

When I learned I had landed reservations at WorldMark's Mariner Village for Super Bowl Sunday, I headed straight for the cookbooks. The prospect of combining great food, great digs and the greatest single game in sport (don't even try to argue) focused my mind. No more indifferent nachos and beer in front of a flickery TV. This year, I would eat the ocean.

EATING THE OCEAN

Washington's Mariner Village

Mariner Village has the ocean literally in its backyard. The resort complex, situated on the western front of Washington's Olympic Peninsula, overlooks the jetty on the south edge of Ocean Shores. The town inhabits its own six-mile-long peninsula, which encloses the northern half of historic Grays Harbor and its deepwater timber port. The gray-sand beach around Ocean Shores is a haven for razor clams—the king of chowders—and clam seasons can be declared suddenly and sporadically throughout the year. Fleets fish the open ocean from Grays Harbor, and Willapa Bay farther south is the home of excellent oysters. It's honest, working-class ocean up here—free of glitz and spectacle and full of hand-painted, wind-faded charm.

I pack plaid shirts, boots, olive oil, vinegar, a special bottle of white Burgundy, and *American Cookery* by James Beard, the great gourmand of the Northwest, an eater of fish. Would I dine on chowder, fish stew, oysters? I would decide after I arrived and saw what was fresh.

Returning to Nature

As long as I can remember, I have loved the Olympic coast's severe beauty, how the clouds change the water from gray-green to slate black

and the forests topple into the sea. Family vacations introduced me to the far northern beaches and rain forests, so I was anxious to get intimate with the gentler coast around Ocean Shores. My sister's family has a cabin at Lake Quinalt, an hour north and inland from Ocean Shores, and I planned to drive there a day early to sleep amid giant old-growth trees and get a head start on my exploration.

Three hours from Seattle, I bypass Ocean Shores and turn north, driving 20-odd miles of scenic coast to Moclips, where I walk into the Ocean Crest restaurant just in time for dinner. Fine Northwest Indian woodcarvings lead to a cozy cork-and-wood dining room, with a view through the trees of the breakers below. A plate of homey bread, oil and vinegar tempts me to try a couple of specials—six fine-flavored baked Goose Point oysters from Willapa Bay, then a really nice shrimp fettuccine with a hint of basil and garlic, topped with an edible red orchid. The bartender, who knows his wines, steers me to a lovely Washington Sauvignon Blanc, and I finish with a glass of vintage Port with Beethoven playing in the background. A fantastic splurge.

After spending a rustic night in the cabin, I head back to the coast to prowl the oceanside



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VIEW FROM MARINER VILLAGE / PHOTO BY DAN STEARNS

communities, starting at Moclips with its driftwood fences, wood- and shake-sided cottages, A-frames, cracker boxes and log cabins, all in various stages of returning to nature. As I head south, the beach-front forest and earthen cliffs gradually give way to low grassy dunes. At Ocean City, a faded, painted sign for Granita's Baked Goods lures me inside past flower boxes and genial disarray. I buy a loaf of whole wheat bread, two doughy hippy-style sweet rolls and an apple turnover.

Local Arts and Edibles

I roll into Ocean Shores on Point Brown Avenue a few hours before check-in and visit Gallery Marjuli to browse the regional artworks. The shop has nice things—art glass, ceramics, watercolors, primeval dreamscapes painted on silk. I fall in love with Nancy Bowman's colored-pencil "Portugal Country-side," where dark-bottomed clouds billow in a light gray sky and a whitewashed village shines under an unseen sun. She's captured a moment of change. It's beautiful, and cheap at \$225 for an 11x14-inch original. But last night's dinner splurge has left me short of cash.

The area has a small reputation for collectibles, so I pull in a few doors down at Ocean Shores Antiques, where I am greeted by a display case featuring flow-blue Delft ceramics. But no sooner do I look at a table of knickknacks than a Clyde Drexler Wheaties box reminds me that my mission here is food and sports. I leave to find some fish.

On a tip from my sister, I stop across the street at Mike's Seafood and buy one of their excellent cooked crabs plus a pound and a half of steamer clams to get me through the evening. Then I double-back a block to the IGA and find some treasures—long, wiggly white potatoes resembling fingerlings and the best head of escarole I've seen in years, with lots of tender pale-yellow leaves. The green beans also look good for mid-winter. I get some of each.

A left turn onto Chance-A-La-Mer brings me to Murphy's Homemade Ice Cream and Candy,

where a scoop of yellow French vanilla is very tasty on a homemade waffle cone. The chocolate-dipped maraschino cherries and almond-and-chocolate-covered English toffee are yummy, too, though I am not convinced by the cranberry fudge. The shop also has a soda fountain with a cute counter and new circular stools.

All the Comforts of Home

It's fast approaching 4:00 p.m. and the Super Bowl has just started, so I drive the long Ocean Shores Boulevard beach road nearly to the tip of the peninsula and check into the resort. Quickly inside, I flip on the big TV. It's midway through the first quarter and the favored Rams are up 3-0, but it's not the predicted blowout and the Patriot defense is looking good. I pour myself a glass of wine and inspect the modern full kitchen. It's got everything I need: big pots, kitchen shears with a crab cracker, even some stylish French nesting bowls that I wish I owned, with plastic covers for storage. The earth-toned furnishings are solid and new. I dump the clams into a pot and start cracking the crab, watching the game while standing at the tall kitchen island.

By the second quarter, I'm dredging cold crab and hot clams through lemon butter as the Patriots return an interception 47 yards for touchdown to lead 7-3. Delicious. The potatoes are browning, the green beans are boiling, the wine is excellent, and the Patriots lead 14-3 at the half. I flip on the gas fire and make the escarole salad. Life is good.

Outside, a towering white cloud turns yellow and pink in the late-afternoon sun. My neighbors and I drift onto our patios to watch the colors deepen. A burly guy in a second-floor unit, with a view of the breakers, takes photographs. No one is watching the halftime show. I eat perfect potatoes and beans with my fingers at the patio table in the gentle salt breeze.

For desert, the Patriots win on a 48-yard field goal as time expires. Granita's flaky apple turnover is superb. Everything has turned out much better than expected. I fall asleep on the long, comfortable couch.

Rediscovering Youth

Monday starts with an hour-long hypnotic walk on the sand just 10 yards over the dunes right outside my unit. Only a few people are out this morning—scattered singles and pairs. A lone fisherman in waders casts into the surf. I'm fascinated by all the colorful pebbles—jellybean-sized quartz, a light granite disk, a smooth blue-green oval. I am five years old. I reach the North Jetty with so many rocks in my pockets that my pants are falling down. I find a tiny, coiled seashell. I climb up the jetty's boulders and see the blasted cone of Mount St. Helens
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LAKE TAHOE *continued from page 9*

Ride the Sky

To get a touch of heaven right here on earth, ride the gondola at Heavenly, only five minutes from your newest WorldMark resort. Once you embark, the gondola will whisk you from mid-town to mid-mountain in just 12 minutes. At the observation deck, you'll be treated to breathtaking views of Carson Valley to the east and Desolation Wilderness to the west—not to mention shore-to-shore views of Lake Tahoe. In the summer, the gondola is a fantastic way to reach grand vistas. In winter, it will save you the hassle of driving up to the slopes.

Hike the Vistas

After the Heavenly gondola deposits you high above the lake, you can choose between three hiking trails—the Sky Meadows Trail, the East Peak Trail and the East Peak Lake Trail. They range from two to five miles, and free trail maps are provided at the observation deck. In addition, trail markers and interpretive signs provide information about the history and geography of the region—and help you find your way. Depending on the weather, hiking in Tahoe is possible from late May until the end of September.

Drive the Rubicon

I own a Jeep Wrangler. It goes where most cars can only dream of traveling. And one place it must go is on the Rubicon Trail. Four-wheeling enthusiasts around the world acknowledge the Rubicon as one of the most challenging off-road trails in existence. If you don't own an off-road vehicle but are still up for the dare, contact Lake Tahoe Adventures at 1-530-541-2985. This company offers guided tours by ATVs (which you drive) or Jeeps (which they drive), varying from two hours to multi-day adventures. The trail opening date depends on snow pack. And speaking of snow—when the white stuff falls, those trails turn into snowmobile trails and LTA offers similar tours.

Play the Links

There's more than one "tee" in Tahoe. In fact, the area is blessed with several pro-caliber golf courses. A conversation with any golfer will include the mention of Edgewood—arguably the best among all Tahoe greens. A par 72 featuring 14 water holes and slick, undulating greens, this golfer's paradise will keep all players captivated. Other standout options include the Lake Tahoe Golf Course and the Tahoe Donner Golf and Country Club in nearby Truckee.

With so much to do year round, Lake Tahoe is a destination the whole family will enjoy. And you'll never forget the blues of that high mountain lake. While your kids may get most excited about standing in two states at once, they might also grow up to appreciate all the places you took them. They might even call and thank you for it someday—which reminds me, I've got a phone call to make. 🌲

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dominating the hazy southern horizon. A black-bottomed ship pulls out of Grays Harbor for the open ocean. I search for whales, but it's too early in the season.

Hunger stirs again. Today, last night's leftovers look like a promising new start—crab chunks, clams, clam broth. I'm thinking cioppino, the great red-wine-and-tomato fish stew. I head back to Mike's for a nice slab of fresh halibut and a few shrimp, then to the IGA for plump cherry tomatoes and—the secret ingredient—fresh sprigs of basil.

On the drive, the Olympic Mountains are radiant. I see boys chasing girls at the go-cart track. Golfers are out in pastel sweaters. Young families are riding horses along the water. A few mopeds putt along the shore. I'm delighted by the sight of a blue-and-white porpoise kite undulating, dipping, wriggling in the sky. Back at my unit, it lures me onto the beach again. Other kites are coming out, too. Up climbs a stately red-white-and-blue box kite with curved wings. More pink-nosed fun in the breeze.

Inside, loosely following Beard, I simmer the new ingredients with the clam broth and a big glass of red wine, then add the leftover crab and clams and sit down to a deliriously good bowl of the deep.

Comedy of the Birds

Tuesday morning I awake to moderate rain. I check out of my unit and head for Damon Point

and the marshy nesting grounds of the rare Snowy Plover. The road is gated shut, but the rain has stopped. I walk a quarter mile to where the road is washed out, then follow a stream inland to a long pond. And there are the plovers—small white-bellied, brown-backed birds zipping around and through dish-sized puddles in the marsh, legs aflutter, stopping dead still for an impossible millisecond to bob a beak in the water, then continuing on at exactly the same speed.

I take a shell-strewn path through the dunes to the ocean and stroll around the point. A gull picks at a salmon carcass. A heron hunts the surf, hunching its elegant neck tight to its shoulders and taking exaggerated long, slow strides, like a burlesque routine: "Walk *this* way."

By now it's mid-afternoon and I'm famished. I drive to Alec's By the Sea and wolf down a plate of no-surprises fish-and-chips—a reminder that food is foremost to replenish the body.

Restored, I can't leave town without one more look at the Nancy Bowman picture. Back at Marjuli, I take off my glasses to study its clouds. From a distance they look stippled, almost like an etching, but up close it's difficult to make out the individual pencil strokes. I could look at it forever and want to take it home, but I just don't have the scratch. So I drive away, melancholy with unrequited love. 🌲

