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The college search can be a great excuse for a family vacation — and a 57-hour train ride

 By JOHN CARPENTER
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Our first leg of the drive south was a challenge, as it was a spectacularly good beach day, with all the traffic that brings. We were rewarded in Monterey with a balcony room at the [Monterey Plaza Hotel](#), and my daughter and I soon found ourselves standing over the ocean, mesmerized by the seals and otters playing below.

I was skeptical of the hotel restaurant, as I live by the rule that eateries with spectacular views are often good but rarely great. But [Schooners Coastal Kitchen](#) was the latter, especially the cioppino, which exploded with flavor.