

DOUG HANSEN PHOTOS

Numerous lakes in Mono Hot Springs, a three-hour drive northeast from Fresno, are worth exploring. A scattering of cabins provide overnight accommodations.

Sierra wilderness retreat

Keep the electronics at home and try basking in the natural beauty and remoteness of Mono Hot Springs

BY DOUG HANSEN

John Muir, the sage of the Sierra, once wisely said, “Everybody needs beauty as well as bread, places to play in and pray in, where nature may heal and give strength to body and soul.” My wife and I found the perfect place to practice what John Muir preached — at Mono Hot Springs, a collection of cabins tucked in the remote wilderness between Yosemite and Kings Canyon National Parks, about a three-hour drive northeast from Fresno.

I discovered Mono Hot Springs by chance while looking at a California map; what caught my attention was the name, which aligned with our search for the “perfect hot springs,” and the resort’s remoteness (all the tiny road lines on the map abruptly stopped there). After a two-day visit, I can say that this trip was one of the most special nature getaways that we’ve done in California.

What’s the appeal? If you enjoy being out in unspoiled nature, this is the place to be. Not to be confused with another similarly named hot springs in Mammoth, this resort attracts visitors not only for its 15 natural hot springs, but also for its trout fishing, hiking, horseback riding at nearby Edison Lake or swimming in the nearby San Joaquin River (later in the season when placid eddies form — in early June, the river raged with snow-melt water).

We focused mainly on hiking to the two nearby lakes and exploring as many of the hot springs as possible. One night, after chatting with our neighbors by their campfire, we took advantage of the clear, moonless night and climbed atop the rocky outcrop behind our cabin to gaze in awe at the countless glimmering stars that filled the sky. We savored the quietude and the lack of light pollution.

As much as we loved this trip, this may have been an inopportune time to find our “best ever hot springs.” Scattered across the river from our lodge, the half dozen

hot springs’ muddy access trails, lukewarm temperatures and mosquitoes made us better appreciate our resort’s outdoor hot bath, which was clean, accessible, hot and also fed from natural hot springs water. Jeff, the resort’s longtime owner, explained that conditions with the hot springs vary throughout the season (which extends from May 15 to Nov. 1).

Getting there

Soon after we left Huntington Lake and crossed over the 9,184-foot Kaiser Pass, our adventure began as we negotiated the curves and bumps of a single lane, two-way road that snaked down the mountains for the next 14 miles. We alternated between feelings of apprehension as unseen vehicles appeared on the narrow road, and elation as we stared at the succession of spectacular views of the snow-topped Sierra Nevada, aptly named “the Range of Light,” whose jagged, gray peaks sat nestled between the deep blue sky and rich green forests extending as far as the eye could see. Our Prius made the journey just fine, but clearly a truck or SUV would have been preferable for some side-road explorations.

What to bring

Leave your electronics at home and savor the rare experience of a relaxed, low-tech wilderness experience without TVs or telephones.

SEE MONO • E11



Seven miles from Mono Hot Springs, the road ends at Edison Lake. The nearby Vermillion Valley Resort is a stop for hikers on the Pacific Crest Trail.



Rancheria Falls, near Huntington Lake, on the way to Mono Hot Springs, are spectacular and should not be missed, especially in early summer when the waters are raging.

LUXURY VINEYARD, WINERY TAP INTO URUGUAY’S FERTILE SOIL

Bodega Garzón destined to become tourist focal point

BY MICHELLE LYN

Brazil is known for its picturesque beaches, Argentina for its tango and Uruguay, the small, coastal country nestled in between the two, can now be known for its wine.

In a land built by Spaniards, Italians and Basques, the terroir of Uruguay mimics that of Tuscany. When Argentine billionaire Alejandro P. Bulgheroni first ventured to Uruguay’s Garzón region, he says he “felt the magic of the land.”

For that reason, he

purchased 10,000 acres in the heart of the country. After consulting friends and experts about the quality of the land, Bulgheroni was convinced that the soil had ideal conditions to grow grapes. After tapping Italian winemaker Alberto Antonini to come onboard in 2006, Bulgheroni’s vision for Bodega Garzón was born.

Located two hours outside the nation’s capital of Montevideo, the Garzón region (working to become its own appellation), consists of rolling green hills, cattle, an interesting blend of vegetation and the town of Garzón, which celebrated Argentine chef Francis Mallman has put on the map with his Hotel & Restaurant Garzón.



ERIC WOLFINGER

The Garzón region consists of rolling green hills, and its terroir mimics that of Tuscany.

Nearby is chic beach town Jose Ignacio, nicknamed the “Hamptons of South America,” where the jet set crowd goes for the

summer, to shop and eat at such renowned restaurants as La Huella and Mallman’s outpost in Garzón.

And now, visitors to the

region have an even better reason to come — Bodega Garzón-Bulgheroni’s \$100 million winery that celebrated its grand opening this spring.

The first winery in the world seeking LEED certification for its entire facility, Bodega Garzón emanates five-star luxury from the moment you pull up to the entrance. Hidden among acres of lush, green vineyards, the exterior is grand, with clean, contemporary lines, glass, stone and landscaping that is oriented to enhance biodiversity.

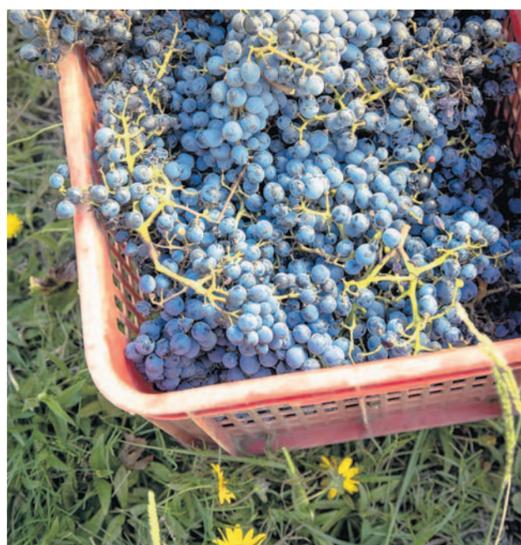
Elegant and classy, the winery reception rivals that of any Four Seasons property, with floor-to-ceiling windows facing a terrace overlooking the vineyards.

Fresh roses and candles abound, with sophisticated touches like the lotions and soaps in the bathrooms, provided by Bulgheroni’s wife, Bettina, who created the line of beauty products.

Mallmann, a good friend and business partner of Bulgheroni, designed a stunning, open-flame-focused kitchen and trained the culinary team running the restaurant at Bodega Garzón, soon to be a destination in itself.

A tour of the palatial 205,000-square-foot winery reveals top-of-the-line machinery and concrete “egg” tanks that were imported from Italy. A sexy, candlelit cellar for private events also boasts its own kitchen and lockers for

SEE URUGUAY • E12



ERIC WOLFINGER

Open in spring, Bodega Garzón already has its signature wines: Tannat and Albariño.

URUGUAY

FROM 10 exclusive member tastings.

Thoughtful architecture incorporated pre-existing rock formations and adds an interesting juxtaposition between the smooth and modern lines of the design with the imbalance of nature.

Signature wines, best tasted on the sun-soaked veranda overlooking the property, are Tannat and Albariño.

The Tannat, native to the region, is a silky, well-rounded red that could easily be compared to a Bordeaux, likely because it was brought from there to Uruguay in the late 1800s. Due to the climate and geography, Tannat actually flourishes best in Uruguay, making the country the number one producer in the world.

The Albariño is a crisp white that gives a nod to the Spanish heritage of the land. Originally from northern Spain, this Albariño is decidedly Uruguayan and imparts hints of apricot, white peaches and tangerines.

The combination of multicultural influences brought together by owner, winemaker and the historical composition of Uruguayan make Bodega Garzón and its wines truly unique.

In an area that thrives on tourism for a very brief

If you go

WHERE TO STAY

Casa Suaya: www.casasuaya.com

Posada del Faro: www.posadadelfaro.com

Hotel Garzón: www.restaurantegarzon.com

WHERE TO EAT

Bodega Garzón: www.bodegagarzon.com

Restaurant Garzón: www.restaurantegarzon.com/e-001.html

La Huella: www.paradorlahuella.com

WHERE TO SHOP

La Estefía: www.facebook.com/laestena.joseignacio

El Canuto: www.elcanuto.com.uy

Alium: http://alium.com.uy

portion of the year (December through March), Bulgheroni hopes to stimulate the local economy by increasing tourism year-round.

With excellent wines, breathtaking views and a dedication to sustainability, Bodega Garzón has arrived — and welcomes you with open arms and a kiss on the cheek.

Lyn is a freelance travel writer.

TWO ISLANDS SO NEAR, AND YET SO DIFFERENT

Michigan's Mackinac and Beaver isles have unique charms

BY TERRI COLBY

An island is a world apart — that's part of what makes them such in-demand travel destinations. But you don't need to go to Hawaii or the Bahamas to experience that distinctive sense of place and culture.

You can visit islands in the heart of the United States, where you're likely to get more bang for your buck and maybe spend less time traveling to get there.

Since these aren't tropical islands, the most popular time to visit is summer. With that in mind, here's a look at two very different inland islands less than 50 miles apart as the crow flies: Mackinac Island in Lake Huron and Beaver Island in Lake Michigan.

Mackinac is famous for its Grand Hotel, horse-drawn carriages and fudge. It's been featured in several movies, including "Somewhere in Time," starring Christopher Reeve and Jane Seymour.

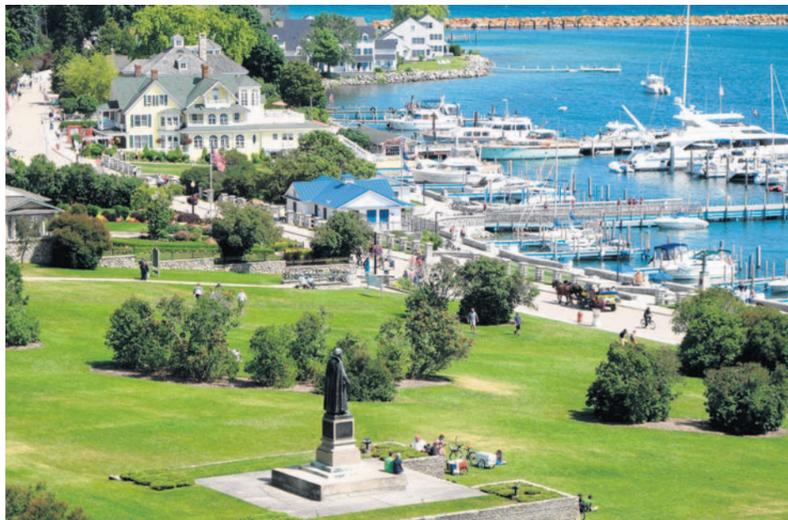
Beaver Island is famous for ... well, it's not really famous. But it is one of the backdrops for National Geographic Channel's reality TV show "The Boonies" with Dan Burton, a boat builder who spends time "off the grid" with his family in the woods.

Both Michigan islands are rich in history, from Mackinac's military past to Beaver's Irish inhabitants who dubbed it America's Emerald Isle.

Mackinac Island

Measuring less than 4 square miles, Mackinac draws more than a million visitors a year from near and far. That includes the 130,000 who stay at the Grand Hotel, a National Historic Landmark billed as the world's largest summer hotel.

Last month kicked off the Grand Hotel's 130th season, which included the debut of the island's first-ever sushi restaurant, Sushi Grand. Even if you're not staying at the hotel (rates start at \$304 a person and



TERRI COLBY/TNS

Mackinac Island has been a popular summer destination since the late 1800s.



BEAVER ISLAND CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

There are miles of public beaches on Beaver Island, some right in town and others more remote.

include breakfast, lunch and a five-course dinner), splurge on a drink, an ice cream cone or the extravagant luncheon buffet. Or pop for the \$10 fee levied on nonguests to walk on the expansive front porch. The spectacular surroundings are worth it.

Mackinac is a place of manicured lawns, art galleries, boutiques and Victorian buildings painted in pastel hues. No cars are allowed on the island, helping to ensure its lost-in-time feel. Fudge might as well be a required souvenir; it's said that each day during the summer, tourists leave with 10,000 pounds of the sweet treat.

Bicycling and horseback riding are popular activities. There are a few sandy beaches, but most of the coastline is rocky.

Beaver Island

At 55 square miles, the largest island in Lake Michigan draws about 50,000 visitors a year, most from neighboring states. It's a no-frills, wooded natural wonder about 32 miles from the mainland's resort town of Charlevoix.

"We don't have Beaver Island fudge, and our horses stay in the fields where they're supposed to be," said Steve West, executive director of Beaver's chamber of commerce, taking a good-natured jab at the island's better known neighbor.

Indeed, Beaver Island is

a laid-back, rustic destination with people so friendly they'll lend a car to strangers who show up without a rental car reservation. (That happened to two people I met during my visit last fall. I heard the story while attending an impromptu sunset party at the rental house of a woman I'd met on the ferry on the way over.)

Spend a day on the island, and you can hit the beaches, hike to the lighthouses, fish, hunt, and drive or bike through miles of native forest. Everybody leaves their car keys in the ignition when they park. Who would steal the car? Where could they go?

The island's dark skies make it an ideal stargazing spot. It's also a popular place for bird-watching. West said Beaver Island's reputation for fishing flats-style (in shallow waters where the angler spots the fish before casting) draws visitors from around the country and even a few from Europe.

In town, there's a small bakery and deli where you can watch the sun rise as you sip a cappuccino on the front porch — no \$10 fee required. Don't leave the island without watching a sunset on its western shores.

You can rent a waterfront home for less than \$1,000 a week, even in high season, and rooms can be had for less than \$100 a night.

If you go

Mackinac Island: Ferries are run by three companies — Arnold Mackinac Island Ferry, Shepler's Ferry and Star Line Ferry Ferries — from both Mackinaw City (Lower Peninsula) and St. Ignace (Upper Peninsula). The trip typically takes between 16 and 40 minutes. Round-trip prices range from \$18 to \$26. Luggage service and parking are available at the ferry docks. Flights can be arranged too. www.mackinacisland.org

Beaver Island: The ferry ride from Charlevoix, Mich., takes about two hours (\$31 one way in peak season) and can be rough sailing. Contact the Beaver Island Boat Company (www.bibco.com) for schedules and reservations. I took the ferry to the island and returned to Charlevoix on a small plane, a delightful 15-minute flight that costs about \$50 one way. The Beaver Island Chamber of Commerce website (www.beaverisland.org) has information about transportation options, events and lodging.

Beaver and Mackinac islands rank as two of my favorites inland islands, but other gems include Madeline Island (www.madelineisland.com) and Isle Royale (www.nps.gov/isro) in Lake Superior; Washington Island (www.washingtonisland-wi.com) in Door County, Wis.; and the wooded wonderland of Thousand Islands (www.visit1000islands.com) between northern New York and southeastern Ontario, Canada.

Colby is a freelance writer for the Chicago Tribune.

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BAJA CALENDAR

BAJA BLUES FEST SPANS THREE DAYS

Tijuana: Food, Park and Zoo Adventure: Sundays at 10 a.m.: Aug. 7, 14, 21. The guided tour by Wild Foodie Adventures visits Tijuana's largest public park — Morelos Park — and the Tijuana Zoo. The adventure includes a meal and dessert, zoo admission, a train ride around the park and pedal-boating on the lake. The \$74-per-person fee also includes round-trip transportation from the group meeting location at San Ysidro. More information: wildfoodieadventures.com

Tecate: Rancho La Puerta Brunch Wine Bazaar: 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on the following Sundays: July 31, Aug. 14, Sept. 18, Nov. 13 and Dec. 4. Rancho La Puerta fitness and spa retreat welcomes culinary enthusiasts and wine aficionados for a day of traditional Baja Med cuisine with a gourmet farm brunch and Valle de Guadalupe wine pairings. Guests can browse a curated pop-up bazaar and local Mexican crafts. The \$180.34 USD-per-person fee includes round-trip transportation from East Mission Bay in San Diego. More information: www.eventbrite.com and enter The Baja Kitchen Presents

Ensenada: Fiestas de la Vendimia 2016: Aug. 5-21. The Vendimia wine harvest festival is a series of more than 40 events that will take place in the Valle de Guadalupe and Ensenada, featuring wine and food from the region. The event calendar kicks off Aug. 5 with the Muestra del Vino and ends with the Concurso de Paellas on Aug. 21. More information: provinoc.org

Ensenada: La Ruta del Vino Tour: 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. Aug. 6. This tour with several stops along the Baja California "wine route" includes breakfast buffet at Bajamar Ocean Front Golf Resort, a light midday meal, wine tasting at three wineries — Cuatro Cuartos, La Viña de Liceaga and LA Cetto (or similar wineries according to availability), production wine tours and lobster dinner in Puerto Nuevo. \$120 fee includes round-trip transportation from the San Ysidro Jack in the Box. For more information: saber-spanish.com or call (619) 453-0892

Tijuana: Tijuana Waterpark: Aug. 6 and Sept. 4. Join Turista Libre for a day at Baja California's largest waterpark, Albercas El Vergel. \$30 includes park

admission, round-trip border transportation and en-route libations. The group meets in San Ysidro at 11 a.m., with an estimated return to the border at 7 p.m. turistalibre.com

San Quintín: Pesca La Baja Tournament: Aug. 19, 20. The Pesca La Baja is a series of family-friendly community sportfishing tournaments throughout Baja California. The fourth stop in the series is at San Quintín on Aug. 19 and 20; the Gran Final is at Ensenada on Sept. 23 and 24. More information: pescalabajacom

Rosario: Fifth annual Baja Blues Fest: Aug. 19-21. This year's seaside music festival is headlined by Coco Montoya and John Németh, and hosted by San Diego's Backwater Blues Band. Numerous world-class blues artists from both sides of the border will perform at the three-day festival, with proceeds benefiting local charities, including the Friends of the Library, Los Angelitos Orphanage, BECA and La Misión Children's Fund. Three-day pass is \$45 (advance sale only); Friday admission is \$20 at the gate; Saturday is \$25 in advance or \$30 at the gate; Sunday afternoon jam session \$10 at the gate. Lodging packages at the Rosario Beach Hotel & Resort, Blvd. Benito Juárez 31, Rosario. More information: bajabluesfest.org

Rosario: Fourth annual Sabor de Baja: 6-10 p.m. Aug. 31. The all-white attire event in the oceanfront gardens of the Rosario Beach Hotel & Resort features tastes by 20 of Baja's best chefs paired with the region's best wines and craft beers. Awards are determined by a panel of distinguished judges and by popular vote via guests' ballots. Tickets are \$70 per person general admission, \$85 for VIP. Event packages to include overnight stay at the Rosario Beach Hotel are available. More information: www.sabordebajacom

Events are subject to change or cancellation. Confirm with event organizer before booking your trip.

To submit Baja events information, email at least two weeks in advance to Cynthia.zanone@sduuniontribune.com

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