



## Climate and Weather



### Contrast and Variation

While Point Reyes' climate is generally described as a Mediterranean climate with cool rainy winters and warm dry summers, the peninsula's weather can vary considerably from the headlands of the national seashore to the inland areas of the Olema Valley. While visiting Point Reyes, you can experience extremes in weather within a few short miles. The key to the contrasts in weather is the Inverness Ridge. It separates the headlands, dominated by the oceanic influences of the Pacific Ocean, from the Olema Valley, which is dominated by the terrestrial influences of the continental mainland.

### Seasons

The moderating influence of the Pacific Ocean creates a climate with no great extremes of heat or cold. Any season can bring interesting weather during your visit to Point Reyes National Seashore. Come prepared!

**Summer:** Although there is very little rain during summer months, there is often dense fog. If you are visiting Bear Valley or Tomales Bay, expect patchy morning fog to burn off by mid-day. Afternoons are often sunny and warm with a light breeze. By contrast, the beaches and headlands are often 20 degrees cooler with heavy fogs common throughout the day in July, August and September.

**Fall:** The coastal areas of Point Reyes experience some of the clearest days in late September, October

and early November. The occasional storm will start rolling through in late October, bringing clouds, wind, and rain. The strongest winds occur in November and December during occasional southerly gales.

**Winter:** The heaviest rainfall occurs in the winter months. Come prepared for rain and drizzle to possibly last for several days. More rain falls east of Inverness Ridge than on the west side. In between winter rains, it is often sunny, calm and cool.

**Spring:** Most spring days are windy and even Bear Valley and Tomales Bay experience stiff breezes. Expect cool temperatures in March. By late May and early June, temperatures can be quite warm on the east side of Inverness Ridge.

### Leaning into the Wind

You'll often need to lean into the wind to keep your balance on the windiest place on the West Coast! Near the ocean on the western side of the Inverness Ridge, near-constant winds of moderate to strong velocity sweep the exposed headlands and outer beaches. During most of the year, particularly in summer, prevailing winds blow from the northwest. In November and December, the winds can shift to the south, bringing some of the fiercest winds during southerly gales. Over the course of the year, the

average maximum wind velocity is 43 miles per hour (69 km/h). These strong winds are a faint breeze compared to the highest wind speed recorded at the point of 133 miles per hour (213 km/h).

However, east of the Inverness Ridge, extremes are much less common. Sheltered from the open ocean, winds are much lighter in velocity, but it is an unusual day that does not bring some breezes to the Olema Valley.

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## Feeling Your Way Through Fog

Point Reyes is notorious for its fog. Whether walking or driving, you often feel as though you could step off the edge of the earth. On the West Coast, there is no place foggier. This fog can blanket the ocean for more than 50 miles (80 km) off the coast and often smothers the beaches and coastal areas of Point Reyes. The fog of Coastal California had been documented as early as 1579 when Francis Drake and his men complained of “thicke mists and stynkinge

fogges.” Such heavy fogs are most common in July, August, and September, but can be found throughout the year.

While the summertime fog is often unrelenting along the coast, the warmth of the inland California land mass, combined with the natural barrier of the Inverness Ridge, keeps the fog from spreading to the inland areas of the national seashore.

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## Experiencing Hot and Cold Flashes

Visiting both the coast and the inland areas of the park, you’ll be amazed at the difference in temperatures. Influenced by the California mainland, inland temperatures are often 20°F (11 °C) warmer than temperatures on the headlands and outer coast. During the summer, sunny areas for picnicking and swimming can be found on the east side of Inverness Ridge and at the beaches of Tomales Bay. West of Inverness Ridge, the beaches are best suited to beach combing and walking due to colder conditions.

Even with the difference in temperature found between the coast and Olema Valley, the influence of the Pacific Ocean keeps the temperature more moderate than the inland areas of California. The Pacific moderates the entire climate of the Point Reyes peninsula creating no great extremes of heat or cold. Average monthly temperatures vary only about 28°F (16°C) from high to low throughout the year.

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## Rain Tapering to a Drizzle

No matter where you visit Point Reyes on a rainy day you’ll get wet; the question is how wet. During the rainy season, the Bear Valley Visitor Center in the Olema Valley receives an average of about 36 inches (91 cm) of precipitation, while at the Point Reyes Lighthouse the average is only about 11.5 inches (29 cm) per year.

In most circumstances, the effects of Inverness Ridge and the Pacific Ocean concentrate most of

the extreme weather of the Point Reyes Peninsula along the outer coast. However the opposite is true of rainfall in the winter months. The rainfall at Point Reyes is much greater inland due to a “reverse rain shadow.” As saturated clouds pass the ridge during the winter months, they encounter the colder temperatures of the California mainland. The cold air lowers the dew point forcing the clouds to drop their moisture as rain.

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## Come Prepared

With the variability of weather found at Point Reyes National Seashore, be prepared for cool temperatures year round. Along coastal areas dress

in layers and bring warm clothing. Bring sunscreen and plenty of water, especially in inland areas during the dry season.

