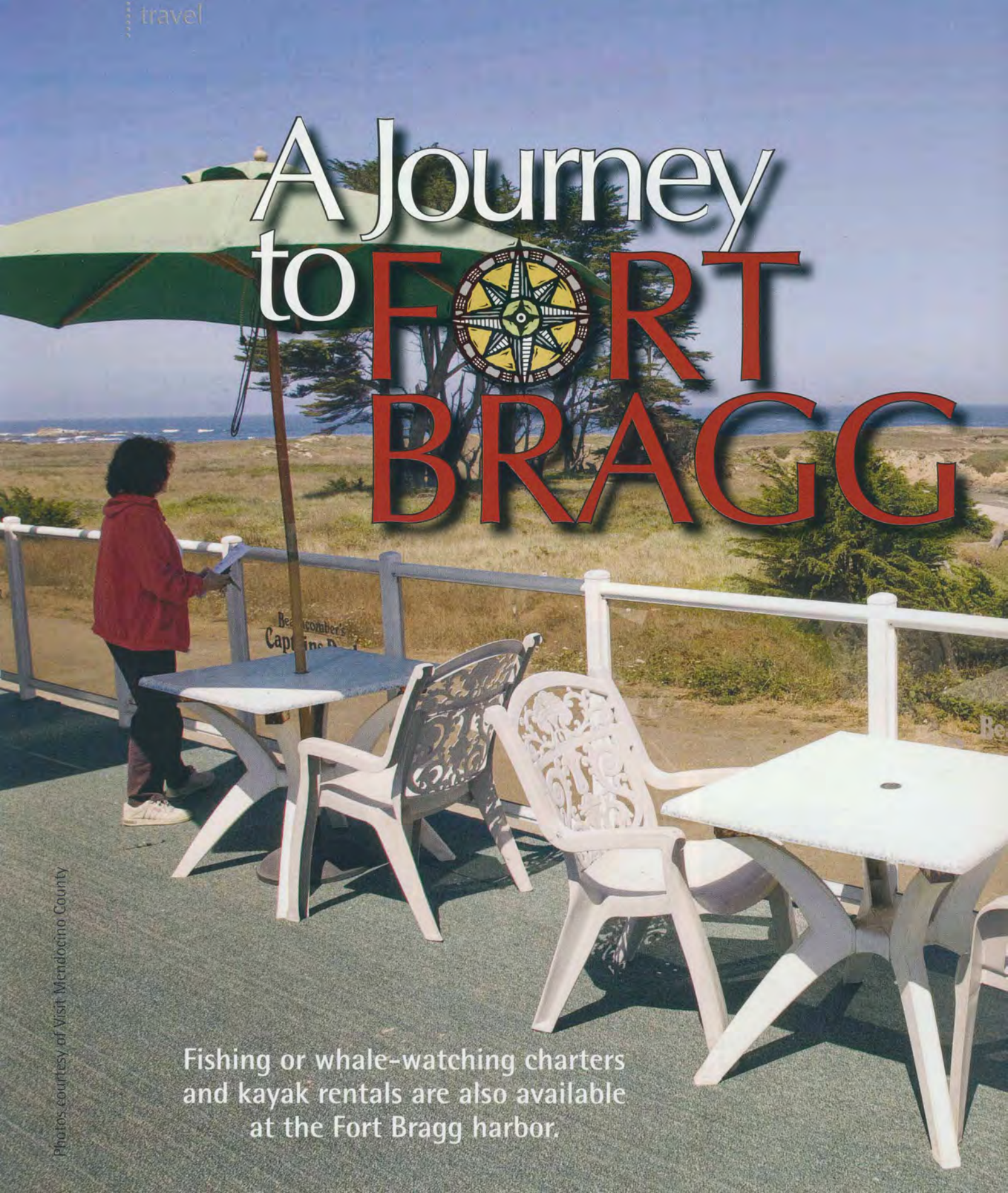
COLLEGE BOUND

How To Prepare

A Journey To FORT BRAGG

The Perfect Vacation Getaway

A Journey to FORT BRAGG



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Fishing or whale-watching charters
and kayak rentals are also available
at the Fort Bragg harbor.



The Perfect Vacation Getaway

By **JAN FERRIS HEENAN**

THERE IS HARDLY A SEASON THAT FORT BRAGG DOESN'T WEAR WELL. When the El Dorado County foothills bake in the summer heat, this former lumber town on the Mendocino coast averages a refreshing 67 degrees. When the Sacramento Valley winter chill settles in, Fort Bragg enjoys mild climate.

And the weather is just one selling point for a community that, after decades largely known as the blue-collar neighbor to artsy Mendocino, is coming into its own – with a robust offering of restaurants, shops and increasing public access to the area's natural resources.

The patio at the Beachcomber in Fort Bragg provides guests with a fabulous and relaxing view.



Some of the Earth's oldest (and tallest) Redwood trees thrive in this area.

Fort Bragg is located 220 miles northwest of El Dorado Hills along Highway 1. In the 1850s and 1860s, the area was established as an Indian reservation for the Native Pomo and, subsequently, a U.S. military outpost. Lumber mills began cropping up around that time and thrived for the next century and a half until Georgia-Pacific ceased operations on its redwood mill in 2002.

The Journey

Getting to Fort Bragg is half the adventure. The easiest route is up Interstate 5 to Highway 20, which winds west through rolling hills and parallels parts of Cache Creek. Portions of the drive follow the north shore of Clear Lake, California's largest freshwater lake and dubbed "the Bass Capital of the West" by local boosters.

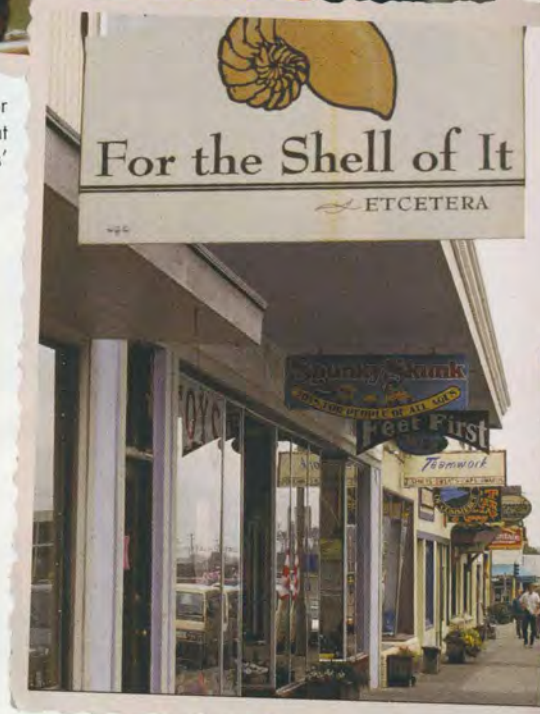
Fosters Freeze along Highway 20 in the tiny berg of Lucerne comes about halfway on the four-hour drive and provides a welcome ice cream break. A small playground is situated across the street, and local parks a few miles west provide other leg-stretching opportunities for little ones.



TOP RIGHT: Noyo Harbor is the gateway for coastal fishing, kayaking and offers many great restaurants. MIDDLE: A food and wine lovers' paradise. BOTTOM: Downtown Fort Bragg.

Lake County has become an established grape-growing region in recent years, and several wineries dot Highway 20. A few to keep in mind as road stops: Shannon Ridge Vineyards, Ceago Vineyards (established by a member of the Fetzer family) and Tulip Hill Winery.

The last leg of the journey is a windy, hour-long stretch on Fort Bragg-Willits Road, much of it through the scenic Jackson State Forest. The road ends at Highway 1, just south of Fort Bragg.





The Skunk Train journeys from Fort Bragg to Willits through towering redwoods. Some special Skunk rides feature Mendocino wine and beer events right on the train!

The Skunk Train

Lumbermen have given way to tourists aboard the Skunk Train, but the "Redwood Route" is unchanged since the logging railroad's 1885 inception. The train travels 21 miles from Fort Bragg to Northspur, once a thriving logging camp along the Noyo River and now a turnaround point – or transfer spot to continue the 18 miles inland to Willits.

The Skunk Train schedules a variety of special events for passengers, from summer barbecues at Northspur and kayaking trips to wine-tasting and Christmas holiday runs.

The Outdoors

There is ample public access to the breathtaking beauty in Fort Bragg and its immediate surroundings, and walking trails connecting several popular spots have been completed in recent years.



Glass Beach

Glass Beach is a 10-minute walk from downtown Fort Bragg, and was once the city dumpsite. Mother Nature had the last laugh – the sand is littered with colorful pieces of glass and pottery that have been tumbled and smoothed over the years by waves and sand.

Fort Bragg.com

CALIFORNIA

With the reconstruction of the Pudding Creek Trestle in 2007, the former Georgia Pacific timber-hauling road provides direct pedestrian access between Glass Beach and points north, including MacKerricher State Park and Ten Mile River. (Once the 417-acre, shuttered Georgia-Pacific mill property is cleaned up, the walking trail will be extended to the south, with an estimated 2012 completion.)

A walking trail loops to the ocean and to the "Cliff House," an enclosed building that overlooks the pounding surf.

MacKerricher is as lovely a state park as they come. Located on the former Mendocino Indian Reservation, the park boasts three campgrounds, tide pools, and a fully accessible boardwalk trail with prime viewing of Harbor seals and the gray whales' annual migration (mid December through early April).

Jug Handle State Natural Reserve is several miles to the south, roughly midpoint between Fort Bragg and Mendocino. A trail allows for exploration of this geologic marvel, with its pygmy forest and five terraces formed by glacier, sea and tectonic activity. Each level is 10,000 years older than the next, affording a rare look at what scientists call "ecological succession."

The Gardens

One of local resident Scott Schneider's favorite spots, a convenient stone's throw from his home: the Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens. "It's a great family thing," says Schneider, president and CEO of the county tourism bureau, Visit Mendocino County.

The property capitalizes on the Mendocino coast's mild and foggy climate, its 47-acres teeming with specialty rhododendrons and a variety of other flora. A walking trail loops to the ocean and to the "Cliff House," an enclosed building that overlooks the pounding surf.



Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens celebrates its 50th anniversary in 2011.

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TOP: Goldeneye Confluence Vineyard in Mendocino County. Part of the amazing Anderson Valley region. BOTTOM: The Living Light Inn in Fort Bragg.

Spend the morning in the gardens, and then head back up Highway 1 to Noyo Harbor on the outskirts of Fort Bragg for fresh fish and chips at Captain Flints and a spiffy seaward view. Fishing or whale-watching charters and kayak rentals are also available at the harbor.

The Rest

The Mendocino coast has long been known for its bed-and-breakfast inns, and Fort Bragg boasts a good dozen or so. The Grey Whale Inn was built in 1915 as a hospital. The redwood building served as one until 1971 when a more modern health-care facility opened.

The Living Light Inn, in the former Colonial Inn, is another local landmark, albeit one with a New Age twist. The

B-and-B offers "eco-friendly comfort," replete with organic bedding and a sophisticated water-filtration system. The proprietors run the Living Light Culinary Arts Institute in downtown Fort Bragg, which trains chefs in gourmet raw vegan cuisine.

There are also a number of motels and hotels, including the Beachcomber Motel adjacent to the Pudding Creek Trestle.

Fort Bragg offers similarly diverse dining options. North Coast Brewing Co. is known for its award-winning brews and is also a family-friendly restaurant and pub. Headlands Coffeehouse is the perfect spot to nosh and chill. And Mendo Bistro's claim to fame: Chef Nicholas Petti was promoted to judge of the Mendocino Wine and Crab Days' crab cake cook-off after too many successive wins. ■