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## Travel Feature Story

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## Living it Up in Oceanside

By: EDDIE RIVERA

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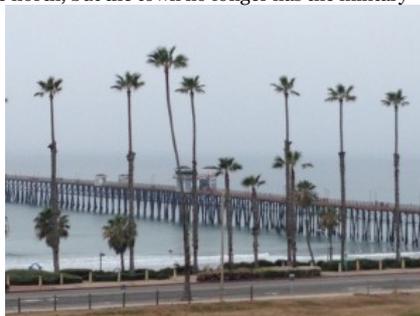
The sunset at Oceanside Pier from the Marriott Springhill suites.

The best vacations are the ones you take when you really, really need them. Like this one.

We'll travel for just about any reason, but when the invitation arrived to visit The Marriott Springhill Suites in Oceanside, we jumped at the chance. Clearly, it had been a busy few months in the land of Now.

Oceanside, about 100 miles from LA, is one of many Southern California beach towns scattered up and down the coast, but for too long it was considered the poor relation to San Diego to the south. It's been a long time since the town was known only as the home of Marines and their attendant industries. Camp Pendleton is just to the north, but the town no longer has the military-only feel of years gone by.

No one might ever have thought of Oceanside as a family-friendly place to be, necessarily, but that's all changed. Oceanside is undergoing quite the revival, and it's not just the Marriott. The downtown area is vibrant and dynamic, with a host of new restaurants from sushi to burgers, as well as pubs featuring artisan beers. In fact, we lingered, one more long afternoon, before driving home after our hotel visit, to really soak up the local vibe.



The family thing is the first thing that strikes me upon entering the property. The spacious open lobby faces the ocean at street level, and it's just a short stroll to more than three miles of beaches, to the north and south. The Oceanside Pier, just a few minutes away, in fact, is the longest over-water wooden pier in San Diego at 1,942 feet. And see that rickety fenced-in house just to the south of the pier? It was featured prominently in the film, "Top Gun."

Kids scampered through the lobby laden with beach paraphernalia, and parents perused a list of kid's activities. This is no romantic getaway, to be sure. It's a family place with family details, like a 24-hour mini-market in the lobby, where you can find late night snacks for hungry kids who should

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- Benjamin Disraeli

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be sleeping. There's also a full breakfast served every morning, which eliminates one serious headache from the Parental Planning Department.

And, though this was early March, the temperature was in the mid-70s, and there wasn't a sweater to be found, until after sunset.

The studio-sized rooms themselves are spacious and comfortable, with free wi-fi, roomy bathrooms, and most have ocean views and plenty of outlets. And, isn't that all that we really want in a hotel room?

The rooftop pool was quiet and available the morning of our stay, and we hung out there until it was alas, eventually discovered. We were also lucky enough to watch whales migrating south, just off the Oceanside Pier on this quiet weekday afternoon.



Doing the chicken at Hello Betty Fish House.

When dinner beckoned, we hustled next door to Hello Betty Fish House, a lively bar/restaurant where we watched the perfectly placed sunset while we dined. The first course clam chowder was thick and creamy, with a vaguely cheesy tang, in a really good way. Our grilled chicken breast was succulent and laden with a unruly mob of fresh grilled vegetables. We topped the meal off with a Mexican hot chocolate brownie sundae as sweet and rich and sugary, as, well, life should be.

A stay at the Marriott is affordable, comfortable, and just about everything you'd want in a family-friendly, mid-range hotel.

And its not so far away, either. Oceanside is south of Pasadena, and easily available from Interstate 5. There are also a host of rail opportunities, each accessible from the nearby Oceanside Transit Center.

Amtrak's Pacific Surfliner services cities between Santa Barbara and Oceanside. The Transit Center is also the hub for the Coaster, which runs between downtown San Diego and Oceanside; the Sprinter, which runs daily between Oceanside and Escondido to the east; and the Metrolink, which services east Orange County, San Bernardino and Riverside.

There is a lot to like in Oceanside. And we'll be back soon.

*The Marriott Springhill Suites Oceanside is at 110 North Myers Street, Oceanside, CA. 92054. (760) 722-1003. [www.marriott.com](http://www.marriott.com)*

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