

BUDGET HONG KONG

PLUS A GREAT CALIFORNIA WEEKEND

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The villas at Rancho Valencia rock the hacienda vibe—mucho.

Rancho Santa Fe north of San Diego—one of the most expensive real-estate zip codes in California—makes a civilized weekend of polo, ponies and pars. **BY LUCY HYSLOP**

IF AFFLUENZA (the affliction of riches without happiness) were a real virus, San Diego's elite northern villages would be immune. The weather is virtually perfect year-round; locals complain if it's a few ticks off the average temperature of 21°C. These coast and ranch enclaves have long sipped the cocktail of old money and Hollywood class (Bing, Bogie and Durante; more recently, it's become home to players like Bill Gates, Janet Jackson and Barbra Streisand). Thanks to these roots and a fastidious architectural code, the area's DNA has changed little over the decades. Luxuriate amid an unapologetically upbeat atmosphere at gated Spanish hacienda, Tuscan or Mediterranean-style resorts.

STAY

Stay at the achingly chic Rancho Valencia Resort and Spa (5921 Valencia Circle, Rancho Santa Fe, 858-756-1123, ranchovalencia.com, from \$395 [U.S.] a night), a 40-acre resort so well sculpted from palms, birds of paradise and bougainvillea it belies the

liveliness of its sporting alter ego: 18 hard tennis courts (the top tennis resort in the U.S. according to *Tennis* magazine), a world-class spa, two swimming pools, Relais & Châteaux restaurant and even a quintessentially English croquet lawn. Including guest use of five Mercedes-Benz models (including the sweet SL550 convertible) is a nice touch. On a smaller scale, try the Inn at Rancho Santa Fe (5951 Linea Del Cielo, Rancho Santa Fe, 858-756-1131, theinnatrsf.com; from \$229 [U.S.] a night).

EAT

With an epicurean barnburner like chocolate-peanut butter bombe with caramel sauce listed on the menu, it's never a faux pas to head straight for dessert at the Pamplemousse Grille (514 Via de la Valle, Del Mar, 858-792-9090, pgrille.com). If you crave savoury, dine on osso bucco or crispy duck; a side order of chef Jeffrey Strauss's truffled Parmesan fries are a must-order dish. Make reservations in advance: even Monday nights are busy here.

THE GOODS **Travel**

Staying power is clearly a maxim in Rancho Santa Fe. Chef Martin Woesle has been at the helm of the upscale Mille Fleurs (6009 Paseo Delicias, Rancho Santa Fe, 858-756-3085, millefleurs.com) for more than 20 years. Discreetly situated in the Covenant, the tiny "downtown core" and the oldest community in Rancho Santa Fe, this restaurant woos with dishes like venison saddle with d'Anjou pear, served with vegetables from Chino



Architectural desserts on offer from Rancho Santa Fe stalwart Mille Fleurs.

Farm (6123 Calzada Del Bosque, Rancho Santa Fe, 858-756-3184), a producer much heralded by the likes of Wolfgang Puck and Alice Waters and worth a visit in its own right.

PLAY

Top courses in this area suit both scratch players and those bringing their full game. Test drive the Farms (8500 St. Andrews Rd., Rancho Santa Fe, 858-756-5585, thefarmsgolfclub.com), Del Mar Country Club (6001 Clubhouse Dr., Rancho Santa Fe, 858-759-5500, delmarcountryclub.com) and the Bridges (6670 Avenida del Duque, Rancho Santa Fe, 858-756-8700, thebridgesrsf.com): with its 300-foot suspension bridge and canyon below, teeing off from the 10th hole is priceless.

Why is an expanse of prime real estate devoted to a few months of polo and not multimillion-dollar homes? Two words: flood plain. Sundays in May through October at the San



The majestic facade of Del Mar racetrack, one of temples of the Sport of Kings.

Diego Polo Club (14555 El Camino Real, Rancho Santa Fe, 858-481-9217, sandiegopolos.com) are bustling with city and country families enjoying long lunches a horse-kick away from the thrill of a chukker. Whether you don a high-falutin' hat or low-brow jeans (it's less formal than other clubs), everyone mingles at halftime when spectators stomp down divots churned up by the horses.

A trip to Del Mar Racetrack (2260 Jimmy Durante Blvd., Del Mar, 858-755-1141, dmtc.com) not only evokes the spirit of its founder, Bing Crosby, but that of the legendary Seabiscuit. The popularity of the little horse that could helped rocket the grounds, dramatically situated "where the turf meets the surf" by the ocean side, onto the thoroughbred map. Races run from July to September.

LIVE

The Bridges (858-756-8700, thebridgesrsf.com) is a Tuscan-inspired community, down to the sangiovese vines, with a Robert Trent Jones II golf course (homes priced from \$2 to \$7 million [U.S.]). Rancho Valencia offers fractional-ownership, three-bedroom villas through the Timbers Resorts Residence Club (866-996-6442, villas-ranchovalencia.com; \$515,000 [U.S.] for an eighth share). *wl*

For information visit sandiego.org.