

The Luxury of Laguna Beach

By Jessica O'Hehir



IMAGE COURTESY OF 15FIFTYFIVE LOUNGE

The laid-back lifestyle in Laguna Beach isn't the only perk of visiting this quaint, art-driven city in California; luxury is around every corner.

From five-star restaurants to gorgeous hotels, Laguna Beach beckons you to live the good life. The stunning ocean views alone can be the catalyst that will have you packing up your life and moving to Laguna Beach — or at least considering it!

The vacation that dreams are made of began for my family and me at Laguna's Surf & Sand Resort. Traveling with young children can be, to say the least, a chore. At the Surf & Sand, every effort is made to accommodate your needs; mine begin and end with my children. The beautiful ocean front hotel has 167 rooms, all of which have an ocean view. There are plenty of amenities; I highly recommend the complimentary S'mores and Snores package (upon request). The hotel staff set up a small tent in our room for the little ones to sleep in, and delivered S'mores before bedtime. According to my children, "That's the right way to begin a vacation!" The Surf & Sand also provides complimentary earplugs, in case the soothing sounds of the surf threaten to disturb your slumber.

Stepping onto the balcony of our hotel room was serene; the Pacific Ocean creeps precariously close to the foundation of the Surf & Sand, giving the impression that the hotel will be consumed by the waves at any moment. Actually walking along the beach or gamboling in the surf (or doing back handsprings in it like my teenager) supersede any optical illusion for my family, however. We spent hours chasing waves and playing catch in the sand, soaking up every ounce of sun possible. The staff at the Surf & Sand set up beach chairs and umbrellas along with spa water — just in case relaxation is calling your name instead of the hot California sun.

When the sand becomes a nuisance, the Surf & Sand's rooftop pool and spa offers a reprieve. I spent some serious time reading in a cabana lounge chair facing the ocean, with a Laguna Sunset — the Surf & Sand signature cocktail of course!

The famous Splashes restaurant, located just steps away from the pool (and a mere 25 feet from the ocean), offers the same gorgeous seaside view. Fortunately, Splashes was also just feet from my hotel room, making

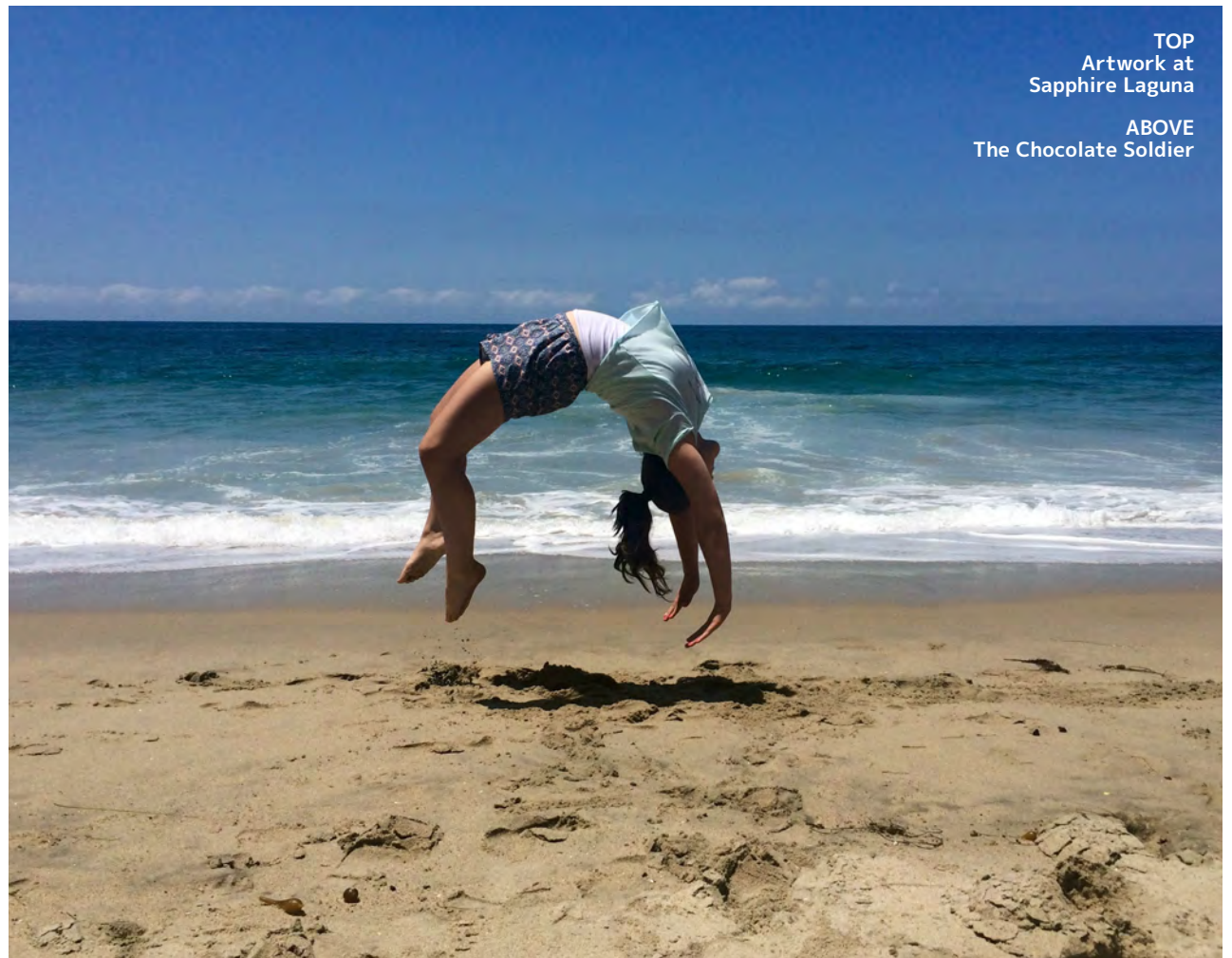
life that much easier. Dining on the palm-shaded patio of Splashes feels like a vacation in itself (despite the shameful crayon throwing — courtesy of my youngest child).

During our lunch at Splashes, I was served an interesting dish: Flatbread of Forest Mushroom and Pork Belly, complete with pickled baby apples, soy caramel, Brie cheese, rosemary and black garlic. What's a vacation for, if not to experience life (and therefore food) outside of your comfort zone? My teenage daughter, on the other hand, opted for her usual: the Kobe Burger with smoked cheddar, coriander slaw and garlicky pickles.

We swung by Sapphire Laguna for brunch while out exploring and were pleasantly surprised. Sapphire offers patio or indoor seating, and displays works from local artists throughout. The restaurant is known for providing comfort food inspired by cuisines from around the world. My husband, relishing the moment, ordered A Study of Eggs Benedict. Served three ways, A Study of Eggs Benedict consists of a toasted English muffin, Canadian bacon, hollandaise sauce, thick sliced summer tomato, poached egg and

pancetta-mushroom cream sauce. My younger children were less concerned about the food they received and more about the plates; all kids' menu items are served on Disney or Pixar plates at Sapphire Laguna.

Dinner at Selanne Steak Tavern in downtown Laguna Beach beats them both, however. This contemporary American steakhouse offers outdoor seating in their veranda or sunset terrace, as well as in the wine loft and wine library. Co-founded by hockey legend Teemu Selanne and Kevin Pratt, Selanne provides menus inspired by executive chef Josh Severson. We were first offered a small plate containing the Selanne 'Flash' Burger — ground sirloin and short rib on a pretzel bun with angry onions and baconaise. For our first course, we were served the Wedge: baby iceberg with heirloom tomatoes, bacon foam and Point Reyes blue cheese. (Normally I despise the pretentiousness of anything "foamed," but have to admit that now I'm obsessed.) The entrée of Filet Mignon with truffle marrow butter and bordelaise, served with Truffle Oil Risotto Carnaroli, had me euphoric, although I'm sure the Chardonnay helped with that. I couldn't have guessed that



TOP
Artwork at
Sapphire Laguna

ABOVE
The Chocolate Soldier



dessert (Vanilla Crème Brulee Torte with lavender foam, orange saffron and pistachio jaconde) would have come in second to an entrée.

Exploring downtown was the perfect way to walk off calories from the excessive consumption that occurred throughout our stay in Laguna Beach. The local art scene is on point (I may be adopting lingo from my teenager) and is visible in every store window. Be it canvas, clothing, food, architecture or surfboards, art is everywhere. The Chocolate Soldier in downtown Laguna Beach provides both works of painted art and gelato. What could be better?

If you are ready to end the ambulation (or if you tripped off of one of Laguna Beach's very large curbs, as I did), Laguna Beach offers

complimentary trolleys throughout the summer. The trolley runs throughout the day and into the evening. I downloaded the Laguna Beach Travel Info app and used the Trolley Tracker function to see real-time locations of all trolleys.

After a busy day wandering around Laguna Beach's stunning streets (think flowers and succulents everywhere), we were able to kick our feet up at the Manager's Reception. Hosted by the Surf & Sand's 15FiftyFive Lounge, the reception (occurring every Friday evening) featured live music by local artists, wine and appetizers.

The 15FiftyFive Lounge is also host to the most adorable event on Saturday mornings, Little Picassos. The Surf & Sand staff

View from the Surf & Sand pool patio



Sunset on
Laguna Beach



Forest Mushroom
and Pork Belly
Flatbread

sets out multi-colored framed easels, along with paper and markers. The Lounge area also boasts a picturesque view of the sand and ocean – more than enough inspiration for my little artists.

Creating our own artwork in a city known for its creativity was the perfect way for my family to end our time in Laguna Beach. While we won't be making the move there anytime in the near future, I'll be staring often at our photographs and reminiscing with my family, remembering all of the wonderful (and silly) experiences we had in Laguna Beach. Now we are onto our next adventure – wherever that may be. Henry David Thoreau wrote, "This world is but a canvas to our imagination." I'm ready to paint the town – are you?



Little Picassos