

Written by Allison Young

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It's easy to exercise your body, mind and spirit at this Southern California escape.

What you won't find me doing on vacation: catching up on my summer reading or catching up on my sleep. For me, idle time is like pressing the snooze button on life. Even poolside lounging I find an exercise in total and utter boredom. Forget r-n-r; I'd rather be catching a wave...or catching a Frisbee...or catching a yoga class, which is why I loved Omni La Costa so much. Granted, the 400-acre property has a little something for every paradise-seeker, including a different pool for every day of the week (they range from a rowdy kid splash pad to an adults-only infinity-edge). But, for me, the recently renovated property, nestled in the coastal foothills of Southern California, was an exercise in, well, exercising my body, mind and spirit.

Hip to be fit

Let's be honest: most hotel gyms are little more than four walls filled with a few token pieces of fitness equipment, which is probably why they're often empty. Not La Costa. I walked into the Athletic Club with the same low expectations but was blown away. Most impressive was the view. You're not staring at some blank wall while working away on the elliptical; you're gazing out at a 270-degree panorama of the pristine golf course, the kind of view that'll beckon you to bust out your iPhone to get a pic (which I did). The classes followed suit. I signed up for Power Plyometrics expecting it to be more style than substance. I was happy to be wrong. The action-packed 60 minutes covered sprints, mountain climbers, split jumps—all serious calorie-torchers. And it's only one of 50-plus classes on the weekly schedule of kettlebells, kickboxing, spin and Pilates.

But that's just the tip of the fitness iceberg. If you want to take your calorie burning to the next level, La Costa is also home to Premier Fitness Camp, or what I like to call fat camp for adults. Sounds harsh, but people come to lose serious weight and the results speak for themselves. Multiple clients have lost 100-plus pounds.

Vacation eating redefined

Want to know a great way *not* to eat like you're on vacation while on vacation? Be active. After sweating it out in plyometrics, the last thing you'll want to do is down a piled-high burger and fries. The more I work out, the more I crave foods that fuel, and La Costa has plenty of healthy grub to pick from. For quick energy, Marketplace has grab-and-go snacks (and souvenirs), plus coffee and smoothies. My fave: the LiveWell Green Smoothie that somehow whirls spinach and Swiss chard into yumminess. There's also the Spa Café, a gardenside gem that serves up superfoods like quinoa and edamame in delish salads and sandwiches.

Of course, you can also go upscale at BlueFire Grill or Bistro 65 (the latter is currently getting a facelift). Both have plenty of healthy dishes disguised as gourmet grub (BlueFire even has a daily Ayurvedic-inspired vegan dish). That's because Executive Chef Marc Therrien and Chef de Cuisine Gregory Frey Jr., both locavores, believe fresh is best. My palate couldn't have agreed more. I inhaled farro cooked in coconut milk, balsamic-coated grilled veggies, ridiculously delicious risotto and green shots of goodness with plenty of sighs of delight and not an ounce of guilt—which is the way eating should be.

Omni La Costa: Ultimate Southern California Resort & Spa

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Flex your mental muscle

La Costa is also the hallowed ground of The Chopra Center. As in Deepak Chopra. As in Oprah-endorsed. As in the place Eva Longoria went post-divorce to get re-centered. Here, I had a crash course in Ayurveda, a holistic healing system that originated in India way, way back, and learned that my dosha (a k a: my mind-body type) is Vata, which explains my dry skin and why I need yoga to quiet my monkey mind. Speaking of which, the Center also offers classes in yoga and meditation.

Now, I may be adverse to poolside procrastinating, but I don't put spa in the same category. The spa serves a purpose: it irons out sore muscles, buffs, polishes and it feels darn good. And like the grandiose property itself, the Spa at La Costa fills any pampered niche: gather the gal pals together in the Luxe Lounge for a private party; go romantic with a side-by-side couples massage in the VIP Spa Suite; or take a solo stroll along the Reflexology Path, a rocky walk that hits all the pressure points in your feet. I enjoyed the Hydrating Acai Bamboo Facial, an antioxidant party for your face that combines acai berry, blackberry, raspberry and plant-derived hyaluronic acid for an instant glow. The Spanish mission-style pampering palace also boasts waterfall Jacuzzis, an herb garden and a spa boutique that'll suck you in with divine smells and ogle-worthy workout wear.

So yes, I accomplished a lot in three days. I powered up in plyometrics; inhaled plenty of healthy food; downward dogged on Deepak Chopra's turf; and pampered my body and mind. But all that sweating and centering, not to mention the spa relaxing and sea air, must have rendered me temporarily insane. Because after three days at La Costa, I plunked down in one of the poolside loungers and did a whole lot of nothing—and it felt great. Guess it took all that moving to finally find my vacation state of mind.

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To learn more:

Omni La Costa www.lacosta.com