





A photograph of the interior of a glamping tent. In the foreground, a brown leather chair with a black metal frame sits on a light-colored wooden floor. To the left, a dark green trunk with brass hardware is on a woven mat. In the background, a wooden bed frame with a white pillow and a white curtain is visible. The lighting is bright and natural, coming from a window on the left.

# GIRLS GO GLAMPING

A Trip to **Mendocino Grove**

BY LINDA LENHOFF

**SURELY YOU'VE HEARD ABOUT IT BY NOW**, and maybe you've pictured yourself trying it: glamping. A rustic tent cabin with a plush-but-firm bed awaits you in a wooded forest, with high-thread count sheets and soft, woolly blankets. It's not your mother's camping trip (or should I say father's?) — no smelly sleeping bag and air mattress that tends to deflate after a couple of hours. This is luxurious, glamorous camping: the perfect contrast to sleeping on the ground for a few nights just to get a little fresh air in your system.

As you might have guessed, I'm not a super enthusiastic camper. I've done my share of camping so that my daughter will have those camping memories of waking up to birds singing and lighting a campfire (while her mom tries not to complain too much and spoil everything). But glamping always struck me as an attractive possibility, with just a touch of too good to be true in the (fresh) air. ▶▶

PHOTOS BY MENDOCINOGROVE.COM





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So naturally, when Mendocino Grove invited me to write about its spot high above the ocean, I knew my opportunity was here, and I thought about my now-grown daughter, and the equation came out like this: Girls Go Glamping!

Will I sleep through the night? Will I awake with dawn's early light? (I do like to sleep in a little, so this is not a plus.) Will I long for the new organic mattress I just purchased for my bedroom at home? Will I be warm enough? (A constant question.) And of course: Will my daughter and I still be speaking after glamping together for a few days?

### **Mendocino Grove: Modern Camping**

Or so the website claims, and it's true. We found the place pretty easily by following the directions sent to us after we registered. We drove up the curvy road to the top of the hill to reach the check-

in tent — and some pretty awesome trees. Then, it was off to our own campsite. Mendocino Grove is well-set up at first look — and a detailed tour shows that husband-and-wife owners Teresa Raffo and Chris Hougie have put some serious thought into the 36-acre property — along with a lot of plain-old hard work. Mendocino Grove is flourishing.

You have your choice of “glampsites.” For a romantic visit or even a girls’ getaway for two, the Classic Tents (12-by-14 feet) are roomy, homey, and a huge improvement from our old Girl Scout tents (now thoroughly ripped up). The sturdy, light tents all sit on firm wooden foundations (so there’s no bumpy patches of earth to deal with at all). Inside, you’ll find an inviting bed with down-filled comforters and rustic wool blankets. Family tents (16-by-20 feet) have a comfy big bed, plus additional bunkbeds (for the family, of course, or how about even more girls for your girls’ getaway?). Features vary but include nightstands, a solid-yet-small desk to write on (postcards are provided gratis, another wonderful small detail Mendocino Grove doesn’t forget to include). Our tent had a couple of chairs, a chest at the front of the bed, a coat rack I covered with the variety of coats I’d brought (plus hats) for staying warm even in the summer, and more. There are also night lamps and you can plug in your phones for recharging, along with your computer if you just had to bring it — but try not to. Larger tents come with dressers and drawers for all your kids’ socks. You’ll also find your own high-power lantern — which may easily become your new best friend. That is, if it weren’t for the heated mattress pads, with his-and-hers, or hers-and-hers, controls. This, I believe, is what Edison originally had in mind for electricity. Even in July, it was chilly at night (okay, 50s). My daughter heated her side up to 5 before bed. I put mine at 17. I have rarely been this happy.

Rest assured, you won’t want to spend all your time in bed. Each site comes with a picnic table and fire pit. Ours had a long wonderful log that set us apart from the rest of the world (I liked to think) and a view of the ocean and coastal trees. Everything smelled good, inside and out. And the tent was clean — as in your mother’s clean. There’s even a little broom to keep

your floor and rugs tidy should you be that kind of person. (Honestly, I only swept once in three nights — I got over it fast.)

Stop in town at Harvest Market at Mendosa’s for supplies to cook up camp dinner (including freshly made specialties and a solid selection of fine wines), or BYO. My daughter whipped up gluten-free quesadillas in a pan over the fire she built. You can purchase very inexpensive local wood at the camp office for your fire. Even better, when you make your reservation, order a camp box, which Mendocino Grove fills with a country-style tablecloth, set of plates, drinking glasses, mugs, bowls, eating and cooking utensils, paper towels, salt and pepper, plus a fry pan and pot — pretty much everything you may have forgotten to bring, and really don’t need to. We also picked up a s’mores kit from camp, filled with fresh graham crackers, puffy marshmallows, plenty of chocolate, and well-built skewers for after dinner, which never comes fast enough. You do have to wash your own dishes at the sinks, I’m afraid. But well-tended cooking stations (featuring handsome gas barbecues) are located throughout the area so you can grill with ease.

Any time of day, the meadow in the center of Mendocino Grove beckons with a great campfire surrounded by relaxing Adirondack chairs (and blankets). This is the place to kick back and get a cup of coffee or tea. Choose from a variety of excellent teas the owners hand pick — which during our stay included ginger, white tea, Earl Gray, and their special herbal “Dandy Blend.” Vegans will appreciate the variety of milks available (almond, soy, regular, and more). In the mornings, feast on a light breakfast of yogurt, healthy snack bars, and fruits. And take an apple for later — glamping makes you hungry.

### **Where to Go Once You Can Bear to Leave the Grove**

The beach, or should I say beaches. Whether you’re a sun lover or a beachcomber, Mendocino has you covered. We spent hours at Glass Beach, and while reviews on Yelp and Trip Advisor may warn that there’s no glass left, just keep looking. I discovered I can spend endless amounts of time searching for the rare piece of blue and red hidden beneath the piles of black and white. ►►







“SOMEWHERE IN ALL THIS, RENT YOURSELF A CANOE AT CATCH A CANOE, JUST ACROSS THE STREET FROM MENDOCINO GROVE.”

There are also paths to take you to more interesting spots during low tide, and plenty of other gold diggers to chat with as you while away a morning (or afternoon or evening, just saying). Stop by the Sea Glass Museum in nearby (and super friendly) Fort Bragg, where the owner will direct you to secret spots and share with you amazing sea glass history. Plus it's free and on the way to the beach!

Other must-sees include Mission Gulch State Park, where you can hike to a waterfall; Mendocino Headlands Trail, a simple trail along the bluff; and my favorite, Black Sand Beach in Fort Bragg, where you can truly lay back under blue skies and enjoy the view of blue waves (on silky black sand with tiny pebbles). Do stop at the enchanting

Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, a 47-acre explosion of flowers, which has a great plant shop and a little café perfect for lunch. The parking lot is nearly full for good reason.

Tired of campfire food? Locals recommend a number of in-town (as in just down the road) cafés: There's the Mendocino Café with deck seating and Thai-inspired cuisine; Mendocino Hotel for upscale bistro fare and California wines; and Café Beaujolais for refined seasonal dining. We also loved casual Frankie's for divine pizza. When you're in Fort Bragg, you'll never find a nicer place than Headlands Coffeehouse, where we had scrumptious quiche and enchiladas, and were treated to a jazz quartet and the nicest people

ever. I saw plates of dreamy tiramisu whisk by, too. And stop by Cowlick's for handmade ice cream. Though the locals advised us to try the mushroom flavor, which they swore was sweet and one of a kind, I recommend the black raspberry chocolate chunk. They had me at black raspberry.

Somewhere in all this, rent yourself a canoe at Catch a Canoe, just across the street from Mendocino Grove. Catering to families, pets, beginners, and major league adventurers, they'll set you up with an ultra-stable redwood outrigger or canoe so you can explore the Big River up close, and watch the birds nest high in the trees. On our trip, a couple of seals and river otters greeted us with smiles and upturned tummies. Do not miss this memorable highlight to any visit to Mendocino — then head back to the grove and your welcoming campsite to finish off your trip — maybe with a bottle of wine you picked up in town, or at least a s'more or two. You've earned it after all that rowing, which will give you the greatest appreciation of peaceful Mendocino. ♣



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