

A Slice of SUMMER

EXPLORE THESE POPULAR SPOTS TO CREATE THE SEASON OF YOUR DREAMS.

By LAGUNA BEACH MAGAZINE STAFF

Laguna Beach is full of magic—especially in the summertime. From sipping cocktails on rooftops and watching the sunset to exploring the great outdoors, lounging on the sand or shopping for swimwear, our sleepy beach town comes alive when the weather heats up.

Here, check out staff and locals' picks for favorite places to dine, recreate and relax this season, ensuring that residents and visitors alike are able to enjoy everything Laguna has to offer.



Favorite Places for Feel-Good Fare

WHETHER YOU HEAD UP TO A rooftop or down on the sand, dining outdoors in Laguna Beach is unrivaled. Sip cocktails in the sunshine, stop by in time to catch the sunset or dine under the stars—no matter what you choose, you're sure to have a memorable experience with good vibes all around.

RELAXING ON ROOFTOPS

If you're going to dine out in Laguna, consider visiting one of three local rooftops. Kurt Bjorkman, general manager at The Ranch at Laguna Beach, recommends that those staying at his resort stop by **The Rooftop Lounge**. Housed atop the historic La Casa del Camino hotel, Bjorkman says it

COURTESY OF THE ROOFTOP LOUNGE



Skyloft's rooftop (above) and drinks (left); right: Mozambique's fire pit; below: the patio at The Cliff

being part of a hotel experience sets it apart from the other sky-high eateries in town. "As awesome as those are, I have an affinity for any elevated hotel-related bar experience," he explains. Grab a fruity cocktail or a cold glass of wine to sip in the sunshine, paired with shared plates that your whole group can enjoy together.

Downtown, **Skyloft** offers sprawling views of Main Beach from above, along with fresh salads, barbecue plates and an array of beverages. An additional happy hour menu offers deals on house wines, draft beers and well cocktails in addition to appetizers like pulled pork sliders, smoked wings, a cheeseburger and grilled salmon.

Over at **Mozambique**, an African-inspired eatery offering wood-fired steaks and seafood—plus happy hour every day of the week—the Pacific rests along the horizon line. With live music four nights a week, this is a lively spot with something to offer those from all walks of life.



VIBRANT VIEWS

Patios with a view are abundant in Laguna, and they never disappoint. **Las Brisas** near Heisler Park has an alfresco dining area that overlooks the blue waters of the Pacific, sprawling Main Beach and the park itself—a gorgeous spot, and a favorite for those that live in town as well as those visiting from elsewhere. The Mexican-inspired fare and seafood delights are delicious and just enhance the views.



An ocean-view breakfast at The Cliff, including one of the eatery's over-the-top bloody marys



Patios at Las Brisas (above), The Deck on Laguna Beach (above right) and Sapphire, Cellar-Craft-Cook (left)



Another spot with stunning views is **Splashes Restaurant** at Surf & Sand Resort, which Jess Watson, owner of The Shop. Laguna Beach, says is a great place to grab a drink and a snack. “I would get an Aperol spritz and the charcuterie, with a side of ocean and water right in front,” she says.

At **The Cliff** restaurant, an expansive, multilevel patio ensures that there is plenty of room for everyone—and the views of the endless ocean are unrivaled. Whether visiting for breakfast, lunch or dinner, edible flowers added to the plates make the meals just as picturesque as the views.

At **Montage Laguna Beach**, there are patios galore to enjoy. The highlight, of course, is the open-air dining area at The Loft, an elevated space at the resort where it feels like you can see for miles. Aside from panoramic views, guests can sip wine or cocktails while dining on creative American cuisine with a coastal California twist. The Lobby Lounge is an open-air spot that extends into the



from the surf paradise that is Brooks Street Beach. Keep your eyes on the horizon by day for views of the ocean or cuddle up by the fire pit at night while dining on dishes like house-made duck meatballs, Hawaiian albacore tartare, wild-caught halibut, short rib Bolognese, a wagyu burger and—for dessert—guava creme brulee.

Adolfo's also offers glimpses of the ocean from its small patio area, and remains a favorite for Ryan Hitzel, owner of Roark clothing company (which is based in town). “Walk in sandy and out of sorts, by yourself or with the family—Adolfo and Connie won’t turn you away,” he notes. “[It’s] simple Mexican food that comes out fast, from the cheese enchiladas and ‘surfer’s special’—side of rice, beans and tortillas—to the sneaky good burger cooked in carne grease. Adolfo’s isn’t Michelin-rated, but is a lifelong vice. [And the] patio is top notch for people-watching and tossing down your beach gear on a hot summer day.”

COMFY & COZY

For a spot to sit and soak up the sun, visit **Zinc Cafe & Market**, where fresh greenery and shady umbrellas create the perfect atmosphere for daytime dining. Enjoy soup and quiche specials that change daily or opt for other dishes on this meat-free menu, such as citrus-drenched vegetables with hummus, avocado toasts, pizzas, sandwiches, veggie burgers and drinks like coffees, juices and smoothies.

Hitzel says that his favorite spot for outdoor dining is the comfy, cozy **Ahba** restaurant. “[It] transports me to New York or Havana—it’s communal and loud with great music and youthful energy,” he explains. “One could live off an alternating diet of branzino and cheeseburgers, [plus the] open-air patio



The Porch (left) at The Ranch at Laguna Beach and some of the eatery’s fire pits where appetizers, wine, cocktails and more are served (below)



and side pocket alley are magical.”

Beer lovers will rejoice in a visit to **Laguna Beach Beer Co.** in Laguna Canyon. The patio here is a refreshing place to enjoy a few brews, like Thousand Steps IPA, the Greeter’s Ale or the Tuava Guava, paired with dishes such as a soft pretzel, pizzas and sandwiches from the brewery’s kitchen.

For summer nights, you can’t beat a visit to **The Porch** at The Ranch at Laguna Beach, where verdant canyon landscapes create a rustic feel—especially as you sip cocktails around the fire pits. Enjoy live music as you sample California-inspired fare, including a caprese sandwich, wagyu hot dog, carnitas nachos, a cheese and charcuterie board or garden salad.

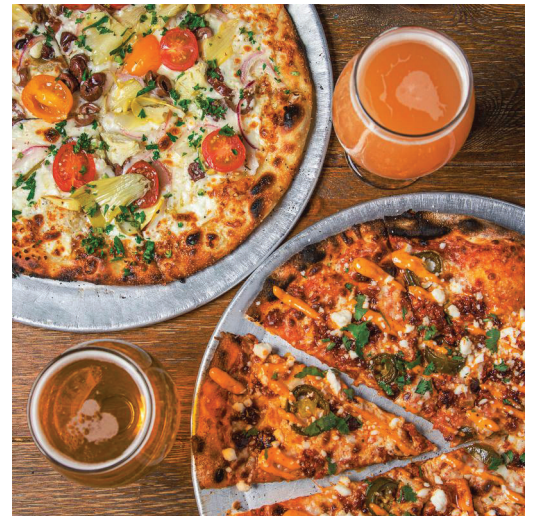
DINING DECKS

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down indoor dining at local restaurants, no one could have dreamed how **The Promenade on Forest** would transform the downtown landscape. Decks on which to dine, called parklets, are set to become permanent here, ensuring that locals and visitors can continue to unwind at the promenade while enjoying fare from neighboring eateries. Plus, diners can listen to live music or view public art installations during their visit, too.

At **230 Forest Avenue**, you can find everything from oysters, beetroot salmon crudo, and shrimp and scallop ceviche to pork chops, lush salads and skirt steak. The eatery also serves handcrafted cocktails, which can also be enjoyed out on the parklets, with unique drinks like a fig margarita, blood orange paloma and Oaxacan wildflower martini.



Laguna Beach Beer Co.’s patio and some of its pizza and beer (inset)



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: COURTESY OF LAS BRISAS; COURTESY OF THE DECK ON LAGUNA BEACH; COURTESY OF SAPPHIRE; CELLAR-CRAFT-COOK

TOP TWO PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE RANCH AT LAGUNA BEACH



Victoria Beach and the iconic “pirate tower”

Favorite Spots for a Secluded Beach Day

RELAXING AT THE BEACH IS A quintessential summertime activity. Whether you opt to go for a walk on the sand, swim in the waves or unwind with your favorite playlist or a good book as the sun kisses your skin, there’s no doubt that the day is made better without crowds of people around every turn.

So skip Main Beach this summer and head to a more secluded spot instead. With at least 30 coves and beaches, there are so many places to explore, and they all have something special to offer.

Crescent Bay Beach is a standout in north Laguna. “Get there early to grab a street parking spot near the stairs,” says Kurt Bjorkman, general manager at The Ranch at Laguna Beach, adding that resort guests will enjoy getting in the water at this large cove. “On a calm day, this is an amazing beach for snorkeling—super clear waters with some amazing tide pools, kelp forests and local sea lions.”

Also tucked away in the north are **Shaw’s Cove** and **Fisherman’s Cove**, two more great snorkeling spots; Shaw’s Cove is also home to tide pools so visitors can view urchins, crabs, sea stars, garibaldi fish, snails, lobsters, octopuses and more.

As its name may suggest, scuba divers take to **Divers Cove** to get a more in-depth look at the underwater world. But it’s also a picturesque beach even if you don’t plan to hit the water. “It’s got a different vibe, with

palm trees that hug the shore,” adds Jess Watson, owner of The Shop. Laguna Beach.

Or, for a secluded spot closer to downtown, try **Sleepy Hollow Beach**, a favorite of Mike Thomas, a teacher with Anneliese Schools, and his wife, Allison Corradini. “We usually go to Sleepy Hollow because it’s far enough away from Thalia and all the crazy surfers and stuff,” Corradini says.

Farther south, a whole different set of beaches offers more natural beauty to explore under the summer sun. The community vibes are strong at **Wood’s Cove**, which is popular amongst local Lagunans. Venture slightly north and you’ll find the only blowhole in Orange County, but the waves on the south end of the beach are ideal for another popular Laguna activity: skimboarding.

Moss Point Beach may be small, but that makes it even more perfect for a secluded beach day. The currents can get rough here so it’s not the best for swimming, but scuba diving and tide pool exploration are prevalent.

If you’re lucky to catch it when it’s secluded, **Victoria Beach** can’t be beat. With the iconic “pirate tower” and a human-made swimming area in the surf, it’s probably the most unique spot in town. “The waves are usually pretty swimmable, the beach is wide and there is always a great volleyball game to watch,” notes Gorjana Reidel, a Laguna resident and founder of the gorjana jewelry brand. “I also love the tower and pool—I call it a pool. So great for young kiddos.”

Those looking for stunning scenery can find it at **Treasure Island Beach**. “Laguna is home to some of the prettiest beaches, but I would probably say Treasure Island [is my favorite in the south],” Watson says. “... [It] has some of the most beautiful water and it’s a small cove.” This pristine space sits adjacent to Montage Laguna Beach so it can get crowded, but head further away from the main access point to find peace. As you explore, you just might stumble across **Middle Man Cove**, a hidden beach tucked away to the north.

Another somewhat hidden spot, **Table Rock Beach**, is great for exploring rock outcroppings—if you can make it there. Another local’s spot, this stretch of sand is for adventurous types, with wooden stairs and rocks to traverse to get there. Active visitors will also enjoy **Thousand Steps Beach**, which actually requires about 200 steps to get down on the sand—and then 200 to get back up after some fun in the sun. Cindy Byrne, co-owner of Roux Creole Cuisine restaurant, adds, “If we’re [with] friends or family that don’t mind a workout, we go to Thousand Steps.”

No matter which cove or beach you select, you’re sure to enjoy any spot in a town as beautiful as Laguna.



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From left: Swimsuit styles from Mare Blu and Rip Curl

Favorite Places to Shop for Swimwear

WHETHER YOU'RE LOOKING FOR THE latest bikini styles or new board shorts for hitting the waves, Laguna has you covered with plenty of shops for swimsuits and other beach attire.

Head to **The Shop, Laguna Beach** for a mix of one- and two-piece women's swimsuits in conservative and bold cuts, neutrals and vibrant hues from brands like L Space, Vitamin A and more. The boutique is also stocked with cute beach towels, sunglasses, sandals, sarongs and other cover-ups. "We cater to a variety of different customers and carry the best of the best," says owner Jess Watson.

Laguna also boasts stores for national surf brands from **Billabong** and **Rip Curl** to **Quiksilver**. Pick up their latest styles for men and women. Billabong and Quiksilver also carry some swimwear for kids while Billabong and Rip Curl carry wetsuits for hanging 10 when the water's chilly. Other beach necessities like flip-flops and sunglasses can be purchased at these locations, too.

When it comes to local surf shops, there are a few to choose from as well, whether it's **Hobie Surf Shop**, **Laguna Surf & Sport** or **Thalia Surf Shop**.

JOHN CAMERONE



COURTESY OF RIP CURL

"Hobie is my favorite surf shop because, for one, they are the OG surf brand in town. And two, they curate the best products out there—I can always count on the fact that they carry the most up-to-date and function-forward gear around," says Kurt Bjorkman, general manager of The Ranch at Laguna Beach.

Ryan Hitzel, founder of Laguna-based Roark clothing and lifestyle brand, is also partial to the Hobie store because of its local roots (as Hobie Alter started shaping surfboards in his dad's Oak Street garage). But Hitzel is also quick to mention Laguna Surf & Sport, admitting he's a little biased because he worked there in his youth—and his best friends own it. "But rest assured, LSS is your destination for all things surf. It smells of wax and, if you play your cards right, you can get an accurate surf forecast and the set list of who's playing at The Sandpiper for the next month. They carry all the best brands in the surf industry, rent surfboards and provide lessons if you want to learn how to shred," Hitzel says.

Thalia Surf Shop also comes in strong with its own brand of boardshorts and bikinis as well as T-shirts, not to mention Vans shoes and sandals. And **Toes on the Nose**, which has its flagship locations only in Laguna and Huntington Beach, carries its own brand of men's boardshorts as well as a selection of women's swimwear, T-shirts, hoodies and other accessories.

Meanwhile, local swimwear brands **Sportkini**, **Swiminista** and **Vitamin A** offer unique options.



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Sportkini, created by a Laguna local

Sportkini, sold online and developed by local open-water swimmer Stephanie Havelka, has styles with the athlete in mind: Think durable swimwear that looks good and stays put. Swiminista, founded by part-time Laguna resident Andréa Bernholtz, also focuses on the perfect fit to help women feel confident—and utilizes luxury recycled fabrics for less impact on the planet; Swiminista is sold locally at Attu in Laguna and at the Waldorf Astoria Monarch Beach Resort & Club in Dana Point. Laguna-based Vitamin A is also dedicated to fit and sustainability by designing collections with plant-based and recycled materials and donates a portion of sales to nonprofits that protect the ocean. Vitamin A is sold by Las Olas and The Shop. Laguna Beach.

And **Merilee's Swimwear**, a family-owned fixture in the region since the first shop opened in Huntington Beach in 1977, allows shoppers to mix and match a variety of bikini tops and bottoms for the perfect fit and to reflect your personal style. Choose from an array of bright hues and designs from florals to animal prints. One-pieces are also available in flattering silhouettes from plunging necklines to French-cut bottoms.

Mike Thomas, a teacher at Anneliese Schools, and his wife, Allison Corradini, say they shop at Merilee's and Hobie, but also like **Tidepools Swimwear**—made with UPF 50+ sun protection fabric—by



Las Olas offers swimwear and accessories.

Brett Keast, a local exhibitor at Sawdust Art Festival who also has a shop open by appointment in front of his warehouse in San Juan Capistrano. “We don’t normally buy our bathing suits at the Sawdust festival, but before summer, we do purchase a lot of swimsuits for my two nieces and our daughters from Brett Keast [at the warehouse].”

Meanwhile, with only a handful of boutiques in Florida and Orange County, California, **Mare Blu** can be found in Laguna Beach with its durable, shaping swimwear that hugs your curves with a lightweight luxury Italian fabric that boasts just the right elasticity to stay in place without bulging or digging in. Details from ruffles to fabric twists lend interest in addition to vibrant colors, stripes and other print options.

Las Olas is also an East Coast-West Coast brand, with most of its shops in North and South Carolina in addition to stores in Newport and Laguna Beach. Find men’s swim trunks and boardshorts in fun prints like Hawaiian florals, flamingoes and animal print, as well as women’s swimwear in traditional styles and textured fabrics or pieces that are reversible for two looks in one. The curated list of brands range from L Space to Mikoh, Beach Riot, Bond Eye and more; some are made with recycled nylon. Pieces are meant to look effortlessly elegant while being worn everyday, whether lounging at the pool or hiking to waterfalls.

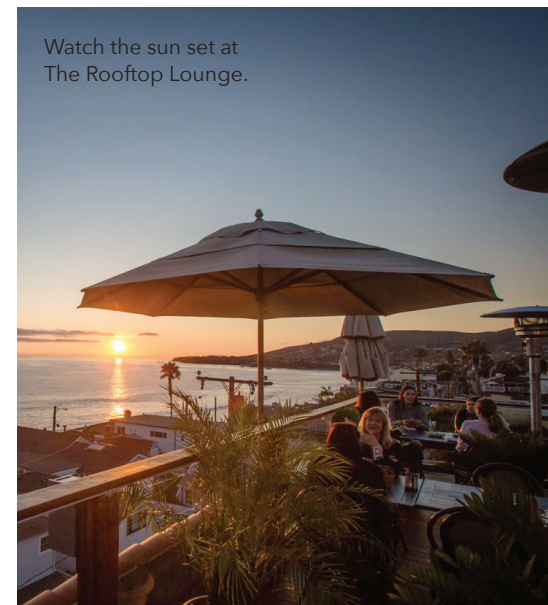
Favorite Places to Watch the Sunset

IN A BEACH TOWN LIKE LAGUNA, striking sunsets come with the territory. And part of the fun is finding the best spots to watch nature’s show unfold. Here are a few of our go-to options and some recommendations from longtime locals.

From the clifftops of **Heisler Park** dotted with palm trees and colorful flowers, looking out across the blue water, it’s easy to imagine you’re in Hawaii or maybe somewhere in the Mediterranean. There’s nothing quite as romantic as strolling hand-in-hand along the path through Heisler Park at sunset, past the art sculptures and gazing out on the Pacific together from the gazebo or a bench along the way. And those streaks of pink and purple make for amazing photos as the sun sinks below the horizon.

Another amazing lookout point is **Top of the World**—a short walk up from Alta Laguna Park—which offers stunning views in every direction, with Catalina Island silhouetted against the sunset sky in front of you and scenic hills behind you. And the vistas only get better during that golden hour as the sun starts to go down.

“The sunsets here in Laguna are pretty magical. My two favorite spots to end the day and watch the sunset [are] either at the beach or at **Alta Laguna trail**. The panoramic ocean views from the top of the trail are amazing,” says Gorjana Reidel, a Laguna resident and



Watch the sun set at The Rooftop Lounge.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: FELICITY MURPHY; MARY KATE BRETSFORD; COURTESY OF THE ROOFTOP LOUNGE



From top: roasting marshmallows with portable fire pits that can be rented at Lost Pier Cafe; stunning sunset views from Splashes Restaurant at Surf & Sand Resort



FROM TOP: COURTESY OF THE RANCH AT LAGUNA BEACH; COURTESY OF SURF & SAND RESORT

founder of the gorjana jewelry brand.

For longtime locals Michael and Cindy Byrne, co-owners of Roux Creole Cuisine restaurant, there are a few favorite spots for taking in the sunset. “Michael loves **Main Beach** or **Top of the World**. I love **Crescent [Bay Point Park]** ... or **Cleo Street Beach**,” Cindy Byrne says.

A few restaurants also made the list. The waves roll right up on the sand mere steps from the Surf & Sand Resort, right below the windows of **Splashes Restaurant**, making this a dreamy place for dinner at sunset. Perfect for a birthday or anniversary celebration—or any night, really—Splashes serves up picturesque views along with standout dishes from lobster bisque to fresh oysters, seared scallops, filet mignon and rack of lamb.

And from the elevated perch of **The Rooftop Lounge**, atop La Casa del Camino hotel, the ocean unfolds as a seemingly endless panorama. And, with mojito in hand, no doubt, and surrounded by good friends, this is a go-to place for watching the sun melt into the water as shades of pink and orange fill the sky.

For those who prefer to be close to the sand, **Lost Pier Cafe** is the choice of Kurt Bjorkman, general manager of The Ranch at Laguna Beach, who is always ready—along with his staff—to provide recommendations for visitors looking to experience the best of this town. “You can sit with a glass of wine and watch the sun set behind Catalina Island,” he says of the cafe, which offers a patio as well as portable fire pits that can be rented to roast marshmallows on the beach. “Another surreal spot for a sunset takes a bit of energy, but the payoff is huge: Try the **Valido Trail**, part of OC Parks’ trail system [in Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park] that ends up 600-plus feet above our south Laguna beaches. Watching the sunset from here is beyond incredible. Make your way back down the trail before it gets too dark.”

Of course, many in town have a great view from their own home. Mike Thomas, a teacher at Anneliese Schools, and his wife, Allison Corradini, watch the sunset from the roof of their abode off of Coast Highway. “We’re actually very lucky. ... We’ve got a wonderful 180[-degree] ocean view. ... We’ve got two chairs out on our roof and we just sit and look at the sunset right out front.” But if they’re with a group, Corradini says, they sometimes go to a lookout just north of The Cliff restaurant or to **Sleepy Hollow Beach**.



Hike at Top of the World for impressive views of the rolling hills.

Favorite Places for Outdoor Activities

WITH HIKING TRAILS THAT WIND through the hills and 7 miles of coastline, Laguna Beach offers plenty of ways to spend time outside. “I am so grateful for all the amazing hiking we have here in Laguna. The trails all have amazing views of either the water or the hills,” says Gorjana Reidel, a Laguna Beach resident and founder of the gorjana jewelry brand. Among her go-to trails are those up at **Top of the World** as well as the Water Tank and Big Bend trails, both in **Laguna Coast Wilderness Park**. “There are a million different trails to walk,” adds Jess Watson, owner of The Shop. Laguna Beach, “but I love the one that connects to Dartmoor [Street—Spur Ridge to Boat Road]. Lots of uphill and a beautiful stunning view at the top. Morning is best.”

Top of the World boasts many trails from this scenic lookout point. “One of our favorite family hikes starts at Top of the World [and] heads down Car [Wreck] ... Trail to the bottom of the ravine,” said Cindy Byrne, a longtime Laguna resident and co-owner of Roux Creole Cuisine restaurant. “We take the ravine hike west to where the trail comes to The Ranch [at Laguna Beach]. We have a cold beer and snacks at The Ranch patio, watch the golfers and then head to Aliso Beach to catch the trolley back to Cleo Street.”

Navigating the criss-crossed network of paths, either on two feet or two wheels, has also been a treasured pastime of Kurt Bjorkman, general manager of The Ranch at Laguna Beach. “Some of my favorite memories are hiking and biking the trails of Aliso and Wood Canyons with my sons over the past 12 years,” he says. “... My two boys basically grew up in this area. We spent a lot of time exploring **Aliso and Wood Canyons [Wilderness] Park**—biking the trails, exploring places like Dripping Cave and finding the car wreck on, well, Car Wreck Trail. Making the connection from, for instance, Top of the World to Laguna Coast Wilderness Park [and] finding your way to Crystal Cove State Park via the El Morro trails—finishing with a date shake at the Crystal Cove Shake Shack is not a bad way to spend an afternoon.”

Outdoor options abound at **Moulton Meadows Park**, which features a fitness circuit, soccer field, two tennis courts and two half basketball courts in addition to a hiking trailhead—with access to a fire road connecting the Top of the World and Arch Beach Heights neighborhoods—so visitors can take their pick of activities to get some fitness in their day.

For those who want to be closer to the coast, shooting some hoops on the half

basketball courts or gathering with friends to spike the ball on the sand volleyball courts, all while enjoying the ocean view, **Main Beach** is the place to be. Of course, with the water right there, you can also take a dip after your game to cool off—or go swimming or bodyboarding. And the boardwalk offers a walking path that connects (up some stairs) with the path at Heisler Park on the cliffs above.

To get a more intense workout, some enjoy running the stairs at **Thousand Steps Beach**. The staircase begins at Coast Highway and Ninth Avenue and, while it’s only a couple hundred steps, it can feel like a thousand—but the view at the end is your reward. If you go in the water here, beware of hazardous rip currents and submerged rocks when the swell is up, but skimboarding, bodyboarding and bodysurfing are popular at this beach.

Another great place to get out on the water, by kayak or stand-up paddleboard for a chance to see marine wildlife up close, are the protected coves in north Laguna. One of Bjorkman’s go-to spots is “launching a kayak from **Divers Cove**—exploring the kelp forest, maybe even spotting a few whales off our protected shorelines.”

For Mike Thomas, a teacher at Anneliese Schools, and his wife, Allison Corradini, a favorite outdoor activity is a simple stroll through **Heisler Park** or on the beach. “We’ll usually just walk along, from The Cliff [restaurant] or from Legion [Street] down to Crescent Bay, or we’ll drive down to **Victoria [Beach]** and walk along Victoria and, ... if the tide’s low enough, down past the Montage and along there.” ■



Kayaking with La Vida Laguna, which offers tours