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(Room Key)

The Ranch At Laguna Beach Was The Coastal Reset I Needed



by **ANGELA MELERO**

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Garden walks and spa treatments? Yes, please.



@TheRanchAtLaguna

I admit, because of its name, I immediately associated The Ranch at Laguna to the aforementioned wellness retreat brand — and I was hesitant to book a visit, fearful I was in for an intense fitness-focused getaway. But, upon closer inspection and research, I realized this trip would be centered around a different type of self-care, one that allows you to indulge in simple, serene pleasures. The type of pleasures that make time stop, that make you grateful for little things like the occasional deer spotting outside your hotel window, tasting edible flowers on an onsite farm, or sipping a glass of wine while enjoying live music against a beach sunset backdrop. At 39, I have to admit this is what my vacation dreams are made of.



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The Stay

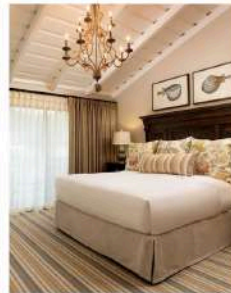
The Ranch at Laguna has come a long way since its 1871 founding as a 152-acre homestead with a single-room cabin for original owners George and Sarah Thurston. Over the span of 150 years, the land has changed hands (and names) several times and transitioned from a quiet residential property to an exclusive country club to a true destination resort and golf course. It was officially reopened as The Ranch at Laguna Beach in 2013, boasting 97 rooms, the original nine-hole golf course, two onsite restaurants, a spa and fitness facility, and acres and acres of canyon-meets-sea surroundings to explore.

Driving onto the property, you truly get the sense of being nestled in a little hidden gem that feels detached from the rest of the world. The first thing I noticed as I navigated the winding road to the main building was the legendary aforementioned golfing green, which has been in place since the 1940s. It's not uncommon for golfers to share the space with local wildlife. Deer, rabbits, ducks — you'll likely encounter all of these little critters over the span of a few hours while traversing the course. So, watch where you swing!

As a lover of more comfy, vintage accommodations, I was particularly impressed with the super-charming cottages. The decor marries rustic, natural decor (raw wood coffee tables, vaulted ceilings, burlap-wrapped chandeliers) with beachy elements (sea-inspired artwork, woven rattan chairs, natural-form metal accents), for surroundings that epitomize coastal grandmother – in the best way.



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There are various options in terms of suites. I stayed in a studio Creekside room, which included a king bed, spacious bathroom, and a furnished outdoor patio. That said, guests can also opt for extra space via one- and two-bedroom suites or go big by booking the coveted Treehouse. The latter is perched high above the grounds and is a 1600-square-foot suite that includes two bedrooms, three bathrooms, a wraparound deck, full kitchen, and living and dining spaces. (Most recently, it's been a top choice for bachelorette parties and wedding day bridal suites.)

The Food

The Ranch has two dining options on site. Harvest is the property's main restaurant and bar, whose menu is a culinary celebration of local farming and oenology. The eatery sources directly from the onsite farm and garden, so many dishes are seasonal and updated every three months or so. I happened to visit at the turn of the winter and spring seasons, so the menu literally shifted within my two-night stay. So, my first night I feasted on hearty braised short rib, crispy octopus, and a decadent caramelized bread pudding. The following day, the spring offerings were in full force, so I opted for a tagliatelle pasta with pistachio pesto and strawberry butter cake for dessert.



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For more casual fare, The Porch is also available for guests as an elevated coffee shop experience. The open outdoor concept offers both AM and PM menus of easy comforts – breakfast burritos, turkey bacon ranch sandwiches, and diavola pizza – and a bar menu chock-full of craft cocktails (I suggest the Lady on the Green!). Starting at 4 p.m., the space comes alive with live music, as local artists step in to serenade guests with tunes ranging from the classic rock and folk variety to indie, pop, and even blues.

The Activities

The beauty of The Ranch is that the intensity of your itinerary is entirely up to you. You are free to pack your schedule with local Laguna-specific activities like bike tours, surf lessons, kayaking, whale watching, or snorkeling. However, true introverts like me will also be delighted at the low-key vibe of the property, which lends itself to truly decompressing and not even needing to leave the grounds. Because of the nature of my super-social job, my main objectives when I'm OOO typically include spa treatments, lounging with a good book and a glass of wine in a peaceful setting, and the occasional outdoor running session or hike. The Ranch delivered all of my favorite vacay things — and then some.

While the weather was a bit chilly for bikini-clad lounging beachside, I enjoyed long afternoon runs along the Laguna coastline, which allowed for optimum views of the breathtaking sunset. During the day, I took a tour of the property's farm with resident green thumb Farmer Ryan, who works year-round to harvest the herbs, fruits, and veggies that are served to guests. This was one of my favorite experiences — I loved playing with the resident farm dog, conversing with the chickens, and sampling the edible flowers and botanicals in full bloom. At night, I took a book to The Porch and alternated between reading and listening to live guitar riffs.

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I of course dedicated some time at The Ranch's Sycamore Spa, where I indulged in a 60-minute Calming Canyon Massage. For a full day of pampering, guests can also choose from a full-service spa menu of facials, body treatments, and wellness experiences like cold plunges, infrared sauna sessions, or the Recovery Cabana, which combines both modalities and throws in an outdoor shower experience and fresh pressed juice for good measure.

Although I'm not a golfer, the property's course is certainly a draw, and has been for decades. A departure from stuffy country club course vibes, the lush Aliso Canyon setting makes for a laid-back, intimate golf experience that made me *almost* want to reach for the clubs. Almost.

Book a stay at The Ranch At Laguna Beach on Expedia.