



The hotel room balcony at The Inn at Laguna Beach features a spectacular view of the beach and the Pacific. The inn offers free beach chairs, towels and umbrellas. PHOTOS: CURT WOODHALL

# Fun beyond Disney in Anaheim and Laguna Beach

Go to California for the theme park, but make the most of Orange County too

MHAIRRI WOODHALL

From the comfort of my chaise, I watch my feisty five-year old sprint back and forth across the waterpark. After three days of hoofing it around Disneyland and California Adventure Park, it seems impossible that she could have any energy left.

My husband's snoring in the late afternoon sun. I can barely move. Yet somehow our daughter is completely unfazed by the 12,000-plus steps we clocked earlier today. Perhaps it was the ginormous, sugar-dusted churro she gobbled down in Critter County. Or maybe it's just because she's five. Either way, the sprays and waterslides at the Courtyard Anaheim are helping exhaust her excess energy.

Like most families with young children, we came to Anaheim for Mickey Mouse. However, after a week in Orange County we've found a ton of family-friendly fun outside the parks as well.

Our trip began in laid-back Laguna Beach, where we combed the shoreline daily in search of what my daughter refers to as treasure — think broken seashells and random objects that beachgoers lose or leave behind.

The Inn at Laguna Beach, where we stayed, allowed us to maximize the sand and surf by providing

complimentary beach chairs, towels and umbrellas. Other free perks we liked (all right, loved) were the hotel's morning Starbucks coffee station; the daily oceanview wine-tasting; and the nightly milk and cookies served in the lobby.

Our two favourite eateries were practically attached to the hotel. The first, Las Brisas, is arguably Laguna's most famous brunch locale. The food and service are excellent, and the ocean views unmatched. We devoured the restaurant's signature seafood tower, piled high with oysters, lobster, king crab and shrimp and then polished off an over-the-top dessert platter.

The other gem we stumbled upon was the tiki-chic Royal Hawaiian. With its lush Polynesian decor, live music and extensive keiki (kids) menu, this place is a total win with families. Head there for the daily Happy Hour to save on tropical drinks and snacks.

If you're in Laguna on the third Sunday of the month, pre-register for the Family Art Studio hosted by the Laguna Art Museum. The free program, which is hugely popular with local families, begins with a parent-led exercise to analyze one of the museum's exhibits. In addition to learning about the artist's style and methodology, children are encouraged to think about how the art makes them feel. Af-

terwards, you'll create your own interpretation of the masterpiece to take home. It's a fantastic experience that our daughter loved, and I recommend for anyone with kids ages three and up.

We also explored downtown Anaheim's arts and culture offerings at the Muzeo Museum and Cultural Centre. The main gallery welcomes unique exhibitions from around the world.

Visit in December through early January for the annual Christmas display, Muzeo Express: Holiday Model Trains. In addition to showcasing trains and miniature scenes, the museum puts on two Polar Express Pajama Parties. At Muzeo's permanent exhibit, the History of Anaheim housed in the historical Carnegie Library, you'll find everything from fossils and 19th-century farming artifacts, to cool Disney memorabilia.

After immersing ourselves in local history we wandered over to the Anaheim Packing District for lunch. This foodie wonderland, located in a beautifully restored cit-

rus packing house, features more than 20 grab-and-go style eateries.

Downtown Anaheim is also a hot spot for craft breweries, which we found to be surprisingly family friendly. Top picks for kids include the patio at Anaheim Brewery, where they can play around in Farmer's Park, and the comic inspired Unsung Brewing Co., for its superhero murals, action figurines, comics and board games.

Another hit is Dave and Busters at the Outlets at Orange. Our plan was for my husband and kiddo

to let loose in the arcade while I racked up our duty free allotment at the outdoor mall's 120-plus shops. That didn't happen. I hit the token jackpot on my first game and got the itch. Two hours later I'd won a stuffed monkey, two-way radio set and Minions headphones.

My high continued as I power shopped the outlets. It turned out to be my happiest place on earth. *The writer was a guest of Tourism Anaheim. No one from Tourism Anaheim read or approved of this article before publication.*



If you have any energy left after visiting Disneyland, head to the splash park at the Courtyard Anaheim Theme Park entrance.

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