



## HI USA News

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### Create World Tolerance by Staying at a Hostel

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*Original Content written by Chandi Wyant of Paradise of Exiles*

#### HI USA Offers Much More than a Cheap Bed

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“I didn’t know hostels existed in the U.S. until after I stayed in them in Europe.” Cheryl-Anne Boccadoro says as we settle onto the bench of a picnic table on a bluff over the sparkling Pacific Ocean. I’m attending a Gardening for Peace event put on by the HI [Point Montara Lighthouse hostel](#), and Cheryl-Anne, a new staff member, is telling me why she chose to work at a hostel after graduating from a hospitality program.

“I was pushed toward the glamorous jobs at high end hotels, but I fell in love with hostelling in Europe and I realized what a special role hostels play in dissolving borders. They are also more eco-friendly than large hotels.”



I learn from Cheryl-Anne that HI Point Montara, with its historic light house, receives equal parts international travelers, and locals from the Northern California area.

**“Nothing makes me happier than seeing the international understanding that happens here just from people of different cultures cooking a meal together.”**

She says, reminding me of my eye-opening experiences when I hosted at age 19.

Hostelling International USA (HI USA) is an organization that offers more than fifty hostels around the country, some in urban centers and others in locations known for natural beauty, such as state or national parks, and historic lighthouses. Their mission is “to provide a community of global citizens who have the wisdom and humanity to make the world a better place.” In conjunction with United Nation’s International Day of Peace, the HI hostels have created “[Sleep for Peace](#)” events, two of which I’m attending on this sunny Saturday on California’s coast.

As Cheryl-Anne and I talk, the soft sounds of peace songs waft toward us. A group of septuagenarians sing from a seated a circle in the garden. People of all ages are writing messages on peace flags and on rocks, and Chris Bauman, who manages the hostel with his wife Janice Pratt, pulls a yellow cart filled with plants into the garden. With many helping hands, a brown patch of the garden soon is refreshed and colorful with new plants.



Janice's enthusiasm for hostelling is clear as she tells me about arriving as a guest at HI Point Montara at age 26.

**“You don't know how a hostel will change your life when you walk in the door.”**

Janice met her husband Chris that day, who was the staff person at the hostel. “I went from knowing nothing about hostels to them becoming my whole life. Our children were born into this lifestyle.”

“Hostelling is for everyone of every age, but I'd like to see more youth leadership groups taking part in hostel experiences,” Janice says. “If young people, age 12, or 13, see that travel is possible, and that they have something to give to it, they may be inspired to make the world a better place.”

Janice, like Cheryl-Anne, emphasizes that hostels are more than a cheap bed, or a beautiful location. “Our ideal guests know they are participating in a greater philosophy.”

HI Point Montara began welcoming travelers in 1980. In an earlier incarnation the buildings that now contain the guest quarters were occupied by the coast guard. The main house, built in 1863 for the lighthouse keeper, is now occupied by the staff of the hostel.



The sturdy cast iron lighthouse here has quite a history. It's the only known lighthouse to have guided ships on two different coasts. It originally stood watch over a harbor in Cape Cod, Massachusetts. After it was decommissioned in 1922 it was moved to San Francisco Bay—no one knows why—and in 1928 the dramatic Point Montara became its new home.

The next hostel I visit is 28 miles down the coast. At [Pigeon Point](#) there is another historic lighthouse and HI USA hostel. The event here is Stargazing for Peace. Jeff Parry, the hostel's manager, who is also a member of the Santa Cruz Astronomy Club, conceived of the event after learning of the Star Peace Project—a United Nations international event that, “allows all the people of the world to look at the sky free of political, religious, national and racial tendencies and without any differences.”

On the rugged and windy Pigeon Point, the tall brick lighthouse dwarfs the adorable cottage that used to be for candle oil storage and carpentry. Like at HI Point Montara, guests sleep in former Coast Guard quarters. Nearby is the largest mainland elephant seal breeding colony in the world, and from December to May it is easy to spot gray whales from the hostel's decks.



Jeff, who has been working for HI USA for 19 years, tells me, as he makes a large thermos of mint tea for the event, that his favorite part of his job is seeing the positive outcomes of the interactions of people from different cultures.

**“There was an Israeli guy here, and the other guys in his dorm room were from Palestine. He came back to the front desk and said, ‘I don’t know if I can do this.’ We didn’t have anything else available. We told him that we’re about peace here, and we urged him to give it a try. He made friends with them, and his preconceptions were dissolved.”**

As day light fades, the Santa Cruz Astronomy Club members turn their large telescopes to the sky, and I feel I’m in a movie with the action mounting each minute. First there are calls of “I’ve got Venus” and “I’ve got Mars” and visitors begin to move among the telescopes.

“Saturn! Anyone want to see Saturn?” John Pierce, the club vice president calls.

“Sure!” As I sit on his stool, I realize I’ve never looked through a telescope of this calibre.

Saturn is perfect, improbable, mesmerizing. I’m seeing it with my naked eye for the first time. It looks just like it does in photographs, and I realize now, maybe I never believed the photos. But there it is, tipped slightly to the side, a perfect white sphere, with a perfect white ring.

“The ring is so flat, so precise, how...?” I begin, and quickly John jumps in with explanations that I try to follow. He takes me on a verbal tour through the universe, moving from Saturn to how the sun formed.

*How the sun formed?* I hadn’t thought about it. My mind grasps at each of his sentences, as if they are rungs on a ladder that will lead me to a whole new library of knowledge that I’ve never entered.

As I thank him, someone calls out “Albireo!” and I trot over to another massive telescope and meet Bill Seiler, also of the astronomy club. I climb a little ladder as he tells me, “It’s a double star. They orbit each other.”

“Like a dance?”



“Yes, like a do-si-do.”

It’s as if I’m looking at the crown jewels. One is gold, the other, blue. “They’re so pretty!” I say inadequately. “How long does it take for them to do-si-do?”

“Thousands of years. The blue one is the hottest. Like when you strike a match, the blue part of the flame is hottest.”



I remain in this other world for an hour, seeing the Lagoon Nebula, the Andromeda Galaxy, the globular clusters M13 and M15, and the teapot in the constellation Sagittarius. Jeff points out to me how the teapot pours “milk” downward while “steam” rises from upward, marking the band of the Milky Way. *Why did I not know this?*

“It’s a disk and our solar system is about 26,000 light years from the center.” Jeff says, but I have no tools for imagining such a distance.

I have a vague understanding that when we look at stars, we are looking back in time but when Jeff tells me, as I view the Andromeda galaxy, that I’m looking back two million years, I understand more deeply the assertions of the UN Peace Star project, and of this star gazing for peace event.

**Viewing the galaxies causes us to transcend race, nationality, and culture, and helps us to be respectful of one another and of our tiny home in this immense and spectacular universe.**



The Sleep for Peace events are free and open to the public. They happen yearly at HI USA hostels between September 21st, and September 27th.

Please note that it is always cold and windy at Pigeon Point at night, even if the day has been hot. To enjoy Star Gazing Peace, it's imperative to have lots of warm layers.

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