

TRAVEL AGE

EXPLORING TRAVEL FAVORITES AND FRONTIERS

WEST

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By Deanna Ting

5/18/2009



All guestrooms feature either a private patio or a balcony. // © Rancho Bernardo Inn

I couldn't take my eyes off of it.

Transfixed by billowing plumes of liquid nitrogen, I watched as Trevor, our waiter, continued to make passion-fruit ice cream laced with Grand Marnier and rum right before my very eyes. Whisking the mixture of rich cream, liquors and passion fruit juice, he stopped momentarily and, with the flick of his wrist, set his whisk down as the icy air slowly dissipated from view. Soon after, he topped off generous scoops of the creamy dessert with freeze-dried chunks of pineapple, and I couldn't wait to take my first bite.

The end result of this feat of molecular gastronomy?

Absolutely delicious. This was just one of many memorable moments I had at the Rancho Bernardo Inn. The family-owned property is located northeast of San Diego in the upscale neighborhood of Rancho Bernardo, some 100 miles south of Los Angeles. The resort itself is both intimate and sprawling — a favorite among locals and visitors.

Chances are that if you aren't familiar the Southern California region, you might never have heard of Rancho Bernardo. And, if you have, you may have remembered it from the recent, devastating wildfires of 2007 that raged across Southern California.

Thankfully, the Rancho Bernardo Inn was not harmed by those fires and, today, the 46-year-old property continues to be a respite for golf enthusiasts, spa aficionados and gourmands alike. About a year-and-a-half ago, the inn underwent a hard-good renovation from the ground up and clients will appreciate the end results.

Even with its \$25 million makeover, which included new spa facilities and meeting spaces, the Rancho Bernardo Inn manages to retain a homey, inviting atmosphere. In the lobby, rich tapestries and rugs adorn buttery oak floors and Old World masterpieces blend in seamlessly.

The same home-like ambience is found in the guestrooms and suites, where warm colors and textures meld together effortlessly to make you feel like you're staying at a bed and breakfast, not a 287-room golf and spa resort. All rooms feature either a private balcony or patio, custom furnishings and original artwork, a plasma-screen television and an iPod-ready stereo. In my room, I loved sitting outside on the patio and gazing onto the green while reading a book. I also appreciated the bathroom amenities — natural Aveda bath products, including a shaving kit — and the sturdy executive desk — perfect for working on my upcoming articles.

Where the resort really excels, however, is in its food and beverage, both of which are what the property was founded on, according to sales manager Inga Richter.

While the Rancho Bernardo Inn is a AAA Four-Diamond resort, it is home to a AAA Five-Diamond restaurant, El Bizcocho. Today, the modern-French restaurant is helmed by chef de cuisine Steven Rojas. Rojas' masterful skills are on full display with the restaurant's extravagant seven-course tasting menu. My favorites from the menu included the aforementioned ice cream, as well as the melt-in-your mouth short ribs and delicate, butter-poached lobster. When paired with an extensive list of exquisite wines from around the world, Rojas' flavors are even more heightened — it's unforgettable and well worth the price of an additional \$50 per person. (The tasting menu by itself is \$105 per person.)

Also well worth a visit is the resort's top-rated spa. Last year, it was voted as the number-one resort spa in the U.S. by readers of Conde Nast Traveler and, having had a treatment there, I can definitely see why. It's not an overtly flashy spa but it manages to wow in all the little details that matter most. For example, spa goers have exclusive access to an immaculate, heated saline pool surrounded by crisp, white cabanas, and can order items from a specially selected spa menu. My favorite feature, however, are the private, temperature-controlled, outdoor treatment casitas where the only sounds you hear are those from a waterfall.

I was lucky enough to book a Signature Massage in one of the private casitas — a blissful way to spend the morning before the long drive back home. I appreciated the level of customization — I got to pick my own scented oils and the type of pressure used — as well as the temperature control. I never once felt the slightest bit cold, chilly or exposed thanks to the casita's powerful heat lamps.

The spa has a total of 13 treatment rooms — eight indoor and five outdoor — as well as indoor and outdoor relaxation lounges and hydrotherapy pools; a steam room; a separate manicure and pedicure suite; and a fitness center. The most popular treatments at the spa are Made-to-Order therapies that are fully customizable to suit your client's individual needs.

And for clients who need a little tee time, they can head to the resort's tree-lined fairways and driving range. The course at the Rancho Bernardo Inn has previously hosted both Professional Golf Association and Ladies Professional Golf Association tournaments, so it should appeal to golfers of all levels of expertise, even the highest. If golf isn't quite what they are looking for, clients can also work up a sweat on the tennis courts, or go for a dip in the swimming pool.

The Rancho Bernardo Inn is also a hub for local meetings, events and family gatherings. While I was there, it wasn't uncommon to find families chatting by the heated fireplace outside each guestroom building, or observe guests bustling in to attend lavish weddings and bat mitzvahs.

Through the end of May, the resort is offering a family-friendly Kidcations promotion with added treats for little ones. Complimentary activities and amenities include: a welcome gift of stickers, coloring pads, crayons and a travel game for children ages 2 to 10 at check-in; access to a Nintendo Wii Lounge on Friday and Saturday nights with ice-cream bars and other snacks on hand; in-room camping that includes tents, sleeping bags, a stuffed animal, glow sticks and a s'mores bar; a self-guided Fountains Walking Tour around the property; a dive-in movie on Saturday nights; and miniature putting golf contests and yoga classes for the family on Saturday and Sunday mornings. A one-night Kidcation package is priced from \$199 per night and includes a \$50 resort credit for each night of stay.

As more clients, especially families and couples, seek to travel a little closer to home this summer, the Rancho Bernardo Inn seems like an especially ideal destination. Whether your clients are into pampering, gastronomy or golfing, the Rancho Bernardo Inn will have them covered.

The Details

Rancho Bernardo Inn
17550 Bernardo Oaks Drive
San Diego, Calif.
858-675-8500
www.ranchobernardoinn.com
Commission: 10 percent

Packages

The Back to Basics Day Spa Package includes a 50-minute Signature Massage of Made-to-Order Facial, a Seasonal Made Fresh Daily Hand Treatment, a spa lunch and use of the spa pool and fitness center. It is priced at \$140 on Mondays through Thursdays and at \$175 on Fridays through Sundays.

The Two for Free Package is priced from \$259 per night and includes two free spa treatments, a free Veranda dinner for two and free unlimited golf for two through May 31.

Twittering agents and clients can also sign up for general manager John Gates' "GM Gone Mad" feed on [Twitter.com/GMGoneMad](https://twitter.com/GMGoneMad). The general manager frequently tweets promotions, property news and musings about the latest happenings at the Rancho Bernardo Inn. Gates' latest promotion is a Survivor Package whereby guests decide how much they are willing to forego in order to enjoy discounted rates. Through June 15, and from Aug. 16-31, the package starts at \$219 per night, based on double occupancy, and includes deluxe accommodations and breakfast

for two. Clients who can go without breakfast, however, can book for just \$199 per night. Varying rates apply for lesser amounts of amenities; for example, a room without a bed, toiletries, linens, lights, sheets, pillows, air conditioning or heat, an honor bar and breakfast is only \$19 per night.

