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The coastline in La Jolla, California

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Loving La Jolla

Just north of San Diego, this village is California at its coastal best

BY MARK MUSSARI

Nestled on the cliffs north of San Diego, La Jolla is blessed with some of the country's most spectacular seaside views. Even better, the seaside community of La Jolla offers visitors countless choices for shopping, dining, and culture. And as a five-hour drive from central Arizona, La Jolla makes for the perfect weekend getaway for sea-starved Arizonans.

Artsy La Jolla

La Jolla is great fun for art aficionados. A visit to the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego (one of its two locations resides in La Jolla) always is enlightening — and the museum also features some powerhouse views to accompany its often cutting-edge exhibitions. The town also boasts some excellent galleries that run the gamut from the ultra-contemporary Madison Gallery and wistful California impressionism at K. Nathan Gallery to the inventive selection of artists at Contemporary Fine Arts Gallery.

Foodie Frenzy

Foodies will love what La Jolla has cooked up, and seafood always is on the menu. Try grabbing a dozen oysters at Crab Catcher. Or if you can nab a table at its rooftop terrace, George's at the Cove provides breathtaking views of the Pacific Ocean.

A couple of newer entries to La Jolla's abundant restaurant scene will make you ponder where to eat next. Herringbone, with its abstract fish skeleton hanging over the bar and trees in the center of the restaurant, has an interior that makes you stop in your tracks. The Hake Kitchen & Bar combines an old-world feel with a new-world menu heavy on inventive preparations of that day's catch. Ask the bartender about bitters!

After a brisk morning walk in the sea air, breakfast in La Jolla is a well-deserved treat. Cody's, near La Jolla

Cove, has won voters' hearts as the best restaurant in town on a number of websites. Meanwhile, The Cottage offers outdoor and indoor seating in a quaint neighborhood setting (and gigantic oatmeal pancakes). Arrive early on weekends.

Out and About

If you're looking for something unique, Warwick's Bookstore is that rarest of finds these days. It's a large, independent shop with a huge selection of fiction and nonfiction (check out the biography and art sections), along with excellent personal service. The bookstore also has its own first-rate gift shop with a wide selection of cards and office supplies.

You can't visit La Jolla without going to the beach. Year-round gorgeous weather means surfers can ride the waves from dawn until nightfall. At Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve you'll find miles of unspoiled beaches and some of the San Diego area's best hiking trails.

MARK MUSSARI is a Tucson-based freelance writer and the author of numerous educational books.

If You Go

Grande Dame of La Jolla:

Be sure to check out the AAA Four Diamond Grande Colonial Hotel, located at 910 Prospect St. For over a century, it has been spoiling La Jolla visitors with its central location, stunning rooms, and some of the best views in town. It also houses one of La Jolla's finest restaurants, Nine-Ten.



© Nine-Ten Restaurant