



Carlsbad Bound

by David M. Brown

It happens every summer: As the mercury travels north to 100, Valleyites travel west.

This year, you and your San-Diego-bound group might turn up Interstate 5 another half hour, 40 minutes or so, from Arizonans' saintly seasonal getaway.

In North San Diego County, Carlsbad Village offers many of the attractions of its mega-neighbor south and some unique additions. World-famous Pacific Highway, U.S. 101, passes through town, and, steps away, is the Pacific. Your less-fortunate desert brethren can just dream of this; text them if you have a moment after windsurfing.

Originally surfer based, much like its neighbors, Oceanside and Laguna Beach, the young-beat but low-keyed Carlsbad Village has become a wonderfully walkable community of locally owned businesses, including the Village Faire Shops, vintage furniture and custom board stores, bike shops and other welcoming boutiques.

The Village has 30-plus restaurants, cafes, wine stores and microbreweries, such as Witch Creek Winery and Tasting Room, Land & Water Co., Paon, Vigilucci's and The Compass gastro-lounge.

On a recent trip, I enjoyed a Sunday light meal at Café Topes and a dinner at the very high-energy Blue Ocean Robata & Sushi, where gracious Chef de Cuisine Andrew Halvorsen served Sticky Pork Spare Ribs and the particularly outstanding Wok-Glazed Beef Tenderloin.

For those who like to eat, come hungry from Interstate 8; for music and dance lovers, the Village sidewalks have rhythm; for shoppers, bring your browsing savvy. "What you won't find is a chain or brand name store," says Nicole, Lazar, a resident



and spokeswoman for the area. "What you'll find is local color and laid-back hospitality."

The Carlsbad Danish Bakery has been here for generations, the popular Paradise Pizza delivers to the Village's "Movies Under the Stars," and the Wednesday farmers' markets unite visitors with locals. And, one of the nation's largest one-day festivals, Carlsbad Village Street Faire, occurs every May.

For art lovers, The Foundry Artist Village is a live/work studio for 16 resident artists, with exhibition galleries to watch them at work, and the Village has other sculptors, painters and jewelers at stores such as Viz Art Ink and TEKSartist.

The New Village Arts Theater schedules performances year round, and

every Friday Night Live provides three or four musicians who entertain on the street to start off the weekend.

Musicians, in fact, have long been a part of Carlsbad Village life. Bassist Ron Blair of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, guitarist Stevie Salas, who played with Rod Stewart and Mick Jagger, lead guitarist John Steely of Daughtry and Grammy Award-winning singer-songwriter Jason Mraz all have lived and played here.

And, go take a walk: A dozen large murals by local artists can be enjoyed throughout the Village; some are as large as 30 feet long. Every corner is serendipity and adventure. One must-stop, the historic railroad station, once important for bringing in goods, is now home to Carlsbad's Visitors Center, where staff can guide you according to your needs. Outdoor activities at the chic seaside village are abundant for active adults and families.

"Don't mistake Carlsbad Village for a sleepy surfer town. Here the culture is constant creativity inspiration and charm," Lazar says. "We're never short on amazing experiences, mixing a spirit of nostalgia, whimsy and fantastic SoCal weather. Carlsbad Village makes taking a beach vacation a breeze."

Stay a Night, Play the Week

One night isn't enough in the Village: You're just getting settled in to the lifestyle. Stay at least two, a long weekend, a week

for the children. For them, nearby is San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park and all of the offerings of San Diego, including museum-rich Balboa Park. Take time to walk the turf and absorb the area élan.

Two of the area hotels I enjoyed are the recently rebranded Cape Rey Carlsbad, a Hilton Resort, just south of Carlsbad Village, and the Beach Terrace Inn, as close to the center of town and the beach that's possible. Its new name was inspired by its location along the San Luis Rey River Valley.

The 215-room Cape Rey Carlsbad is luxurious simplicity, answering the twin demands of today's hip traveler. It's also chic and family friendly. As a guest, I enjoyed its proximity to the beach, the on-property Ocean Crest Spa, offering treatments and services derived from natural, organic and locally sourced products and Chandler's Restaurant and Lounge.

With a relaxing ocean view, Chandler's also offers excellent food, breakfast, lunch and dinner — and without the usual qualifier “for a hotel restaurant.” The night of arrival, after the multi-hour car ride from Phoenix, I enjoyed the Crab-cruste Sea Bass, which, paired with a California Pinot Noir and the ocean views, graciously welcomed me to the area.

Under Executive Chef is Pascal Vignau, Chandler's is also partnering with local brew masters, vintners and food experts to underline its commitment to regionalism. The French-born chef was formerly executive chef for Four Seasons Aviara



Resort in Carlsbad, which offered San Diego County's only AAA Five-Diamond restaurant during his tenure, and he has also worked at the AAA Five-Diamond French Room in Dallas and the legendary Hotel Negresco in Nice, France.

The sea-inspired interior décor also anchors the hotel to its place, with aquatic color schemes and professional photography throughout, showcasing water scenes from the world and locally. In this spirit, the employees are ambassadors to the beach lifestyle, connecting you to area opportunities.

“Our property is a beachfront basecamp for Southern California adventures,” says General Manager Vikram Sood. “In addition to its proximity to some of the best beaches in Southern California, it's also minutes from everything, from San Diego's top breweries to family attractions like LEGOLAND.

“At the hotel itself, couples and guests with kids can each create their own adventure with offerings like beach picnics, poolside cabana service, in-room hot cocoa for movie nights — you name it. The resort and its location are the perfect blend of romance and fun; guests can really make it their own

and feel at home. We want a visit to Cape Rey to be an experience, not just a hotel stay.”

In Carlsbad Village itself, The Beach Terrace Inn is for beachcombers, as it uniquely adjoins Carlsbad State Beach. The boutique hotel, built in the 1960s, completed an \$8-million renovation in 2011 and has been rightly noted by sites such as TripAdvisor.

“The Beach Terrace Inn is unique in Carlsbad Village and San Diego County for its true beachfront location,” says Justin Ruffier, director of marketing. “You can spend all day in flip-flops and wind up on the sand merely by stepping out the private beach gate. Of course, with rooms averaging over 550 square feet in size, most with private ocean-front balconies, it's understandable if you don't ever make the trek.”

One afternoon, a friend and I didn't. We were staying in one of the 680-plus-square foot Ocean Front King rooms, with 300-thread count linens, a 42-inch plasma television, wet bar with a refrigerator and coffee maker.

We were particularly fortunate to have a 64-degree San Diego day in early winter and sat on the balcony for three or four hours. We sipped a California red blend, munched fruit, cheese and crackers and watched the gulls and terns, families, and friends variously soar over, land, play and stroll on the beach. As the cooling evening came on, one couple, surfers just an hour earlier, huddled together and watched, as we did, the sun retire into the sea. |||

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