



Climate and Weather

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. 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.

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, 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 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. These strong winds are a faint breeze compared to the highest wind speed recorded at the point of 133 miles per hour.

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.

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 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 Sir 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.



Fog from Sky Trail, NPS Collection

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 degrees warmer than temperatures on the Headlands and outer coast. During the summer, sunny areas for picnicking and swimming are found on the East side of Inverness Ridge and at the beaches of Tomales Bay. West of the 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 dominates the entire climate of the Point Reyes peninsula creating no great extremes of heat or cold. Average monthly temperatures vary only about 28 degrees Fahrenheit from high to low throughout the year.

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 of rainfall, while at the Point Reyes Lighthouse the average is only about 11.5 inches per year.

In most circumstances, the effects of the 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.

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 plenty of water, and sunscreen especially in inland areas during the dry season. You may call the weather information line at (415) 464-5100 for current weather conditions.



Storm at North Beach, Sue Van Der Wal Photography



Rainbow over Tomales Bay, Alexandra Kruse