

# Asilomar State Beach & Conference Grounds



## Our Mission

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**Discover the many states of California.™**

## Asilomar State Beach & Conference Grounds

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*The open beach gives  
way to a rocky  
shoreline that shelters  
several small sandy  
coves—perfect  
for picnicking or  
watching wildlife.*



**Asilomar, meaning “refuge by the sea,”** offers park visitors

the chance to explore the natural beauty of this coastal park and to learn of its colorful history as the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) conference grounds and summer camp designed by the renowned architect Julia Morgan.

From the beginning, Asilomar has served as a retreat for those who wished to escape the pressures of an increasingly fast-paced world. Enhanced by the natural beauty surrounding the facility, Asilomar offers a peaceful oasis for educational and spiritual retreats, and a place for individuals and families to spend a quiet and relaxing time together.

### **PARK HISTORY**

The earliest residents of this area were the Rumsien people, groups of extended families who lived on Monterey’s abundant sea life, various seeds and acorns, and large and small game. Their homes and sailing rafts were constructed from the ever-present tules and other grasses.

Their way of life changed dramatically with the arrival in the late 1700s of Spanish settlers who claimed the land for their home country. The missions forced native people into the church, and many went to work as ranch laborers. The 1848 gold discovery later brought scores of thousands to California. Chinese settlers established fishing villages, and Portuguese settlers arrived to ply their whaleboats off the coast.



*The Grace H. Dodge Chapel, designed by architect Julia Morgan*

In 1897 at the first western conference of the YWCA—the world’s oldest multicultural women’s group—the organization decided to open a center for educational and vocational training in California. Asilomar became their permanent west coast conference grounds and summer camp in 1913. William Crocker, owner of what is now known as the Pebble Beach Company, donated the original 30 acres of land to the YWCA. Renowned San Francisco architect Julia Morgan, hired to design and build a facility that matched the spirit of the project and the beauty of the land, designed 16 structures in the classic Arts and Crafts style.

When Asilomar opened its doors for the first time, young women came from around the world. Student Leadership Conferences drew YWCA college-age women, while the ten-day summer camps were designed for YWCA Girl Reserves, aged 14 to 16.



*Photo of Julia Morgan taken in 1926  
Courtesy of University Archives, California  
Polytechnic State University*

However, by 1935 harsh economic times caused the National Board to close the conference grounds. A succession of operators leased the grounds from the YWCA in the late 1930s and early 1940s for their own businesses. When the property was placed on the market in 1951, public-spirited citizens fought to preserve this unique natural and cultural site for future generations. Asilomar became a unit of the California State Park System on July 1, 1956.

Today Asilomar State Beach and Conference Grounds totals 107 acres and includes the William Penn Mott Jr. Training Center, the hub of State Parks’ employee training. Guest services throughout the conference grounds are provided by a hospitality concessionaire.

### **NATURAL RESOURCES**

#### **The Dunes**

Adjacent to the conference grounds, 26 acres of restored sand dunes provide a significant ecological boundary between the shoreline and the coniferous forest.

Park resource staff began to restore Asilomar’s dunes in 1984, after the dunes and plants had been severely trampled and nearly destroyed by more than a century of livestock grazing, recreational activities, and uncontrolled public access.

Restoration began with the eradication of the non-native ice plant. Bulldozers reconstructed the dunes into a series of parallel ridges, and the seeds of over 20 species of native

dune plants were planted in stabilizing mulch that held the dunes in place while the plants were becoming established. The half-mile, meandering Dune Boardwalk now guides visitors through the dunes without damaging the fragile ecosystem. Today life in the dunes is once again flourishing.

### The Beach

A one-mile coast trail provides easy walking and allows park visitors the opportunity to explore the treasures of Asilomar State Beach. At the head of the trail, a strip of unbroken white beach sand provides easy access to the ocean. Distinct from other Monterey Bay beaches, where beach sand is derived primarily from sediment in freshwater drainage, the sand for Asilomar comes from wave abrasion and weathering of local granodiorite rocks found along the shoreline. You may see harbor seals, California sea lions and sea otters swimming in the cold waters, feeding on crabs and fish, or resting on “haul out” rocks at low tide. The coastline at Asilomar State Beach is part of the Pacific Grove Marine Garden Fish Refuge and the National Monterey Bay Marine Sanctuary.

### The Forest

When architect Julia Morgan designed the layout of buildings for Asilomar, she was acutely aware that the wealth of the forest was as important as the buildings that would define Asilomar's character. Asilomar's native Monterey pine forest is an ancient, complex



*Deer are abundant in the forest.*

ecosystem that is found in only three local areas—the Monterey peninsula, Año Nuevo and Cambria.

Forest management strategies at Asilomar emphasize long-term forest ecosystem health that includes not just the trees but also the animals, the air, the soil, the plants, even the micro-organisms that together form a delicately balanced web of life.

Deer, raccoons and foxes are frequently sighted. Acorn woodpeckers flash about displaying their bright black, white and red feathers, while crows and hawks soar from limb to limb in the canopies of the tallest trees. White-crowned sparrows sing in the sand dunes, and robins in the forest provide melodious songs from the air.

### RECREATION

Park rangers provide a variety of cultural and natural history walks. Self-guided walking or audio tours are also available at the park store.

Visitors can spend their leisure time bird watching, strolling along the beach, bicycling, swimming in the heated pool, or playing a game of billiards, ping pong or volleyball.

### PLEASE REMEMBER

- Stay on paved areas, boardwalks and trails.
- Do not collect or disturb animals or plants on the beach or in the tide pools. Feeding, harassing or injuring animals is prohibited.
- Use only wood from wood boxes; do not collect wood in the forest.
- The maximum speed limit on the conference grounds is 15 mph.
- No campfires are allowed on the beach.
- Dogs must be on a six-foot leash at all

- times. Do not leave pets unattended.
- Park only in designated parking spaces.

### ACCESSIBILITY

- The Dune Boardwalk and Coast Trail are accessible.
  - A free beach wheelchair is available by reservation only. (831) 646-6440
  - TTY for guest use is available at the front desk on the conference grounds. Dial 711 for TTY relay service.
  - A temporary parking permit is offered to guests with mobility limitations.
  - Free shuttle service is available to all guests.
- Accessibility is continually improving. For current accessibility details, visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov>.

### ACCOMMODATIONS

Asilomar's concessionaire offers a full service facility of year-round meeting rooms, overnight lodging, dining and catering for special events, including weddings.

There are 18 private conference and meeting rooms, ranging from a 650-seat lecture hall to an intimate gathering space for up to 10 individuals. Fireplaces add a unique charm to several of the meeting rooms.

Lodging includes 312 guestrooms with private baths. Many rooms feature fireplaces, balconies or private decks. Some rooms are equipped with special accessibility features. There are no televisions or telephones in the rooms.

Three meals a day, chef's choice, full course fixed menu, are included in a conference package. For leisure guests staying overnight, breakfast, lunch and dinner are available by reservation. For reservations, call (888) 635-5310 or see [www.visitasilomar.com](http://www.visitasilomar.com).

# Asilomar

State Beach and Conference Grounds

## Legend

- |  |                   |   |                    |
|--|-------------------|---|--------------------|
|  | Road              |  | Accessible Feature |
|  | Trail             |  | Nature Trail       |
|  | State Park        |  | Parking            |
|  | Sand Dunes        |  | Ranger Station     |
|  | Historic Building |  | Restrooms          |
|  | Park Building     |  | Swimming           |
|  |                   |  | Telephone          |

