



Exploring Marina Del Rey

By Virginia Gil

June 29, 2015



If you've ever visited Los Angeles and felt it lacked any real sense of community then you've probably never spent time in [Marina Del Rey](#) and its surrounding beach towns: Santa Monica, Venice, Manhattan Beach. You're technically still in Los Angeles County but mentally you'll feel far far away from the bustling, often tourist-laden areas that claim the same county. The ocean is a big unifier here, beckoning you to swim, surf, sail or stroll down the winding bike path that leads practically all of the way down the Pacific Coast, interrupted only briefly by Marina Del Rey's inlets.

Even on chillier days, which happened to be the case when I visited this spring, the beaches are brimming with people on their bikes, moms pushing strollers and tourists bobbing and weaving their way down the path as the area's fit-conscious denizens go about their afternoon workouts.

There isn't a whole lot to do in these parts of Los Angeles — no real landmarks to visit or stars to chase down the boardwalk (though celebrities do favor the area's trendy restaurants, like [Shutters in Santa Monica](#)). Real shopping is designated to a strip in Venice, albeit an incredibly chic and trendy few couple of blocks. But that's kind of the point.

The Ritz-Carlton Spa Del Rey



Tucked away near the pool is [a full service spa](#) and adjacent gym. Here you'll find your basic range of spa treatments (massages, manicures, facials), changing areas with a full suite of bath products and eucalyptus steam room and waiting room, where tea, nuts and dried fruit are served. My therapist, who appeared to be an average woman of ordinary strength, had a remarkably heavy hand that magically rid me of all the knots and back pain I'd been complaining about for weeks.

Marina del Rey's Namesake Hotel

Stay: [Marina Del Rey Hotel](#)

Marina Del Rey's namesake hotel, and also its oldest, just underwent a \$25 million renovation, restoring the aging property to its full mid-century splendor. Expect a cool, 1960s vibe, befitting of a *Mad Men* cameo, but with a decidedly modern feel. A soothing blend of neutral tones and varying shades of blue remind you that you're near the ocean—that's if the hotel's GPS coordinates etched into the lobby floor don't prompt you first.

Every aspect of the décor was seemingly pored over and selected to evoke the serenity you'd expect from a waterfront retreat. From the ambient scent that lingers through the main areas and faint lounge music that drifts in from the infinity pool deck to the comfy shaded cabanas that overlook the docks, the Marina Del Rey targets your senses. And if the views of the marina or the beaming sun ever get to be too much, there's even a sitting area upstairs, which has several bookshelves and big couches to sit and read on.



Salt at the Marina del Rey Hotel

Hungry? Feast on locavore cuisine at the hotel restaurant, [SALT](#), which serves Southern California favorites like fish tacos and Cobb salad. The restaurant is especially popular with locals so hotel guests are cautioned to make reservations, though the delicious prime aged beef burger can be easily had by the pool or ordered up for room service. The hotel staff, a friendly group who dress in trendy, yacht-club attire almost too cool to be called a uniform, are happy to accommodate either.

All rooms at Marina del Rey Hotel feature: Molton Brown bath amenities; Bathrobes in room; 55" LED HD television in room; Complimentary Wi-Fi; Keurig coffeemaker; Morning newspaper; 24-hour room service; 24-hour concierge; Valet parking; and bicycle rentals.

The hotel is located at 3534 Bali Way | Marina del Rey, CA 90292 | 310-301-1000

Picnics and Seals

Picnicking in Burton Chace Park, the largest public park in Marina Del Rey, is a perfect way to spend the afternoon. Bring a blanket to sit and watch the boats sail by. There is also programming like movie nights and concerts that take place throughout the year. In the summer, for about \$1 a ride, water taxis will take you from the park to the Marina Del Rey Hotel and next door to The Ritz-Carlton, Marina del Rey.

It's a bargain, especially if you're used to navigating the inlets on foot.

Seals

You won't have to look too far to spot seals in Marina Del Rey. These playful, and often harmless sea creatures, will just easily swim up to your paddleboard, plop themselves on the front of a boat or shimmy up to the dock to catch some rays.

Shopping

Once deemed the coolest block in America by *GQ* magazine, [Abbot Kinney Boulevard in Venice Beach](#), California is where locals convene to drink, dine and shop. You'll find name-brand stores such as Robert Graham, Alexis Bittar and Warby Parker alongside one-off vintage stores and a handful of boutiques selling super-soft cotton tees, the region's unofficial uniform.

We visited on a sunny, Saturday afternoon and found it was an easy 15-minute bike ride from the Marina del Rey Hotel to the start of Abbot Kinney's busier streets (at the intersection of S Venice Boulevard). From there we followed the crowds, making our way in and out of clothing stores—selling everything from Coachella's signature hippie-chic ensembles to designer denim to *Wayuu mochilas*—and stopping for coffee along the way. The latter took a little bit of planning, as Abbott Kinney is home to a number of respected coffee chains that include Intelligentsia Coffee and Blue Bottle Coffee. Dining options are also plentiful but the lines proved to be longest, deservedly so, at The Tasting Kitchen, a popular farm-to-table restaurant ranked on many of the area's "best of" lists.

Sail on a Champagne Brunch Cruise



[Hornblower Cruise & Events](#) is the same company that operates the dinner cruises out of Manhattan, where some might say they've gotten a rap for being touristy and overpriced. But pull up to the dock at Marina Del Rey Fisherman's Village Marina and it's locals who you'll see in line to board the popular champagne cruise. Expect to find large groups celebrating birthdays and bachelorette parties as well as couples and a handful of tourists, like us, who slinked into a table unnoticed.

Once seated, your server will come greet you, give you a ley of the land (the brunch buffet opens for a one-and-a-half-hour portion of the cruise and the sea salt cookies, which are absolutely delicious, are generally the first to go) and take your drink order. You have the option of walking to the bar for a refill of mimosa, bloody Mary or other brunch cocktail but that wasn't necessary. Our server gave us very generous pours, as did those upstairs on the ship's rooftop, where we hung out for the better half of the cruise.

Seating is split evenly between the first and second floor dining rooms, each with its own buffet of standard brunch dishes, including an assortment of salads, breakfast items and a carving station. Those weary of getting sea sick, which I was admittedly, needn't be; the yacht travels so slowly that you'll seldom ever feel it moving.

Spend the Day Biking



Getting around Marina Del Rey from the hotel is easiest on a bicycle, which you can rent by the hour or at a daily rate from the front desk. The valet attendants will outfit them with baskets and locks, and the rentals are then charged to the room. From Bali Way, the street that leads in from the main road to the hotel, you'll catch the Marvin Braude Bike Path (a 20-mile paved trail that runs along the Pacific Coast) and either head right through the marina toward Chase Park or veer left to peddle past the public library and into Marina Del Rey's city center (In-N-Out and Costco are within biking distance) and the Santa Monica Pier—a pleasant, 5-mile ride down the winding, beachfront path.