

Top California Resort Destinations

Written by Story by Elizabeth Exline, Melissa Larsen, Hayley Mitchell, Amy Strand and Christine Whitton

Tuesday, 29 June 2010 12:02 - Last Updated Wednesday, 30 June 2010 10:15

Around this time every year, most Arizonans get an itch for towering palm trees and the feel of sand between their toes. To help you decide which California retreats to turn to this summer, *AFM* has logged in many hours at some of the Golden State's top resorts. Read on as we share our fabulous findings.



Terranea Resort

Located just south of Los Angeles in beautiful Palos Verdes, Terranea is the newest oceanside resort in Southern California, perched on 120 acres of land. The resort comprises 582 rooms of differing sizes and eight restaurant offerings, so variety is never a problem. If you check in for a family vacation, the main pool is the place to be. But if it's adult-only time you seek, head to the Cielo Point pool or the spa pool where you can soak in the serenity and ocean views. Terranea also offers its own beach with water sports, as well as hiking trails and a great par-3 nine-hole golf course.

True View: *This family- and pet-friendly resort offers 270-degree views of the Pacific Ocean. Whether you are walking the golf course, eating dinner at mar'sel, or waking up in your suite, you have a serene blue view at all times. —H.M.*

866.802.8000, www.terranea.com.



Situated on 400 acres of garden property, there is plenty of space for families to romp around at La Costa, making it a popular destination for summer getaways. Vacationers can head to the golf course, the Splash Landing water park pool, the 17 tennis courts or the three restaurants. Youngsters will be well taken care of at Kidtopia Kids Club or Vibz Game Lounge, while moms and dads will love the family-friendly accommodations, including the two-bedroom family suites with kitchens. San Diego's nearby attractions, like Legoland and the San Diego Zoo, are also part of the family-vacation appeal of La Costa's Carlsbad location.

The Great Escape: *While the kids are having a blast at the various summer camps and programs, you can relax at the stunning Spa at La Costa, one of Southern California's most-lauded spa environments. It's a don't-miss part of the resort experience. —H.M.*

800.854.5000, www.lacosta.com.



Dubbed "The Pink Lady of La Jolla," San Diego's historic La Valencia Hotel is just as glamorous today as when it made its debut in 1926. Located on La Jolla's bustling Prospect Street, this Mediterranean Villa-inspired hotel is just steps away from world-class galleries, shopping and dining, but still manages to maintain its intimate, Old World charm.

Sky High: *While it's true that La Jolla offers an array of fine-dining options, one favorite you won't want to miss is The Sky Room, conveniently located on the 10th floor of La Valencia. With sweeping ocean views, 12 intimate tables and mouth-watering French cuisine, The Sky Room serves up an impeccable dining experience not soon forgotten. —A.S.*

858.454.0771, www.lavalencia.com.



In its heyday, the Riviera Resort and Spa was the exclusive desert hideaway to Hollywood greats like Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis, Jr., and Elvis Presley. After undergoing a \$70 million modernization in 2006, the Palm Springs retreat unrolled its red carpet in 2008 to unveil its new 1960's-inspired mod-glam mystique. The 24-acre property encompasses 406 rooms and suites; green gardens and intimate courtyards anchored by fire pits; two swimming pools; an 11,000-sq.-ft. spa; and several dining destinations.

Sweet Retreat: *The contemporary-style steakhouse, Circa 59, fixes many memorable dishes like the short ribs with house-made ricotta, wild mushrooms and truffle mousse. But it's Executive Chef Bradley Manchester's grandmother's famous sticky toffee pudding that will leave you speechless. —C.W.*

866.588.8311, www.psriviera.com.

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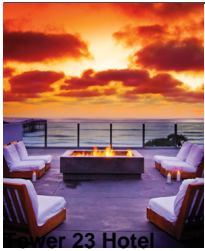


The Grand Del Mar

Minutes from San Diego's coastline, The Grand Del Mar sits atop 420 acres overlooking The Grand Golf Club and the picturesque Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve. The resort's Mediterranean influences are seen throughout its 249 elegantly appointed guestrooms and eight Villa offerings. With 80 one-tenth fractional ownership opportunities (and access to all resort amenities), the villas echo the resort's European-style warm hues and perfectly placed marble and stone accents.

The Dish: *William Bradley, the highly touted chef of The Grand Del Mar's Addison restaurant (and former executive chef of Scottsdale's now-defunct Mary Elaine's and Vu), is at the helm of the only Southern California restaurant to have garnered both the AAA Five-Diamond Award and the Mobile Five-Star Award. —C.W.*

858.314.2000, www.thegradndelmar.com.

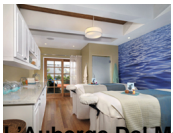


Tower 23 Hotel

Made for modern beach-goers in search of sleek, contemporary design, Tower 23 manages to combine the laid-back lifestyle of its Pacific Beach locale with high-end service and überchic accommodations. The rooms here are sizable and fresh with crisp white linens and dark wood accents; meanwhile, the bathtubs boast a supercool water spout that flows down from the ceiling into the tub. The beds are so comfortable it's tough to get up in the morning (don't say we didn't warn you), and the complimentary cocktail upon check-in sets the mood from the start.

Sexy Waters: *Perfect for a couple's retreat, Tower 23 is not a noisy kid-filled beach resort, but an adult-friendly boutique hotel directly on the water. To enhance the romance, open the sliding doors of your suite and listen to waves all night long, or dine at JRDN, the only formal beachside restaurant for miles. —H.M.*

858.270.2323, www.tower23hotel.com.



L'Auberge Del Mar

Del Mar may have made its mark on the map for horse racing, but non-equine enthusiasts have something of their own to appreciate here: the elegantly sea-inspired L'Auberge Del Mar. Thanks to a renovation in 2008, L'Auberge manages to feel like both an English country house and a laid-back beach resort. The open-air lobby, garden-level rooms, flowering walking paths and California-cool color scheme all soften the echoes of Tudor architecture. And the spa, which gets everything right, coupled with the resort's acclaimed dining options, means L'Auberge has redefined the Del Mar experience.

Suite Life: *Grab your significant other and book the couple's suite at Spa L'Auberge where an idyllic patio—replete with an egg-shape nest for two, organic products and an alfresco bath—make a strong case for outdoor spa-ing. —E.E.*

800.245.9757, www.laubergedelmar.com.



Rancho Bernardo Inn

If you want to experience that sun-drenched, lushly landscaped joie de vivre of the Golden State, the Spanish-style Rancho Bernardo Inn is the place to do it. Its 287 guestrooms all enjoy custom furnishings and balconies, many of which overlook the 18-hole championship golf course that's hosted both PGA and LPGA events. The fountains, foliage and 265 acres give the place an air of seclusion, yet a day trip to the vineyards of Temecula, picturesque Del Mar or San Diego's beaches are all within an easy distance.

So Fresh: *Savor the happy union between culinary arts and relaxation with The Spa at Rancho Bernardo Inn's Made Fresh Daily treatments, which incorporate products made on-site from seasonal and locally sourced ingredients. —E.E.*

877.517.9340, www.ranchobernardoinn.com.

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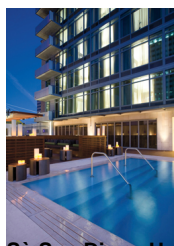


Meadowood

For serious wine and food aficionados or just those in need of a romantic respite in Napa Valley, Meadowood offers 85 luxury cottagelike suites with fireplaces, plenty of privacy and opulent amenities. Not much is missing from this fairy-tale setting; the resort includes naturalized gardens, ancient trees, winding roads, a small golf course and a croquet course, as well as a spa.

Eat, Drink and Be Merry: *Indulge in fine Californian cuisine at The Restaurant, which boasts two Michelin stars (only three other Northern California restaurants can say that). And, naturally, pair every course with wines from the neighboring vineyards. Wine education classes are also a treat at Meadowood. —H.M.*

800.458.8080, www.meadowood.com.



Sè San Diego Hotel

Towering above the financial district, the Sè San Diego Hotel feels sexy yet sophisticated, contemporary yet elegant. And as you open the 900-pound bronze front door, you can't shake the impression that you're entering a jewel box. Witness the 184 guestrooms, which include 10-foot ceilings, custom Italian furniture and rich Sapelli veneers. Elsewhere, hundreds of design finishes, from crystals to stingray pelts, reveal themselves to you in their own good time, usually while you're having a good time. (Think, Siren the hotel's übercool pool deck and lounge.) To ensure that you get some rest with your relaxation, Sè also offers the services of a designated sleep concierge.

Top Treatment: *Book the Sè Spa's Moroccan Rasul for a mud treatment. It's the only Rasul in the country and, with crystal lights and Italian glass tiles, it rivals the purifying mud for top billing. —E.E.*

877.515.2211, www.sesandiego.com.



Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa

There is certainly never a lack of entertainment at this family-friendly resort in Rancho Mirage. Guests can tee-up at the 27-hole Ted Robinson-designed golf course or practice a different kind of swing at one of 25 tennis courts. For A-plus pampering, the award-winning Spa Las Palmas offers several regionally inspired treatments, including the Desert Dream Rituals that comprises a body scrub, wrap and massage. And, of course, there's always the option of stowing away in Rancho Las Palmas's luxe accommodations and perfecting the art of relaxation.

Fun in the Sun: *Recently renovated Rancho Las Palmas is home to the kid-approved on-site water park, Splashtopia. The two-acre aquatic park hosts two mammoth waterslides, waterfalls, a pool, a 425-foot lazy river and play areas with sprinklers and fountains. (No worries, moms and dads: The property has sparkling pools for grown-ups too.) —M.L.*

866.423.1195, www.rancholaspalmas.com.