

A BIRD OF A DIFFERENT FEATHER

The Resort at Pelican Hill and its stunning hillside property overlooking the Newport coastal corridor possess an elevated address like no other

By Kevin Marr



The ash gray Aston Martin Vanquish looked to be a worthy dinner date. The cherry red Ferrari 308 was an equally intriguing partner. In fact, there were no less than a dozen brilliant automobile masterpieces in the valet area of Pelican Grill that would have made for remarkable company, if not for the fact that my wife was my dream date that evening and we had a premier table on the terrace with ocean and golf course views.

Leave it to Newport Beach to tempt with so many alluring options. More specifically, leave it to The Resort at Pelican Hill.

Pelican Grill is one of the property's signature restaurants and, on this night, it was hustling and bustling with patrons throughout the expansive dining room. Chef Marc Johnson features an open kitchen for all to view, with the fare representing an appreciated combination of steaks, seafood, pasta, handcrafted cocktails, an impressive wine collection and the kind of service you'd expect in the Newport Beach zip code. Spicy tortilla soup, bruschetta and oysters on the half shell get the evening going, paving the way for the likes of lobster mac 'n cheese, braised short ribs and pan-seared Chilean sea bass. Butcher cuts of lamb, prime filet, ribeye and wood fired pizzas are also available to make your dinner decision even more difficult. The bar scene alone is reason to pop in for a few belts while taking in the eye-candy that is undeniably Newport. Kobe Bryant lives up the street, so you never know if the future NBA Hall of Famer will run his Ferrari 458 Italia down the hill for a Pelican Grill nightcap.

With dinner over and a bottle of Caymus settling in, it's back to the resort where our ocean view bungalow awaits. Settled among countless collections of beautifully landscaped olive trees, the Italian-themed architecture gives way to luxury bedding and linens, marble walk-in showers, deep soaking tubs, hand-hewn vaulted wood-beam ceilings and limestone fireplaces. Of course, there are also villas available with two, three and four-bedrooms at your disposal, replete with gourmet kitchens, private terraces, gated entry and garages, 24/7 staff including concierge and butler service and a host of other VIP amenities available on the 5-star luxury property. Regardless of where you lay your head down here, nighty night and sweet dreams.

Breakfast at the Coliseum Grill found us ordering the same dish each morning because it was so flawlessly addicting – a spicy Italian sausage, onion and cheddar cheese omelet with English muffins and a few cups of some of the best coffee anywhere. However, I ogled everyone else's orders too, and everything from French Toast and Belgian Waffles to fruit smoothies, fresh pastries and Huevos Rancheros looked like game winners to start the day.



The Coliseum Grill isn't just about the cuisine. The views are beyond reproach and one could find themselves on the terrace for a few hours entranced in the magnificent pool, pristine golf course, wedding rotunda and outlying Pacific Ocean. The pool, as know-it-all mailman Cliff Claven would love to tell you, is one of the largest circular pools in the world – a perfect circle measuring 136 feet in diameter – with more than a million glass tiles that have been cut and laid by hand.

A day on the greens at Pelican Hill Golf Club will make for a remarkable story over cocktails with your golf buddies who weren't privy to the blissful event. The two championship Tom Fazio-designed 18-hole courses with over 400 acres of deep canyons and ocean views have developed a stellar reputation in the golf world as one of the phenomenal tee times anywhere on the planet. Professional forecaddies, the Pelican Hill Golf Academy with instruction from PGA Pro Glenn Deck and a clubhouse with separate men's and women's lounges and a full-service golf shop all provide an unforgettable experience.

The Spa at Pelican Hill is one of superlatives. Recently voted "#1 Spa in California" by *Conde Nast Traveler* and recipient of the Forbes Five-Star rating for its ninth consecutive year, the Roman-soaking pool in the men's lounge is the single most impressive amenity that we've seen anywhere in our spa travels. The sauna and steam room are waiting in the wings after your workout at the

adjoining fitness center but, first and foremost, book a treatment at the full-service spa. Just ten minutes into an 80-minute session, I knew that I was going to get another one before the end of the trip. It was that mind-blowing that quickly.

Whether it's a luxurious spa day, an epic golf session or a few hours hanging out in an ocean-view cabana at the Coliseum Pool, dinner at Andrea, the resort's signature Italian eatery, is an absolute must. My favorite dish of the entire trip lives here. The spicy sausage and cavatelli pasta took one bite for me to wonder if I could shatter the restaurant record for largest consumption in a single sitting. Then there was the perfectly cooked filet mignon paired with a Stag's Leap Wine Cellars Artemis Cabernet Sauvignon. Andrea's menu is one that tasks you with decisions, all of which will be spectacular choices in the end, but the competition to woo your appetite here is fierce. Led by Chef Troy Mendoza and the exceptional service exhibited from his entire team, the non-stop deliciousness only further cemented this culinary experience as some of the finest dining in Orange County or anywhere, for that matter.

And no night in Newport Beach is complete until you hear the occasional roar of a Lamborghini Huracan letting off some steam down below on Pacific Coast Highway.

Just another day in paradise on Pelican Hill.

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AROUND TOWN

So, where do you go should you venture off the property?

Balboa Island is a fairytale perched on Newport Harbor and straight out of a classic beach setting that you'd happily encounter on Cape Cod or along the eastern seaboard. Sailboats and yachts on gingerly cruises pepper the water, while Marine Avenue offers shopping, restaurants and its famous Balboa Ice Cream Bars and Frozen Bananas. A walk around the island's perimeter takes about 45 minutes, displaying a beautiful tour of ocean front homes, architecture, décor and views from across the harbor. The Balboa Island Ferry has been in operation for nearly 100 years, established in 1919, and is a definite bucket list item to experience the short ride across the way to the Newport Peninsula where a Ferris wheel, arcades, and more shopping and restaurants await your arrival on the Pacific.

If the surf is up, a trip to The Wedge on the tip of the peninsula is a chance to see a world-renowned surf spot and the body boarders, body surfers and surfers who take on some of the largest and most dangerous waves on Earth.

Walk to the end of the Balboa Pier to find yourself on top of the Pacific, and hit up the Ruby's Diner rooftop for a burger and shake while surveying nothing but blue for as far as the eye can see.

For another Newport Beach landmark, visit The Galley Café that's tucked into a ship yard and marina while gazing out over part of Balboa Island. You never know who you're going to see there enjoying the signature chili cheese omelet, grilled pastrami sandwich or a banana and peanut butter shake. On one of our visits, Bill Gates was sitting one booth over.

Newport Beach is where John Wayne called home and his former yacht, The Wild Goose, is now part of the collection of Hornblower Cruises and Events. Step on board to Hollywood royalty and see why this floating piece of history was held in such high regard by "The Duke." But if you want to captain your own boat, our favorite thing to do in town is to rent an electric boat at Duffy Electric Boat Company for a few hours and see the harbor for ourselves. Bring a bottle of wine and something to snack on and thank us later.

