

## Hotel California



Monterey seems less tense than San Francisco, or should I say Sandy and I are less tense. This is definitely John Steinbeck country. His books are piled high in all the bookshops and the main street, Cannery Row, is the title of one of his novels. Neither of us have read any of his books.

He was born in Salinas, a town in the nearby lettuce growing area, half an hour's drive from Monterey. There's a museum dedicated to him, filled with interactive galleries illustrating the themes and staging of his novels, several of which became films, *The Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden* the most notable. In the museum we get sense experiences of his settings: feel the cool air of the lettuce boxcar in the *East of Eden*, brush the mane of *The Red Pony* and smell the fish and hear the seagulls in Cannery Row. I am taken a camper van exhibit. This was used by Steinbeck when he travelled around America, with his dog Charley, wanting to visit the country on a personal level. I buy the journal he wrote of this trip, *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*. It later inspires me to try travel writing. I think it inspired Bill Bryson too.

Our next visit is to nearby Carmel, in search of another famous person's habitat. Driving through the town is a challenge. It's laid out on a grid pattern but the blocks are short and there intersections every 400 yards. I am never sure who has right of way at a junction and am in a moody sweat by the time we park outside Clint

Eastward's Hogs Breath Burger Bar.

We are expecting something more distinctive from a millionaire movie star who apparently is still mayor of the town. There's a bar with Eastwood memorabilia and a patio area where we eat. It looks like any other burger chain restaurant and our burgers are just as ordinary. We discover that Clint had closed the bar a year back and it has only recently been re-opened by new owners. We won't be recommending a visit here to our friends.

For our last experience we travel further afield. It's a two hour drive down the wild coastal Highway One to Hearst Castle, the home of the newspaper magnate, William Rudolph Hearst. He was portrayed as "Citizen Kane" in Orson Wells famous film.

Hearst Castle and its estate are monuments to personality. The main house, Casa Grande, is built in Mediterranean Revival style and based on a Spanish Cathedral. It's filled with furniture and artefacts that Hearst bought across the world. The house and its contents are artistically impressive but we leave the house without a feeling for the late owner. Steinbeck, with his words, has affected us more than Hearst's wealth and power.

Pleased with our adventures, we drive back to San Francisco airport for the flight home and pick a Steinbeck novel each to take California with us.