Boating Guide

Precautions

Tide and Currents
The change between high and low tide sometimes creates strong currents which can be dangerous for even experienced boaters. Be aware of the currents and tides, especially at the mouth of Tomales Bay and Drakes Estero. Low tides reveal mudflats not seen during high tides. Tides can be an hour different from the mouth of Tomales Bay to Marshall Beach.

Wind and Water
The winds can pick up unexpectedly, especially in the afternoon. Listen to the forecast on weather radio stations for the most useful information to boaters.

Wildlife

Seabirds are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Avoid areas where large numbers of birds are resting. Both Tomales Bay and Drakes Estero can act as wind tunnels, making return journeys difficult. Water temperatures average 55°F in the ocean and Drakes Bay, slightly warmer during summer in Tomales Bay. Once in the water, hypothermia can set in quickly. Wetsuits are suggested.

Hypothermia
Symptoms of hypothermia include uncontrollable fits of shivering, slurred speech, and frequent stumbling. Without treatment, the condition may lead to stupor, collapse, and death.

Preparation
Know the area and what to expect. Obtain maps, and park information. Bring adequate food and water. Have dry clothes and equipment to keep you warm and dry. Know some first aid and bring a first aid kit. If you plan to fish, purchase a California State Fishing License. All state fish and game regulations are enforced in the seashore.

If you come across an animal that is sick, injured, or dead, call the park dispatch center at 415-464-5170 or the park’s visitor center at 415-464-5100. Report the location and identifying characteristics of the animal. Never attempt to remove an animal from or return it to the water. Do not wrap the animal in blankets or clothing. Trembling animals are not usually cold, but they may be in shock.

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Hog Island and Duck Island are closed to the public from March 1 to July 30 each year to protect sea bird colonies.

Pelicans only use Pelican Point for overnight and day use to provide a peaceful resting area for pelicans. Limited hunting and fishing is allowed in designated areas.

Drakes and Limantour Esteros are closed seasonally from March 1 to June 30 each year for seal protection. They are closed year-round to motorized craft.

Dogs are prohibited on most national park and state park beaches.

NOTE: The Marine Mammal Protection law of 1972 prohibits taking or harassing marine mammals with a civil penalty of up to $10,000. Harassment is defined as any act that has the potential to disturb a marine mammal by causing disruption of behavioral patterns, including, but not limited to, migration, breathing, nursing, breeding, feeding, or sheltering.

NOTE: Personal flotation devices are required and should be worn at all times when on the water.
OVERNIGHT USE

Boat-in camping by permit is allowed on Point Reyes National Seashore beaches on the west side of Tomales Bay, north of Indian Beach in Tomales Bay State Park. Camping on state park beaches or on Hog and Duck Islands and Pelican Point is prohibited. Potable water is not available. Weapons, drones, and fireworks are prohibited. Remove all waste. No camping is allowed in Drakes or Limantour Esteros.

State Park info: 415-669-1140 or http://www.parks.ca.gov/
National Park info: 415-464-5100 or https://www.nps.gov/pore/

Fees and Permits for West Side Camping

Reserve a permit online at www.recreation.gov or call toll free 877-444-6777. The cut-off time for reserving a permit is 6 pm PT two days in advance of the first day of the trip. No reservations may be made online or by phone after the cut-off date. $20 per night for 1–6 people; $40 per night for 7–14 people; $50 for 15–25 people.

DAY USE

Day use is permitted on national and state park beaches and on Hog and Duck Islands and in Drakes Estero. Access to Duck Island is permitted only on the south east side, and to Hog Island only on the west side. Hog Island’s east side is an important seal haul out site. Wood fires are permitted on national park beaches with a free fire permit obtained at a park visitor center, but are not permitted on state park beaches or on Hog and Duck Islands. Bring your own wood. Hunting and personal watercraft are not allowed on the bay.

Human Waste and Garbage

Never dispose of any waste in the bay. Use toilets located on the map or pack it out! Never pump boat-holding tanks into the bay. All human waste should be disposed of in sanitary sewage system, a pit toilet, or dump station. Dump stations: Lawson’s Landing in Dillon Beach (707-878-2443) and Olema Campground (800-655-2267) in Olema.

Launch Sites

Lawson’s Landing 707-878-2443
The campground and boat launch are located in Dillon Beach. Gas, dump station, rest rooms, and water are available. Fees are charged for day-use. Overnight parking requires purchase of a Lawson’s Landing campsite. lawsonslanding.com

Miller Boat Launch 415-499-6387
Also known as Nick’s Cove. Located on the east side of Tomales Bay north of Marshall on Highway 1. The county park provides a two-lane ramp and docks for motorized and non-motorized boat launching. There is a charge for day-use and overnight parking for boaters. marincountyparks.org

Tomales Bay State Park 415-669-1140
No overnight parking allowed.

The state park has two access points on the bay, Heart’s Desire Beach and Millerton Point. parks.ca.gov/?page_id=470

Heart’s Desire Beach, on the west side of the bay, is day use only. Restrooms and water are available. Boats are carried 100 yards to beach launch site. If the beach parking lot is full, unload and park in the picnic lot. Overnight parking is prohibited. Day-use fee is $8 per vehicle ($7 for 62 and older). Exact change required for self-registration. In summer, orange floats indicate the swimming area. Boaters must take out south of the floats. Motorized vessels are prohibited within 100 feet of the swim area markers.

Millerton Point is on the east side of the bay, three miles north of Point Reyes Station on Hwy. 1. You carry your boat approximately 100 yards to the water, and access is best at high tide since this section of the bay is very shallow.

Tomales Bay Resort 415-669-1389
The marina and motel are located on the west side of the bay, north of Inverness on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. A cement boat launch is available. Day-use only. There is a boat launch fee plus a parking fee. tomalesbayresort.com