



A New EDGE

The Pacific Edge Hotel is Sporting a New Look to Celebrate Its Prime Location

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In the 1950s, roadside hotels were an exciting phenomenon. This was the boom of car travel, and tourists searched for easily accessible places to park their cars and stay for their vacations. And if the hotel had a beachside locale, that was even better.

It was during this era that Pacific Edge Hotel emerged. Known as “Vacation Village,” for 51 years this family operated business was the kind of place that you came to as a child, then returned years later with your own family. It was just a typical hotel, conveniently located steps from the surf.

Flash forward a half a century to a time when guests expect a little more from hotels. Time had made its mark, and, while still boasting a prime location, Pacific Edge had grown more than a bit weary. It needed a makeover to answer its challenging layout with outdated rooms, amenities and décor. Or it possibly needed to be torn down.

Enter Joie de Vivre, California’s largest proprietor of boutique hotels. The company officially took over branding and management of the hotel in June, although it had been

planning the renovations earlier. Joie de Vivre decided to retain the essence of the original structure—a significant decision in light of the fact that many properties in beach towns on both coasts are being torn down to make room for larger hotels and condominiums.

Joie de Vivre’s primary objective was to tailor the hotel to the location, says Christian Strobel, the company’s vice president of development. According to Christian, knocking it down to start anew would not correspond with the character of a seaside community that embraces authenticity and originality. Rather, the goal was to restore the hotel to reflect the essence of what defines Laguna Beach.

“We immersed ourselves in Laguna Beach to determine just what that is,” he says.

The result was a cheerful facelift that honors the traditions of Laguna: It’s friendly, maverick, unorthodox and artistic with an irrefutable “chill” factor in the air.

At the Edge

Although it’s a term that’s debated among hospitality professionals, Pacific Edge is truly a “boutique hotel”—it is intimate, quirky and unique. Its new look is bright and fun, with a distinct thread of surfing and beach culture that provides what Christian calls “relaxed nostalgia.”



The interiors of the hotel’s 132 rooms have been spruced up with new furniture, pillowtop mattresses, updated fixtures and bedding, bright colors and decor perhaps best described as retro chic. The new look reflects the “creative vibe of Laguna Beach with surf-themed touches, cheerful accent colors and artistic, edgy elements,” says Kurt Bjorkman, the hotel’s general manager.

For example, Pacific Edge has a unique and exclusive relationship with Bruce Brown, director of the 1966 surf documentary “The Endless Summer.” Artwork from the movie—including the iconic pink and orange movie poster—adorns each room. In the lobby, a giant photograph of a breaking wave covers one wall. The smell of surf wax-scented candles showcases the hotel’s more subtle changes.

“It instantly gets your mind going to the beach,” Kurt says.

Which is really the main draw of the Pacific Edge. Sitting on three acres, the hotel is a complex of six buildings that front 300 feet of Sleepy Hollow Beach, which stretches to almost one uninterrupted mile of crashing surf and sparkling sand.

Forty-nine of the rooms at Pacific Edge are oceanfront. In addition to updating ceilings and adding recessed lighting, the hotel now boasts colorful Adirondack chairs on each balcony. Complimentary wireless high-speed Internet access allows guests to work while watching the surf from their balcony (or from right on the beach, if that’s their preference). The oceanfront rooms were also the first to be updated with flatscreen televisions, with the rest of the rooms following suit.

The renovations also reflect the hotel’s concern for the environment. Water conservation toilets were installed, and Pacific Edge found and sourced its furniture from a higher end hotel that was changing its look.

“We wanted to get green on the whole thing,” Kurt says of the furniture, which was painted white before being placed in the rooms.

Defining the Edge

Changes in place, Pacific Edge is emerging as an adventurous boutique hotel in the heart of the community. Its prime location is a key aspect of the hotel’s identity. Much like a casino in Las Vegas might offer shops and restaurants within it, the hotel considers the town to be among its amenities. The hotel staff is quick to



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recommend shops, galleries and restaurants a stone's throw from the hotel, and upon check in, each guest receives an "Edge Card," which provides exclusive privileges and discounts at local establishments.

"Laguna Beach is such a small village, and we're right there in the middle of it," Kurt comments. "We see ourselves as the hotel rooms for the community."

Christian also stresses that the hotel "is for the adventurous." The "Billabong Surf Experience Package" features a two-hour surf lesson aimed at novices and those who need a refresher course. The hotel can also arrange gutsy adventures, including shark diving, extreme bi-plane rides, car racing, zip-lining or private paintball.

To reinforce its branding as "The Endless Summer" hotel, the Pacific Edge also hosts ongoing themed events, most notably with a movie screen on the beach or in the pool area, to recreate the surfer's pursuit of summer in the movie. "This hotel is where you'll find it," Christian says.

And in establishing its new identity, the Pacific Edge is honest about what it is not.

"We absolutely wouldn't refer to ourselves as a luxury resort," Kurt says candidly. "But if you don't want to stay at a four- and five-star hotel, you can get that same experience from a service standpoint with a very approachable, fun property that is right on the beach."

Rated a "solid three stars," the hotel does offer intimate "four-star service," Kurt says. Guests can order pillows from the pillow menu or have room service delivered from the nearby Beach House. They can also pre-order groceries to be delivered to their room and employ beach attendants known as "beach sherpas." And guests won't need their cars after the valet parks them—the hotel's "Laguna experts" can direct them to attractions within walking distance.

It's a new era for the Pacific Edge—but one that retains the excitement of the past in the same structure that marked the coastline for more than 50 years.

"To change that would really change the personality of Laguna Beach," Kurt says.

More info: 647 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-281-5709; pacifiedgehotel.com. **LB**