



Sunset at Dana Point Harbor.

THE REAL O.C.

Orange County has produced juicy reality TV, but the real story of this underrated Southern California travel spot is much more interesting.

By Kari Hamanaka

As the dreamy backdrop of the reality TV shows *The Real Housewives of Orange County* and *Laguna Beach*, Southern California's Orange County has had lots of prime time attention in recent years, even if the shows themselves painted a one-note picture of the region. The real Orange County, of course, is much more multidimensional, encompassing 34 cities, 42 miles of coastline, nine beaches, three

harbors and an ethnic, racial and cultural diversity that isn't often captured by television producers focused on juicy story lines.

"People need to be aware of everything Orange County has to offer. Many people are aware of places like Disneyland, but they do not necessarily identify these places as being part of the Orange County experience and therefore don't take advantage of all Orange County has to offer," says Ed Fuller, president and chief executive of the Orange County Visitors Association, a marketing, advocacy and educational organization funded by the region's hotels, theme parks and other

hospitality-related businesses. "Once they visit, they become fans because of the history and the culture."

Last year, 43.8 million people visited Orange County (that's up 2 percent from 2011) and spent \$8.7 billion (a 12 percent bump), reports the Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau and CIC Research.

Many of these travelers were headed to Anaheim for Disneyland Resort, which encompasses the Disneyland and Disney California Adventure theme parks, three hotels and Downtown Disney, a shopping and entertainment district. In fact, Anaheim visitors

last year spent \$5.2 billion, up 13 percent from 2011. Likely one big draw was the completion of the final phase of Disney's reported \$1.1 billion makeover and expansion of California Adventure, which capped off with the June 2012 opening of Buena Vista Street and the 12-acre Cars Land based on Disney-Pixar's *Cars* franchise.

Location, Location

Location has long been one of Orange County's strongest selling points as a travel destination. Located 30 miles south of Los Angeles, 90 miles north of San Diego, and with the Inland Empire (which includes parts of Riverside and San Bernardino counties) to the east, it's both a hub for travels throughout Southern California and a great destination in its own right.

"It's becoming more and more important that we talk about that and frame ourselves that way," says Jenny Wedge, spokesperson for John Wayne Airport, which served more than 8.85 million passengers last year. "We have really started to realize that people outside of this area just don't get what Orange County is or has to offer. It's our job to work with our partners to bring people here rather than to Los Angeles or San Diego."

A couple of years ago, Buena Park's former Stage Stop Hotel, an 1890 rest stop for stage-coach riders, won a bid to become a California Welcome Center. A source for information, recommendations and ticket sales for attractions in Buena Park (Knott's Berry Farm, Medieval Times) but also for entertainment throughout Orange County and California, the welcome center has brought a big boost in traffic to the area, says Sara Copping, director of Visit Buena Park, whose offices are located in the center.

Visitors to Orange County today find attractions tailored to every imaginable lifestyle and interest, with surfers and skateboarders inevitably flocking to Huntington Beach.

"We're selling ourselves as the quintessential beach destination in Southern California," says Madison Fisher, director of marketing and communication at Huntington Beach Marketing and Visitors Bureau.

The community's laidback beach lifestyle comes together at Pacific Coast Highway and Main Street, where the beach meets shops selling well-known homegrown sports apparel brands such as Volcom, Quiksilver, Vans and

MY ORANGE COUNTY //

Shawn Nelson

Chairman, Orange County Board of Supervisors

LOCAL ROOTS: Orange County's Fourth District supervisor lives in his hometown of Fullerton, in a good friend's childhood home.

WHY HERE: "Fullerton is a place where people are proud of the town they come from. As you raise kids, you look for quality of life without a lot of complications."

RECOMMENDED: Jack Shrimp's namesake dish ("get it with red beans and rice and it's a little bit of Louisiana right on the California Coast") and the Knuckle Sandwich double IPA from Bootlegger's Brewery. Warning: "It will hit you."

TIP: "If you get to the Balboa Ferry, you really get to the center of what it's like to live in Orange County. You're on the water, the Balboa Peninsula on one side and Balboa Island on the other."



PHOTO ABOVE: GARY CRABBE / ENLIGHTENED IMAGES / ALAMY.



From far left: Knott's Berry Farm; Hilton's Waterfront Beach Resort in Huntington Beach; John Wayne Airport.

Oakley. Huntington Beach's biggest draw, however, is the U.S. Open of Surfing, which attracts 1 million visitors to the city every year. The event includes surf competitions and skateboarding demonstrations and in 2010 was credited with bringing \$21.5 million to the region.

"The economic impact is huge for us, but it also really helps with our branding as the surf capital of the world," Fisher says.

Business travelers still make up the majority of travelers to the college town of Irvine, whose diverse population (45.1 percent white, 39 percent Asian, 9.2 percent Hispanic, 1.6 percent black) mirrors the changing demographics of Orange County.

"We have high hotel occupancy Monday through Thursday and hoteliers are looking to bring in visitors or to have business travelers stay through the weekend," says Wendy Haase, director of tourism marketing for Destination Irvine, a group that is leading a multipronged marketing campaign to promote the city's 14 hotels.

In addition to the University of California Irvine campus and all of its amenities, Irvine is home to the 1,300-acre Orange County Great Park that is being developed on the former site of the Marine Corps Air Station El Toro. Billed as the "first great metropolitan park of the 21st century," Great Park hosts special events and a farmer's market. Two other draws: a carousel and the Great Park Balloon, an orange helium balloon attached to the ground with a steel cable that takes park goers for bird's-eye rides over the grounds. Plans call for the development of a sports complex, golf course and a wildlife corridor.

Another top Irvine attraction is Diamond Jamboree, advertised as a "multicultural dining and shopping destination." The center draws visitors from China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, many of them foreign nationals who are in Irvine on business, says marketing manager Suzie Won-Speizer, who notes that a group of Japanese hospitality executives visited recently on a tour that was organized by the Japan External Trade Organization. Retail is an important economic force in several cities in Orange County,

particularly in Costa Mesa, where retail tourism has become an industry unto itself. The city has trademarked itself as the "City of the Arts," a place where visitors can shop by day at South Coast Plaza and catch a show at night at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts right across the street.

Costa Mesa's other retail meccas include the South Coast Collection—known as SOCO—a retail center for lovers of high-end design, fashion and food. There's also Lab Holding's "anti-mall," The LAB, and its environmentally themed cousin, The Camp, which caters to consumers interested in sustainability and healthy living.

"Our main focus is shopping, dining and the arts," says Nathan Wheadon, marketing coordinator with the Costa Mesa Conference & Visitor Bureau. "We've found that people who are coming to Costa Mesa have a little bit more disposable income and they are looking to go out, shop and take in a show."

BRAGGING RIGHTS
Business Insider has ranked Irvine the safest large city in America for nine consecutive years.

Others might call Costa Mesa's South Coast Plaza a "mall," but you wouldn't want to use that word in front of Werner Escher, a South Coast Plaza veteran and its current executive director of domestic and international markets. Escher is credited with transforming the center from a regional mall to a major tourist destination with more than 250 retailers and restaurants, including luxury labels such as Balenciaga, Cartier, Hermès and Chanel.

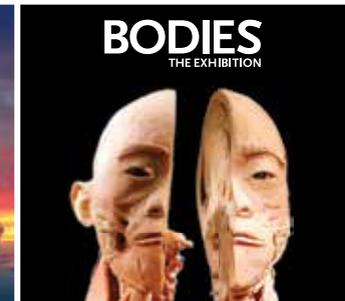
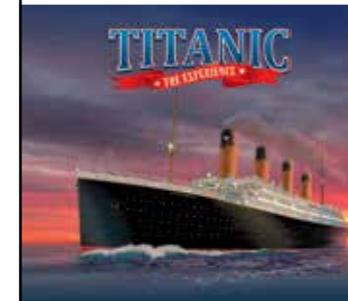
Today, South Coast Plaza encompasses 2.8 million square feet. Last year, its 45th in business, it saw a 10 percent bump in sales to a record-breaking \$1.5 billion. Seven new stores have opened so far this year, including Brioni and Lanvin, along with remodels of Club Monaco and Saint Laurent, among others. This follows 18 additions and 17 store remodels last year. South Coast doesn't have a food court (that's for malls, executives say) and it doesn't allow kiosk carts (they get in the way of strolling shoppers).

"The appeal of South Coast Plaza is beyond brands," Escher says. "It's really a happy place. When you walk our streetscape, there are



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SCAN FOR DEALS



PHOTO: TIM GRIFFITH (AIRPORT)

MY ORANGE COUNTY //

Paul Frank

Artist/designer

LOCAL ROOTS: The founder of Paul Frank Industries, creator of Julius the Monkey and now owner of the Los Angeles design studio Park La Fun, grew up in Huntington Beach. "When I was 31, I finally left the nest," later renting a house in town.

EATING: Cheese enchiladas at Mario's in Huntington Beach. "When you go other places in the country, their Mexican food isn't as good as the Mexican food we have here."

OLD HAUNTS: "We used to see a lot of bands at the Glass House in Pomona and the Coach House in San Juan Capistrano."

MUST SEE: Disneyland, where Frank married in 2005. "I know a lot of people would say that, but Disneyland has something for everyone. It's really unique."

ONLY IN OC: "The ocean air. That's what we miss the most. Whenever we go to Orange County, my wife always says, 'I miss the air.' It's different."



MY ORANGE COUNTY //

Ryan Getzlaf

Anaheim Ducks captain

LOCAL ROOTS: The two-time NHL All Star from Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, has played for the Ducks since 2005. "Orange County is where I call home now."

WHERE YOU'LL FIND HIM: "We've got two kids and one on the way, so we're pretty busy, but we do go out to eat a lot. Both my wife and I used to live in Newport Beach, so we go to True Food Kitchen, The Cannery, different sushi places."

RECOMMENDED: Mastro's Ocean Club in Newport Beach.

ONLY IN OC: "Well, the weather, for one, and the dress code. The dress code is a lot different from where I grew up. People get a lot more dressed up for things and girls are always wearing big heels."



windows and around the next corner there are even more windows. You can look at any one of the windows here and see what is fashionable and what is the look of today. And it's the same with our restaurants. You don't need a food court to be directed into. You want to go somewhere where there's sidewalk dining to see people."

Increasingly, South Coast Plaza is courting international travelers, with staffers fluent in some 40 different languages. South Coast was the first shopping center in the United States to accept the China UnionPay credit card, a good example of "being attuned to what is necessary in the marketplace to accommodate a growing number of people," Escher says.

Similarly, the retail division of Newport Beach-based developer The Irvine Company has launched a marketing campaign with discount packages aimed at international travelers visiting its popular Orange County shopping centers: Newport Beach's Fashion Island and the Irvine Spectrum Center.

"We wanted to reach out globally to invite even more domestic and international travelers to experience what our center offers," says Stacie Ellis of The Irvine Company.

About 10 percent of travelers to Orange County last year came from outside the United States, according to the Anaheim/Orange County Visitor & Convention Bureau. China, with its growing middle class, is a particularly attractive market.

Intent on broadening Orange County's appeal to Chinese travelers, the Orange County Visitors Association recently opened sales offices in Beijing and Shanghai and next year it will launch a Chinese-language website and offer special rates for Chinese travelers at 28 Orange County hotels.

DID YOU KNOW?
Santa Margarita Catholic High School won the USA Hockey High School National Championship this year, another boost to Orange County's hot youth hockey scene.

It's not only a matter of luring international visitors to Orange County, but also making sure their experience in Orange County is a good one, says OCVA's Fuller. For Chinese travelers, that could mean such small gestures as making sure there are slippers and tea kettles in hotel guest rooms and that such traditional Chinese breakfast fare as egg tarts and fish congee are options on hotel menus. "Chinese travelers will find familiar comforts

COURTESY ANAHEIM DUCKS/DEBORA ROBINSON (GETZLAF)

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From lower left: U.S. Open of Surfing in Huntington Beach; Newport Beach shopping; The Hilton Anaheim.



when they arrive on the property, including in their guest rooms and with their breakfast," says J. D. Shafer, general manager of The Waterfront Beach Resort, a Hilton property located in Huntington Beach. "Slowly, we're getting tour groups from Asia that are discovering Huntington Beach."

Orange County's largest hotel by room count, Hilton Anaheim, also participates in Hilton's Huanying ("welcome" in Chinese) program. The hotel has seen a significant increase in travelers from Australia in recent years thanks to the favorable exchange rate, and there's also been an increase in visitors from Canada and Mexico, says marketing manager Jennifer Sacks.

Kristin Elfring, general manager of The Outlets at Orange, which has seen a bump in travelers from China, Japan, Canada, Mexico,

Australia, Brazil and the United Kingdom, works with local tourism marketing organizations and more than 85 area hotels to create promotional packages that target international travelers. New multilingual welcome signs and employees who are fluent in a number of languages have helped "international visitors feel at home," Elfring says.

All of these efforts not only have helped position Orange County as a great travel destination but they also have gone a long way to painting a more nuanced view of a region that has tended to be defined in the popular culture by the over-the-top behavior of its reality TV show stars.

Escher, the South Coast Plaza marketing executive who has more than four decades of experience selling the Costa Mesa shopping center to the world, perhaps best reflects Orange County's evolution as a travel destination. He signs off a recent phone call in English, then Japanese and lastly with "xièxiè"—Chinese for "thank you." //

DID YOU KNOW?

More than a third of Orange County's population is Hispanic and nearly one-fifth is Asian. The Asian community grew 39 percent between 2000 and 2010.

PHOTOS: MICHAEL LALLANDE (SURF CROWD); JAMIE WILLIAMS (SHOPPING); COURTESY HILTON ANAHEIM HOTEL

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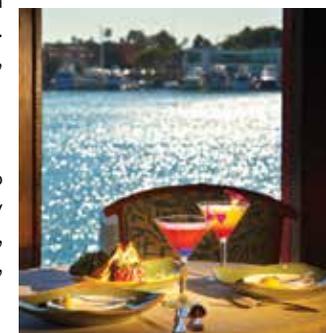


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DECEMBER 18-22, 2013
105th Annual Christmas Boat Parade

JANUARY 17-26, 2014
8th Annual Restaurant Week

APRIL 24-MAY 1, 2014
15th Annual Newport Beach Film Festival

APRIL 25-27, 2014
67th Newport to Ensenada International Yacht Race

MAY 30 - JUNE 1, 2014
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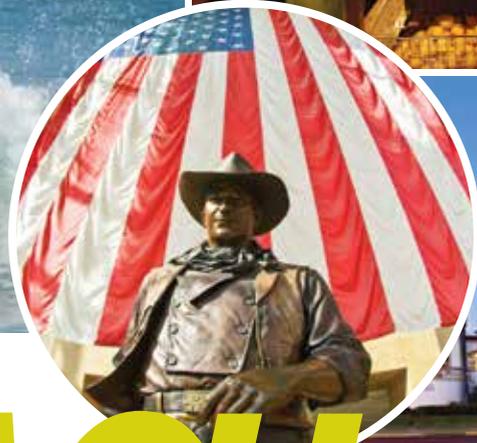


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LIFE'S A BEACH



Clockwise this page from far left: Yadin Nicol at the U.S. Open of Surfing in Huntington Beach; True Food Kitchen in Newport Beach; Hilton's Waterfront Beach Resort; Nixon Presidential Library and Museum; John Wayne statue at John Wayne Airport.

Orange County has it all—incredible surf, glitzy shopping, strip mall foodie finds—and Disneyland.

By Chasen Marshall

Orange County is like those books you read as a child. It's Choose Your Own Adventure. It can be every kid's dream vacation (Disneyland!) or a romantic coastal getaway for two. You can spend a small fortune on luxury accommodations and first-class pampering or you can have an equally great time on a modest budget.

Outdoor enthusiasts crave the hiking and biking trails in the Cleveland National Forest. Retail lovers spend hours (and sometimes much of their bank account) at Fashion Island, South Coast Plaza and Orange County's other fabled shopping centers.

Foodies dine on pho in Little Saigon, then head for tres leches at a Cuban restaurant in the Orange Circle. For a nightcap, they grab a drink with a couple of bikers in Trabuco Canyon or maybe they sip sangria on a ritzy rooftop in Laguna Beach as they watch the sun set over the Pacific.

That's the thing about Orange County. There are always options. With no one true identifying characteristic, it's no one thing for any one person.

It's a place to follow the well-worn tourist map if that's your thing or to have no plan at all and get a little lost in route to something spectacular. At once casual and fancy, familiar and unusual, sometimes rowdy but mostly quaint, Orange County is a place where celebrities retreat to sprawling beach homes, housewives star in TV shows, food trucks make a name for themselves and street fairs bring city centers to life.

Sure, come for its reputation as Southern California's great getaway, but plan to stay and enjoy what you actually find here.

Top Beaches

The top is down on the rental car and the sea breeze is whipping through your hair as you drive along Pacific Coast Highway. The beach is packed with umbrellas, you're wearing summer attire and your forehead is getting a bit sunburned—and it's November. Thank

you, Mediterranean climate. Sure, Disneyland will deliver memories that will last a lifetime, but it's the great weather and those 42 miles of coastline that keep people coming back to Orange County. Unlike Central California, where the coast can be as unpopulated as the Mojave Desert, Orange County has put its beachfront real estate to good use.

The area's wealth of surfing options has made it a major hub for the surf industry, with many of the industry's biggest brands (Quiksilver, Volcom, Hurley) making their headquarters within brief driving distance from a surfable wave. **Huntington Beach**, in north Orange County, is ground zero for those waves. Known as "Surf City USA," it's home to the **U.S. Open of Surfing** and has a walkable downtown around Main Street that dead-ends into the Huntington Beach Pier, a great place to spend some time even if you aren't on the sand.

Newport Beach neighbors Huntington Beach to the south and is known for its beaches but also for its bustling peninsula nightlife, its array of restaurants and shops and as the home of Kobe Bryant and other celebrities. On the south end of the city, near the entrance to Newport Harbor, you'll find the world-famous "Dirty Ol' Wedge" (as it was referred to in the movie *Endless Summer*.) During the summer months, as large south swells brew in the Pacific, hundreds of tourists and locals and just about every cable news crew within 100 miles gathers at **The Wedge** to watch two- to three-story-tall waves crash close enough to shore to send a layer of salty

mist across the crowds as a few brave souls put on a show in the water.

Located on the northernmost portion of San Diego County, adjacent to the city of San Clemente in south Orange County, **San Onofre State Beach** has the most versatile array of waves in the county. With its dirt parking lot and palm frond-surrounded showers, it's also a throwback to the California of the 1930s when the spot was a private beach club of sorts. Encompassing more than 3,000 acres of beach and rolling hills, the area serves a multitude of purposes and attracts more than 2.5 million visitors a year. It's one of the top five (of 280) most-visited areas in the California state park system, a draw for day hikers and bird watchers, although its primary attraction is the waves.

A quarter-mile north of "SanO" is **Lower Trestles**, one of the few world-class surf breaks in Southern California and host to several major surf competitions. When the waves are good, it's known to be as congested as the 5 Freeway at rush hour.

HONORABLE MENTIONS: *Salt Creek Beach (Dana Point), San Clemente State Beach (San Clemente), Little Corona Del Mar Beach (Newport Beach), Main Beach (Laguna Beach)*

Great Destinations

If you're the type of person who likes to have a plan in mind when you travel, you'll want to make sure to reserve tickets for a touring Broadway show playing at the **Seegerstrom Center for the Arts** in Costa Mesa or at the **City National Grove of Anaheim**.

Another great night can be had watching the burly, bearded players of the NHL's Anaheim Ducks get slammed against the boards at the **Honda Center** or jumping to your feet when Mike Trout of the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim hits one over the wall in right field at **Angel Stadium**.

If you have kids in tow, make a beeline to **Disneyland** and get your picture taken with Mickey Mouse. Visit Jack Sparrow on the Pirates of the Caribbean ride. Then take a spin



Clockwise this page from top left: Cars Land at Disney California Adventure; Huntington Beach lifeguard; University of California Irvine athletes plant orange trees; Pin Wall at Discovery Science Center in Santa Ana; Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim.

PHOTOS: CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: CHRISTOPHER HALLOREN (SURFER); STEPHEN FRANCIS (HILTON AIRPORT); ALEX ESTRADA (NIXON LIBRARY); PAUL HOFFMEYER (DISNEYLAND RESORT); CAROL STEPHEN DUNN (GETTY IMAGES); H. LORREN / ZUMA PRESS, INC. / ALAMY (UC IRVINE)



From left: 320 Main in Seal Beach; Restaurateur and mixologist Jason Schiffer at 320 Main; U.S. Open of Surfing.

on the giant Mickey's Fun Wheel at the newly expanded **Disney California Adventure**. Tip: If you plan to check out both parks, buy the two-day park hopper ticket.

For dining and nightlife in and around the parks, **Downtown Disney** delivers an array of themed chain restaurants and bars, including the Rain Forest Café, ESPN Zone and the House of Blues.

A slightly more adventurous, older and taller (to be able to get on the rides) crowd congregates at **Knott's Berry Farm** in Buena Park. Built on the site of a berry farm established by the Knott family in the 1920s, it has roller coasters, adventure rides and finger-licking-good fried chicken.

Although most of the citrus fruit groves that gave Orange County its name are gone, remembrances of the Orange County of the past remain. In San Juan Capistrano, head to **Mission San Juan Capistrano** (founded in 1775), considered one of the most beautiful missions in the world and renowned for the annual return of the swallows. For an early California experience, there's also the **Irvine Historical Museum** housed in an old ranch house.

For a bit of hands-on marine education, drop by the **Ocean Institute** in Dana Point Harbor. If science is your passion, there's the **Discovery Science Center** in Santa Ana, a perfect place for curious minds, young and old alike.

HONORABLE MENTIONS: *Orange County Great Park (Irvine), Newport Landing Whale Watching (Newport Beach), Orange County Museum of Art (Newport Beach), Pageant of the Masters (Laguna Beach), Orange County Fair (Costa Mesa), Nixon Presidential Library and Museum (Yorba Linda)*

Outdoor Adventures

Orange County is full of tidy neighborhoods and dense cityscapes, but with more than 230 miles of riding and hiking trails among 25 urban and wilderness parks, it delivers lots of ways to get away from the bustle. Two great destinations to do just that: **El Moro Canyon** in Laguna Beach, which benefits from ocean breeze and rolling hills, and **Holy Jim Falls Trail** in Trabuco Canyon, a sanctuary for beginning

to intermediate hikers seeking a retreat from the suburban setting.

Long walks on the beach are always a good idea, and Laguna Beach's **Crystal Cove State Beach** is an ideal place to take a stroll. Here low tide unveils tide pools for a first-hand look at local marine life.

Among Orange County's numerous golf courses there's the five-star masterpiece at **The Resort at Pelican Hill** in Newport Coast and the country-inspired layout of Irvine's **Strawberry Farms Golf Course**, featuring the county's longest hole at 630 yards. There's also the tree-lined **Anaheim Hills Golf Course** located just a few minutes from Disneyland (a break from the kids?) and sporting rolling terrain surrounded by lovely Spanish-Mediterranean architecture.

Surfing is the local passion, of course. If it's not your thing, but you love to be on the water, consider standup paddleboarding. With every city along the coast sporting a couple of shops that offer board rentals (by the hour or by the day) and even a few SUP-specific businesses such as **Stand Up Paddle Company** in Laguna Beach, its popularity and accessibility is growing by the day. It's easy to learn and a unique way to experience Orange County's coastline, harbors and lakes. If you need a little help, lessons are readily available. (Be sure to stretch first!) Kayak rentals and tours are a good backup, however, if you don't trust your balance to keep you from taking an unexpected dip in the water.

HONORABLE MENTIONS: *Aliso Creek Golf Course (Laguna Beach), Arroyo Trabuco Golf Club (Mission Viejo), Paddle Board Bliss (Laguna Beach), Mile Square Park (Fountain Valley)*

Shopping Hubs

Whatever your taste (and budget), you don't need to drive far for incredible shopping. Start at **South Coast Plaza**, considered by many to be Southern California's premier shopping

MY ORANGE COUNTY //

Courtney Conlogue

Professional surfer

LOCAL ROOTS: Conlogue, who competes on the Association of Surfing Professionals Women's World Tour and finished fourth in the world for the 2013 season, travels eight months a year, but calls OC her home. "My parents have lived in the same house in Santa Ana for 25 years."

HANGOUT: "I love Java Point in Huntington Beach. It's the local surf shop and coffee shop. It's a great spot to meet the locals or catch up after I've been traveling on the tour for a while."

LANDMARK: Watson's Drugs and Soda Fountain. "It brings back memories from when I was little. I'd go into the candy area with a buck from my dad and get what I wanted."

BEST BEACHES: "Huntington Beach is a great place to sun bake and hang out. Lower Trestles in San Clemente is the best wave, but there can be 150 guys out."



ORANGE COUNTY GREAT PARK BALLOON Irvine
A giant orange helium balloon whisks visitors 500 feet above Orange County Great Park, a clever nod to the region's fabled citrus heritage.

PAGEANT OF THE MASTERS Laguna Beach
At this annual event, masterworks of art come alive as "living pictures" that are recreated by actors and set to a live orchestral score.

LITTLE SAIGON Westminster
This densely packed four blocks is said to be the largest Vietnamese community outside of Vietnam, with more than 2,000 Vietnamese-owned restaurants, shops and businesses.

PHOTOS: ORANGE COUNTY GREAT PARK (STEVEN GEORGES/THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER/ZUMA PRESS, INC./ALAMY (PAGEANT); MICHAEL GOULDING/THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER/ZUMA PRESS, INC./ALAMY (LITTLE SAIGON); RANDALL NELSON (MAP).

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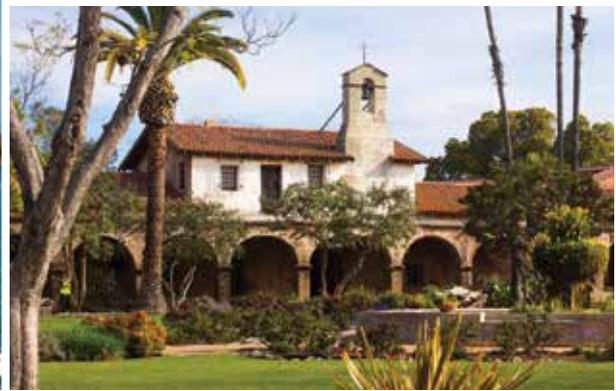
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PHOTOS: MICHAEL LAULANDE (U.S. OPEN OF SURFING); CLARE PUECKHAHN/BILLABONG (CONLOGUE).



From left: Supreme Scream at Knott's Berry Farm; Standup paddleboarders in Newport Beach; Mission San Juan Capistrano.



MY ORANGE COUNTY //

Gustavo Arellano

Writer/editor

LOCAL ROOTS: The syndicated columnist (jAsk a Mexican!), author (*Taco USA: How Mexican Food Conquered America*) and editor (*OC Weekly*) has lived in Orange County his whole life. "My great grandpa came to Anaheim in 1918 to pick oranges and pack them."

HANGOUTS: "At Memphis at the Santora in Santa Ana, at the pink Alebrijes Grill Taco Truck and in Little Arabia in Anaheim to get my Middle Eastern food on."

RECOMMENDED: "Taco María in Costa Mesa for amazing high-end Mexican food. Pho Dakao in Little Saigon for the best chicken pho in the galaxy. Kareem's in Anaheim, makers of the best falafel on earth."

MUST SEE: Fire pits in Huntington Beach and Corona Del Mar.

ONLY IN OC: "The Dos Chinos taco trucks, created by a Vietnamese kid who grew up in Santa Ana. The Mexican kids called him *Chinito*, but instead of becoming bitter he became a very rich man."



destination. You'll find all the luxury retail your bank account can withstand (Versace, Louis Vuitton, Prada, Dior, Gucci), as well as popular department stores (Nordstrom, Saks Fifth Avenue) and a carousel where the kids can take a spin. There's even shuttle service to surrounding area hotels.

Fashion Island in Newport Beach is also a great stop for upscale stores and spas, while the **Irvine Spectrum Center** is popular with a younger crowd and with families drawn to its movie theaters, family friendly restaurants and Dave & Buster's outpost.

The LAB, a self-described "anti-mall" in Costa Mesa that was created to "combat retail monotony," is as suited for hanging out as it is for shopping. In addition to stores, restaurants and a quaint coffee shop (**The Gypsy Den**), it also hosts art shows and outdoor movies.

Across the street, there's The LAB's earthy cousin, **The Camp**. With shops and restaurants catering to those mindful of the environment who also adhere to an active, healthy lifestyle, it's the place to take a yoga class, buy a juice cleanse, gear up for your next camping trip, and get a tattoo designed with orangic ink. Reward yourself with a visit to **Umami Burger**.

HONORABLE MENTIONS: *Brea Mall (Brea)*, *Westfield MainPlace Mall (Santa Ana)*

Music Scene

Some of the biggest names in music, from No Doubt to Social Distortion, Sublime to Local Natives, got their start playing at venues in Orange County. Today, great bands regularly pass through the area, either on their way to bigger venues in nearby Los Angeles or in the hopes of getting noticed by someone who might help get their foot in the door in LA. Either way, Orange County music fans win.

One of the best places to check out up-and-coming bands is the **Detroit Bar**, a dimly lit space in changing west Costa Mesa. Musicians who have already made a name for themselves (Bob Dylan, The Flaming Lips, Weezer, ZZ Top) play at mega open-air venues such as the **Pacific Amphitheatre** in Costa Mesa and at **Verizon Wireless Amphitheater** in Irvine. **House of Blues Anaheim** also brings in

well-known acts, while **The Observatory** (formerly The Galaxy Theatre) in Santa Ana has a new look, new ownership and is starting to attract some good shows once again.

HONORABLE MENTIONS: *The Coach House (San Juan Capistrano)*, *The Yost Theater (Santa Ana)*, *City National Grove of Anaheim (Anaheim)*, *Chain Reaction (Anaheim)*

Nightlife

What's your preference? A cozy corner booth where you can nurse a fancy cocktail? A dance club with a VIP list and a DJ of note? Hip décor and more craft beers than you can fathom? Whatever your nightlife fancy, you'll find it—just ask the locals.

Night owls who want to get dressed up and hit the dance floor go to The Triangle in Costa Mesa for **Sutra**, one of Orange County's hottest clubs. Just across the street, you'll find a very different scene at **Goat Hill Tavern**. This isn't the place to fuss about your footwear, as peanut shells and other bar flotsam cover the floor.

Swallow's Inn in San Juan Capistrano is the place to meet fellow cowboys and cowgirls (and listen to country music). Or take the short drive to **Turk's** in Dana Point Harbor to mingle with a boat captain over a strong and well-priced drink.

The Cellar in Fullerton is known for its award-winning wine list, cozy ambiance and hard-to-find subterranean location that's more than worth the effort. Another gem: **320 Main** in Seal Beach, which makes fantastic pre-Prohibition cocktails but also has been known to host the occasional mixologist.

If you want a great view to go along with your drink, be sure to grab a patio table at **180Blü** at The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel in Dana Point, overlooking Salt Creek Beach. Another contender for the best place to enjoy a cocktail at sunset is **The Rooftop Lounge** in Laguna Beach, located atop the Mediterranean-style boutique hotel La Casa del Camino

DID YOU KNOW?

Rick Warren's Saddleback Church and Rev. Robert Schuller's *Hour of Power* Crystal Cathedral are two of an estimated 80 megachurches that have come out of Orange County and Los Angeles.

PHOTOS COURTESY: KNOTTS BERRY FARM (SUPREME SCREAM); COURTESY NEWPORT BEACH & COMPANY (PADDLEBOARD); LITTLE ARABIA (SHUTTERSTOCK); (CAPISTRANO); JOHN GILHOOLEY (ARELLANO).

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Clockwise from top left: Runners in the Ridiculous Obstacle Challenge 5K at Orange County Great Park in Irvine; Fashion Island in Newport Beach; Discovery Science Center in Santa Ana.

PHOTOS: KEN STEINHARDT/THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER; ZUMA PRESS, INC.; ALAMY (PARK); TOM LAMB/IRVINE COMPANY (FASHION ISLAND).



and boasting a stunning view of its own.

HONORABLE MENTIONS: *Casa* (Costa Mesa), *Memphis at the Santora* (Santa Ana), *The Twisted Vine* (Fullerton), *Landmark* (Corona del Mar)

Where to Eat

Orange County is often called a melting pot of cultures and this especially applies to the food scene. It's all here from pho in Little Saigon (said to be the largest concentration of Vietnamese outside of Vietnam) to Ethiopian food at **Abyssinia** in Anaheim, sushi with an ocean view at **242** in Laguna Beach (just don't ask for soy sauce), Peruvian dishes at **Inka Mama's** in Aliso Viejo and Cuban food at **Habana** at The LAB in Costa Mesa (be sure to order the sangria). Part of the fun of eating

in Orange County is uncovering great food in the most unexpected places. Some of your best meals here can be had in non-descript strip malls and in restaurants where two-thirds of the lettering in the fluorescent signage is on the fritz.

One sure-fire strategy for uncovering great Mexican is to head to Santa Ana, where it's made the way it was intended: with few ingredients but fresh and properly marinated. (Tip: Avoid any place with a "Mexican pizza" on the menu.)

DID YOU KNOW?

Whale watchers around the world head to Dana Point every March for the annual migration of the California gray whales.

The fine-dining options in Orange County are numerous and great—**Raya** at The Ritz-Carlton in Dana Point, **The Cannery**



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From left: 180Blü at The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel in Dana Point; Mike and Sully to the Rescue! and Silly Symphony Swings, both at Disney California Adventure Park.

PHOTOS: MONSTERS, INC. (SCOTT BRINEGAR/Disney ENTERPRISES, INC.); RIDE (PAUL HIFFMEYER/Disney ENTERPRISES, INC.)

in Newport Beach, **Orange Hill Restaurant** in Orange, **Javier's** in Newport Beach—but you'll likely be just as happy foregoing the frills and building your own burger at **The Rider's Club**, a ten-table café in San Clemente that has a range of microbrew beers on tap.

You'll find more great burgers at **Slater's 50/50** (Huntington Beach and Anaheim Hills), where the patties are half ground beef and half ground bacon. Another decadent meal awaits you at **Burrell's BBQ** in Santa Ana, one of the best representations of Southern cooking the county has to offer.

In a region known for its beach-ready hard bodies, healthy dining options are everywhere. **True Food Kitchen** in Newport Beach is one of the best, focusing on providing the essential nutrients the body needs to thrive,

but without sacrificing great flavor. Vegans and vegetarians especially like **Native Foods Café** at The Camp in Costa Mesa, where the popular Caribbean jerk kale salad and the Scorpion Burger made with home-made blackened tempeh and chipotle sauce are enjoyed by even devout red-meat lovers.

DID YOU KNOW? Oxford Academy in the Orange County city of Cypress consistently ranks as one of the best public high schools in the country on national and regional lists.

HONORABLE MENTIONS: *The Burnt Truck (roaming), TK Burger (Huntington Beach), Bad to the Bone (San Juan Capistrano), Felix Continental Cafe (Orange), El Campeon (San Juan Capistrano), Rooster Café (Costa Mesa), TAPS Fish House & Brewery (Brea) //*

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— **Knute Kurtz**, Managing Partner, PricewaterhouseCoopers



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