

Patrice-Anne Rutledge—Writing Sample

Laguna Beach: Romantic Getaway on the Orange Coast *Black Diamond Living*



With a seven-mile coastline reminiscent of a Mediterranean seaside village, Laguna Beach is the perfect romantic getaway destination. Laguna earned its reputation decades ago as an artist colony and hideaway for Hollywood's rich and famous, which it carries on today.

Although it's hard to tire of spectacular scenery, there's a lot more to do in Laguna Beach than just gaze at an ocean sunset. Art lovers will appreciate Laguna's art galleries—nearly 100 of them in all. If you're in town on the first Thursday of the month, you can participate in the First Thursday's Art Walk, where a free shuttle takes you to all of Laguna's art hotspots. Outdoor enthusiasts will enjoy Laguna's beaches, coves and tide pools as well as opportunities for kayaking, hiking, golf and whale watching amidst scenic beauty.

Accommodation options range from luxury resorts to cozy B&Bs. The **Montage Resort & Spa** is one of the top hotels in Orange County and warrants a visit even if you don't actually stay there. The Montage offers guest rooms, suites and bungalows—many with ocean views—which are priced in the deluxe range (from over \$400 per night). The Montage serves casual to elegant cuisine at its three main restaurants: Studio, the Loft and the Mosaic Bar & Grille. For spa lovers, the Spa Montage provides innovative spa treatments in an indoor/outdoor setting with 160-degree views.

Another lodging option is the **Casa Laguna Inn**, a relaxing hillside retreat with ocean and garden views. Rates range from \$130 to \$450 per night. If you travel with pets, you'll appreciate the inn's pet-friendly policy. People aren't the only ones who enjoy Casa Laguna's spa treatments; the spa also offers canine massage.

The vintage guest cottages at **Arabella Laguna** are a good choice if you're looking for privacy in a garden setting. Rates start from \$175 per night, with special discounts for week-long stays. The cottages and suites at Arabella include a complete kitchen, ideal for those looking for self-contained seclusion.

The restaurants of Laguna Beach, however, are an irresistible lure even for couples enchanted with the views and ambiance their lodging provides. In Laguna, the setting is almost as big a draw as the food itself, with numerous top-quality establishments overlooking the ocean or situated in a romantic garden. A longtime Laguna favorite, **Las**

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Brisas serves upscale Mexican cuisine in a spectacular oceanfront setting. If you enjoy breakfast—omelets, Belgian waffles, eggs Benedict and more—the Las Brisas Saturday buffet breakfast is a great bargain at only \$8.95 per person.

The **Cottage Restaurant** gives you a taste of old Laguna in a cozy garden setting. Built in 1917, the building has been used as a restaurant since 1964 and offers a varied menu including homemade quiche, rack of lamb and vegetarian penne pasta as well as several breakfast favorites.

If you'd like to take a step back in time, check out **French 75**. This trendy bistro and champagne bar evokes the feel of Paris in the 1930s and 1940s. Dinner selections include French favorites such as thyme roasted sea bass Provençal, steak au poivre and herb roasted chicken breast. Live jazz adds to the ambiance.

Although the city of Laguna Beach could keep you busy for weeks on its own, consider traveling a few miles north to neighboring Newport Beach for a unique romantic adventure. The **Gondola Company of Newport** offers one-hour cruises through the canals of Newport on a gondola, the ultimate symbol of romance on the water. What could be a more perfect ending to a romantic getaway on the Orange Coast?

Sidebar: If You Go

- **Arabella Laguna.** 506 North Coast Highway, Laguna Beach. 866-376-5744.
- **Casa Laguna Inn.** 2510 South Coast Highway, Laguna Beach. 800-233-0449.
- **First Thursday's Art Walk.** 949-683-6871.
- **French 75.** 1464 South Coast Highway, Laguna Beach. 949-494-8444.
- **Gondola Company of Newport.** Lido Marina Village, 3400 Via Oporto, Suite 102B, Newport Beach. 949-675-1212.
- **Laguna Beach Visitors & Conference Bureau.** 252 Broadway, Laguna Beach. 800-877-1115.
- **Las Brisas Restaurant.** 361 Cliff Drive, Laguna Beach. 949-497-5434.
- **Montage Resort & Spa.** 30801 South Coast Highway, Laguna Beach. 866-271-6953.
- **The Cottage Restaurant.** 308 North Coast Highway, Laguna Beach. 949-494-3023.

Note: original article included extensive photography.