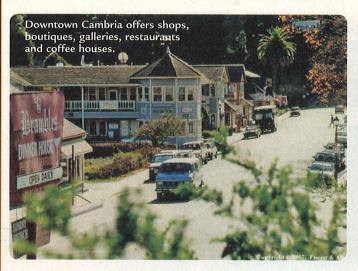
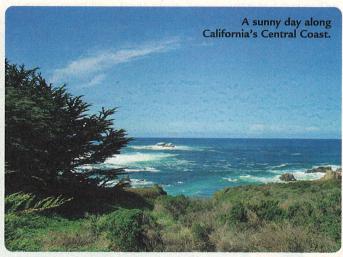
IOTOS: ERNEST & ALLEN INC. AND ANN SHULT

Cambria Up the Coast

Central Coast town is peaceful, picturesque and lots of fun.





ambria is a little bit California
Beach town, a little bit quaint
English village by the sea. It
is just close enough to get to
in a half a day (240 miles from
Los Angeles) and just far away enough to
be a real getaway. Located on the central
coast between Morro Bay and San Simeon
this picturesque town offers lots to do and
see, and has a nice variety of restaurants
and shops.

It takes between five hours to reach Cambria from Orange County, following the 405 to the 101. On the first leg of the journey, there's not much to see as you fight the tangled L.A. traffic. But as you drop down into Camarillo you are treated to a green patchwork of California farmland. The verdant valley is the first of many beautiful sites. The road soon meets the ocean, and the scenery changes to rocky cliffs and magnificent wind swept sea as you pass through Carpenteria, Santa Barbara and Pismo Beach. At San Luis Obispo, you pick up Highway One, a gentle ribbon passing through rolling green hills where cows graze under the branches of old oak trees. Cambria is about 40 minutes beyond

the intersection of 101 and Hwy. 1.

Fog and fireplaces

Here the air is cooler and foggier than at OC's beaches. The water is greyer and more turbulent, crashing on rocky coves. Wisps of fog creep in early in the afternoon. Along Moonstone Beach Road there's a chain of charming inns and motels. Among them is the Fireside Inn, which offers cozy rooms with fireplaces and patios. Your stay at the inn includes a continental breakfast with cereal, fruit, fresh juices and warm oven baked goods. Another option is premeasured waffle batter and a hot griddle to cook your own waffles on.

The highway that runs parallel to Moonstone Beach Road is bordered by grassy hills topped with the dark silhouette of a forest of Monterey pines. Here the sea and forest converge in a magnificent brooding landscape - nature's elements contrasting and complimenting at the same time.

Cambria is known for its serene and tranquil pace. It's an ideal place to relax on your patio as you watch the waves spreading out on the sand, the gulls swooping above and magical dawns and sunsets. Still there is lots to do.

Out and about

Just across the highway from the Inn is the beach walk, perfect for walking, jogging or biking. A wooden walkway takes you down the length of Moonstone Beach. December through March, you can catch the passing parade of whales from Leffingwell Landing. The tide pools are home to crabs, sea anemones and an occasional sea star or octopus. Sea life shouldn't be disturbed, but you can collect shells, driftwood and semi-precious jasper stones of all colors on the beach.

Twelve miles beyond on Highway 1 is Piedras Blancas, a haul-out spot and rookery for Elephant Seals. In the cove, these immense seals mate, rest and raise their pups. It is one of the few places in the world where you can observe and take pictures of these amazing creatures up close. On a winter morning, we spied the brownish-green mammals lolling on the sand like overweight tourists.

Just six miles from Cambria is Hearst Castle, a provocative slice of California

BY ANN C. SHULTZ

Downtown Cambria

Back in town, Cambria's Main Street offers shops, boutiques, galleries, restaurants and coffee houses. The town's roots extend back to the 1800s when the mining, logging and whaling industries kept Cambria thriving. At the eastern end of Main Street, stand lovely Victorian buildings dating back to that era. Nearby Burton Drive is home to upscale galleries and eateries.

If gardening is your thing, don't miss Moonstone Gardens, located between Cambria and Hearst Castle on Exotic Gardens Drive. Visitors can tour three acres of gardens and waterfalls. There is also a nursery, wood gallery and day spa.

The Garden's Hamlet restaurant has continental fare - seafood, steaks and pastas and a breathtaking view of the Pacific. The night we dined there we were enchanted by the sun shimmering on and setting below a pearl grey sea. The Hamlet's owner, Roy Ford, was more than hospitable, pouring us a taste of some local wines while regaling us about his interview with Huell Howser for a spot on the PBS show "California Gold." The restaurant is also known for its lemon ice cream and Jazz concert series.

Speaking of food, Cambria is rich in restaurants. The 100year-old Brambles dinner house serves hearty, delicious fare. Nearby Linn's menu includes sandwiches, salads, soups and baked goods. The air here is redolent with the smell of berry and apple pies. Linn's also sells Olallieberry (a type of blackberry) jam, jelly and preserves. I always stock up on jars for my home pantry as well as gifts for friends. Down the street, the smell of barbequed chicken, burgers and ribs wafts from the outdoor grills on the patio of the Main Street Grill.

People in Cambria are consistently friendly and love to take the time for a chat. Their welcoming attitude adds to an experience that leaves you feeling peaceful, rested and in awe of the beauty of the golden state of California. **OCM**

Ann C. Shultz is a freelance writer from Dana Point.



ERNEST & ALLEN INC.