

ELLE



ELLE Escapes: Laguna Beach

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When my husband and I chose Laguna Beach as the destination for our fifth wedding anniversary, we sought little more than a postcard's idea of a California vacation: ideally a few good sunsets, palm trees a must. But the famous locale along the Pacific Coast Highway offered up a much more expansive itinerary than we'd originally envisioned.

Roughly 40 miles south of Los Angeles, Laguna Beach has a storied history as an enclave for artists, free spirits, and conservationists. Those influences are obvious throughout the resort town to this day: Take a stroll along the assortment of streets just off the Main Beach, and among the coffee bars, gift shops, and restaurants, you'll find art galleries aplenty, catering to virtually anyone on the spectrum of casual to experienced collector. Nearly every meal we were fortunate enough to eat during our time in Orange County was crafted with sustainable practices and a focus on local ingredients. And, of course, the picturesque blue waters of the Laguna coast tell their own story of valiant conservation efforts.

Ultimately, these influences rubbed off on us: My husband and I ended the trip as newfound evangelists for abstract art and kelp forests; we brought home ceramic bowls we'd thrown alongside Tessa Mansour of **Sweet T Ceramics**, who was preparing to show her wares at the annual **Sawdust Art Festival**. I even renewed my daily yoga practice after a particularly restorative beachside session with **La Vida Laguna**. Our vacation was as relaxing and romantic as we'd hoped, but it was equally enlightening—solidifying Laguna Beach as a spot to which we'll want to return again and again. Ahead, find a handful of the stops we recommend most.

Where to Eat

Harvest



Courtesy of Visit Laguna Beach

Inside the rustic main building of The Ranch at Laguna Beach is **Harvest**, a dining destination with a rotating seasonal menu formed with ingredients from the property's on-site farm and gardens. The views of Aliso Canyon alone are worth the trip, but the food offers just as significant a pleasure: It took all my willpower not to eat an entire loaf of pull-apart milk bread before my Jidori half chicken could even reach the table. As was the case with Splashes, the dessert is well worth saving room for. I'll be dreaming about the strawberry butter cake with strawberry-rhubarb jam and brown butter ice cream for many months to come.

Where to Stay

The Ranch at Laguna Beach



Courtesy of Visit Laguna Beach

Tucked within the picturesque Aliso Canyon off of Highway 1—but within easy strolling distance of the shore—**The Ranch at Laguna Beach** is an ideal option for travelers who prefer plenty of peace and quiet to accompany their scenic views. The resort is set on 87 acres and prides itself on its eco-friendly efforts, which are evident throughout the property, including in the locally sourced dining options and the verdant nine-hole golf course irrigated entirely with reclaimed water. Be sure to book a treatment at the House of Hudson Day Spa, where the Calming Canyon Massage is among the best I've had in years.