

Surprising San Diego's Grand Del Mar

A Throwback to a Bygone Era, Visitors Will Step Back in Time at This Luxury Resort

[WRITTEN BY CARL DANBURY]



NORTH OF DOWNTOWN SAN DIEGO and the beautiful shores of La Jolla sits the upscale beach community of Del Mar. Its spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean, trendy shops, haughty inns and spas have beckoned visitors for many years, particularly during the race season, as the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club holds its annual meeting from mid-July through Labor Day like it has nearly every summer since 1937. Hollywood stars Bing Crosby, W. C.

Fields, Don Ameche, Ava Gardner, Red Skelton, Pat O'Brien, Mickey Rooney, Lucille Ball, Desi Arnaz and Jimmy Durante once were regular visitors to the track but unfortunately for these stars of bygone days, they never had the opportunity to visit and stay at one of the most stunningly luxurious resorts in California. Given the opportunity, they would have flocked to The Grand Del Mar.

Sitting about 5 miles inland with no view of the



Pacific, The Grand, which celebrates its first anniversary this month, is among the top five of any hotel or resort I have visited in the past decade, ranking high with such properties as The Dorchester in London, The Cloister at Sea Island, the Four Seasons Palm Beach and the Bellagio and Wynn hotels in Las Vegas.

Refined Opulence

The Grand Del Mar, owned and developed by Douglas F. Manchester, who also developed the Manchester Grand Hyatt San Diego and the San Diego Marriott Hotel & Marina, is a testament to extraordinary taste and attention to detail, in both its design and execution.

Set amidst the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve, this 249-room luxury resort is reminiscent of and includes the finery one would expect to find at

the most opulent Mediterranean estates. The Grand's design honors the architecture of Addison Mizner, the famed architect who drew his inspiration from palaces in Spain, coastal retreats in France and decorative arts from Italy as insignias for Florida's coastal communities of Palm Beach and Vero Beach.

While opulent, the interior design throughout the hotel is more gracious than ostentatious. Imported marble, an exhaustive list of fabrics, stone, custom furnishings and art combine to woo the senses and render each guest virtually pulse-free in extant comfort. While some properties would rather provide a chair or sofa that looks better than it feels, there are no such worries at The Grand. Even a poolside chaise — without any sensory contribution — is cottony soft for hours of relaxation.

The resort offers its guests three outdoor swim-

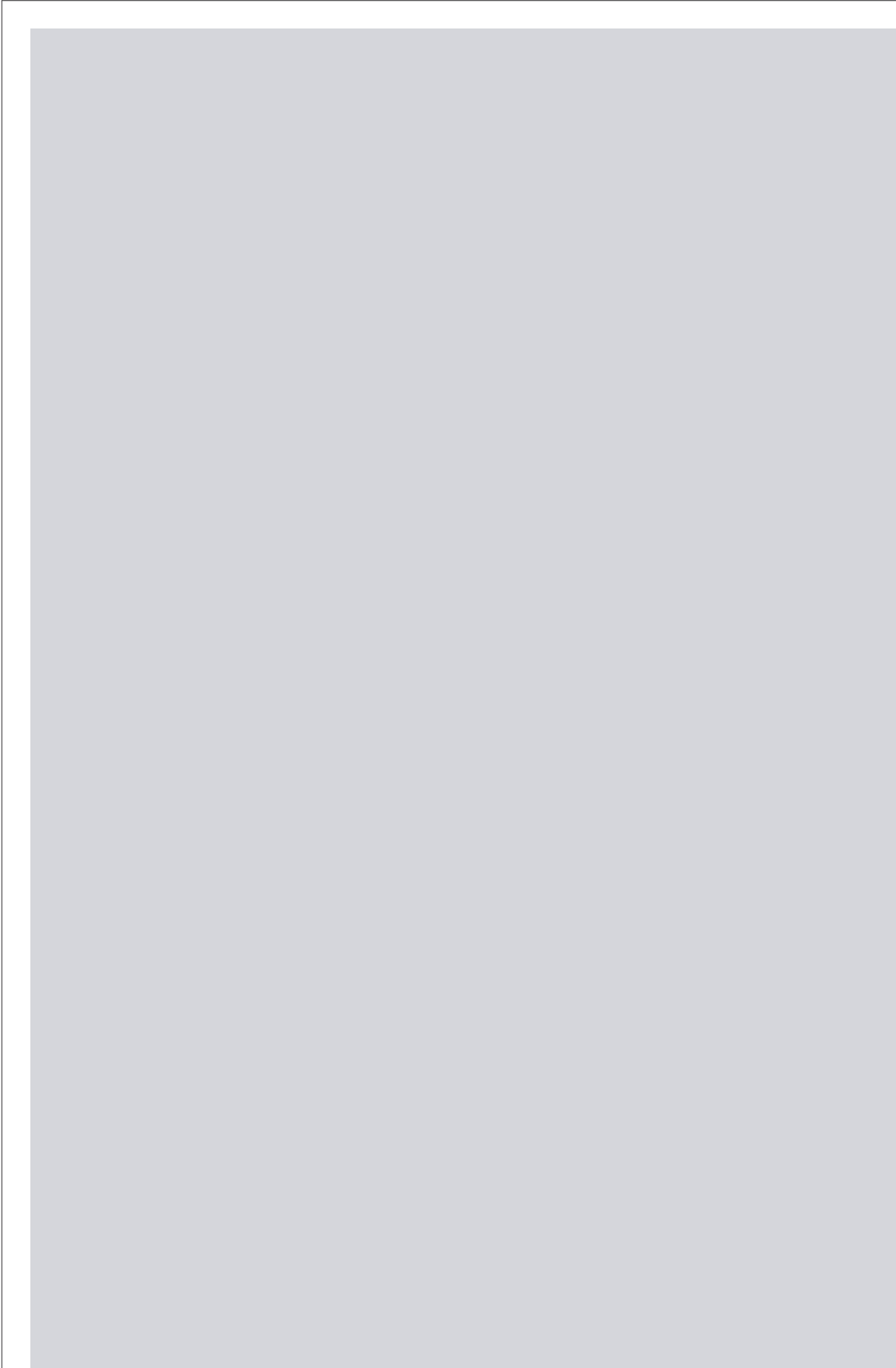


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ming pools, a splendid full-service spa, a great fitness facility, hiking trails, horse-back riding and the San Diego area's only Tom Fazio-designed golf course, a former private club, which preceded the resort by five years.

I enjoyed a round of golf with assistant golf professional Erik Wilson on a course featuring a layout replete with spectacular views of the resort and the canyons. The most astounding feature is the lack of crowds.

"You're not having to fight the crowds like at a Ritz Carlton or Four Seasons where there are 800 guests on property at one time," Wilson said. A busy day here might include 60 golfers, which means



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GRAND DEL MAR



playing a round in less than three-and-a-half hours is the norm.

The club plans to have no more than 140 members and resort guests rarely have to fight for tee times. Torrey Pines, site of the 2008 U.S. Open and the Buick Invitational every January, is just 15 minutes away. Two other renowned layouts, Aviara and Maderas, also are just minutes away, providing travelers a fine locale for a great golf vacation.

“We’re only 10 minutes from the beach,” Wilson offered. “Plus, there are a lot of other things to do in the area besides just playing golf and enjoying a day at the spa. This is a good home base, a central location, to enjoy all of the North county activities but you’re only 20 minutes from downtown, too.”

But for those not interested in golf, such as my wife, other activities are available. My wife joined naturalist Dylan Jones for an energetic hike through the canyon. Upon her return, she enjoyed a 60-minute Core Elements treatment, unlike any she had previously experienced. “They have thoughtful touches throughout the spa and I never had to ask for one thing. I felt like royalty,” she said.

Wining and Dining

Seeking a little beach time after lunch, we made the short drive to the public beach in Del Mar and spent the remainder of the afternoon walking and watching before heading back to the resort for a memorable evening at Addison, The Grand Del Mar’s signature restaurant.

The restaurant, in a posh building near the golf club, has received rave reviews from many area food critics, and the wine list is perhaps the deepest of any



OUT AND ABOUT IN SAN DIEGO

Coronado. The Hotel Del Coronado is a glorious old resort and offers a great brunch overlooking a wide expanse of beach. Further to the south is the Silver Strand State Beach, a great venue for sunbathing and body surfing.

Del Mar. If you enjoy horse racing, opening day at Del Mar is a fantastic experience and if you think the Kentucky Derby brings out the most outlandish hats and fashion, think again, as the Southern California ladies put on quite a show. After the races, or for that matter during any visit to the area, visit Chef Jeffrey Strauss’ Pamplemousse Grille. It is one of our new favorites anywhere with a fabulous menu, a great wine list and superb service. An absolute must, and try the veal chop!

Gaslamp Quarter. A trendy and lively spot with bars and restaurants in downtown San Diego. With Petco Park, home of the San Diego Padres, as its centerpiece, the Quarter is a great place before and after games.

Little Italy. It’s actually nothing more than a street or two, but Buon Appetito offers solid Italian food and al fresco dining.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SAN DIEGO VISITORS & CONVENTION BUREAU



Point Loma. Just south of Ocean Beach are the Old Point Loma Lighthouse and Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery. Both should not be missed, particularly the cemetery, which is similar to Arlington but with

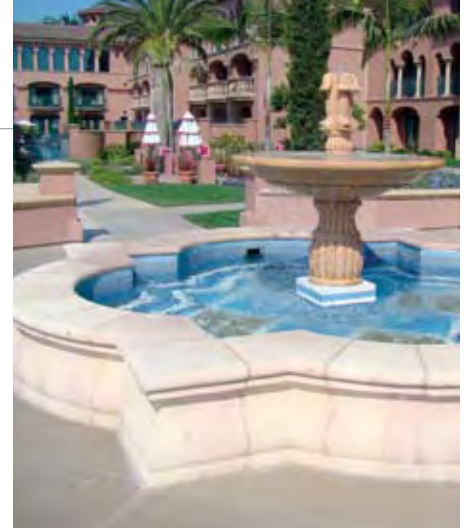
great views, and a sobering reminder of all those who gave their lives for our country. A little south of the lighthouse is the whale overlook, a vantage point that offers panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean. Migrating whales are often seen here from January through March.

Ocean Beach. A quaint town just a bit northwest of downtown San Diego where the surfer culture is alive and well. My ears harkened back to those timeless Beach Boys lyrics from “Little Deuce Coupe” and “Surfer Girl” as we walked along the sandy sidewalks of this outdated beachside haunt, Ocean Beach. Don’t miss the tacos at South Beach Bar & Grill on Newport Avenue or breakfast at Shades Oceanfront Bistro.

we have seen. The dining room is exquisitely decorated, adding a romantic aura to any meal. We'll let you judge whether Chef William Bradley's inspired cuisine is to your liking. He offers a four-course menu nightly utilizing local ingredients to complement his menu with contempo-

rary French influences. The service, from the sommelier to a fine staff of attentive servers, is the best I've experienced.

Wine director Jesse Rodriguez oversees a collection of 32,000-plus bottles and has created a great program of pairing wines with the four-course meals. While



you will be tempted by the vast collection of individual bottles to suit your palate, the paired tastings are an excellent way to sample vintages you may not have tried in the past.

With so much to offer, The Grand is worthy of a visit on its own, but it's also San Diego that is alluring. Talking about the weather gets a bit redundant, but there is no question that the combination of ocean breezes and the dry climate ensures year-round opportunities for outdoor fun. The true testament to the area, however, is that most of the locals we encountered were very warm and welcoming, with the staff of The Grand Del Mar at the very top of the list.

Our visit to San Diego was very surprising indeed, filled with many pleasures we can't experience in the Southeast. And, isn't that the essence of any vacation? **PN**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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