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Our Perfect Beachfront Family Escape

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After a few long-haul trips, I was keen to spend quality time with my husband and son that didn't involve tickets, passports, and speaking another language. Four nights in [Laguna Beach](#) at the extraordinary [Pacific Edge Hotel](#) was the perfect answer. Just a couple of hours from our home in Hollywood, California, the hotel is positioned on the beachfront but also located near the center of town, which meant we could park the car and explore the surrounding areas on foot (coming from Los Angeles that's a vacation in itself).

Not that we pushed ourselves. Our schedule went something like this: sleep, eat, beach, pool, beach, pool, sleep, eat, beach, pool, beach, pool.... You get the idea.

The Pacific Edge is a Joie de Vivre Hotel that boasts unobstructed views of the ocean and is utterly sublime. Our room was ocean-facing with a balcony that appeared to hover over the sand. We felt as if we were on the deck of a cruise ship the entire time we were there, soaking up the relaxing sounds of the ocean as well as enjoying the cool Pacific breeze.

For a few stress-free days we truly felt as if we owned a precious piece of Southern California real estate. I don't think we could sleep any closer to the ocean without a set of gills.



Our room was perfect, family friendly with a bright seaside décor, comfortable beds, and complimentary Wi-Fi, although as ever, I managed to pry my husband and son away from their gadgets to make the most of this beautiful ocean-side getaway.

The hotel staff is friendly and helpful, but from a tired mom point of view it was helpful to know that just a block away there was a large grocery store that sold everything we didn't bring with us. It might not sound like a big deal but it is. As

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Vermont

Virginia

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Wisconsin

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a mom all that anxiety of “what if I forget something?” just didn't matter. I was also happy to discover everything necessary for a beach outing—beach towels, lounge chairs, and umbrellas—is provided for complimentary at the Pacific Edge Hotel, meaning there was no heavy schlepping of bags or chairs (and we were so near our room we could just run in and change). Details like that really help make a holiday swing.

My son is an enthusiastic water baby and so we spent a lot of time splashing around, either on the beach or in one of the two heated swimming pools. Jett, who is now almost eight, absolutely loved the to-ing and fro-ing between water activities, but his super-fun go-tos were the stunning **tide pools**. It was divine to be able to connect with nature while we relaxed, and because of the ocean's proximity it was easy to enjoy the groovy casual beach vibe.



We also played volleyball and Frisbee on the beach, which of course along with all that outdoor “beach/pool, beach/pool” activity made us very hungry. The hotel delivered on that score, too. We ate at the **Driftwood Kitchen**, the Pacific Edge's newly renovated upscale dining room, which is open from breakfast to dinner. Oozing a delightful California coastal vibe, the restaurant is where you come for the finest seafood, steaks, and hand-shucked oysters. Again, we felt as if we were bobbing along on the blue cresting waves as we looked out over the uninterrupted views of the ocean. It's a killer place for brunch.

My husband loved the grilled Spanish octopus with chickpea purée and capers, while my grilled farm chicken sandwich with Brie, avocado, and Kennebec fries was heavenly. The goat cheese panna cotta and roasted baby beet salad were both standouts, and our son enjoyed his hearty burger.

The bar here has Hollywood pedigree, too. It is located in the former home library of character actor Slim Summerville (he appeared in “All Quiet on the Western Front” in 1930), and much of the original woodwork and wrought iron remains. The outside patio features oversized couches and fire pits.



For a more casual experience at the hotel, there's **The Deck** open-air restaurant, which is the kind of the casual diner where you can turn up barefoot in a beach kimono or without a shirt on and still be greeted with a smile. Laguna Beach locals eat here, which is always a good sign—look out for the live music nights as many locals drop in to play a set or two during the week. We ate simply but well, sharing homemade hummus and guacamole, steamed Venus clams and mussels, and strozzapreti pasta with Baja wild shrimp. I had the best grilled cheese of my life here. It was all gorgeous.

We managed to tear ourselves away from the hotel a couple of times to explore Laguna Beach. You can get a trolley bus into the town, and we played Frisbee in the park and walked around the galleries. We also chose to take one whole day out of our four-day trip to head 17 miles farther down the coast to **Dana Point**. Eager to see more nature and completely break from our daily routine we joined **Captain Dave's Dolphin and Whale Watching Safari**. We saw tons of dolphins and also a blue whale, which was a huge thrill.



The boat we sailed on was called “Manute’a,” and our kid loved it because it had two eye-to-eye underwater viewing pods. In other words, you can see through the bottom of the boat. Each pod has glass windows on both sides that allow you to actually eyeball with the animals. Our son was squealing with delight. (The safari is very family friendly, but as a precaution I gave my child half a Dramamine beforehand.)

Afterward the whale watching trip we toured Dana Point's [Ocean Institute](#), which is an ocean education center that offers in-depth marine science, maritime history, and outdoor education programs. Although it's not a museum or aquarium there was a lot to absorb and the tour enabled us to teach our kid more about the sea life he'd just enjoyed. It's hands-on, interactive, go-at-your-own pace learning and exploration.



At the end of the day, we were naturally ravenous and decided to have a fancy pants family vacation celebration dinner at [Raya](#) in the nearby [Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel](#). Raya boasts glorious ocean views sitting 150 feet above the ocean on the beachfront and provides a sumptuous and beautiful dining experience. I was very glad I cajoled my kid out of his flip-flops for this dinner.

My husband tucked into tasty Colorado lamp chops, while I enjoyed the spectacular seafood risotto. The Raya romaine salad, which came with Caesar dressing, avocado, tomato, pumpkin seeds, cotija cheese, and croutons, was particularly memorable, as were the inspired cocktails. Our son enjoyed his organic chicken quesadilla followed by an ice cream brownie sundae.



The rest of our vacation was spent, yes, you guessed it, mixing up a heady combination of “beach/pool, beach/pool,” back at the Pacific Edge Hotel.

The hardest part was checking out; it's my dream someday that I get to move there. Seriously, I almost considered hiding in the closet, but figured Laguna Beach wasn't going anywhere and we could always head back there soon. Laguna Beach is a lovely town with a cool artistic vibe, and the Pacific Edge hotel is simply magnificent. Sitting on our oceanfront balcony it felt as though we were on stationery cruise ship that truly offers the perfect family beachfront escape.