JUST PRESS PAUSE

by Allison Hata

REFRESHINGLY DIFFERENT FROM A TYPICAL DAY AT THE BEACH, THE COVE URGES VISITORS TO ‘TAKE A MOMENT’

Splashing happily at the water’s edge, children gather around a young girl grasping a sparkler and blazing a squiggly trail of light across a dusky sky. It’s the Fourth of July, circa the ’60s — a snapshot painstakingly preserved of a charming enclave nestled in the crook between Corona del Mar and Laguna Beach.

“Up and down the beach, families like mine celebrated the Fourth with bonfires and fireworks,” recalled Laura Davick, founder and vice president of the nonprofit Crystal Cove Conservancy. “We always wanted that day to last forever.”
Whether it’s from atop El Moro Canyon or at the sandy shore, Crystal Cove takes us back in time. Adventurers rise with the sun to search for wildlife in the verdant hills. Plein-air artists capture, with paint-streaked hands, the pristine coastline and quaint cottages of the Cove’s historic district. Children frolic in the shallows and enjoy bonfires at nightfall, spearing marshmallows and telling stories.

Rituals remain sacrosanct in this flashback to Orange County’s earlier days. In the mid-1900s, a hand-stitched flag bearing the outline of a martini glass was hoisted every Saturday at 4 p.m. to signal the start of cocktail hour. The tradition has been handed down again and again, and The Beachcomber now flies those colors fully seven days a week because, as the locals say: Every night is Saturday night at Crystal Cove.

This summer, leave your cares in the car and dive into a season of celebration and discovery.
SAND. SHORE AND S’MORE[S]

Dawn breaks on another perfect summer day and the sky tints the tide as water rushes toward the beach. Multicolored umbrellas shade the little ones as they fill bucket after bucket in an ageless sandcastle restoration effort. And the backdrop? Rows of vintage cottages and hills dotted with hardy scrub and delicate wildflowers.

“There is a great relaxation element there,” said Danielle de Beaubien, guest experience manager at The Resort at Pelican Hill. Guests regularly take de Beaubien’s advice and head to Crystal Cove on the Resort’s complimentary shuttle. Armed with water-and-towel-filled totes, they stop in at The Beachcomber Express tent for chairs, umbrellas, sand toys, boogie boards and an assortment of picnic foods.

The far ends of the beach may draw a surfing crowd, but most visitors opt for a more leisurely day. Swimmers find calm water in front of The Beachcomber. At low tide, families venture out to Reef Point, Rocky Bight, Pelican Point and Treasure Cove. There, shallow pools of water form underwater parks that afford an intimate peek at sea creatures from mussels and hermit crabs to barnacles. State parks staff and volunteer docents are stationed at the tide pools to answer questions about the aquatic ecosystem.

Come sunset, de Beaubien suggests snagging a fire pit on the sand. Just last year, The Beachcomber launched the S’mores and Beach Fire Pit experience. Families and groups of friends can reserve multiple pits, while couples escape for a romantic evening under the stars.

For more information, please visit crystalcovestatepark.org and thebeachcombercafe.com.

BLAZING A TRAIL

Morning, noon and evening, Crystal Cove State Park’s 2,400 acres of backcountry wilderness bask in sunshine. Day hikers and campers rejoice in the solitude and natural beauty of the many trails along the bluffs and tucked inside El Moro Canyon. “Hiking is right in our backyard,” said de Beaubien.

Catch vast vistas of the Santa Ana Mountains from the perimeter of the park during an invigorating 4.5-hour, nine-mile
#NOFILTERNEEDED

FROM SUNUP TO SUNDOWN, CRYSTAL COVE WARMS THE SKIN AND THRILLS THE SENSES WITH A NATURAL, INVIGORATING BEAUTY.
#FRESHAIRDEEPBREATHS

RECONNECT WITH

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

ON BIKE-AND-HIKE

PATHS FRAMED IN

FRAGRANT GREEN AND

BABY BLUE.
loop that leads hikers up No Name Ridge and through the Moro campground. The park has trails for all experience levels, and even the lower-elevation loops offer the chance for wildlife sightings.

Smooth, well-marked paths that skirt the coastline encourage both two-wheeled and two-legged outings and afford breathtaking views from both sides of Pacific Coast Highway. The paved and packed-dirt paths, wooden plank boardwalks, benches and picnic tables add practical and aesthetic charm to leisurely strolls and power walks and rides. Paths that hug the coastal bluff offer easy beach access for those wishing to regain the sand. From the park’s visitor center, a gently sloping trail winds through the quiet canyon, while biking El Moro reveals stunning valley and ocean views as well as physical challenges like the narrow, rocky Rattlesnake Trail.

A dirt trail above the El Moro campground leads across a wooden bridge to a well-appointed day-use area. There, shade ramadas and picnic tables are perfect for catching one’s breath before continuing down to the beach. The far end of the hidden walking tunnel beneath Coast Highway reveals a picture-perfect display of sand, sky and the sparkling sea.

*For trail maps and routes, bike rentals and tours, Resort guests may visit the concierge or explore online at crystalcovestatepark.org/map-of-hiking-trails.*

**LIVING HISTORY**

If the tranquil trails of El Moro Canyon offer a break from civilization, the historic district is its foil, providing an immersive, community-centric experience. This stretch of parkland, thought to be the last remaining example of a 1920s Southern California beach colony, is the heart and soul of Crystal Cove.

Tours of the district take place the third Sunday of every month. Led by Davick, they become especially engaging when visitors learn that her parents, Bob and Peggy, met and fell in love at Crystal Cove. Davick grew up with the beach as her playground and the red-and-white “Shell Shack” as home base.
When permanent residency at the Cove ended in 2001, Davick and others formed what is now known as the Crystal Cove Conservancy, a group aimed at protecting the area’s marine wildlife and landscape and educating visitors about environmental challenges.

“The work we’re doing is not transferable unless we educate the next generation,” Davick said. “My experience as a child here has greatly impacted my desire to protect Crystal Cove.”

Nearly every day promises an unforgettable experience, thanks to an array of activities offered by the Conservancy. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, aspiring artists find inspiration in nature through plein-air painting, while Wednesdays feature historic games, sea glass crafts and more. Monthly events include coastal geology and field science workshops for adults and kids.

Of the 29 restored cottages featuring original textiles and furnishings from the mid-1930s to the 1950s, a few have been repurposed for educational use. Cottage #46 is now a rotating gallery that showcases marine life, art and educational programs. The Beaches Cottage became a media center filled with photos and relics commemorating the cove’s starring role in the early years of the film industry.

In addition to selling books, photographs, one-of-a-kind crafts and vintage signs, the Park Interpretive Store and Gallery showcases more than 40 artists each year. The Whistle Stop now houses The Beachcomber Café and Bootlegger Bar, while the ever-popular Ruby’s Shake Shack maintains its 70-year tradition of serving up shakes, malts, burgers and much more.

The cottages are also an important part of the future of Crystal Cove. The California Coastal Commission recently approved restoration of the final bank of 17 cottages, with fundraising expected to help support infrastructure development and restoration. Davick looks ahead with excitement to the day when the children and grandchildren of today’s visitors will be assured access to the magical, carefree spirit of this lovely vestige of Orange County’s past.

For more information, please visit crystalcove.org.
#COTTAGEINDUSTRYCC

A 1950s GENERAL STORE AND SODA FOUNTAIN AND THE FORMER WATERING HOLE, THE WHISTLE STOP, BRING HISTORY TO LIFE.