

A Slice of Summer

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

BY ASHLEY RYAN AND SHARON STELLO

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.

OUTDOOR DINING

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. No matter where you go, you're sure to have a memorable experience with good vibes all around.

RELAXING ROOFTOPS

If you're going to dine out in Laguna, consider visiting one of the 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 is set 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.



The rooftop view from Skyloft, located near Main Beach

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.

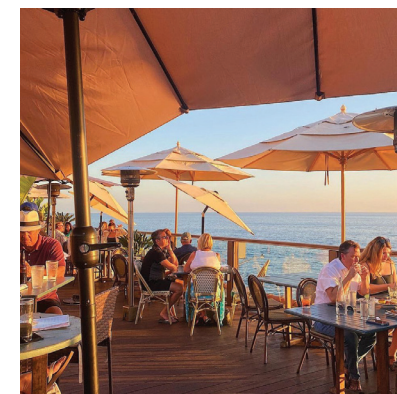
VIBRANT VIEWS

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.

Another spot with stunning views is **Splashes** 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

MIKE ALTHIN



From left: the communal fire pit on the patio at Las Brisas; visitors dining at The Rooftop Lounge while the sun sets

water right in front," she says.

On the sand is **The Deck on Laguna Beach**, the more casual counterpart to sister restaurant Driftwood Kitchen. With a cozy deck set next to rolling waves, it's a wonderful spot for fresh air and fresh fare. "When friends come to visit from out of town, we always take them to The Deck for brunch or lunch," says Cindy Byrne, co-owner of Roux Creole Cuisine

restaurant. "It's like being right on the water and gives them a sense of beach life without the sand in their shoes." Sample shrimp tacos, a beach burger, tomato bisque and more along with delicious cocktails.

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.

BEACH DAY

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.

So skip Main Beach this summer and head to a more secluded spot. With at least 30 coves and beaches, there are so many places to explore.

In north Laguna, **Crescent Bay Beach** is an obvious standout. Kurt Bjorkman, general manager at The Ranch at Laguna Beach, notes that guests of his resort will enjoy getting



Crescent Bay Beach in north Laguna is great for snorkeling or exploring tide pools.

into the water here. "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," he says.

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. Scuba divers take to **Divers Cove** to get a more in-depth look at the underwater world.



The "pirate tower" makes Victoria Beach a really unique spot.

Farther south, a different set of beaches offers more natural beauty to explore. At **Wood's Cove**, venture slightly north and you'll find the only blowhole in Orange County while the waves on the south end are ideal for skimboarding.

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.

Those looking for stunning scenery can find it at **Treasure Island Beach**. "I would probably say Treasure Island [is my favorite in the south]," says Jess Watson, owner of

The Shop. Laguna Beach. "... [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.

Another somewhat hidden spot, **Table Rock Beach**, is great for adventurous types, with 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. 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 Beach.

WATCH THE SUNSET

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.

From the cliffs of **Heisler Park** dotted with palm trees and colorful flowers, looking out across the blue water, it's easy to imagine you're somewhere tropical. 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.

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.

"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 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

COURTESY OF SURF & SAND RESORT



Enjoy sunset views at Splashes Restaurant.

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



Roasting marshmallows at Lost Pier Cafe

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES

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. "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," says 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

The Rooftop Lounge, the ocean unfolds as a seemingly endless panorama. And, with a mojito in hand, this is a go-to place for watching the sun melt into the water.

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."



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

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."

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.

Shoot some hoops on the half

basketball courts or gather with friends to spike the ball on the sand volleyball courts, all while enjoying the ocean view at **Main Beach**. Of course, with the water right there, you can also take a dip after your game to cool off—or go swimming or bodyboarding.

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.