REVIEW: The L’Auberge Hotel in Del Mar

Although I travel a fair amount, when I can’t get away for a lengthy vacation I tend to explore areas and hotels in the Southern California region. One of my favorite parts of being in California is the length of highway that runs North and South along the coast. It’s called PCH, and it offers epic views, convertible-perfect cruises, and that Beach Boys California surfin’ vibe that is unmatched.

One of my favorite stretches off of PCH happens to be the area South of Orange County all the way to San Diego. On the northernmost side of San Diego County is a little town called Del Mar, which was built for the “rich and famous”. It’s a quaint area with beautiful bluffs, white sand beaches, and gorgeous year round weather. There’s a few of my favorite California hotels here as well, one being the L’Auberge, and the other being the Rancho Valencia. The L’Auberge is a cute little boutique hotel, with rooms overlooking the ocean, and restaurants and shops all within walking distance.



The lobby has a Martha’s Vineyard vibe to it

The lobby is a gorgeous and cozy affair, with dutch-colonial influence and small spots to sit and chat. The doors open to the pool and the outside patio, where it’s almost possible to do year round dining due to the perennially serene weather. The rooms themselves follow up with Oceanside touches, such as wicker chairs, colorful pillows, and blonde and white accents. The bathrooms aren’t particularly stunning, but you can’t help but appreciate the vibe of the entire hotel. There are certainly hotels with nicer fixtures and finishings, but at the L’Auberge all of it comes together as a whole to provide a unique luxurious Oceanside experience without a hint of pretentiousness. The textured walls, lime green accents, and live flowers in each room really add to the overall atmosphere.



The rooms are not large but decorated in quaint seaside cottage manner



The pool which overlooks the ocean is a great place to relax and enjoy good company and a cocktail

One of my favorite things about this hotel is actually the spa. It’s small and you’ll have to book ahead to get a spot, but it’s a separate building next to the main lobby that houses some of the most attentive and incredibly luxurious treatments i’ve had a boutique hotel. Their outdoor couples massage is highly recommended, and the tub on the patio completes that experience.



The spa is a hidden gem here

PROS:

- The atmosphere of the place just screams “beachside”, everything from the decor to the location is cohesive
- The views are incredible from almost anywhere on the property
- The prices are usually pretty reasonable

CONS:

- The rooms, although updated, could use a slight refresh (January 2017)
- The main restaurant in the lobby is nothing to write home about, but the patio dining is highly recommended

SECRETS:

- I love the spa, so be sure to check it out!

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- Walk through the footpath from the back of the hotel right over to the seaside bluffs. It’s just a staircase away to a great morning jog, or a peaceful walk down the beach. Going SOUTH on the beach will yield a calmer experience with less people!

REVIEW: The Pasea Huntington Beach – A Pacific Coast Getaway

Lets start by saying that I can almost give this place a 100% recommendation. It’s almost there, but like my experience at the Seattle Thompson, everything is in place, except for excellent staff. At first glance, everything about this hotel makes me want to recommend it. The lobby and public spaces are gorgeous. The pool is large, with plenty of seating, and faces the Ocean. The restaurant downstairs, Tanners, is a stunning establishment with a cherry-wood burning fire in the kitchen, and dishes worthy of a Michelin mention.



The lobby is graced by enormous windows and a tall ceiling, beautiful furniture, and the instant feel of a coastal vacation



The Pool is gorgeous, and located directly facing the Ocean,

making it feel somewhat like a Miami-esque hotel. Not a bad thing!

The rooms have unique touches, like free water, complimentary bottles of wine in the suites, and guitars tuned and ready for your plucking pleasure. You can tell thought went into the decor. It's timeless, yet modern, clean, and fits in perfectly with the vibe of Surfer-centric Huntington Beach. Location is also superb, with the new Pacific City mall next door. There's a cool co-op space in the Pacific City Mall with eclectic choices for food and drink.



The bathrooms are some of the nicest i've seen…

Where the hotel falls behind its facade, however, is in service. The Concierge was barely helpful (and I happened to meet two of them), and seemed flustered. This is one of my first tests of a hotel, asking what should be the equivalent of a well-versed local (the concierge), what to do, where to eat, or what to see. If they cannot respond with answers appropriate to the season, the guest's preference, or provide a gamut of variety in their suggestions, then they are not a

top-notch concierge. I also find that the quality of the concierge most often matches with that of the quality of the other staff. The hotel is new (As of December 2016), and it it showing some teething problems. I do expect, however, that over time there will be a level of quality that hopefully reaches that of some of the larger luxury chains.



Great Restaurant, check. Great Pool, check.

PROS:

- Stunning property
- Great Location
- Amazing restaurant on property (Tanners)

CONS:

- Concierge and staff are still a bit new and unpolished

SECRETS:

- This hotel is one of the cheapest in the area. It’s a

great steal if you want to be near Newport Beach but want something more modern, hip, and fun

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- Definitely set some time aside to hang out in the mall next door. There's a variety of restaurants and bars worth your time.

REVIEW: The Andaz West Hollywood – Your spot on the Sunset Strip

I've stayed at nearly every hotel on Sunset strip, and most of them are pretty unique in their own way. The Andaz West Hollywood stands out for being the most modern and updated of the properties on the strip, and whenever someone asks for a recommendation for something modern this is where I send them.



The view from Sunset Strip (Your ad on side of building may vary)

The lobby is clean and small, with an open check-in concept that Andaz is known for. This means that there is no large check-in front-desk with employees standing at the ready. Instead, there's a few laptops on some unassuming desks located next to refreshments and couches. The feel that this is supposed to connote is one of casualness and modernity. It does the job.



The minimalist lobby, notice the check-in "stands" in the distance

The hotel itself is a smaller property, but that's because the Andaz believes that this property is all about the location around it and they don't expect you to spend a lot of time within the hotel. There is a restaurant on the side of the lobby, which is beautiful, but rather expensive. It's not a bad place to grab a bite, but I would recommend checking out everything else that Los Angeles has to offer – it IS the foodie capital of the US.



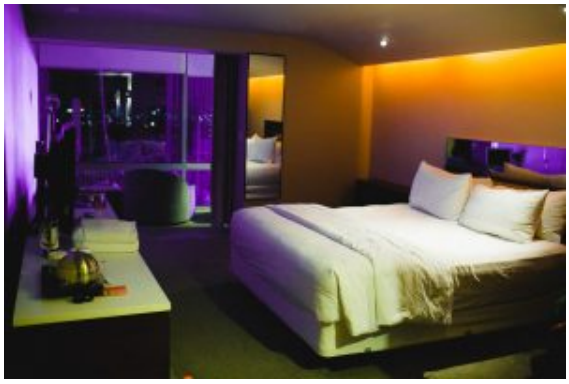
The lobby restaurant is

gorgeous AND expensive

The reason you come to this hotel, though is because the service is good, the rooms have beautiful floor to ceiling windows with breathtaking views, and there’s a very cool rooftop pool with expansive views of the surrounding Hollywood Hills, Downtown LA, and sometimes when there’s not so much smog – views all the way to the Pacific.



The rooftop pool where you’ll want to spend a lot of time



Floor to ceiling windows unveil the beautiful view from the high-up Andaz which is already on the high-up Sunset strip area

PROS:

- One of the only modern hotels on Sunset strip

- The views from the rooms and rooftop pool are pretty fantastic
- Walking distance to everything in the area (and there's a lot)

CONS:

- There's not a lot to the hotel itself, it's a small property

SECRETS:

- This is a place you want to stay at during the summer months or when it's hot in LA, because otherwise the rooftop pool and lounge is otherwise pretty useless

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

- This is Sunset strip, which means you are within walking distance to some pretty legendary bars and restaurants. Check out the lounge at Chateau Marmont, it's cheeky and hip and always "in".
- Walk over to the Rock & Reilly's bar if you want a cool place to have a drink and watch a game. This bar also has an incredible selection of whiskeys (Go figure – it's an Irish pub)

REVIEW: The Hotel Del Coronado

The Hotel Del Coronado is a hotel that holds a special place in my heart. Having grown up in Southern California, my family spent many summers down in San Diego, and one of the go-to spots that we would always visit was the Hotel Del

Coronado. It was always the family tradition to spend some time on the beach in front of the Hotel Del and to grab one of their juicy burgers while watching the sun set over the Pacific.

However, it was NEVER a family tradition to *stay* at the Hotel Del Coronado. Why? Because the rooms were either in the old "Victorian" tower and old and stuffy, or they were in the "newer" tower which was just not quite as nice as the Loews Coronado Resort.

Everything else about the property was exquisite – the public spaces had an old school elegance, the elevator harkens back to the 1800's with manual controls, and the ballroom is a sight to behold by itself, but we never chose to actually stay in the rooms at the Hotel Del.

This changed recently, because as of 2014, a major renovation was completed at the Hotel Del Coronado. The rooms in both towers have received significant changes, and the public spaces have been refreshed, with special care taken to preserve the national treasure that the hotel actually is (it's a historic site – and yes, some swear it's haunted ;).



One of the renovated rooms at the Hotel Del Coronado – I can now highly recommend it!



The Thanksgiving dinner at the ballroom is exquisite and HIGHLY recommended

The best part of the Hotel Del Coronado is that it embodies the beachy California vacation vibe that so many try to replicate but very few actually achieve. It also has so much history to it that it's practically a given that should a president or governmental figure visit San Diego they stay at the Hotel Del Coronado.

Service is also incredible at the Hotel Del, but it's much better if you choose to stay in the Victorian historic side of the hotel, this is something I highly recommend doing – especially post-renovation.

If you do visit the Hotel Del, be sure to visit the underground gallery and marvel at the history of the place –

it’s all setup in a mini-museum type setting. All in all, I am happy to now be able to recommend the Hotel Del Coronado as a prime property that everyone should stay at if they visit Coronado island.



Get your burgers at the pool and just marvel at the great weather and the historic beauty of the Del

PROS:

- Location wise, the Hotel Del Coronado is the best place to be on Coronado Island, the nearest competition is the Loews and it’s located in a more rural area down the

peninsula
- The hotel has so much character, it’s not just another cookie cutter resort

CONS:

- The service could be slightly better, it’s not bad by any means but it doesn’t necessarily reach the levels of smaller Ritz properties or the Mandarin Oriental’s standards
- The pool is a bit small and has very little seating

SECRETS:

- Try brunch at the ballroom, its better food than the rest of the restaurants, and the environment is stunning

THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:

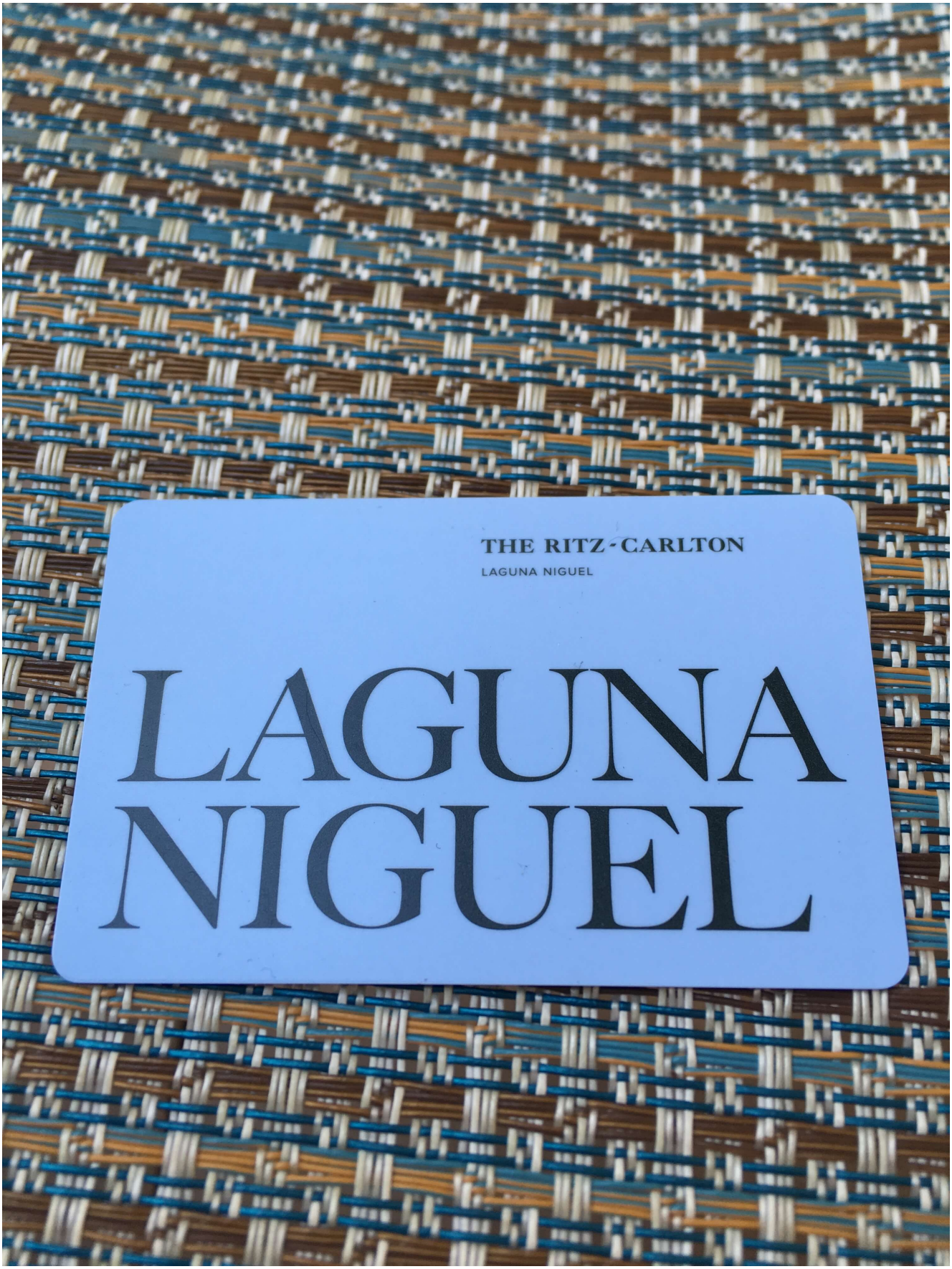
- Rent a surrey (four person bike) and just ride around Coronado island. It’s a great way to spend the day and enjoy the beauty of the island, the greenery of the golf course on Coronado, and to check out all the little shops around the peninsula

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REVIEW: The Roosevelt – A Hollywood Staple

The Roosevelt – I have been to this hotel many times, because it’s the center of Hollywood when it comes to hotels. Drop by this place any random weekend and there’s an event happening, the pool is packed with fun-loving people, and the bars are flowing.

REVIEW: The Ritz-Carlton Laguna Niguel



This one’s a keeper – as they say. The Ritz-Carlton Laguna Niguel is a mixture of old-world elegance and contemporary flair. The hotel is large but the intimate spaces hidden

within it make it feel homey and comforting rather than barren and excessive.



The Spanish villa look of the Ritz in Laguna gives it some old-world charm

The minute you walk in you're wowed by the depth of the hallway. It has a very similar feel to the Monarch Beach Resort in this respect, but with slightly lower ceilings which makes this hotel the perfect accessory for a romantic getaway.

The service here is impeccable, at the top of its class for Ritz-Carlton's, and the lobby bar here is a cool place to hang out. I had a chance to check out two of the restaurants here, EnoSteak and Raya and highly recommend both of them. Raya's floor to ceiling glass portals overlook the Pacific Coast and it's a dazzling place to have breakfast at a leisurely pace. Enosteak is the quintessential martini and ribeye spot which serves its purpose in this type of resort.

The rooms themselves are on the smaller side, and are not as new as the The Monarch Beach Resort in Dana Point but they are definitely still clean and luxurious. This is yet another hotel built with weddings in mind and as such there are

breathtaking vistas throughout.

I recommend checking out The Monarch Beach Resort in Dana Point and doing a spot compare between the two when booking to see which one is priced better during your stay as they both are comparable hotels, with the Ritz possibly edging on service, but slightly older in room quality.

PROS:

- Feels intimate yet maintains that large resort feel
- The pool area is well thought out to include private secludes so that not everyone is staring at each other when you're laying out
- The service is impeccable and the dining establishments at this hotel are above average

CONS:

- It could use some room refreshes

SECRETS:

- Check out the view at 180 Blu while enjoying a drink. It's easy to miss this part of the hotel

OTHER THINGS TO DO:

- Officially the second smallest church in the world, St Francis By the Sea is a pretty cool place to visit. Plus it's on the Guinness Book of World Records!
- This one's been written about but if you want to get around and you don't want to hire an uber. Check out the Laguna Beach Trolley. It's fun to use it as a method of hopping around town and checking out the sights.