

Salinas Valley life is the life



RICHARD GREEN/THE SALINAS CALIFORNIAN FILE PHOTO

A couple walk on Marina State Beach in January of this year. Beaches are a big part of Monterey County recreation and are situated minutes from the Salinas Valley.

Even temperatures, fantastic food, lots of recreation space and history are just a few of the pluses

By **DAVE NORDSTRAND**
The Salinas Californian

Unload those snow tires and bulky air-conditioning units when you move to the Salinas area.

You won't need them.

At this end of the Salinas Valley, expect balmy January days and cool nights in June, a perfectly comfortable climate.

You'll seldom see lightning flash or hail fall.

Look forward also to fields of plump strawberries. In spring, purple lupine and orange poppies carpet the hills.

After 19 years, it's easy for me to hop atop my lettuce crate and preach the virtues of this area.

My approach to Monterey County

has been to enjoy life here, including the famous California Rodeo Salinas and air show and a growing number of good restaurants.

I also use Salinas as a point of departure for other nearby adventures.

For example, this city has the house where author John Steinbeck was born and in which he spent his childhood. It has a museum that honors his life and works.

Half an hour by car and you're on Monterey's Cannery Row, made famous in Steinbeck's novel of the same name and also home to the celebrated Monterey Bay Aquarium.

An hour or two north on Highway 101, and you're in the theater, dining, shopping centers of San Jose or San Francisco.

On one outing to San Jose, my wife and son and I sat at the counter of an old Italian restaurant. We dined on grilled halibut and pasta and fresh-baked bread. Then we walked down the street to see the circus.

Think also of abundant dining options on the Monterey Peninsula.

Want to kayak on Monterey Bay or fish for salmon or hike or mountain bike or hang glide? Fate has placed you in the land of opportunity.

Think also of scarlet sunsets over ocean waves on Marina State Beach. Almost any morning, you can see dolphin feeding near shore at the Monterey Beach Resort in Seaside.

If you're called away from the Salinas area, you'll soon find yourself longing for home.

Say that circumstances force you to go to Fresno in July. You'll bake in a smoggy furnace. Hellish vapors will rise from dank mounds of cow dung at the factory dairies.

Soon you'll be yearning for the cooling mist of sea breezes and the refreshing comforts of the Salinas Valley.

I've also found the natives here to be generous, friendly, kind-hearted and of superior intelligence.

You've selected the Salinas area as your home. Congratulations.

You're now among the chosen few.

DAVE NORDSTRAND is a staff writer for The Salinas Californian. His column appears Wednesdays and Saturdays in Living. If you have a comment or an idea for a column, call him at 424-2221, ext. 268, or e-mail dnordstrand@thecalifornian.com.