

The Drive Home

Getting south, and the 6 PM question

The honest math. You are off the boat at 3:00 PM at Lake Sonoma. The art party opens at 6:00 PM at 3649 Lawton Street in the Outer Sunset. The drive is **2h10m in light traffic and 2h45m on a normal August Saturday**. That leaves somewhere between 15 and 45 minutes of slack for nine other people, three dogs, wet swimsuits, and a bathroom. It is possible. It is not comfortable.

Two ways to play it

	Go for it	Let it go
Leave the dock	3:00 PM sharp, gear packed before the boat lands	Whenever the last cooler is loaded
Stops	Exactly one, 20 minutes, counter service	As many as you like
Arrive	6:00–6:30 PM, salty, happy, slightly feral	Home by 6:00, showered, on the couch
Best for	The Presidio car — they're already going that way	The Oakland cars, who are driving the opposite direction

Worth saying plainly: the party is a **stretch goal, not a schedule item**. The Presidio crew (Carly, Dave, Beck) pass within blocks of the gallery on their way home and lose nothing by trying. The Oakland cars would be adding a full crossing of the bay in the wrong direction at the end of a long sun day with a kid and three dogs. Decide per car, not as a group, and decide it at the dock rather than pretending at 5:15 PM on the 101 that it's still on.

The route south

There is one real route: back down Dry Creek Road to **US-101 south** through Healdsburg, Windsor, Santa Rosa, Petaluma, Novato and San Rafael, then the Waldo Tunnel and the Golden Gate Bridge. The coastal alternative on Highway 1 through Bodega Bay and Point Reyes is a genuinely beautiful drive and takes over four hours. Save it for a day you aren't on a clock.

Where it gets slow

- **Dry Creek Road** — 25–30 minutes, unavoidable, same as the morning.
- **Santa Rosa** — the Steele Lane and Highway 12 interchanges clog on summer Saturdays.

- **Petaluma** — East Washington Street backs up.
- **Novato through San Rafael** — Marin's Saturday beach-return traffic, the worst stretch of the drive.
- **The Waldo Tunnel** — three lanes become two right before the bridge. Classic weekend bottleneck.
- **The bridge itself** — moveable median barrier plus tourists slowing to look at the view.

The one stop, ranked

1. HopMonk Tavern Novato — 224 Vintage Way, Novato. Open Saturday 11:30 AM–9:00 PM. This is the pick. A large beer garden shaded by oaks, which in August with three dogs is the entire argument — they cannot wait in a hot car and they cannot sit on scorching pavement. It sits late enough in the route that you've already banked most of the drive, and it's roughly 30–35 minutes from the bridge afterward. Call ahead about three dogs: (415) 892-6200.

2. Big John's Market — 1345 Healdsburg Ave, Healdsburg. Open until 8:00 PM. The efficient play rather than the pleasant one: deli, hot bar, sandwiches made to order, food in hand in ten minutes and eaten in the car. You pay the time cost early, right as you rejoin 101, which is exactly when you have the most margin to spend.

3. Petaluma Creamery — 711 Western Ave, Petaluma. A working creamery with an ice cream counter. This is the Casper option, and after four hours on a boat it is a strong one. Verify the dog policy by phone before you commit — plan on the outdoor seating either way.

Backups if HopMonk is slammed: Russian River Brewing in Windsor (700 Mitchell Ln), or in Healdsburg, Willi's Seafood (403 Healdsburg Ave), Campo Fina (330 Healdsburg Ave) and The Wurst (22 Matheson St) all have dog-friendly patios — but all three are far enough north that you'd be eating your slack early.

Rinse off before you leave the marina, not after. Nothing on 101 is set up for ten people changing out of swimsuits, and burning twenty minutes on it in Petaluma is twenty minutes you don't have. Handle it at the dock while the boat is being returned. Pack a dry set of clothes in something you can reach without unpacking the trunk.

Scenic option, and why to skip it

Battery Spencer in the Marin Headlands has the definitive Golden Gate photograph — exit at Alexander Avenue, the last exit before the bridge, then Conzelman Road. The catch is that the turnout fills on Saturdays and you'd have multiple cars circling for spots. Easily thirty minutes with no guarantee.

Note also that the big **Vista Point** lot at the north tower is only reachable when driving *northbound*. Heading south you cannot get into it without crossing the bridge first and doubling back. Don't put it in the plan.

The bridge toll

The Golden Gate charges **southbound only** — so unlike this morning, everyone crossing it pays now. **\$10.25** with FasTrak, **\$10.50** via a license plate account or one-time payment, **\$11.25** if you let it become a mailed invoice.

There are no toll booths and no cash. If a car doesn't have FasTrak, settle it within 48 hours at bayareafastrak.org rather than waiting for the invoice and the higher rate.

If you go: parking in the Outer Sunset

The gallery is at **3649 Lawton Street**, around 41st and 42nd Avenue. Street parking out there is more realistic than almost anywhere else in San Francisco — wide residential streets, low density. Read the signs for residential permit zones, which are scattered through the neighborhood.

Don't expect adjacent spots for multiple cars. Plan to park within a block or two of each other and walk.

The Great Highway closure does not affect you. The old beachfront roadway between Lincoln and Sloat is now Sunset Dunes park and has been closed to cars since April 2025. Lawton Street is five or six blocks inland and reached normally via Sunset Boulevard or the avenue grid. There's a November 2026 ballot measure that could partially reopen it, but nothing about that changes the drive to the gallery.

Snacks that survive an August car

Bring: pretzels, chips, crackers, nuts, trail mix, jerky, whole fruit with a skin. Water, well beyond what seems necessary — ten people and three dogs after a day in the sun go through it fast. A collapsible bowl for the dogs.

Skip: chocolate anything, which will not survive a closed car in Sonoma County in August. Anything mayonnaise-based, which has already spent four hours in a boat cooler and should not spend three more in a trunk. Soft cheese and yogurt. Anything you would hate to find melted into upholstery.

Sources

- [Golden Gate Bridge — Tolls & Payment](#)
- [HopMonk Tavern Novato](#)
- [HopMonk — Dog Rules](#)
- [Big John's Market, Healdsburg](#)
- [Sonoma Magazine — Dog-Friendly Restaurants in Sonoma County](#)
- [Battery Spencer directions — OurSausalito](#)
- [Vista Point access \(northbound only\) — SF Tourism Tips](#)
- [Sunset Dunes / Great Highway status — Wikipedia](#)
- [The Great Highway Gallery — Contact](#)