An Elegant Jewel by the Sea: La Jolla

By: Kathy Strong

A relaxing alternative to bustling nearby San Diego is this tiny enclave that bejewels the Pacific like a nearly flawless diamond. La Jolla, known for its art galleries, upscale bistros, pristine beaches, designer boutiques and cultural pastimes, is a refreshing escape for a weekend or a day.

Visitors to the village of La Jolla are inspired by its European-style charm and Mediterranean beauty. La Jolla Cove, fronted by a long grassy park for picnicking and jogging, caresses the village offering idyllic swimming, diving and surfing beaches. One of Southern California's most interesting oceanographic museums is located here at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography.The Stephen Birch Aquarium Museum, at 8602 La Jolla Shores Road, lets visitors experience walking by a kelp bed, past a submerged pier piling, and next to a coral reef – all without getting their feet wet. Large tanks and tide pools display hundreds of various underwater inhabitants.

Also nearby the entrance to La Jolla is the Torrey Pines Reserve, a unique state preserve devoted to the magnificent Torrey pine.The rare tree from the Ice Age clings to the sides of the weatherbeaten sandstone cliffs along Torrey Pines Road, leading to the visitor center, which also houses a museum and interesting natural history exhibits.

Don't leave La Jolla without viewing the seals at play at Children's Pool.The man-made beach protected by a sea wall is a playground for the California gray seals that make the pool their home. If you time your visit for low tide, you can explore the tide pools at Hospital Reef, just south of Children's Pool. The cultural offerings of La Jolla are reason enough to visit. Art galleries line Prospect Avenue, and the arts are further represented by the offerings of the prestigious La Jolla Playhouse, the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art and La Jolla Chamber Music Society.

An overnight in La Jolla may range from a quaint boutique hotel, such as Hotel Parisi, to one of the grand dames of hostelries, La Valencia Hotel. La Valencia, located in the heart of La Jolla, has been the perfect getaway for celebrities and notables for the past 80 years. Steps from both shopping and La Jolla Cove beach, the hotel – rich in history and flower covered colonnades – offers several fine restaurants, including the intimate Sky Room, and 115 guest rooms, suites and villas (that come with their own butlers).

How to Get There: Take Interstate 10 west to the 60 west. Merge onto the I-215 south toward San Diego. I-215 south becomes the I-15 south. Take the I-15 south, merging onto the CA-163 south. Then merge onto the CA-52 west. Merge onto La Jolla Parkway, which becomes Torrey Pines Road. Turn right on Prospect. Driving time is approximately 2 hours and 15 minutes for the 142- mile trip. Where to Stay: La Valencia Hotel 1132 Prospect Street La Jolla, CA 92037 800-451-0772 www.lavalencia.com info@lavalencia.com Hotel Parisi 1111 Prospect La Jolla, CA 92037 858-454-1511 www.hotelparisi.com info@hotelparisi.com La Jolla Visitor Center 7966 Herschel Avenue La Jolla, CA 92037 619-236-1212 www.sandiego.org

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