



# SAN DIEGO'S

Endless adventures and deep relaxation await at Rancho Valencia & Spa

By ALISON LEWIS





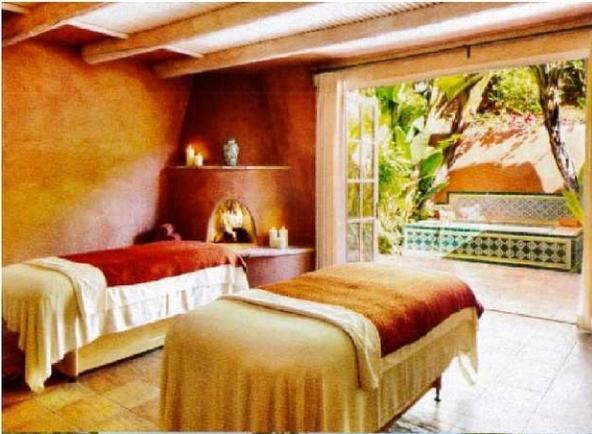
# HIDDEN GEM

Attain a sense of inner calm in the magical setting at Rancho Valencia.  
*opposite* Relax with a good book or play croquet right outside your casita.



*left to right* An outdoor soak is the perfect way to start any spa treatment. Ana Spalding and I after class. *opposite, clockwise from top left* Rancho Valencia's serene indoor/outdoor spa treatment rooms. The new yoga pavilion. Try a tennis clinic or lesson. The spa's private pool.





There's nothing better than discovering a hidden gem right outside a big city. Rancho Valencia & Spa is the epitome of complete relaxation, serenity and wellness in a boutique hotel that lies just 25 minutes beyond San Diego. You'll find amazing accommodations here; 49 lush, Mediterranean-inspired guest casitas (all suites) feature rustic but lavish furnishings, high-beam roofs, walk-in closets, spacious baths with deep soaking tubs, expansive living spaces, intricate design accoutrements and private patios with fireplaces and whirlpools. Freshly squeezed orange juice and a newspaper of your choice are delivered to your door daily. Complimentary is the most frequently used term used here, including Wi-Fi, all drinks and snacks in the minibar, workout classes and even a house Porsche—should you feel the need to leave the property. They're available on a first-come, first-serve basis, and you may choose from the 911 sports car, an SUV or sedan. Guess which one I chose? (Hint: The 911!)

Temperate days are filled with sunshine and the bluest skies imaginable. Nights are cooled by the ocean breeze, but a fire pit or outside heater is always nearby. Come for a romantic getaway with your favorite person, for a girls' weekend or even a family retreat. Endless opportunities are on tap for outdoor adventure, exercise or complete blissed-out relaxation.

#### WELLNESS

Tucked away in gardens and olive groves, you'll find the amazing Spa at Rancho Valencia, where tempting choices

await to soothe your spirit, rejuvenate your body and clear your mind. All products are from Amala, the only luxury skincare brand to have its entire collection certified by NATRUE, the world's most recognized and respected natural and organic cosmetic certification organization.

The 2.5-acre spa features outdoor elements including three temperature-varied therapeutic pools, a Watsu therapy/massage pool, a lap pool and private sun gardens. Indoor amenities include 10 beautifully tiled, vibrant treatment rooms with private patios; five with deep outdoor soaking tubs and rain showers. A pair of couple's rooms features fireplaces, private patios, outdoor showers and tubs for two. I indulged in Sixth Sense Ritual, a re-energizing experience that began with a soothing bath soak said to relax the body, mind, muscles and joints—and it did. A massage followed, which included a harmonizing scalp massage with organic Mediterranean myrtle, juniper and organic jojoba, plus avocado and olive oils. A hand and foot paraffin treatment came next—absolutely incredible.

Every detail at the spa is tailored to wellness and tranquility, including freshly made organic fruit and vegetable juices. Head to one of the many classes at the 1,000-square-foot serenity yoga pavilion, where you'll find complete Zen and talented, hands-on instructors, along with a variety of yoga styles and fitness instruction. If the pavilion isn't enough, explore the Pilates studio, state-of-the-art fitness center and large spinning studio where cycling is taken seriously. Inspired



*left to right* Start with a cocktail outside the Pony Room. Book a party or private dinner in the wine room. Relax by the fire pits before dinner. *opposite, top to bottom* Enjoy Veladora for breakfast or dinner. A look inside the casita.



rides are taught by some of San Diego's most elite spinning instructors on their Keiser M3+ Bikes. Each night you'll find the new list of up to eight classes for the next day, including high-energy cardio classes, yoga, ballet sculpt, TRX circuit classes, TRX tennis classes and outdoor boot camp. The biggest decision of the day is which to try first.

Ranked No. 1 in *Tennis* magazine last year, Rancho regards the sport as more than a pastime. You'll find 18 beautiful Plexipave hard courts set in a serene garden. A staff of passionate instructors host clinics and private lessons daily for devotees and beginners alike. I had not hit a tennis ball in four years, and I spent the morning with the resident pro. He worked me hard, and gave me more than a few tips as well as the will to get my tennis game back in form.

**DINING**

Executive Chef Eric Bauer's farm-to-table coastal ranch cuisine features local produce, herbs, flowers and honey cultivated on the property. Veladora, the property's signature restaurant, hosts all things fresh and handcrafted in the most gorgeously decorated setting with spectacular valley views. Open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, the sunny morning and afternoon vistas give way to candlelit evenings, and the menu changes often. For breakfast, start with one of the "slow" juices. I loved the Wellness Journey, a blend of kale, apple and

celery; the Sunrise Smoothie, a combination of strawberries, banana, honey and yogurt with added protein boost; and the breakfast parfait layered with yogurt, berries and homemade granola. If you're in a hurry to make it to a workout class or just want to relax, dial room service for a variety of breakfast options and a perfectly heated latte served outside on your private patio. For lunch, the quinoa vegetables salad is a must, as is the quinoa cashew burger. At dinner, the Bolognese or Maine lobster and black truffle risotto are highly recommended (all pastas are homemade), and pair beautifully with any of 600 hand-selected wine varietals at the ready. If you have a large party for dinner, book the private wine room. Be sure to at least sneak a peek; it is the loveliest of settings.

The Pony Room, the resort's equestrian-themed bar in a familiar John Wayne atmosphere, is designed with old-world furnishings, enlarged windows and a marble wraparound bar along with an al fresco dining setting. The restaurant serves craft tequilas and clever cocktails alongside rustic lunch and dinner dishes. You'll find a large variety of gluten-free fare on both restaurant menus, but be sure to try the homemade pretzel bites, flatbread pizzas, fish tacos, salads, roasted cauliflower, French onion soup and paella. Whatever you choose, it will be served to you on a sprawling terrace dotted with fire pits; al fresco dining is a must. Enjoy local beers and even a house sparkling wine on tap.

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