WEEDKEND GETAWAY: LA JOLLA

‘Riviera of the West’ a five-hour drive away

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La Jolla, Calif., along the Pacific coastline of northern San Diego is nicknamed “The Riviera of the West” and “The Jewel of San Diego” for a reason: With its ocean views and beaches, fine dining, outdoor activities aplenty, moderate climate and well-heeled residents, the oceanside hamlet is an escape into the lap of luxury.

And it’s an escape from the desert heat via five-hour drive or quick plane trip; no pricey travel expense here. I lived in San Diego from 2002 to 2008 before moving to Las Vegas, and La Jolla was an occasional day trip. Now it’s an annual August trip for brunch and to catch up with family members and friends.

In the past year, I’ve stayed in La Jolla at two accommodations that were at the time the No. 1- and No. 2-rated on TripAdvisor: The Lodge at Torrey Pines and the Pantai Inn, respectively.

The Pantai Inn, 1003 Coast Blvd., is Bali-inspired and beyond charming. Across the street from where the sea lions sunbathe and swim and the shopping and dining center La Jolla Village, the Pantai Inn is bungalow-style with full kitchens and accommodations. Each unit is unique and includes parking — which comes at a premium in La Jolla. Day or night, the ocean waves and sea lions can be heard at the Pantai (pronounced “pawn-tai” and meaning “beach” in Malay).

My first weekend getaway in La Jolla was pretty much a fine-dining tour, and it was a fabulous feast: lunch at A.B. Quinton’s at the Lodge at Torrey Pines (with incredible views of the Torrey Pines Golf Course and the Pacific) and dinner at Nine-Ten at the Grand Colonial Hotel on Prospect Street in La Jolla Village (a unique his-and-her tasting menu, titled “Mercy of the Chef,” that’s great for sharing). The next day, brunch was at the Med in the historic La Victoria, also on Prospect Street (Old Hollywood glamour in a Mediterranean villa-inspired restaurant, gorgeous Pacific views and a menu prepared from local organic and sustainable fisheries, ranches and farms) and dinner

LUXURIOUS OCEAN VIEWS, WORLD-CLASS GOLF PLENTIFUL

at the 70-year-old Marine Room in the La Jolla Beach & Tennis Club on Spindrift Drive (directly on the beach, the elegant Marine Room features sensational surf, surfer and sunset views, plus award-winning global cuisine). For a more casual setting, and one of my favorites as a resident, Richard Walker’s Pancake House on Prospect Street is great for a good, no-fuss meal to start the day.

I did venture from La Jolla to check one item off the bucket list that escaped me as a resident of San Diego: brunch at Hotel Del Coronado. It was fabulous and could compete alongside Las Vegas’ fancy brunches, except that it’s on an isthmus in a historic hotel on San Diego Bay. An absolute treat worth the expense for a special occasion.

Driving back to La Jolla, there was no escaping Las Vegas, as this trip’s final dinner was at “Top Chef” star chef Brian Malarkey’s Herringbone in La Jolla (since this weekend getaway, Malarkey has opened Searcys in Caesar Palace). The indoor-outdoor design is charming — the restaurant is built around large trees — and the fish fry special was, well, special.

I returned to La Jolla last September for the San Diego Chargers’ game against the then-Super Bowl champion Seattle Seahawks (the Bolts defeated Seattle, 30-20) and stayed at the Lodge at Torrey Pines, 11480 N. Torrey Pines Road. The accommodation was what one would expect from a place called the Lodge — woody and quaint.

But, given that we’re in La Jolla, it also is luxurious with ocean views and world-class golf, the home of one of the most scenic stops on the PGA Tour. This trip was my introduction to Searcys, the lively location in the Gaslamp Quarter and Malarkey’s inventive and savory small-plates menu and cocktail program.

La Jolla is an indoor lover’s destination with surfing, trails for hiking, the family-friendly Birch Aquarium at Scripps, museums (La Jolla was home to Theodor Geisel, aka Dr. Seuss, and there is a small exhibit on Prospect at Legends Gallery), shopping (boutiques galore), a kayak tour of caves, paddle boarding and more.

La Jolla is truly a gem in Southern California that is to be treasured, and I’ll be back in August and October, the latter for a wedding at the La Victoria. brunch, anyone?

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