

Around Town / A Culinary Cruise



Sail the Douro River with chef Amar Santana during a unique vacation experience.



Set sail with renowned chef Amar Santana, known for appearances on Bravo TV's "Top Chef" as well as for his fine dining restaurant, Broadway by Amar Santana, in downtown Laguna. From Nov. 5-12, avid foodies and travel lovers can cruise Europe with Santana as their guide during the upcoming Sail With Amar Santana experience. The trip, which is being organized by Village Travel Laguna Beach, will whisk guests along the Douro River through Portugal and Spain aboard the S.S. São Gabriel, stopping at local farmers markets and vineyards to procure food and vino. Santana will prepare a specialty dish each night using the fresh ingredients they find along the coast while Broadway's co-owner, Ahmed Labbate, will curate the wine pairings. There will also be cooking classes aboard the ship. An optional, three-night excursion through Lisbon, Portugal, may also be added on to the end of the cruise. Santana is currently on air as a contestant on "Top Chef All-Stars," which began airing in early March. (949-464-5778; villagetravellaguna.com) —Ashley Ryan

GOING GREEN

With its Marine Protected Areas and status as a water-wise city, Laguna Beach has already made its mark as an environment-friendly locale, but the new Eco Now store downtown is helping take that a step further. Located in the Lumberyard Mall, the shop offers eco-friendly, handmade and locally sourced household goods made from biodegradable materials, all in an effort to provide sustainable options and reduce waste; bring your own reusable containers or purchase one from the store. In addition, Eco Now hosts monthly sustainability workshops on things like composting, fixing things and cleaning up the community in order to educate locals on what they can do to help the planet. A grand opening celebration and ribbon cutting ceremony was held in early March, though this isn't owner Thea Merritt-Pauly's first retail venture. Eco Now originally set up shop at Orange County farmers markets in 2018 and there are now permanent stores in Costa Mesa and Anaheim as well as a shop reopening in a new location this spring in Riverside. (949-715-0632; econowca.com) —A.R.



Eco Now is a new store downtown that offers sustainable household goods without packaging.

TOP SECTION: COURTESY OF UNIWORLD RIVER CRUISES; BOTTOM: ANDREA BADILLO



The Parker Mini (top) and Parker Pearl necklaces by gorjana, which were donated to Dress for Success

INSPIRING CONFIDENCE

Jewelry brand gorjana, which was founded by local Gorjana Reidel and her husband, Jason, and is still based in town, used its products to inspire confidence in honor of Women's History Month. The brand gifted 1,000 of its bestselling necklaces to Dress for Success, a nonprofit that provides professional attire and development tools for women to help them obtain jobs and thrive in the workplace. Two chain-style necklaces, the larger Reed and the petite Parker Mini, were included in the effort, as was the feminine Parker Pearl necklace. These gifts were intended to provide those in need with versatile items that can be fitting for job interviews as well as celebratory meals afterward, ensuring they look and feel their best every step of the way. Giving back is a core part of gorjana's business, with regular support given to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation, Baby2Baby and Toys for Tots and additional initiatives taking place throughout the year. (949-715-8166; gorjana.com) —A.R.

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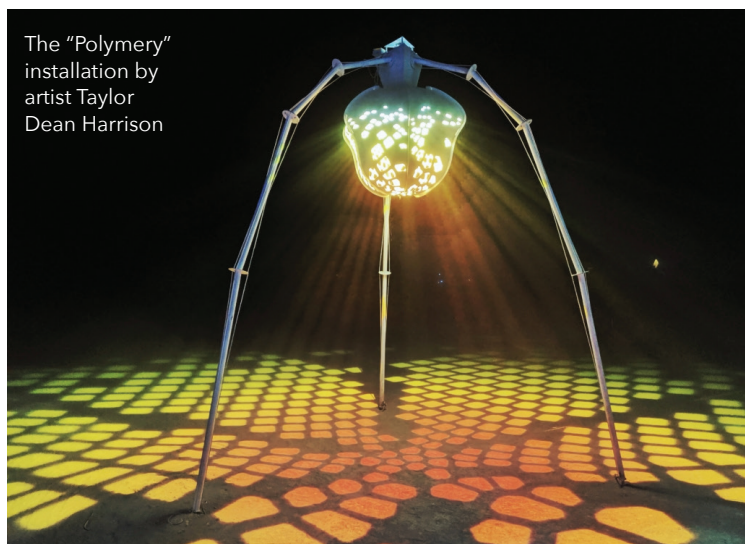


ILLUSTRIOUS ILLUSTRATIONS

With images of colorful dragons, winged tigers and werewolves filling her paintings, April Solomon has become known for her artwork—a style that she calls classical fantasy. And now, the local resident and Laguna College of Art & Design graduate is being honored with a unique award: She was chosen as a winner in the international Illustrators of the Future contest, which was launched 40 years ago by L. Ron Hubbard following the success of his Writers of the Future contest. As part of the competition, in addition to a cash prize, Solomon will head to Los Angeles in April for a weeklong master class and award ceremony, and her artwork will be published in “L. Ron Hubbard Presents Writers of the Future Volume 39,” an anthology set to be released in May. Last spring, when Solomon graduated from LCAD, she also won the 2022 Trustee Choice Award and her painting “Sulfur Dragon” was added to the school’s permanent collection. (April Solomon: aprilsolomonart.com) (Illustrators of the Future contest: 323-466-3310; writersofthefuture.com) —A.R.



“Treasure Horde” by April Solomon (pictured at top with “Sulfur Dragon”), who won the Illustrators of the Future contest



The “Polymery” installation by artist Taylor Dean Harrison

A temporary art installation by Taylor Dean Harrison titled “Polymery” is illuminating the night since it was installed in front of City Hall in mid-March, where it will be on view for around three months. (taylordeanharrison.com)

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF LAGUNA COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN; APRIL SOLOMON; TAYLOR DEAN HARRISON



Ella Wyatt and Rob Harryman were recently appointed as No Square Theatre’s artistic director and managing director, respectively.

TAKING CENTER STAGE

No Square Theatre appointed two longtime volunteers to the organization’s first paid positions in January. Stepping into the spotlight as official staff members, Ella Wyatt was named artistic director while Rob Harryman was deemed managing director. Both Wyatt and Harryman have been active participants with the nonprofit community theater for years, donating time and energy as actors/directors as well as maintaining positions on the group’s board of directors. In addition, the duo were actively involved in “Waiting in the Wings: The Musical,” which No Square produced at the beginning of the year, as Wyatt directed the show and Harryman played three different roles. The group’s current production, “Lagunatics: 30 Years of Yucks,” is part of an annual series that makes fun of all things Laguna, with the 2023 anniversary show featuring a collection of its silliest moments. This show, which runs through March 26, is being held at the Festival of Arts Forum Theater. (949-715-0333; nosquare.org) —A.R.

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New experiences at The Ranch at Laguna Beach include The Shaper (left) and The Painter (right).



CULTURAL COLLABORATIONS

In an effort to celebrate the roots of our coastal town, The Ranch at Laguna Beach has debuted two new exclusive experiences for resort guests. These cultural adventures feature collaborations with community members who are experts in their fields. For The Shaper, enjoy an immersive afternoon with Gary Larson, who has been shaping surfboards for Hobie Surf Shop in Dana Point for over 20 years. Guests will meet with Larson for lunch at a local brewpub to discuss his background and their dream board before heading to the studio to help shape it, as he teaches them about contouring, rails and colors; the finished board will then be delivered to their home a few months later. The other experience, The Painter, is inspired by Laguna's art colony history, with renowned plein air painter John Cosby sharing knowledge on his artistic process at his local studio and continuing the conversation over lunch before taking guests out to a local beach to create a demonstration painting before they craft their own. Each cultural encounter starts at \$2,500 plus tax and must be booked at least three weeks in advance. (949-499-2271; theranchlb.com) —A.R.



The Teen Loft and WellSpace has reopened at the Boys & Girls Club of Laguna Beach's Canyon Branch.

Take a Breath

For teens, it's often difficult to remember to pause and take a breath in times of struggle. While the Boys & Girls Club of Laguna Beach already provides a safe, comforting environment in which for youth to thrive, it's important to ensure that all teens are practicing mindfulness and focusing on their own well-being to combat things like depression, anxiety and loneliness. To help with this, the organization reopened its Teen Loft and WellSpace at the Canyon Branch with a ribbon cutting ceremony in late January, after it was transformed into a healing oasis that focuses on physical and mental health to promote a sense of overall wellness. Designed by Deana Duffek of Design With Purpose, the space provides cozy seating, greenery, a wealth of resources and more. Currently, there are 20 to 30 teens making use of the area each day, though the club expects numbers to grow in the coming months. (949-494-2535; bgclaguna.org) —A.R. ■

TOP SECTION: COURTESY OF THE RANCH AT LAGUNA BEACH



Students Alia Marriner, Penelope Jameson and Caleb Cornell with Vista Aliso resident Katie Fitch

Third grade students from El Morro Elementary School's RAK Pack, or Random Acts of Kindness club, created Valentine's Day cards for local seniors at the Vista Aliso apartments; the cards and some chocolates were delivered by El Morro's fifth-graders in the PAL, or Peer Assistance Leadership program, through a partnership with Sally's Fund, a nonprofit transportation service that has been helping older adults in Laguna get around since the 1980s. (ems.lbusd.org)

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