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# DELMAR

## *Raises the Stakes*

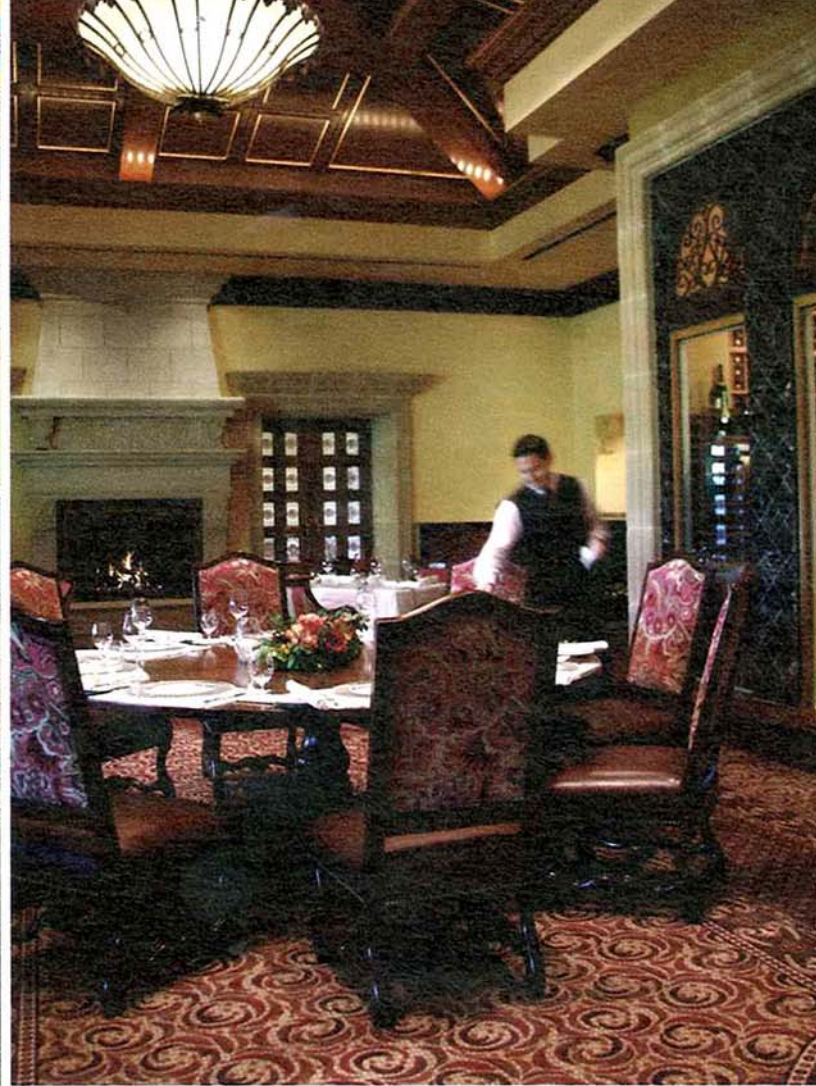


Torrey Pines State Beach, just south of Del Mar, lures many visitors with its rugged beauty and promise of relaxation.

World-class dining arrives at this California beach and golf enclave • *By Tim Fish*

**D**el Mar has been a playground for big kids since the days of Clark Gable, when Hollywood came to play a little golf, revitalize a tan and bet the trifecta at Del Mar racetrack. Today, Torrey Pines State Beach, just south of Del Mar, remains a soft and open range

for laying down footprints, and on a sunny day, the calm water along the shore is a smoldering blue. The track is still a lively destination, and golf courses old and new draw aficionados from far and wide. What has changed, and what distinguishes Del Mar from the many other beach communities between Los Angeles and San



Clockwise from top left: The racetrack at Del Mar has been drawing gamblers since the 1930s; more recent visitors have also been demanding fine food and wine, which they can find at the stellar Addison at Grand Del Mar; Susan Sbicca's eponymous restaurant features flavorful dishes and an Award of Excellence-winning wine program.

Diego, is a burgeoning passion for food and wine. Today, the town is home to many of the best restaurant wine lists in Southern California.

Two-hour's drive south of downtown Los Angeles and 30 minutes north of San Diego, Del Mar and adjoining Rancho Santa Fe are situated on some of the most expensive real estate in the country. The two communities are symbiotic: Del Mar plays the public role, a lively and upscale beach town, while Rancho Santa Fe is behind the scenes, a guarded inland community of exclusive homes, resorts and private clubs. "Del Mar has always been the beach for Rancho Santa Fe," says Don Terwilliger, a lifelong resident and celebrity watcher who as a kid played with Bing Crosby's children at the shore.

The climate is tailor-made for relaxation. In the peak of summer, the temperature rarely exceeds 80° F, and on the coldest winter night, it seldom dips below 48° F. Humidity is modest and there's only about 10 inches of rainfall annually, most of that arriving in the winter months.

Although the region has long drawn well-heeled travelers, fine dining is a relatively recent arrival. "Ten years ago, when we first opened, there wasn't a lot going on," says Dan Sbicca, co-owner of Sbicca Bistro. "You had to go to La Jolla or downtown San Diego. It's gotten much better. There are a lot of new chefs and restaurants."

The newest and most promising talent can be found at Addison, the lavish dining room at the equally extravagant Grand Del Mar resort. Wine director Jesse Rodriguez and chef William Bradley conspire nightly to create an unforgettable experience in a setting done on a Las Vegas scale. Complete with a wine list that holds a Best of Award of Excellence from *Wine Spectator*, Addison is one of the best wine-and-food venues south of Los Angeles.

Long-established and impressive in its own right is El Bizcocho at Rancho Bernardo Inn, located several miles inland from Del Mar. This restaurant too boasts a Best of Award of Excellence wine list, rich with older vintages, and the food and service match that level of quality.

Other resort restaurants can be a mixed bag. If you're seeking privacy, Rancho Valencia is a serene, Mission-style bungalow resort hidden in the hills. Ask for one of the newly updated suites, which are casually classy, but venture off the property for dinner. For something just off the beach, try the recently opened Kitchen 1540 at L'Auberge Del Mar. There's real promise there, and the hotel itself has just been given an attractive makeover.

Sbicca, too, is a great little bistro. Chef Susan Sbicca consistently crafts interesting, full-flavored food, and the Award of Excellence wine program is consumer friendly, with bottles selling for half price on certain days, and corkage fees waived on others.

Two other Award of Excellence holders in the area are worthy



The beautiful weather in Del Mar makes the location perfect for golfing. Aficionados of the sport have a number of options, including the Tom Fazio-designed course at the Grand Del Mar.

of consideration: Market and Arterra. If you must have a view of the water, Pacifica Del Mar is a good choice and also holds an Award of Excellence. A short drive south will bring you to the area's only Grand Award winner, WineSellar & Brasserie. It's worth the trip.

For something more casual—this is Southern California after all—try 3rd Corner in nearby Encinitas. It's an outlet of the popular wineshop and bistro of the same name in Ocean Beach. In the heart of Del Mar Village is Harvest Ranch, a high-end grocery that's ideal for stocking up for a picnic lunch on the beach. There's a fine selection of sandwiches, salads, artisanal cheeses and the like, plus an impressive selection of wines, from values and half-bottles to hard-to-find labels such as Pahlmeyer and Beaux Frères. Wine specialist Ron Saiki can often be found at the wine tasting bar. "The locals that frequent us are becoming more and more wine savvy," Saiki says.

Beyond food and wine, Del Mar and the surrounding area have much to offer. Pampering abounds at the high-end resorts, which feature an array of body and face treatments for women, men and



The Four Seasons brings its signature sophistication to the area, along with Pacific Ocean views.

couples. Golf courses are more plentiful than gas stations; La Costa Resort's course and Torrey Pines Golf Course are considered the most challenging in the area, while Aviara Golf Club at the Four Seasons, Rancho Santa Fe Golf Club and the Grand Golf Club at the Grand Del Mar are other highly regarded options.

Many of the resorts are family-friendly, with popular attractions such as Disneyland, San Diego Zoo, Sea World, Universal Studios and the well-respected Birch Aquarium all just an hour or two away by car. And watching the

ponies run at the racetrack is a tradition. Race season generally runs from mid-July through the beginning of September, and that's when you'll face the biggest crowds in the area.

Terwilliger, keeper of local lore about the Golden Age of Hollywood, recalls that in the 1930s through '50s, Del Mar's racetrack was the place for star sightings. "The track was full of celebrities all the time," he says. Hollywood may have moved on, but Del Mar has lost none of its charm. In fact, for the upscale traveler, it is quickly becoming the place to be in Southern California.