

# Santa Monica Daily Press

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THE FOR THE VETS ISSUE

## Travel

14 FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2011

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Photo courtesy Rancho Valencia

**SERVE:** Rancho Valencia resorts boasts some of the best tennis courts around.

## Playing tennis in the Garden of Eden

BY CAROLE ORLIN  
Special to the Daily Press

If you are looking for a combination of tennis and the Garden of Eden, you need look no further than Rancho Santa Fe. Nestled on 40 rolling acres, less than two hours from Santa Monica, is a gem of a resort called Rancho Valencia. As we approached this splendid hacienda-style haven, we immediately knew that it was a cut above any resort we have been to in many years.

We were greeted by the warm and welcoming staff and escorted to our suite. Our custom furnished suite, complete with our own private garden patio filled with vibrant Bougainvillea, hibiscus, bird of paradise, bromeliad, lemon and orange trees, palm trees and more, literally brought me close to tears. The abundance surrounding our patio, as well as the entire resort, is second to none. I hate to be effusive about this, but their classic Spanish California setting is really awe-inspiring. I cannot imagine the landscaping bills, but I know that whatever it is, the investment is well worth it!

Despite the peace and tranquility of this 49 suite/hacienda resort, it boasts a number one rating in the U.S. for tennis resorts by Tennis Magazine (2010). The resort manages to wed serious tennis with tranquility. Although their 17 Deco Turf hard tennis courts are but a short walk through the citrus groves, they are hard to see because each one is private and surrounded by the same beautiful foliage as the rest of the resort. Evidently, this was done because politicians and celebrities play here and need privacy. I would need the privacy simply to save myself the embarrassment of being seen as I routinely run after the next missed backhand!

Although I play tennis, I went there basically to relax and unwind. They have a state of the art, 10,000-square-foot spa and lovely fitness center. There are two swimming pools — one that seemed to be family friendly and was a little too lively for me, and another one by the hacienda (a 5,000-square-foot adobe home which is used for retreats, weddings, etc.) that was perfect for my needs.

After a hard day of swimming, working out at the fitness center and relaxing in the hot tub, sauna and dipping pools, we headed out to dinner. We braved the five minute walk to The Restaurant, their elegant and inviting eatery. The staff there, especially our server, Chip, was knowledgeable, enthusiastic and helpful with our selections. Their chef, Eric Bauer, has created a superb menu, and we loved our selections. One dessert

### If You Go

**Rancho Valencia**  
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item I regret not getting was the old fashioned natural root beer float. It seems the chef, as sophisticated as he is (formerly of the Four Seasons and Anthology), has a whimsical side to him too.

After a lovely and relaxed dinner, we trekked back to our suite, and relaxed by our comfy fireplace. It was a little difficult to decide which of the three TVs to watch, so we decided to sit outside on our patio and treat our senses to some more aromatherapy. My other regret, aside from not getting the root beer float, was that we did not bring our dog, as this resort is also dog friendly.

Before we knew it, it was morning and time to leave Shangri-La. As sad as we were to leave, I took with me the desire to create a bit of California abundance in my own little outdoor space here in beautiful Santa Monica. I think I'll start with a small Valencia orange tree and Bougainvillea and see where I go from there!

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Photo courtesy Rancho Valencia

**SWEET SPOT:** Each suite at the Rancho Valencia comes with its own garden patio, great for relaxing and watching the sunset.