

## Big Sur makes it on Fodor's Travel NO list

### TOURISM

By Jackie Burrell

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**BIG SUR** >> Each autumn, Fodor's Travel puts out two travel lists — a Travel GO List of 52 destinations around the globe that belong on your bucket list, and a Travel NO List of spots to avoid. This year's NO List includes an unexpected California destination: Big Sur.

The NO List, Fodor's editors say, includes places “that should be avoided due to ethical, environmental or sometimes even political concerns.” Some “don't go” destinations land here because of safety risks, others due to environmental catastrophe. They're “places and issues,” the editors said, “that give us pause.”

Big Sur made the list under the category of “places that don't want you — or want you in smaller and better doses.”

The destination has become overwhelmed by its own popularity, Fodor's says: “Between the free publicity from the massively popular award-winning HBO series ‘Big Little Lies’ and Monterey County's hospitality association and tourism campaign, the once bucolically secluded area within Pfeiffer Big Sur State Park staked its future on the completion of Highway 1, a dual-line highway — and now the chickens have come home to roost.”

The result, according to Fodor's, includes sanitation issues, overcrowding and a lack of stewardship sensitivity on the part of visitors. (You can read more of Fodor's reasoning at [www.fodors.com/news/photos/fodors-no-list-2020](http://www.fodors.com/news/photos/fodors-no-list-2020).) Rob O'Keefe, interim CEO of the Monterey visitors bureau, and Kirk Gafill, president of the Big Sur Chamber of Commerce, were both caught by surprise by the Fodor piece. They say traffic has always been

“Big Sur doesn't have an overtourism problem,” O'Keefe said. “It has a responsible tourism problem, which is a challenge for every destination that participates in tourism.”

Those Issues arise at locations such as McWay Falls and Bixby Bridge, where “Big Little Lies” fans and camera-toting crowds park anywhere, then walk back and forth across the highway, stopping traffic and risking injury.

“If you're a commuting resident, the repetitive aspect generates a lot of attention,” Gafill said. “But when you think of the Big Sur coast — 90 miles from Monterey to Cambria — two locations absorb 98 percent of the (traffic) concern. Caltrans has largely addressed those concerns at McWay. Bixby is still an unsolved situation.” Big Sur is not the only destination on the “avoid” list. Its compatriots on the “places that don't want you” list include four other destinations plagued by their own popularity. Among them: Cambodia's Angkor Wat, Bali, Barcelona and Vietnam's Hanoi Train Street.

Fodor's also warned against adventure travel to Switzerland's Matterhorn, where seven people have died this year and 11 died scaling its peak last year; snorkel trips to threatened coral reefs in the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary and Parque Nacional Arrecifes de Cozumel in Mexico; and any destination that features elephant rides, citing concerns for those animals' well-being.

an issue, one that reached a peak in 2015-16. But the idea that Big Sur has been overwhelmed, Gafill said, is “a minority view, to be sure,” and they contest the idea of environmental issues.

“There are no facts on the ground or original research or reporting that suggests the overall Big Sur ecosystem has been impacted by visitation,” Gafill said. “There has certainly been an increase in local residents’ angst over traffic delays, especially over holidays and the summer season. (We’ve had) a significant number of highway projects. Traffic levels this year are at or lower than in 2018, which is striking considering Highway 1 to the south was closed for much of 2018. (Over-touristed is) really a very disproportionate and remarkable way to describe it. It’s in no way in line with the facts.”

Any destination that relies on tourism has to “balance the desires of tourists and the concerns of residents,” O’Keefe said. For Big Sur, where tourism is the primary industry, that balancing act is paramount — hence the community’s stewardship program, an effort to train tourists to respect the landscape.



Big Sur residents gathered at Bixby Bridge on Saturday, Dec. 29 to launch the “Big Sur Pledge” campaign, urging visitors to treat the coast with more respect. They are frustrated by the trash, traffic and thoughtless behavior of tourists.

PHOTO BY LISA M. KRIEGER

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— *Rob O’Keefe, interim CEO of the Monterey visitors bureau*