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## GIRLS SURFING AND DIVING WEEKEND IN LA JOLLA



Famous for its year-around sunshine and European charm, La Jolla features one of California's best surfing and diving. Not too long ago, I read something interesting in a magazine. "Travel, ultimately, is an investment in memory." I don't remember the author, just this one sentence.

It put a bug in my head. I called my girlfriends to organize a quick getaway. Without arguments we selected our own responsibilities. I looked for accommodation, Lisa found a surf shop and Eo set up the diving. It was all done in a matter of hours.

We all like to travel when it is less busy, so we decided on a Sunday till Tuesday getaway. Having flexible work hours definitely proved to be advantageous. Lisa works for an insurance company, Eo has her own accounting firm and I teach scuba diving. One thing in common: we all love adventures and are always ready for a trip.

We rendezvoused at Eo's place Sunday morning, gathered our belongings into one car and hit the road. It still amazes me how our freeways, in Los Angeles, are always crowded. Where do people have to rush to on a Sunday morning? About an hour later, when we finally have left the always crowded, smoggy city behind, our eyes gazed at a picture Nature composed ever so perfectly. On our left, the mountain was covered with an array of yellow and purple flowers, with no human in sight. On our right there was a commanding view of the California coastline. Palm trees set the beach mood, young and old, together laughingly splashed around in the water. I loved our vacation already.

Our temporary residence, the Grande Colonial Hotel in La Jolla is a landmark historic hotel that overlooks the shores of the Pacific Ocean and is ideally located just steps away from miles of beautiful beaches renowned to Southern California. I opted for this hotel because it is within walking distance of world-class shopping, dining and entertainment. As much as we are adventure hungry wild girls, we all have our typical female, shoe-loving side that needs satisfaction.

Ever wonder on the streets purposeless, just for the sheer joy of it? We did. We explored several glass shops, an animal accessories store, furnishing and rug outlets, and clothing boutiques while wondering the seaside Village of La Jolla. As we walked through the streets I felt we were really on a vacation. We blended with tourists from France, Italy, Scotland and Australia. We just had to travel less to get to this charming place neighboring San Diego.

Monday morning, we ate breakfast at the Grande Colonial's restaurant, NINE-TEN. Being a culinary aficionado, it is much harder to please my taste buds than that of my girlfriends, but we agreed it deserved to be called the best breakfast place.

I am a true European coffee snob. I can hate a place just because of the coffees they serve. My café latte was perfectly presented and started my day on a great note. The darker coffee part was clearly separated from the fluffy milk and the temperature was neither too hot nor too cold. I was people watching while our food was prepared.

Lisa and Eo opted for house-smoked salmon and eggs benedict, while I chose seasonal fruits and a croissant to gain enough energy for the activities ahead.

We booked private surf lessons at San Diego's number one surf school, Surf Divas. Recognized worldwide as the first all-girls surf school, Surf Diva introduces students of all ages to the sport and spirit of surfing since 1996.

We were really looking forward to meeting the legendary owners, Izzy and Coco Tihanyi when we walked through the doors of the Surf Diva boutique to sign in for our lesson. They were not there, but nevertheless we enjoyed browsing the variety of fashionable, yet functional, surf gear for a few minutes before heading to the beach.

Our instructor, the Australian competitive surfer, Josh Fuller set a fun and encouraging mood right-away. We practiced on our oversized, foam covered boards in the sand for a few minutes. We rehearsed how to stand up when we caught waves and off we went.

Lisa went first, followed by Eo. They both stood up seemingly effortlessly when Josh gave them the signal. Then it was my turn to try. Just as I felt the push on my board, I excitedly grabbed the front, pulled up my legs, arched and balanced as I straightened my back. I was standing and riding the waves. I could not believe that it was that easy.

The one hour lesson seemed to pass by in five minutes. I experienced something extraordinary and life changing. My body and soul felt completely happy. There is nothing like riding on a piece of plastic board while the wind is blowing one's hair and the sun is stroking her face for a moment before splashing into the ocean with a happy scream.

After a hearty dinner, some wine and a short stroll through the village, we retired relatively early to recoup for next day's scuba diving excursion.

For a dive that's easy to access, La Jolla Cove is a can't miss. Just behind the seaside Village, steps are leading into the Pacific Ocean showcasing the underwater world.

La Jolla Cove is an ecological preserve, which means no harm can be done to any plant or animal within it. The wildlife seems to know this and the Cove is always teeming with marine life. California has something that no other ocean has to offer: it's fast growing, abundant kelp forest. Swimming through the kelp forest is often compared to hiking through Yosemite National Park.

Marine life includes sheep-head, halibut, horn shark, lobster and of course California's state marine fish, the bright orange Garibaldi. Our dive was outstanding. A short swim across the sand took us to a small reef crowded with tiny silver fish. The average depth was around 15-30 feet, providing great snorkeling opportunities to those who are not ready to submerge just yet. As I looked up, I saw swimmers viewing the divers below. They were curiously checking out what we were looking at a few feet under them.

La Jolla is a world famous dive site, provides great surfing, while also offering quiet time under the palm trees for those who prefer a more relaxed vacation. With its coastal location, extraordinary environment and European charm, La Jolla provides the ideal destination for travelers.

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