



**LOVING
LAGUNA**

**A LOCAL'S GUIDE TO
LAGUNA BEACH**



To Frank and Sue Tanner
who back in 1958 brought a group of
Boy Scouts from Sacramento to
Laguna Beach with the promise of
teaching them how to surf.

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PROLOGUE

The Roots of Laguna's Uniqueness

This book is a guide for the thoughtful person—resident or visitor—who wishes to wiggle their feet deep into the sand and understand what makes Laguna Beach so unique. But it's more than a travel guide, as you'll see. The roots of Laguna's uniqueness are varied, some physical, others more ethereal.

The coastal range that physically separates Laguna from inland regions, over eons of wearing by waves, formed the coves that make Laguna's beaches unique. It's likely those same hills that kept Laguna from being a land grant ranch in the Spanish and Mexican eras, thus saving a place for the homesteading families of the 1870s. Those homesteaders were people of faith: their first collective effort was to form a church.

That coastal range forms our marine layer, the seasonal fog bank that's our natural air conditioner. Folks from Riverside came in the beginning to escape the summer heat. They brought their faith with them and funded a town hall for Sunday meetings. Next came the artists, beginning with Norman St. Clair, drawn here by the beauty of those coves. These were *plein air* painters, and in the work of these early California impressionists, one can see a deep reverence for Nature. The survival of the early colony was ensured when that town hall was converted into a gallery to sell their art.

Later the wave riders discovered Laguna. If you visit with a surfer, you'll find a reverence for nature similar to those early artists. The ocean moves them in many ways. Hawaiian surfers brought the aloha spirit—a way of bonding with family, community, and Nature—that distinguishes the true waterman.

So the roots of Laguna's uniqueness run deep. It's a premise of this book that having understood Laguna, you're a step closer to understanding what makes you, the reader, unique. And that, I think, makes this much more than a travel guide.

♥ = Editor's pick

AT LEFT: The Agrarian Age meets the Industrial Age in this nostalgic (c. 1912) Forest Avenue photo—horses and automobiles equally share the unpaved street. The Isch Warling Palace Livery, a bed and breakfast for horses, stood behind the cameraman. But down Forest a banner for Roy Peacock's Garage offers services for autos.

Other businesses were getting started, though the *café* on the left and *bakery* on the right have only generic names, as if there were no competitors. Fred Clapp, on the other hand, has added his name to the top of the sign for the General Store. Look down the street and you can see the sign for Laguna Cliffs. This was Howard Heisler's north Laguna subdivision—advertised as the tract with water. The sign didn't bother to mention the gorgeous ocean views. In early Laguna, just about everyone had an ocean view, but piped water was a luxury.

All the picture lacks is a *plein air* artist working at his easel, but artists likely made the store signs. Out of sight at the end of the road an enterprising young man named Joe Jahraus has opened a needed business—a lumberyard. In a couple of years, 1915 to be exact, the county will pave a single-lane road down Laguna Canyon and this sleepy town by the sea will start to bustle. In time everyone will have water and ocean views will become a luxury. And just like today, you'll feel fortunate to find a parking space on Forest Avenue. *Credit: Photo from First American, courtesy of the Laguna Beach Historical Society.*



SECTION I

WALKING THROUGH HISTORY

To understand the roots of Laguna's uniqueness you have to get your feet on the ground. Here are five walks, plus a stroll through the historic Hotel Laguna. If your time is limited on this trip, visit Heisler Park in the freshness of the morning, and then stroll up Forest Avenue after brunch. Truth be told, the walks are great any time of day, especially at sunset. *Photo: David Laws*

Chapter 1: Heisler Park

Chapter 2: Main Beach Park

Chapter 3: The Hotel Laguna (a short walk)

Chapter 4: Forest Avenue Historic Shopping District

Chapter 5: A Walk Down Coast Highway

Chapter 6: Two Corners (Brooks and Cress Streets at Coast Highway)

Chapter 7: Montage Laguna Beach

In the beginning everyone in the scattered settlements—Laguna Canyon, Laguna Beach, Arch Beach, and along Aliso Creek—was some kind of farmer. The family farm was the founding institution of early America. Search your family tree and you'll find farmers within a few generations. We remember those early settlers in Section VII.

In the second Laguna Beach period two new professions emerged: artist and merchant. (We'll talk about the artists in Section III.) Those first merchants learned that making a business was different from farming; the early Laguna farmers struggled when they tried their hand at business. The critical parameters were different: capital, for example, replaced land as the resource to be protected. Though the farmers settled the area, it was the business people who shaped the town, as you'll see in our walk through history.

CHAPTER 1

Heisler Park

Getting started: To start this walk (by car) drive up Coast Hwy 0.7 mile from Main Beach and turn left at Cliff Drive. (Beverly goes to the right; to the left the street is Cliff Drive. Cliff Dr. touches Coast Hwy in three places and you want the middle place.) Once on Cliff Dr. look for a place to park. (Parking is free on the streets above Heisler Park; meters adjacent to the park are \$2/Hr. and take quarters or credit cards.) Allow 1-2 hours for this walk, depending on what catches your interest; a jogger could do it in 15 minutes.

DIRECTIONS This is a loop walk. Take the path along the bluff first and return via the Cliff Drive sidewalk. At the mid-point (Las Brisas Restaurant) continue on Cliff Drive to Coast Highway to admire the scene before returning.

SIGHTS OF INTEREST

There are stairs from the main walkway down to the coves below Heisler Park. The beaches, starting from the north end:

Fisherman's Cove, the beach below Boat Canyon, is a protected bay that paddle boarders like because of the gentle surf. But there is the task of carrying paddleboards down and back up the stairs. For paddleboard resources see Chapter 18.

Diver's Cove (as well as Shaw's Cove, ¼ mile north) is a favorite with divers because of the reefs and kelp beds that harbor fish. Southern

NORTH LAGUNA COTTAGE TOUR



CHAPTER 9

North Laguna Cottages

In the beginning, north Laguna was part of the San Joaquin Rancho, then the Irvine Ranch in 1876. James Irvine sold this portion of his ranch in 1905 to Howard Heisler and partners. They set land aside for Heisler Park along the bluff top, subdivided the rest, and piped in water from Laguna Canyon. Laguna Beach was difficult to reach in the horse-and-buggy era but Henry Ford mass-produced Model Ts starting in 1908 and that changed everything. To encourage building on sold lots, Heisler offered a \$100 prize for the first home built and the first residence on this tour won the prize.

Though eight homes are featured on this tour, you'll pass other charming residences. Please drive carefully; the streets can be narrow, often without sidewalks, and are shared with humans and pets. The drive takes ½ to 1 hour. Bring a picnic lunch if you want to stop along the way.

DIRECTIONS: From Main Beach head north on Coast Hwy 0.3 mile and turn right on Jasmine St. Go one block to Magnolia and check the cottage set back on the far right (southeast) corner.

Jasmine & 390 Magnolia St: A family built (or assembled; Sears used to sell kits) this Settlement style home over one weekend in 1907 with the help of friends. They won a \$100 prize for the first home built in Laguna Cliffs, plus bragging rights to north Laguna's oldest home.

DIRECTION: Continue ¼ block to 416 Jasmine (on the left).



Cotswold cottage at 416 Jasmine. Credit: Sketch from *The Cottages and Castles of Laguna*, courtesy Karen Wilson Turnbull.

CHAPTER 24

Breakfast by the Beach



Photo: David Laws

You can't beat Laguna for breakfast spots. The ocean is essential to the perfect Laguna breakfast: The morning sun lights the salty foam, the sea smell delights the senses, and the seagulls shriek their approval. When you walk away from breakfast comfortably full and feel the warm sun on your back, you've given the day a darn good start.

It's likely more convenient just to eat in your hotel, or at home if you're a local, but if you want to get out and live a little, here are our best by-the-beach breakfast places. None have celebrity chefs but really, how hard is it to cook a good breakfast? The list:

♥ **The Beach House**, 619 Sleepy Hollow, once the home of actor and comedian Slim Somerville who first played a Keystone Kop back in 1912. The Beach House is great for breakfast and a good location for sunset dinners.

OceanView Bar & Grill, 425 S. Coast, at historic Hotel Laguna; the terrace is right on the sand, as close as you can get to the water. Check the old photographs in the hall as you enter. There's inside dining but the beach is the attraction so dining is casual.

The Cliff, 577 S. Coast; people love the view, so enjoy it with breakfast or sunset drinks. And check out nearby Brown's Park.

Greeter's Corner, 329 S. Coast, this isn't our first choice for breakfast by the beach, but they have a great patio overlooking Main Beach.

Las Brisas, 361 Cliff Drive is on the bluff above Main Beach and offers a buffet style all-you-can-eat brunch with made-to-order omelets. It's not as personal as other places but there's a lot of history here and the dining room is great for visiting. Try for a window seat. We bring visitors here for brunch but it's also a great place to enjoy the sunset.

♥ **Nick's Laguna Beach**, 440 S. Coast, is just across from the Hotel Laguna. There isn't a lot of ocean view but it's close. Nick's is new and well run. Here we met Mark, a Silicon Valley refugee, stopping for his morning cup. He sold his Palo Alto home, he said, to live in the warmth of the sun by the sea.

♥ **Penguin Café**, 981 S. Coast, is a breakfast and lunch place for locals. You can't actually see the ocean here but the Penguin stays busy; it's the kind of place your grandfather enjoyed in his day.

White House Café, 340 S. Coast, said to be the oldest restaurant in Orange County. It's been on this block since 1918 and once was Laguna's nicest restaurant. Now closeness to Main Beach makes it a visitor's place but locals do come for breakfast, especially the weekend brunch. Come here to connect with history and say you've eaten at the White House.

Coyote Grill, 31621 S. Coast; there's an ocean view from the back patio so this south Laguna hangout gets on the breakfast list. Also a popular dinner spot.

Beachcomber Café, 15 Crystal Cove, just north of town, is technically in Newport Beach. You park in the state park by Pacific Coast Highway and take a shuttle, or walk, to the beachside restaurant. You're away from the city; it's all about the beach.

Madison Square, 320 N. Coast, is a gift shop inside and a breakfast-lunch place outside in the gardens; you order at the counter.



EPILOGUE

I hope this meandering tour has made you a believer that there's no place quite like Laguna.

As we've said, the roots of Laguna's uniqueness began with those early homesteaders. The artists documented the primal beauty of Laguna's coves and created our cultural foundations—the Museum, Festival, and Pageant. Early architects created our charming cottages and castles. Merchants built hotels, restaurants, galleries, and all the rest. Watermen (and women) showed us the joy of wave riding, whether as surfers or skimboarders. One man—Eiler Larsen, the Laguna Greeter—taught the importance of unfeigned friendliness. And ardent conservations convinced us of the importance of preserving Nature—the small town of Laguna is graced by the country's second largest urban wilderness, our Greenbelt.

It bears repeating: There's no place quite like Laguna. When some unusual thing occurs here, you're likely to hear the phrase, said with a roll of the eyes, "Only in Laguna." Whether you're resident or visitor,

Laguna is a place to step out of the daily hustle and bustle, dig your feet into the sand, and savor life. And that's the goal of this book—to live as fully as one can, by loving Laguna.

Looking back, it was an audacious mission to explain Laguna's uniqueness plus give a guide to the town in 116 pages. It demanded Hemingwayesque brevity—so many stories deserve a fuller telling. But we held to our goal of a book you could fit in your jacket pocket but also want on your bookshelf. Do you remember the fable of the six blind men from Indostan who encountered the elephant? How each imagined it differently according to what part he touched, whether leg, tusk, trunk or ear? Laguna is like that. This guide is based on the parts that we have touched in our years here, and what has touched us. Others may experience Laguna differently. If you want to share your experience or have an idea for future editions, please write to: skip@lovinglaguna.com. Thanks for reading.

A time exposure of Crescent Bay as the sunrise reveals another perfect day.
Photo: David Laws

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