

Carmel Lodge Offers Renovated Accommodations in Quaint City-By-The

Sea By James Raia

Carmel is among the country's most popular small-city destinations. Quaint restaurants, art galleries, boutique shops, unique homes, international conferences and famous golf courses are all back-dropped by the Pacific Ocean.

As a result, the city by the sea has a steady influx of global visitors. More than 900 rooms are available in 60-plus locations within a mile radius of the city's center.

So, while a visit to Carmel is a good choice for myriad reasons, it does present a dilemma: Where's the best place to stay? Logical choices, of course, vary depending on your reason for visiting the Monterey Peninsula - business to budget travel, a romantic getaway to golf.

Carmel is not an inexpensive destination, but one location that provides covers a good cross-section of accommodations needs is Carmel Lodge.

Formerly known as Carmel Sands Lodge, the 42-room property was family owned for several decades. But earlier this year, the property was purchased by a syndicate led by Fornine Investment Company of Pacific Grove.

Fornine chose Coastal Hotel Group of Seattle to manage the property and its renovation plans soon began. Within a few months, the motor lodge had undergone an exterior facelift, a name adjustment and interior renovations steadily progressed.

Carmel Lodge is located two blocks from Ocean Ave. (the city's main east-to-west artery), on San Carlos. And it's the location, along with the ownership and management changes and its renovation that has helped the property earn a continuing reputation as among the city's best values.

Certainly, there are more upscale properties. Likewise, plenty of places charge more and offer less. But during a recent several-night stay (just prior major room renovations), I spent several nights at Carmel Lodge while on a brief "business vacation" and enjoyed my stay.

Carmel Lodge has four room types, some featuring classic retro-looking furniture and decor and varying accouterments, microwave ovens to refrigerators. Six rooms also have wood-burning fireplaces.

I stayed in an upstairs, corner deluxe room in the back building. My room had been remodeled, a mixture of modern styling but with pleasing reminders of the past. The bathroom had clean but old tile and fixtures. Since my stay, all rooms have news carpet and new mattresses.

My room was spacious and appointed well, including an upscale audio system and flat screen television. On one evening I left the window shutters open while getting ready for a late dinner and watched as the room's natural light dimmed as the sun set.

Since its new management tenure began, Carmel Lodge has also begun to offer several guest packages. One features dining at Kurt's Carmel Chop House, the adjoining establishment. The 80-seat restaurant and bar, which opened in 2001, offers guest staying at Carmel Lodge and \$50 credit with a two-night stay minimum. Carmel Lodge also has a beach and romance-themed packages available.

With its central but quiet side-street location, Carmel Lodge is within walking distance to many Carmel attractions and within a few blocks of three of my favorites.

The gift shop and studio of radio station KRML is located across the street and one block away from the lodge in the Eastwood Building. The gift shop is also a small jazz museum with objects ranging from rare recordings to information about actor/director/composer Clint Eastwood's passion for jazz.

Also a short walk away are two diverse restaurant options: Casanova and Brophy's Tavern. Casanova (5th & Mission) is situated an old adobe house, and it features beautiful gardens and fine Italian/French cuisine. It's considered one of Carmel's most romantic dining choices. Brophy's (4th and San Carlos) is the quintessential neighborhood pub. The pub grub is good, the crowd is friendly (but not raucous) and the bartenders are skilled.

Plenty of other vacations favorites await Carmel visitors, world-renowned art galleries to the Pacific Ocean. And like the aforementioned locales, it's all conveniently located near Carmel Lodge.

(Carmel Lodge, San Carlos & 5th Ave. Mailing address: P.O. Box 951, Carmel By-The-Sea, Calif., 93921. Handicap accessible rooms. All non-smoking rooms. No pets. Off-street parking. Reservations: 1-866-339-1552 E-mail: innkeeper@carmellodge.com. Web site: www.carmellodge.com.)