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DEPARTURES

Vintage Variety

Retreat to the beach for an unforgettable girls-only getaway

BY KRISTIN N. MILLER

Family vacations and romantic retreats are wonderful, but sometimes a girl's just gotta get away. What better way to decompress and recharge than by enjoying some quality time with friends on a "girls only" escape?

Responsible for generating roughly \$5 billion for the travel industry annually (according to research by AAA), "girlfriend getaways" are undeniably popular. While personal interests will determine the ideal destination for a group of gals, the common denominator is typically going someplace where you don't have to think about schedules, carpooling or housework.

When a dear friend from high school and I recently decided to plan a long overdue girls' trip, we sought a classy yet casual destination that would enable us to enjoy a little bit of pampering, a dash of adventure and a whole lot of bonding time. Our planning ultimately led us to California's charming coastal town of Del Mar just north of San Diego. We booked a stay at the iconic L'Auberge Del Mar and prepared ourselves for a weekend of fun in the sun.



SOAK IT ALL IN The iconic L'Auberge Del Mar, top, is chic and scenic, complete with a luxurious on-site spa.

HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

Long before it was a luxurious L'Auberge property, the resort site was home to The Stratford Inn, built in 1910, which later became Hotel Del Mar. With exciting attractions nearby, such as the Del Mar Fairgrounds and the Del Mar Racetrack, the resort served as a favorite hideaway in the 1920s for Hollywood movie stars seeking a discreet beach getaway. Today, those same historic attractions, in addition to other local points of interest such as Balboa Park, the San Diego Zoo and the Birch Aquarium at Scripps, still entice scores of visitors, and L'Auberge Del Mar fluidly maintains the sophistication and grace of a bygone era, making it a true icon of Southern California hospitality. Celebrated as a top luxury resort and recognized for its outstanding spa among travel experts at *Travel & Leisure* and *Conde Nast Traveler*, this AAA Four Diamond Property represents all that

I have come to love about this coastal region—relaxed, vintage California vibes with a definitive upscale twist. Luxuriously appointed rooms boasting cozy fireplaces, full marble bathrooms, plush billowy bedding and

COURTESY L'AUBERGE DEL MAR

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THE FRIEND ZONE Clockwise from above: L'Auberge Del Mar offers spacious rooms with ocean views, poolside lounging and seasonal dining at the lovely L'Auberge Kitchen 1540.

private patios/balconies serve as a source for peaceful R&R when not lounging in a poolside cabana, enjoying an al fresco lunch at the Coastline Restaurant or sipping on cool libations at the property's Bleu Bar.

SURF, SAND, SUN

With its premier location in the heart of the charming village of Del Mar, the resort is an idyllic starting and ending point for activities in the area. Guests have easy access to Del Mar Beach for playing in the surf or simply strolling along the sandy shoreline. The resort concierge can arrange for a guided kayak or snorkel tour of nearby La Jolla's marine ecological reserve or set you and your gal pals up with surf lessons through Fulcrum Surf. If your group enjoys hiking, take a trek through the Torrey Pines State Nature Reserve for one of the most scenic and untouched stretches of land in Southern California. Or, for a blissed-out start to your morning, the resort spa will arrange a private or semi-private yoga session by the sea. Those interested in thoroughbred-racing season can get in on the action from mid-July through early September at the world-famous Del Mar Thoroughbred Club or catch a Sunday polo match at San Diego Polo Fields, located in nearby Rancho Santa Fe and presenting one of the longest playing seasons in the country, from May through October.

WELLNESS BY THE SEA

Be sure to schedule time at Spa L'Auberge. With an emphasis on maximizing the healing powers of the ocean, the spa offers a variety of treatments utilizing curative marine extracts. Stepping foot into the spa feels like stepping into the serene comfort of a beloved beach bungalow—two parts laidback “surf chic” and one part Zen solitude. Beach photography and marine-inspired artwork line the walls of the airy, sunshine-filled space, which houses 10 treatment rooms and an herbal-infused steam room. After soaking in some quiet time in the open-air relaxation courtyard, I was treated to the rejuvenating Marine Renew-



al—an 80-minute detox ritual that begins with a full-body exfoliation using ocean minerals, followed by a massage with organic botanical oils. My friend opted for the 80-minute Vineyard Body Bliss—a hydrating treatment for her parched skin that began with an exfoliation using an antioxidant-infused Chardonnay body buff and ended with the application of nutrient-rich Chardonnay shea butter. Neither of us could get over how soft our skin felt, and I'm not exaggerating when I say we were both left glowing from head to toe.

A TASTE OF DEL MAR

Recognized among the top 10 best restaurants in Del Mar by *USA Today*, L'Auberge's Kitchen 1540 is contemporary yet comfortable, with a seasonally changing menu, an award-winning wine list and polite, polished service. We found this lovely venue to be a wonderful choice for our first night in town—a fine-dining yet relaxed experience after a long day of traveling. The next two nights we ventured off property and enjoyed an extraordinary ocean view at Pacifica Del Mar while we indulged in a sampling of oysters, macadamia-crusted mahi mahi and porcini-dusted sea scallops. We topped off our third evening with a sunset dinner at a local favorite—Jake's Del Mar, where we were treated to yet more creative seafood fare. There are plenty of excellent dining options in Del Mar, from casual to upscale and quick bites to ocean-view eateries. Your only dilemma may be the challenge of narrowing down your options. **DLM**



NEED-TO-KNOW INFO

L'Auberge Del Mar
1540 Camino Del Mar
Del Mar, California 92014
858.259.1515 / laubergedelmar.com

SHOPAHOLICS

Girlfriends who want to get their shop on will find a wonderful variety of boutiques and cafes in Del Mar's quaint shopping district, **DEL MAR PLAZA**, very conveniently located across the street from the L'Auberge Del Mar. Find treasures at eclectic boutiques including Urban Girl Accessories, Made in Earth, Peaches En Regalia and Urban Beach House. delmarplaza.com