

Travel

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SECTION E



MAGGIE ESPINOSA FOR THE TIMES

WAVES TICKLE the coast at Woods Cove in Laguna Beach. Inspired by such beauty, the plein-air artists moved from San Francisco to settle in Laguna in 1917.

TO EACH A BEACH

From dogs to surfers, Southern California has sandy stretches for everyone

By Maggie Espinosa
TIMES CORRESPONDENT

BEACH BOYS tunes roll through my head as I zoom along the Pacific Coast Highway. My assignment: to find great Southern California beaches. Though urban encroachment has touched some, many offer luscious sand and sweeping views, and some have developed special identities that make them beloved among Southern Californians.

Try these beaches for a day of bliss beside the blue Pacific.

Most dog friendly

■ **Coronado Dog Beach, Coronado Island**

At the end of Ocean Boulevard at North Island Naval Air Station, Coronado Island. Coronado Visitors Information Center, 619-437-8788, www.coronadovisitorcenter.com.



A POOCH PARADISE, Coronado Dog Beach near San Diego, left, has showers for sandy paws. Surfers negotiate the rocks at Will Rogers State Beach in Malibu, right.

A pooches' paradise, San Diego County's immaculate beach invites Fido to rollick on the sun-kissed sand. A large area is designated for dogs and their owners to chase onrushing wa-

ters. Spend an afternoon here and you're sure to see a golden retriever chasing a tennis ball, or a tuckered-out beagle curled up on his owner's towel.

The atmosphere is amazingly



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harmonious. Cleanliness is paramount. Doggie waste-bags keep the beach spic-and-span. Foot showers keep paws and feet clean for the ride home. A day at Coronado Dog Beach is fun

for both two-legged and four-legged visitors.

Most beautiful beach

■ **Woods Cove, Laguna Beach**
At Diamond Street and Ocean Avenue, Laguna Beach. Laguna Beach Visitors & Conference Bureau, 800-877-1115, www.laguna-beach.com.

A winding path through a quaint flower garden escorts visitors to the beach access. Hidden at the bottom of a long staircase lies a sandy knoll that aesthetically champions any beach within 50 miles.

Multiple blues tint the waves tickling the coast, creating an ever-changing display of beach scenes. With more than 30 beaches and coves in the area, it's heartwarming to see Woods Cove is unspoiled by time and development. A few houses precariously perched on

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Beaches

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an overlooking cliff boast a bird's-eye view.

Locals seem to be the only ones privy to this stunning beauty. Tourists rarely know their way down the path, so neighborhood residents stroll the quiet seaside. A marine-protected area just off the shoreline hosts a few scuba divers.

This beach is a reminder of what drew 40 men from San Francisco known as the plein-air artists — Monet-style impressionists — to settle in Laguna in 1917.

Most romantic

■ Inspiration Point, Newport Beach

At *Narcissus Avenue and Ocean Boulevard, Newport Beach, Newport Beach Conference & Visitors Bureau, 949-719-6100, www.newportbeach.com.*

Within the confines of Newport Beach is the upscale community of Corona del Mar, home to the quintessential romantic beach — Inspiration Point. Cliche-ish indeed, but inspirational without a doubt. People equate it with the days of cajoling their loved ones to smooch in the back seat of a '57 Chevy.

A grassy lawn high above the beach provides panoramic views. Ice plant fills the cliff-side. Benches dot a long, sinuous pathway leading to the shore. Tiny waves entice couples to cavort at the water's edge as birds coo overhead. Sandy alcoves are hideouts for romantic interludes. Definitely an unrelentingly dreamy place to declare your undying love for that special someone.

Most child friendly

■ Seal Beach Junior Tot Lot, Seal Beach

At *Main Street and Ocean Avenue, Seal Beach, Los Angeles South Vicinity Beaches & Harbors, 310-305-9545, www.sealbeachcalifornia.com.*

Giggles overflow from the Tot Lot at Seal Beach. Little ones climb, swing and twirl about the soft, sandy floor.

This unique playground was dedicated to children in 1985 by the Seal Beach Junior Women's Club as a safe haven to let kids be kids. The area is protected by four walls with inlaid tiles painted by local darlings.

Yellows, purples, and pinks reveal a panoply of handprints,



KIDS WILL LOVE the Tot Lot at Seal Beach, left, where they can swing, climb and twirl on the sand to their heart's content. After a long day of walking around the beach, fill your belly with something tasty from Tony's at Redondo Beach & Pier.



LOVE IS IN THE AIR: You want romance and the beach? Head for dreamy Inspiration Point.

hearts, sailboats, shells, castles, turtles and more.

Although the lot is situated in the west corner of the parking area, what it lacks in ambience it makes up for in pure fun.

Most delicious food

■ Redondo Beach & Pier, Redondo Beach

At *Torrance Boulevard and Catalina, Redondo Beach, Redondo Beach Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau, 310-376-6911,*

www.redondochamber.org.

Foodies, unite. A galaxy of hot dogs, burgers, ice cream, Philly cheesesteaks, enchiladas, smoothies and lattes await on Redondo Beach Pier. Not necessarily epicurean delights, but perfect for chowing down.

Stop in at Tony's piano bar and listen to a virtuoso tickle the ivories as you sip a fruity cocktail. In the mood for something more casual? Head over to "Old" Tony's for a brewski and the fabulous



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second-floor view. If you can tear yourself away, Zeppy's offers homemade Sicilian pizza; El Torito whips up fresh guacamole daily; and the Seagull Cafe tempts diners with mouth-watering seafood dishes. Oh, yeah: Once you've had enough to eat, there is also a huge beach to explore.

Most wild

■ Venice Beach
At *North Venice Boulevard and Ocean Front Walk, Venice*

Beach, Los Angeles County Beaches & Harbors, 310-305-9545, www.venicebeach.com.

A wild, quirky, cockamamie mix of people from all walks of life frequents this beach. Musclemen lift weights alongside street performers balancing chairs on their foreheads. Television stars tape scenes for upcoming shows while high school kids shoot hoops nearby. Shop vendors convince tourists to buy trinkets as yuppies play paddleball on adjacent courts. You name it, it's here. Everyone should put Venice Beach on their list of "places to visit in my lifetime."

Most surfers

■ Will Rogers State Beach, Topanga Beach

Off *Pacific Coast Highway, Malibu, Malibu Chamber of Commerce, 310-456-9025, http://beaches.co.la.ca.us.*

This stretch of Los Angeles coastline was made famous in the 1960s when Frankie and Annette boogied and sang their way through a series of surfing films. "Beach Blanket Bingo," "Bikini Beach" and "Back to the Beach" offered a glimpse into Southern California life.

Today, beachophiles worldwide flock to this ribbon of shore. Neoprene-clad surfers dance on top of hefty pewter waves. Dudes and chicks hang 10 in search of a thrill. Patience is a virtue, since not every swell culminates in the "big one."

Rocky spots make for a rough landing if surfers don't maneuver their boards with accuracy. To them, the amplified waves make it worth the risk.