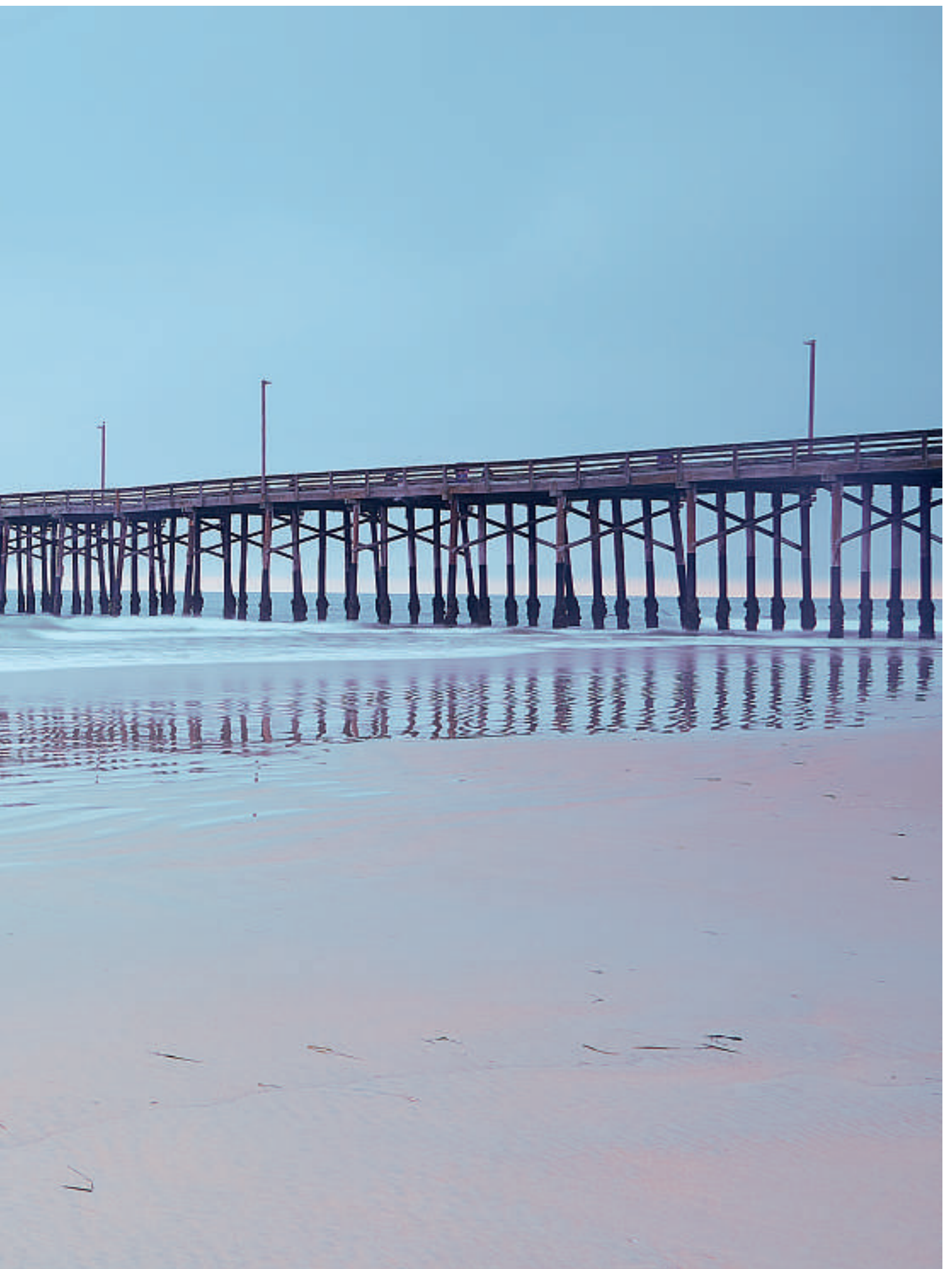




# BEACH BALM

The simple pleasures of a lesser-known Southern Californian seaside city attract celebrities and civilians alike, each in search of escapism.

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**P**otter southward of LAX for 70 kilometres and you'll find Newport Beach, one of Southern California's most underrated seaside cities. Well known to Cali natives but surprisingly undetected elsewhere, Newport has faded ties to American presidents and Hollywood starlets. But those in the know remain lured by its balmy beaches and year-round mild weather – holiday spot perfection.

While LA's population is almost three million, Newport Beach is sparser, with around 85,000 residents laced along its coastline in the neighbourhoods of Balboa Peninsula (the beach), Balboa Island, Lido Isle, Crystal Cove State Park and "the mainland": the shopping hub Fashion Island, Upper Newport Bay Nature Reserve – aka "Back Bay" – and suburb Corona del Mar.

The most distinguished of Newport Beach's former residents is arguably John Wayne of Wild-Western fame, who, in the 1960s, moved to a mansion on Bayshore Drive. Sadly, this pad is long gone, so it's only

the site of his former home that is pointed out to me as I sail across the bay while on a **Newport Harbour Cruise** ([funzoneboats.com](http://funzoneboats.com)). "Wayne used to sail his yacht here," says the captain, gesturing at an impressive crowd of docked catboats gently bobbing on the water. Named *The Wild Goose*, he explains the vessel was a 136-ft US Navy Minesweeper before its luxurious conversion and where the actor fraternised and fished with colleagues such as Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr.

Modern mansions still line the coast, signifying the wealth and high-status of the area's residents. But there's more to be doing than gawking at ostentatious homes, such as taking a whale watching "Ultimate Experience" cruise with **Newport Coastal Adventure** ([newportcoastaladventure.com](http://newportcoastaladventure.com)). Its *Shearwater* vessel, small of size and fast of speed, allows us to approach a pod of dolphins close enough to pet. These cruises cost from \$56 and last approximately three hours – don't forget to pack water and high-factor sunscreen. ➔

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Opening pages, serenity beside Newport Pier.

This page, top, wild coastline on Back Bay and, above, Jenai Nelson – yoga with a difference with Pirate Coast Paddle Company.







**On Balboa Peninsula, tanned locals sunbathe on golden sands, surf foaming swells and stroll the boardwalk**

✈ To immerse yourself in wider ecosystems, **Crystal Cove State Park** ([crystalcovestatepark.org](http://crystalcovestatepark.org)) is filled with canyon walking trails and tide pools, while twitchers can enjoy a self-guided kayak or paddleboard tour from a number of rental operators in **Back Bay**, a 400-hectare ecological reserve of wetlands that is home to 35,000 migratory birds and 200 endangered species, such as the gnatcatcher, Belding’s Savannah sparrow and California black rail.

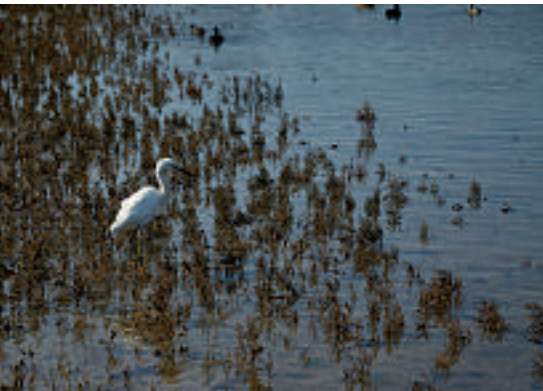
It is also here, off Back Bay Drive, that adventurers can experience another rare animal: a yoga paddle boarder. Yes, that really is doing yoga on a paddle board. **Pirate Coast Paddle Company** ([piratecoastpaddle.com](http://piratecoastpaddle.com)) is one of the few places that teaches the craft and, thankfully,

it is easier than it looks. Barefoot and Lycra-clad – and myself a yoga virgin – our group paddles past the drone of distant traffic and into a quiet pocket of the bay, forming a slowly shifting semicircle. Deep breaths, slow movements and core-engaging balances ensue, while listening to the lilt of yoga master Jenai’s coos of *sthira* (steadiness) and *sukha* (ease and comfort). “Our goal is to not only form the poses, but to do so with *ahimsa*,” she explains, “which means ‘do no harm’ and to listen to the body’s subtle way of speaking and making slight adjustments.” This is moving meditation, connecting breath to paddling and focusing on the present with each stroke. It’s a far cry from the entrepreneurs and worker bees slaving away in the nearby office district of Irvine.

There are more orthodox pleasures to be found on Newport’s main beach, past 47th Street on **Balboa Peninsula**. Here, crowds of tanned locals sunbathe on golden sands, surf foaming swells and stroll the boardwalk on foot, bike – or rollerblade, led by Chihuahuas and Yorkies (most places around here are pet-friendly, restaurants included). Give your legs a

Opposite, clockwise from top left, telephoto views from Newport Beach Pier; Technicolor on a plate at Balboa Bay Resort; hello deer ... a watering hole near the pier; Sicilian-style pizza at Gina’s.





Above, an eagle-eyed egret stalks the shallows and, above right, angles in America. Next page, left, boat-fresh fish at Balboa Beach Resort and, right, as well as rustling up tasty Mexican dishes, Javier's is a dab hand at craft cocktails.

## SMART FLIERS

**AER LINGUS** flies from Dublin to **LOS ANGELES** four times per week.

break and rent a two-wheel beach cruiser from **Balboa Beach & Bicycle Boutique** at \$10 for two hours or \$20 for a full day ([balboabeachandbicycles.com](http://balboabeachandbicycles.com)).

In terms of food in Newport Beach, you'll be spoiled for choice. Find cheesy satiation with a 14-inch BiggaSlice from **Gina's Pizza** ([ginaspizza.com](http://ginaspizza.com)), whose founder, Gina Costa, created "the perfect Sicilian pizza recipe" – and, it certainly tastes like it. Or sample some iconic SoCal Mexican cuisine at **Sancho's Tacos** (see "Travel Essentials", page 74) next door.

Opposite the beach is family favourite **Balboa Fun Zone** ([ocfunzone.com](http://ocfunzone.com)), an open fairground of rides, arcades, boutique shops, corndog and frozen banana treats and an illuminated Ferris wheel on the bay's edge. Enter the park via Palm Street's lot or by the **Balboa Island Ferry** ([balboaislandferry.com](http://balboaislandferry.com)), which has been hauling passengers between Balboa Island and Peninsula since 1919. Travel on foot for just \$1 or take the car for \$2 on the five-minute journey.

Back on the mainland, tourists can't get enough of behemoth shopping centre **Fashion Island**, which, at more than 84,000 sqm, is worthy of its title. It has more than

150 stores and restaurants, a movie theatre and year-round events. In contrast, **Lido Marina Village**, on Lido Isle, has more boutique, bohemian finds.

On the Pacific Coast Highway, the city's main coastline road, is the exclusive, members-only **Balboa Bay Club** ([balboabayclub.com](http://balboabayclub.com)), where the likes of Humphrey Bogart, Ronald and Nancy Reagan, Frank Sinatra and Buzz Aldrin were regulars. A comprehensive list of starry guests can be found at the **Balboa Bay Resort's** (see "Travel Essentials", as before) photo gallery next door, which is open to us mere civilians and has a poolside bar, an upscale restaurant and ocean views.

While many stars enjoyed the Club for its swish amenities, most came to escape the public eye and socialise with fellow big names on the racquetball court or on the aforementioned *Wild Goose*. Wayne himself was a Club governor. Even today, stars such as Justin Bieber, Kate Hudson, Michelle Pfeiffer and Britney Spears kick back at Newport Beach. Locals leave the stargazing to tourists and, instead, choose to relish in the escapism that has long since tethered itself to the town's name. 🍀

# TRAVEL ESSENTIALS

## EAT

**FISHY** Once a commercial fish factory, **The Cannery** is now an upmarket, waterfront restaurant. In keeping with its origins, it serves up fresh seafood, and its weekend brunch – bottomless champagne, cornmeal waffles with brown butter syrup, bay king salmon with tatsoi and mizuno greens and tea vinaigrette – is first-rate. (3010 Lafayette Ave, +1 949 566 0060; [cannerynewport.com](http://cannerynewport.com))

**FRUITY** Follow the line of chilled-out surfers and you'll find **Banza Bowls**, selling acai and pitaya bowls, and nutrient-rich smoothies. Choose your fruit and nut combo and tuck in, bearing in mind that each one is made to order so expect a bit of a wait. Well worth it, though. (114 22nd St, Newport Beach, +1 949 200 9389; [banzaibowls.com](http://banzaibowls.com))

**FIERY** **Javier's** serves upscale Mexican fare. Adobe brick and *talavera* tiles add an authentic atmosphere, while traditional dishes are served with a seafood spin. Specialties include lobster, Mexican white prawns and *carne asada* (7832 E Coast Hwy, +1 949 494 1239; [javier-cantina.com](http://javier-cantina.com)). For a more budget-friendly bite, **Avila's El Ranchito** (+1 949 675 6855; [avilaseranchito.com](http://avilaseranchito.com)) on Balboa Peninsula does \$5 all-you-can-eat Taco Tuesdays, while **Sancho's Tacos** (+1 949 723 8226; [sanchostacos.com](http://sanchostacos.com)) has killer burritos, plus an ocean view.

## STAY

**BAY BAE** Although **Balboa Bay Resort** is Balboa Bay Club's direct neighbour, it's open to all. Anyone can stay at the luxury resort and enjoy its outdoor pool, high-end spa and vistas of yachts galore on the shimmering water (the Bay View Room is a dream). Guests can also rent Duffy boats, kayaks and paddleboards before a delicious seafood brunch at its Waterline restaurant. Rooms from \$215. (1221 West Coast HWY, Newport Beach, +1 949 645 5000; [balboabayresort.com](http://balboabayresort.com))

**SELF-CONTAINED** Ideal for families, **The Resort at Pelican Hill** comprises not only hotel rooms but also bungalows and villas that include a full kitchen and laundry appliances, up to four bedrooms

and a private garage. Activities, among them pasta making, cocktail mixing and storytelling, are available in the Social Lounge. Rooms from \$395. (22701 Pelican Hill Rd S, Newport Coast, +1 888 507 6427; [pelicanhill.com](http://pelicanhill.com))

**BEACHY KEEN** Newport's newest boutique hotel, **Lido House** stands on the former site of City Hall. It has 130 rooms along with a rooftop bar, an afternoon tea parlour, a saltwater pool with cabanas, top-tier restaurant and an ice-creamery. Plus, it's located on the peninsula, within walking distance of buzzing bars and restaurants. Rooms from \$299. (3300 Newport Blvd, Newport Beach, +1 949 524 8500; [lidohousehotel.com](http://lidohousehotel.com))

## DRINK

**SPIRITED** Come to **Bosscat Kitchen & Libations** for the cool, rustic atmosphere, stay for the lively liquor (including a seemingly infinite whiskey list) and meat-stacked burgers, BBQ pulled pork, 12-hour braised short ribs – a must for carnivores. Its creative cocktails pair perfectly with Southern stock, such as whiskey okra, French onion mac 'n' cheese and tasty sugar barrel steak. (4647 MacArthur Blvd, +1 949 333 0917; [bosscatkitchen-newport.com](http://bosscatkitchen-newport.com))

**SCENESTER** Recently revamped on *Gordon Ramsay's 24 Hours to Hell and Back*, **SOCIAL Kitchen + Craft Bar** has transformed into one of the area's hottest hangouts. Modern interiors are matched by an inventive weekend brunch menu and

cocktail list; favourites include Coffee's for Closers – Woodford bourbon, nitro cold brew, salted vanilla. (512 W 19th St, Costa Mesa, +1 949 642 2425; [socialrg.com](http://socialrg.com))

## SMART TIPS

**NAVIGATION** If travelling to Newport Beach from outside LA, you'll likely want a car. Download the **Waze app** to avoid the infamous LA traffic and head down to **Avis** Arrivals for your rental. Or, take the **LAX-it** shuttle on the lower level, kerbside, to the Uber/Lyft pick up point. Rides to Newport Beach from around \$60.

**SAFARI** Take a day trip to **Santa Catalina Island**. Bought by chewing gum giant William Wrigley Jr in 1919, the 192 sq km island – 90 per cent of which was granted to the Catalina Island Conservatory – is accessed via the **Catalina Flyer**. The ferry meets at Balboa Peninsula daily. Take an off-track tour and see bald eagles or enjoy zip-lining, snorkelling, hiking, exploring. Round-trip tickets from \$53. (400 Main St, Newport Beach, +1 310 410 0211; [catalinatours.com](http://catalinatours.com))

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