

CALIFORNIA DREAMIN' FOR YOUNG FAMILIES

Del Mar, Rancho Palos Verdes offer surfing, sunshine and fun for water babies

MHAIRRI WOODHALL

With its Instagram-worthy backdrops, infinite sunshine and warm, welcoming vibe, southern California is a dreamy destination for families. On my last visit to the Golden State, I deviated from our preferred beachside haunts to explore two hidden coastal gems. While I'm sure the SoCal crowd would prefer to keep these special spots for themselves, I feel compelled to share their secrets.

THE SURF'S ALWAYS UP IN DEL MAR

Chill like a local at L'Auberge Del Mar. Located just 30 minutes north of San Diego, this boutique, beach-house-chic property sits in the heart of Del Mar; a quaint seaside village brimming with al fresco fun. To harness the SoCal spirit, book a family surf lesson at Power House Park through the hotel's concierge. Led by Fulcrum — Del Mar's original surf school — you and your little dudes will suit up for a dry-land lesson to learn about ocean conditions, techniques and safety. After the in-depth briefing and onshore practice, brave the water and attempt to catch a wave. Expect to be completely upstaged by your children throughout the humbling, yet surprisingly addictive full-body workout.

Stretch your weary surf muscles on a leisurely hike through Torrey Pines State Reserve. This wild expanse of protected coastal trails is a photographer's dream and the perfect place to exhaust your children's boundless energy. The Guy Fleming trail, a gentle one-kilometre loop, is the easiest option for tiny humans. Wind-swept pines, sweeping ocean views and two spectacular look-out points are hallmarks of the scenically stunning route. For a

slightly steeper and more rewarding exploration, give the Beach Trail a try. Playing in the sand and surf is your big payoff for tackling the 1.2-km downhill climb. Hike the trail back, if you're up for the challenge, or take it easy and book a ride with L'Auberge's complimentary shuttle. As Torrey Pines is hugely popular, I recommend arriving early to avoid the crowds.

Beyond Del Mar's natural attractions, there's a host of world-class theme parks to keep the kids entertained. LEGOLAND California, one of our family favourites, is just 20 minutes north of L'Auberge. It's easy to spend a full day riding the coasters, building Lego models, examining the mesmerizing tiny reproductions of America's landmark cities, and cooling off in the waterpark. Plan your visit in advance with LEGOLAND's interactive online attraction guide to find age- and height-appropriate rides and activities.

For animal enthusiasts, the San Diego Zoo Safari Park is a home run. My daughter loved the guided African safari, as well as the playground, jungle gym, petting zoo and splash park. We hope to return in a couple of years to try the Flightline Safari — a soaring zipline sightseeing experience (for ages eight and up) offering aerial views of the park's wildlife. Travel tip: When visiting off-property attractions, request a complimentary beach tote and towels from the L'Auberge concierge.

FAMILY PARADISE FOUND IN RANCHO PALOS VERDES

From Del Mar, cruise north along the coast to Rancho Palos Verdes for the ultimate eco-luxury indulgence. After spending just three days at Terranea, the 102-acre oceanfront resort has catapulted to become my



Terranea, a 102-acre resort in southern California, has so many activities, "you'll find little reason to explore beyond the exquisitely manicured grounds," says Mhairi Woodhall.

top choice for families visiting SoCal. A destination unto itself, you'll find little reason to explore beyond the exquisitely manicured grounds. Water babies will love the splash zone and family pool with 42-metre waterslide. For budding golfers, the nine-hole, par-three Links course is ideal for a round with the family. Play on the water with resort kayaks and stand-up paddle boards, or head to the hills on a self-guided nature walk to the Point Vicente Interpretive Centre. Free guided hikes are also available daily at 10 a.m. For families with children ages four and up, Terranea's two-hour tide pooling adventure, led by a

resort naturalist, is a great way to take a closer look at Rancho Palos Verdes' diverse sea life.

Two additional eco-educational opportunities include visiting the resort's sea salt conservatory to see how salt is harvested from sea water, and attending the falconry meet and greet to learn about natural history and the role birds of prey play in the local ecology.

One of the biggest draws for my family is Terranea's Tide Pool Kids Club, available for children ages four through 12. Interactive, play-based activities include art projects, science experiments and outdoor adventures to explore the bluffs, discovery trails, gardens and beach. While

the kids are immersed in the exciting world of Kids Club, rejuvenate your body and soul in Terranea's expansive indoor-outdoor spa.

Whether you choose to book a restorative treatment, like the Honey Body Bliss that incorporates honey from the resort's beehives (beyond heavenly), or simply bask at the idyllic adults-only oceanview spa pool, you'll feel fully recharged when it's time to collect the kids from camp. Visit Terranea by April 30 to receive 25 per cent off the best available rate with the Winter Escape package.

To follow Mhairri's family adventures, visit arrivalstravel.com.



The L'Auberge Del Mar, north of San Diego, is in a quaint seaside village where families can surf or hike together.



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