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Feature Articles

The Grande Dame of Laguna Beach

The Ritz-Carlton: Laguna Niguel, California
by **Diane Rossen Worthington**

A recent article in the *Los Angeles Times*

about to explode with at least 6 new seaside resorts, mostly south of Los Angeles. One major destination has been the Dana Point Laguna Niguel area. I decided it was time to revisit The



Ritz-Carlton, the long-standing flagship resort of Southern California. In the past my husband and I had always enjoyed the hotel but found it to be a little too formal.

This trip I noticed that there was a more relaxed atmosphere throughout the hotel. Whether we were wearing tennis attire, dressed for the pool or dressed for dinner, we felt at ease. It seems that with the

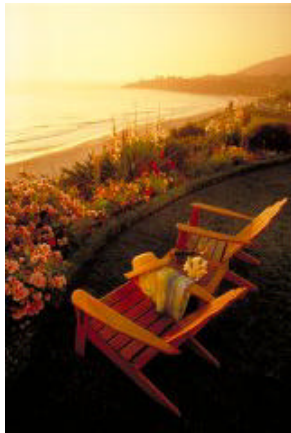
passage of time, the hotel and its clientele have grown into a satisfying relationship with one another. That said, our experience surpassed our expectations from the service to the food.

Our room faced the ocean and was centrally located for use of the pool, spa, tennis and dining areas. The terrace hung over the property with a spectacular view of the coast and the beach below with local surfers offering us quite a show. At night, we kept our door open which helped lull us to sleep while listening to the waves crash onto the sand.



The massage center offers some interesting variations on traditional treatments. I opted for the California Citrus Treatment. First, the extra

smooth citrus body scrub is gently massaged into your skin, then you take a quick shower to wash it off. Finally, a heavenly Orange Blossom Aromatherapy massage followed. I felt enveloped in oranges. My husband went with the Island Infusion massage scented with papaya and pineapple. Within three hours of our arrival we were already on our way to a place of total relaxation.



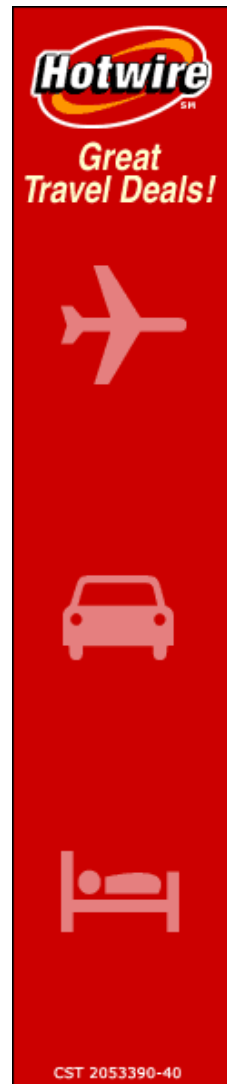
We took walks on the beach and along paths set up for joggers. We played tennis and even had a laugh at our novice game of croquet (I am still trying to figure out how to hit the ball with the mallet and make it fly in deep grass!). The fitness center offered classes each morning and I luckily met Cynthia, the yoga instructor, who showed me how to relieve my neck pain after all these years. What an unexpected treat.

We enjoyed dinner in The Dining Room, which has won the coveted AAA 5 Diamond Award for a second consecutive year. It

For more information about the Ritz-Carlton: Laguna Niguel, please visit their website, **Ritz-Carlton.com**.

The Ritz-Carlton - Laguna Niguel

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also has the distinction of being the only restaurant in Orange County to have been awarded this honor. Chef Yvon Goetz is in command and he is truly talented. The Dining Room is definitely the place to go for a special occasion. The décor features beautiful Impressionist paintings with banquettes strategically arranged around the room with partitions for privacy.

To begin, we selected the Petrossian caviar sampling and Champagne which was served with all the traditional condiments including freshly made blinis and toast triangles. A tiny Éclair of Duck Foie Gras was amazing with its creamy richness playfully offset with a touch of fruit. Paper thin slices of New England Scallops and Ahi Tuna surrounded by Toasted Couscous and a really refreshing Tomato Bloody Mary Sorbet showed off Chef Goetz's inventiveness. Other memorable dishes included Filet of Dover Sole in a Black Truffle and Roasted Lobster Nage and thin slices of Veal Tenderloin Wrapped in Prosciutto and served with Black Olive Polenta and a Madeira and Oregano Essence. Each of these dishes was served with a glass of wine that complimented the dishes. The Hanzell Pinot Noir, 1997 really stood out and up to the veal dish.



We finished with Profiteroles. Here the chef had scooped out the centers of the small cream puffs and stuffed them with Tahitian Vanilla and Brandied Cherry Ice Cream. A drizzle of warm bittersweet chocolate sauce added a finishing touch. Life was good.



The next morning before we left, we took a walk on the beach and looked at some of the new resorts that had just opened or would be opening soon. It is clear that this unique coastal area must continue to grow and evolve but there is no way to duplicate the seasoned old beauty or the superlative location of the Ritz-Carlton. If you are thinking about making a trip to Southern California you owe it to yourself to visit this bastion of California beauty.

We give **The Ritz-Carlton - Laguna Niguel** five Epicurus Crowns, our highest award.

