



MAKE A SPLASH!

by Janine Robinson

Driving along the coast on a warm sunny day, it's almost impossible not to gaze over the expansive Pacific Ocean, and dream of being out on that sparkling water. But not everyone can make it down to the sand for an invigorating swim session.

So, what are other ways that visitors and residents can access the gorgeous Orange County coastline this summer? It all depends on what you want to do and see out there.

The more fit and adventurous are often eager to tap the energy of the waves; others want to venture

out on a calm day to investigate the scenic coves and local marine life.

Some folks prefer to keep it more social, and stay dry when enjoying the salty air, sea life and coastline views—including those in search of a little romance.

Thanks to the many locals who have made it their business to provide fun and safe access to the splendors of the sea, it's all possible. Whether in or on the water, you don't have to look far to find the perfect activity to experience the local ocean vibe.



Who hasn't watched surfers catching waves and wished they could do that, too, someday?

According to Clint Carroll, owner of a popular surf school in "Surf City" Huntington Beach, there's no reason you shouldn't give it a try. As long as beginners are in good health and can swim, all they need is the right attitude to feel the stoke.

SURFING: find your inner stoke

"We invite anyone who wants to come. The sport of surfing is something I wish everyone could have," said Carroll, who has taught kids as young as 4 and adults into their 70s.

First-time surfers only have to show up—or get picked up at Pelican Hill®—to his shop, just north of Newport Beach. Carroll and his veteran surf instructors outfit learners in wet suits and soft-top boards.

Before heading into the knee-deep waves at the beach break just a block from his store, newbies spend about 20 minutes learning the basics of paddling to catch a wave, "popping" up to stand, following surf etiquette and staying safe in the water.

After the lesson, students head into the gentle shore break with their instructors at their side. First they try catching waves in the white water, and head into bigger "outside" surf only when they feel ready.

"A lot of students stand up on their first wave. It's a good learning beach," Carroll said.

Students only need to bring or wear a swimsuit, towel, sunscreen and other beach gear.

Clint Carroll Surf School, 949.355.7285, clintcarrollsurf.com.

KAYAKING & (SUP) STAND-UP PADDLING: at one with the water

Paddling an ocean kayak or a stand-up paddleboard (SUP) is probably the best way for ocean lovers of all ages to get out on the Pacific and explore the hidden wonders of the local shoreline, including scenic coves, pristine beaches, spectacular oceanfront residences—and the spectacular marine wildlife.

"We see tons of whales and dolphins year-round," said Billy Fried, chief experience officer of La Vida Laguna. "We paddle right through the giant kelp beds and with the water so clean and clear you can look right down at the golden strands."

Laguna Beach, which recently established a marine reserve along most of its coastline, is teeming with fish and marine life. It's also one of the safest and easiest to access.

"Laguna is very much protected from the winds and prevailing waves.

Catalina Island protects our coast and is the perfect wind barrier from the west. We have an unusually calm coastline for the Pacific," Fried said.

Children as young as 3 can ride in La Vida Laguna's tandem kayaks, which are stable and easy to maneuver.

"We've taken out people in their 80s. It's a great family activity," said Fried.

Fried takes out kayakers from a special launch location that is protected by a reef, so there are no waves to deal with.

"We see tons of whales and dolphins year-round."

— BILLY FRIED



For those who want more placid water, Fried recently introduced his Newport Glam Tour, which explores the Newport Harbor and many of the sights, such as the tiny islands, luxury yachts, the popular Balboa Fun Zone and iconic Balboa Island Ferry.

Fried also takes tours out of the Newport Aquatic Center to paddle around Newport's Back Bay, which is a wetlands alive with migrating waterfowl, including pelicans, Osprey and other wildlife.

Ocean lovers who want a slightly more intense, and physically challenging, experience on the water can try the SUPs. Fried said that almost anyone

who is in decent shape can quickly master standing and steering with a single paddle. And it's worth the effort to learn.

"You get a unique perspective looking straight down into the ocean," said Fried. "You can see deeper than from a kayak, and people can get a similar feeling to that of surfing. Only it's a lot easier."

New paddlers also have the option to kneel or sit down on their SUP boards if they grow tired or want a break.

La Vida Laguna, 949.275.7544, lagunavida.com.





SAILING: take the helm

For families and small groups who desire a memorable experience, there's almost nothing better than chartering a private sailboat—especially since it comes with its own friendly and knowledgeable captain.

“It's a very special experience. Guests can drive the boat and trim the sails or relax and have the captain take care of everything,” said Chris Jester, managing director of Newport Beach Sailing Charters.

The captains of Jester's fleet of 18 sailboat yachts are all sailing instructors, and they love to let youngsters take the wheel or teach passengers how to crew the ship if they show an interest.

“From the moment that guests board, the entire charter is designed to be a special one. Whether a guest wishes to get closer to wildlife or drift along the California coastline, the captain ensures the day is tailored to their specific needs and desires.” Captains typically take the sailboats out the Newport Harbor and out on the ocean heading south, and often pull into the spectacular local coves, where they anchor while the passengers enjoy a picnic or a refreshing swim.

Guests are welcome to bring their own food and drinks, or set up a catered meal in advance. The boats are about 35-50 feet long, and can handle couples and groups up to 11.

“It's really perfect for any group that just wants to go out on the water and spend the day with family and friends, and relax and enjoy having a guide.”

Newport Beach Sailing Charters, 800.609.3203, sailnewportbeach.com.



GONDOLA CRUISING: ride the love boat

Most of those who book a ride on a gondola have something special in mind. Either it's a romantic dinner cruise, wedding or a birthday surprise—and often, an even more ambitious mission.

“It's arguably the most romantic boat in the world,” said Greg Mohr, president of Gondola Adventures, which has been in business for 22 years.

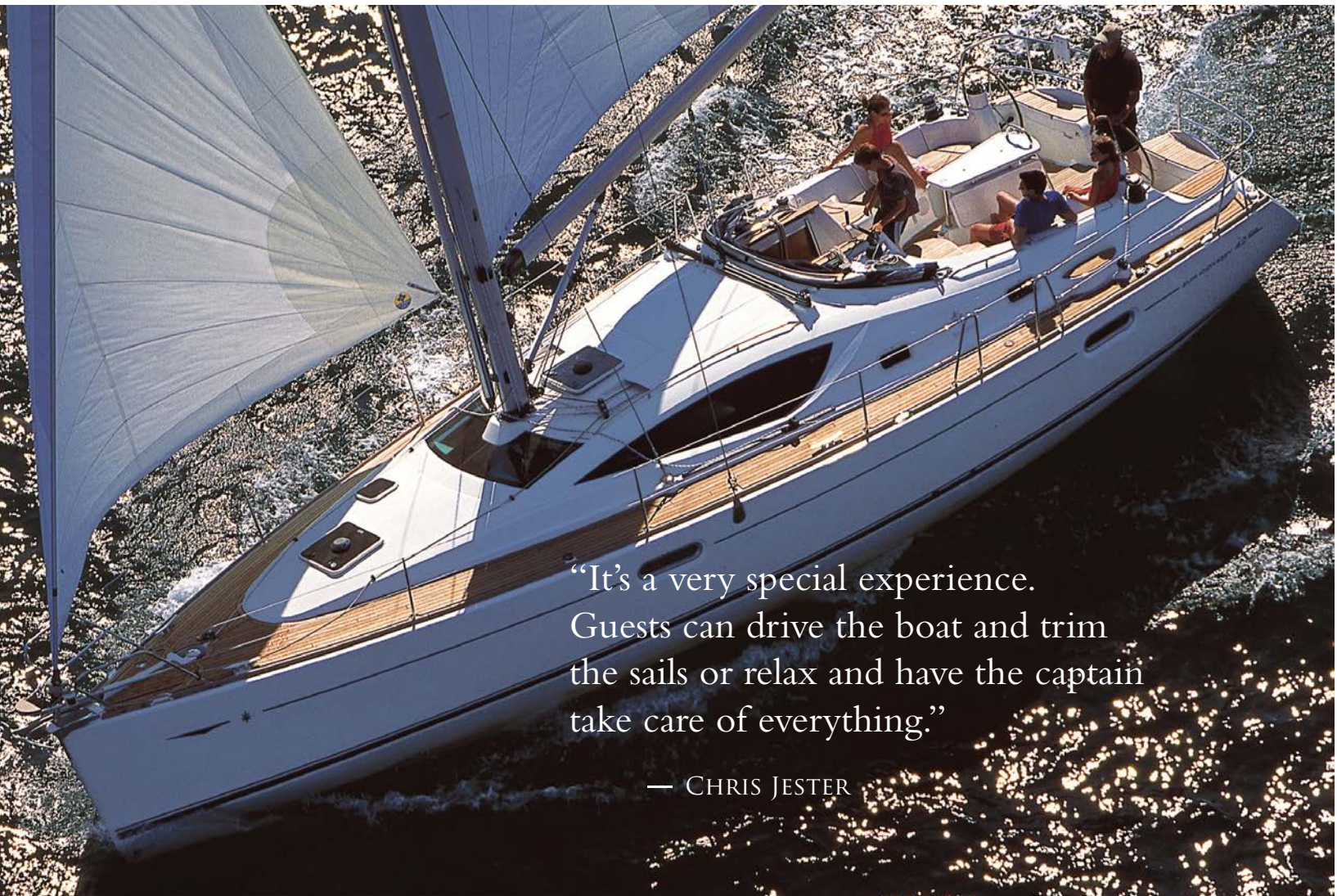
The gondola drivers, with their famous black-and-white-striped shirts and straw hats, are almost all talented singers who will serenade you as they use a single oar to row around Newport Harbor in one of the 10 gondolas. In addition to authentic Venice-built gondolas, the company also has Venetian-style crafts with mahogany decks and ornate designs.

“With a gondola, someone does the driving for you while in the harbor. It almost feels like a hammock in the water, lightly swaying,” Mohr said. “And you have the benefit of a captain, who sings and points out the sights. We are connoisseurs of romance.”

Some people just want to enjoy the serene ride, while others set up a dinner cruise, complete with a full-course gourmet meal with wine or other drinks, soft music playing and blankets over their laps.

Young families with kids like to bring bread to feed the ducks. But about 85 percent of Mohr's passengers are couples. And one of the most popular cruises involves an elaborate marriage proposal using a message-in-a-bottle routine to pop the question. 🍷

Gondola Adventures, Inc., 949.646.2067, gondola.com.



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— CHRIS JESTER