

Fort Bragg / Westport Stone Family Punch List

January in town | August via Branscomb Road

Adults-only dates, family outings, kid missions, road stops, pools and open water

Team Stone on the Mendocino coast

Built for repeat trips, not first-timer tourism.

Choose one major outing, one food anchor, and one weather-proof backup for each day.

The guide is organized for seasonal rotation, not a grim campaign to complete every checkbox.

REGULAR ROTATION

Princess Seafood; Casa del Sol; Westport beach;
Pudding Creek Trestle; Haul Road and dunes;
Noyo Harbor kayaking; playground and indoor pool.

SKIP / DEPRIORITIZE

No need to repeat Glass Beach from obligation.
North Coast Brewing is not a draw. Piaci's is out.
Anderson Valley is loved, but off the current route.

For Randall, Krista, Rhys and Karden

Team Stone edition | source guide updated July 29, 2026

randallstone.com/sites/teamstone/travel/guides/fort-bragg-westport/

Hours, rates, surf, water quality and road conditions change. Confirm before departure.

The Next-Trip Shortlist

The highest-value additions for people who already know the coast.

- ☐ **Moonlight Railbikes to Glen Blair Bar** ADULTS • SUMMER
 Two-person electric-assist railbikes, redwoods after dark, firepits, drinks and s'mores. Roughly four hours. This is the strongest adults-only "new experience" on the list.

- ☐ **Pacific Star + Westport Sunset + Old Abalone Pub** ADULTS • SUMMER
 Bluff-side wine tasting north of Fort Bragg, then sunset and dinner in Westport. Pacific Star is Friday-Sunday, noon-5. Old Abalone is a summer option, not January.

- ☐ **Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens** ALL AGES • BOTH SEASONS
 A true repeat destination: camellias in January; dahlias and peak perennials in August. Art in the Gardens is August 1-2, 2026.

- ☐ **Point Cabrillo Light Station** ALL AGES • BOTH SEASONS
 Lighthouse, bluff trails, marine exhibit and museums. The August 2026 lantern-room/lens tours fall on August 29-30.

- ☐ **Noyo Center + Harbor Food Circuit** FAMILY • RAIN BACKUP
 Crow's Nest on the coastal trail, Discovery Center downtown, then Princess Seafood or Casa del Sol. Add HarborView for a grown-up finish.

- ☐ **Jug Handle Ecological Staircase** ACTIVE • FAIR WEATHER
 Full ecological staircase is about five miles round trip and best for age 10+. Use the beach and first terraces for a shorter whole-family version.

- ☐ **Russian Gulch** FAMILY / ACTIVE DATE
 Redwoods, beach, iconic bridge, Punch Bowl and a waterfall hike. Especially worthwhile after winter rain.

- ☐ **Laguna Point Boardwalk** ALL AGES • BOTH SEASONS
 Easy half-mile accessible loop with harbor-seal and whale-watching overlooks. The low-effort, high-payoff coast stop.

- ☐ **Blue Wing Saloon at Upper Lake** ROAD DATE
 The best true date/meal stop on the inland route: restored stagecoach-era setting, garden seating and frequent live music.

- ☐ **Willits Museum + Roots of Motive Power** KIDS / FAMILY • ROAD STOP
 Logging, railroad and regional history. Strongest inland kid-centered stop when hours or events line up.

Adults-Only Date Circuits

Complete pairings that do not require surrendering half the day to Anderson Valley.

Summer dates

☐ **Redwoods After Dark** **TOP PICK**

Moonlight railbikes to Glen Blair Bar. Reserve early, dress in layers, and treat this as the evening's main event.

☐ **North Coast Bluff Date** **WESTPORT**

Pacific Star Winery, then Westport beach or bluff sunset, followed by Old Abalone Pub. Check dinner reservations and summer operating nights.

☐ **Garden + Dinner** **EASY / POLISHED**

Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens after 2:00 p.m. for a quieter walk, then KW Saltwater Grill or HarborView Bistro.

☐ **Point Cabrillo + Fort Bragg Dinner** **COASTAL**

Late-afternoon lighthouse and bluff walk, then return north for KW Saltwater Grill. In late August, target the lens-tour weekend.

☐ **Harbor Progressive Date** **NO EXTRA DRIVE**

Walk the Noyo Headlands South Trail and Crow's Nest, share seafood at Princess or Casa del Sol, then cocktails or dessert at HarborView.

☐ **Mendocino Theatre Night** **SOUTH, BUT WORTHWHILE**

Check the current production calendar and pair a show with an early Fort Bragg dinner or a post-show drink.

January dates

☐ **Whales, Lighthouse, Harbor Dinner** **WINTER SIGNATURE**

Point Cabrillo or Laguna Point in a clear weather window, then HarborView or KW. Keep well back from bluff edges and surf.

☐ **Camellias + Cozy Dinner** **LOW-STRESS**

Botanical Gardens winter collections, coffee in town, then a deliberate dinner rather than another "we'll grab something" collapse.

☐ **Storm-Watch Day, Safely** **WEATHER-DEPENDENT**

Use established overlooks only; do not improvise on cliffs or jetties. Follow with Noyo Harbor food and a warm bar.

JANUARY REALITY CHECK

Old Abalone Pub currently closes from mid-December into early February, and Pacific Star closes all of December but may be available in January on its normal weekend schedule. Verify before building the day around either one.

Adults + Kids

Family outings that remain interesting after the adults have already seen the obvious attractions.

Noyo Marine Science Pairing FAMILY Crow's Nest: daily 11-3 on the South Coastal Trail. Discovery Center: Thursday-Monday 11-5 downtown. Pair with harbor lunch.	Point Cabrillo FAMILY Half-mile walk from the upper lot, lighthouse museums 11-4 daily, broad bluff trails and marine exhibits.
Botanical Gardens FAMILY Use a photo scavenger hunt. January: camellias and winter texture. August: dahlias, begonias and peak perennial color.	Russian Gulch ACTIVE Choose the beach/headlands for a lighter outing or the waterfall hike for a substantial family adventure.
Jug Handle ACTIVE Full ecological staircase for Rhys-ready stamina; beach and lower terraces for a shorter whole-family version.	Laguna Point EASY Half-mile boardwalk, seals, whale-watching platforms and tidepool access when conditions and tide are right.
Pudding Creek Railbikes / Train RAIL Railbikes are a seasonal family outing; the Pudding Creek Express is a shorter year-round redwood option.	Willits Museum Day ROAD Mendocino County Museum plus Roots of Motive Power. Best when a steam or demonstration event aligns.

Kid-centered missions

- ☐ **Coastal Wildlife Count** **KID MISSION**
Track seals, sea lions, otters, pelicans, osprey and whales. One point per species; no points for gulls because civilization must maintain standards.
- ☐ **Botanical Photo Challenge** **KID MISSION**
Best strange plant, best insect, best ocean frame, best color, and plant most likely to be plotting something.
- ☐ **Tidepool Bingo** **KID MISSION**
Anemone, limpet, crab, snail, mussel, seaweed and a "mystery organism." Look, photograph and leave everything in place.
- ☐ **Dunes Time Trial** **KID MISSION**
Use the MacKerricher/Haul Road territory you already love, but rotate the challenge: sprint, relay, photography or sand engineering.
- ☐ **Railroad History Hunt** **KID MISSION**
Find a steam component, logging artifact, caboose detail and one machine nobody can identify without reading the placard.
- ☐ **Harbor Science Journal** **KID MISSION**
Sketch one working boat, one marine animal and one harbor structure; add one question to research later.

August Rotation

Choose one major outing per day. Coastal fog is not a scheduling failure; it is simply the coast refusing to perform on command.

Morning choices

- ☐ **Botanical Gardens early MORNING**
Arrive before 11 for quieter trails and strong dahlia/perennial color.
- ☐ **Jug Handle staircase MORNING**
Start before the day warms; carry water and allow enough time for the full route.
- ☐ **Laguna Point seals MORNING**
Easy first outing before a larger afternoon plan.
- ☐ **Westport beach morning MORNING**
Keep one day deliberately unprogrammed around camp and the water.
- ☐ **Dunes / Haul Road run MORNING**
A regular staple, but worth keeping as the trip's exercise anchor.

Afternoon choices

- ☐ **Noyo Center + Princess or Casa del Sol AFTERNOON**
Marine science, coastal trail and the harbor food you already know you love.
- ☐ **Point Cabrillo AFTERNOON**
Museums, lighthouse and bluff trails; target August 29-30, 2026 for lens tours if your dates align.
- ☐ **Pudding Creek railbikes or train AFTERNOON**
Reserve ahead. Keep the longer Noyo railbike experience for a day with real time available.
- ☐ **Russian Gulch AFTERNOON**
Beach and headlands, or commit to the waterfall hike.
- ☐ **Pacific Star Winery AFTERNOON**
Adults-focused. Friday-Sunday, noon-5; children are restricted from bluff areas.

Evening choices

- ☐ **Moonlight railbikes + Glen Blair EVENING**
The special-event night. Do not stack another major activity on top of it.
- ☐ **Westport sunset + Old Abalone EVENING**
Thursday-Sunday summer dinner schedule; reservation strongly advisable.
- ☐ **Harbor progressive dinner EVENING**
Princess or Casa del Sol, walk, then HarborView for drinks or dessert.
- ☐ **KW Saltwater Grill EVENING**
The polished downtown dinner option.
- ☐ **Camp evening EVENING**
Fire, beach, games and absolutely no need to "maximize" the day.

AUGUST 2026 EVENT FLAGS

Art in the Gardens: August 1-2. Point Cabrillo lens tours: August 29-30. Event availability, railbike schedules and restaurant hours should be confirmed once the exact trip dates are fixed.

January Rotation

Winter is a different trip, not merely August with wetter shoes.

Clear + Calm BEST WEATHER Point Cabrillo; Laguna Point; Botanical Gardens; Russian Gulch; long coastal walk; harbor dinner.	Light Rain / Fog WORKABLE Noyo Discovery Center; Grace Hudson Museum en route; botanical winter collections in proper gear; cafés and galleries.
Hard Rain INDOOR Indoor pool; Noyo Discovery Center; museum stop; long meal; games and reading. Avoid turning misery into a character-building expedition.	High Surf / Storm SAFETY FIRST Watch only from established, setback viewpoints. No jetties, cliff edges or tidepools. Move the day toward museums and harbor dining.

January priority list

- ☐ **Whale-watch window** **WINTER SIGNATURE**
Use Laguna Point or Point Cabrillo when visibility and wind cooperate.
- ☐ **Botanical camellias** **SEASONAL**
Typical bloom season runs January-March. Pair with town lunch or dinner.
- ☐ **Russian Gulch waterfall** **AFTER RAIN**
Winter rain improves the waterfall, but trail conditions must govern the decision.
- ☐ **Noyo Center double-header** **RAIN-PROOF CORE**
Discovery Center plus Crow's Nest if the weather allows the coastal trail.
- ☐ **HarborView or KW dinner** **DINNER**
Reliable adults-only or family meal anchors when Westport dining is seasonally limited.
- ☐ **Grace Hudson Museum** **ROAD / INDOOR**
Use on the inbound or outbound drive when the coast is thoroughly uncooperative.
- ☐ **Mendocino County Museum** **ROAD / INDOOR**
Willits stop, Wednesday-Saturday; winter Sunday hours can differ.

WINTER PACKING DOCTRINE

Waterproof outer layers, dry shoes in the car, binoculars, towels, warm drinks and one complete indoor backup. Conditions can change faster than anyone's enthusiasm.

The Road West

I-5 to Highway 20, Clear Lake, Ukiah, Willits, Laytonville and Branscomb Road.

I-5	Williams	Clear Lake	Ukiah	Willits	Laytonville	Westport
-----	----------	------------	-------	---------	-------------	----------

Stops worth making

Williams	FAST RESET BOTH	Granzella's for restroom, deli sandwiches, bakery, olives and coast supplies. Open daily; easy I-5/Highway 20 transition.
Upper Lake	ROAD DATE BOTH	Blue Wing Saloon at the Tallman Hotel. Historic setting, garden dining and frequent live music. Best inland meal stop.
Ukiah	INDOOR / CULTURE JANUARY WIN	Grace Hudson Museum: regional art, Pomo culture and the historic Sun House. Wednesday-Sunday; closed Monday-Tuesday.
Willits	KIDS / HISTORY BOTH	Mendocino County Museum and Roots of Motive Power. Strongest kid-centered stop if hours or demonstration events align.
Laytonville	LAST SERVICES AUGUST ROUTE	Handle fuel, food and restroom needs before committing to Branscomb Road.

Window visions – enjoy without inventing unsafe stops

- ☐ **Highway 20 west of Williams** **WINDOW VISION**
Watch the valley flattening give way to Cache Creek hills and tighter canyon country.
- ☐ **Clear Lake north shore** **WINDOW VISION**
Long water views through Clearlake Oaks, Lucerne, Nice and Upper Lake.
- ☐ **Blue Lakes corridor** **WINDOW VISION**
A sharp shift into forest and bright water west of Upper Lake.
- ☐ **Branscomb Road** **WINDOW VISION**
Dry interior hills to river country, then deeper forest, ridge crossing and the sudden Pacific reveal.

ROAD RULE

Use legal, obvious pullouts only. Branscomb Road and parts of Highway 20 are not suitable for spontaneous scenic braking. Check Caltrans QuickMap for state highways and Mendocino County's road-closure page for county roads immediately before departure.

Master Punch List

A single page to mark up, photograph, and reuse every January and August.

Adults-only dates ☐ Moonlight railbikes to Glen Blair Bar ☐ Pacific Star + Westport sunset + Old Abalone ☐ Botanical Gardens + KW or HarborView ☐ Point Cabrillo + dinner ☐ Harbor progressive date ☐ Mendocino Theatre night	Family outings ☐ Noyo Center Crow's Nest ☐ Noyo Discovery Center ☐ Point Cabrillo ☐ Botanical Gardens ☐ Russian Gulch ☐ Jug Handle ☐ Laguna Point ☐ Pudding Creek railbikes / train
Kid missions ☐ Wildlife count ☐ Botanical photo challenge ☐ Tidepool bingo ☐ Dunes time trial ☐ Railroad history hunt ☐ Harbor science journal	Road stops ☐ Granzella's - Williams ☐ Blue Wing - Upper Lake ☐ Grace Hudson Museum - Ukiah ☐ Mendocino County Museum - Willits ☐ Roots of Motive Power ☐ Branscomb window-vision drive

Trip-specific notes

Swimming & Pool Strategy

Pool-first in January, lake-first in August, ocean only when conditions earn it.

STONE FAMILY RULE A pool is an activity; a hotel pool is a booking filter; the Pacific is not a substitute for either.

C.V. Starr Community Center RELIABLE HOME-BASE SWIM

- Competition pool for laps plus a leisure pool with lazy river, slide, spray features, diving board and summer Swim/Slide/Splash sessions.
- Current summer Swim/Slide/Splash: Monday-Thursday and Saturday-Sunday, 1:00-4:00 p.m.; schedules vary, so scan the link before leaving camp or hotel.
- Nonresident drop-in: \$16 adult and \$14 youth. Two adults plus two youth = \$60, so treat it as the day's paid attraction rather than an incidental dip.

Winter Hotel Pool Scorecard BOOK THE POOL, NOT THE LOGO

PROPERTY	POOL REALITY	STONE USE	CAUTION
Best Western Vista Manor	Indoor heated pool; free breakfast.	Best actual-swim candidate.	Confirm operating hours.
Seabird Lodge	Indoor pool + spa; listings show long hours.	Best value / evening-use candidate.	Verify hours directly.
Motel 6 Fort Bragg	Pool listed as under renovation in July 2026.	Do not book for the pool.	Conflicting websites.
Holiday Inn Express	Official IHG page says no pool.	Breakfast hotel, not swim hotel.	Outdated filters mislead.

The Five-Question Pool Call BEFORE PAYING

- | | |
|--|--|
| ☐ Is the pool open for our exact dates? | ☐ Can we swim before check-in or after check-out? |
| ☐ Is it heated, and is the spa operating? | ☐ May we cancel without penalty if the pool closes? |
| ☐ What are the child/family hours? | |

Open Water & En-Route Swims

The warm inland water is the swimming opportunity; the coast remains the dramatic scenery.

JANUARY

C.V. Starr or verified hotel pool.

AUGUST

Lake swim en route; pool as fog-proof backup.

Best Open-Water Bets IN PRIORITY ORDER

1. Pomo Swim Beach - Lake Mendocino

The best practical family swim stop on the actual route. Designated swim beach, playground, picnic tables, grills and flush toilets. Summer day-use is typically 8:00 a.m.-8:00 p.m.; confirm before relying on it.

2. Blue Lakes - private day use

The prettier water stop. Access is generally through lakeside lodging or paid day use, so call first. Excellent for swimming and paddling, but four admissions can turn a roadside dip into the day's major paid outing.

3. Clearlake Oaks / Clear Lake

Convenient to Highway 20, but never a blind spontaneous swim. Check current bacterial data and harmful-algal-bloom information, and skip any water with scum, mats, foam, paint-like streaks or posted advisories.

4. Clear Lake State Park swim beach

A developed swim beach with shade, tables, restrooms and showers, but it is south of your normal north-shore route. Use only when Clear Lake itself is the planned destination.

Mendocino Coast Water Hierarchy BEAUTIFUL DOES NOT MEAN SWIMMABLE

Russian Gulch

The official park page permits swimming at the creek-mouth beach, but also warns of no continuous lifeguard coverage, rogue waves, very cold water and swift conditions. Calm-day shore swim only, never the family's casual lap venue.

Van Damme

A relatively protected cove and strong paddling/diving option. Better for kayaks and supervised water play than for an improvised open-water workout.

Westport-Union Landing

Beach play, running and wave watching. State Parks describes roughly 52-degree water and surging surf. That is a concise government way of saying the Pacific has declined your pool reservation.

Water Bag & Go / No-Go KEEP IT PACKED IN AUGUST

- ☐ Bright caps and goggles
- ☐ Adult tow float
- ☐ Water shoes / booties
- ☐ PFDs for paddling

- ☐ Warm changing layers
- ☐ Towels + changing mat
- ☐ Drinking water / warm drink
- ☐ Dry bag for phones and keys

NO-GO: posted advisory, visible bloom/scum, high surf, sneaker-wave risk, poor visibility, or unclear access.

Before Leaving

Confirm the handful of things that actually change. Schedules remain humanity's least stable invention.

- ☐ **Exact trip dates** CHECK
Check August event dates and any winter closures.

- ☐ **Rail reservations** CHECK
Moonlight railbikes and selected train experiences can sell out.

- ☐ **Westport dinner** CHECK
Confirm seasonal days and reserve Old Abalone when desired.

- ☐ **Hotel pool status** CHECK
Call the property directly; confirm pool, spa, heat, hours and child access.

- ☐ **Pool schedule + rates** CHECK
Check C.V. Starr lap, open-swim and Swim/Slide/Splash blocks.

- ☐ **Water quality + surf** CHECK
Check HABs, bacterial advisories, tide, wind, high surf and sneaker-wave risk.

- ☐ **Road status** CHECK
Check SR 20, US 101, Highway 1 and Branscomb Road.

- ☐ **Museum / venue hours** CHECK
Winter weekdays, Sundays and private-event closures vary.

Aquatic quick links

 C.V. Starr pool hours	 C.V. Starr rates	 Best Western pool hotel	 Seabird Lodge
 Pomo swim beach	 Clear Lake water quality	 California Safe to Swim	 North Coast beach safety

Source and timing note

Aquatic information was checked July 29, 2026 against official city, park, hotel and water-quality sources where available. Hotel pool operations, public-pool schedules, water access, surf and advisories can change abruptly. Confirm the final choice shortly before use.