

UP FRONT | AROUND TOWN

PLACES | PERSPECTIVES | HAPPENINGS



COURTESY OF MONTAGE LAGUNA BEACH

Montage Laguna Beach offers a variety of kid-friendly holiday activities.

HOLIDAY HOTEL HAPPENINGS

To welcome the season, local hotels host a range of festive events from fun crafts at Montage Laguna Beach to a luxury shopping experience at The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel, and special dinners at Surf & Sand Resort. With so many opportunities to celebrate old traditions and make new ones, it's easy to get in the holiday spirit.

Montage offers a packed schedule in the 12 Days of Christmas through the Paintbox children's program: Build a gingerbread house and take part in Hanukkah art projects on Dec. 14, decorate cookies and make a stocking on Dec. 17, and embrace the cold (even if temps only dip to the mid-60s in Laguna) with snow crafts and snow cones on Dec. 18 and 25. On other days, create ornaments, candy necklaces, T-shirts and suncatchers; these workshops are for kids ages 2-12 (or older if interested) whose parents or caretakers are staying at the resort, dining there or using the spa. (949-715-6005; montagelagunabeach.com)

Over at The Ritz-Carlton, indulge in a staycation with an exclusive shopping trip. The package, starting at \$589, includes overnight accommodations; complimentary round-trip transportation to South Coast Plaza in Costa Mesa; entry to the mall's VIP suite, which includes package check, gift wrapping and Champagne; special offers from more than 100 stores and restaurants; and a \$100 mall gift card. For \$3,150 per night, boost the experience to premium level: stay in a suite and receive access to The Ritz-Carlton Club Lounge, a \$500 gift card for South Coast Plaza and a two-hour private stylist consultation. (949-240-2000; ritzcarlton.com)

Among many holiday meal options in town, Surf & Sand Resort's Splashes Restaurant hosts a three-course dinner on Christmas Day, for \$80 between noon and 3:45 p.m. or \$95 between 4 and 8 p.m. Then, enjoy a four-course dinner with celebratory party favors on New Year's Eve, for \$125 between 5 and 11 p.m., to toast the end of 2015 and new adventures ahead. Reservations are required for both events. (877-741-5908; surfandsandresort.com) —*Sharon Stello*

SEASONAL SELECTIONS

Only open through mid-February, the Molly Wood holiday pop-up shop brings a curated collection of furniture, home and garden decor, pottery, plants and other greenery to Laguna Beach for the winter season. Molly Wood, an acclaimed landscape designer with a retail showroom in Costa Mesa, presents an eclectic array of nature- and coastal-inspired items in her stores: fountains, fire pits, rope chairs, arrangements of living succulents, garden ornaments such as glass fishing float spheres, handmade driftwood stars and galvanized metal chicken feed troughs that serve as tabletop planters. In addition to carrying a selection of items from the Molly Wood Garden Design flagship store, the pop-up shop offers exclusive pieces only available at the Laguna location, which opened Oct. 1 on North Coast Highway. Shoppers may also choose from holiday decor and gift-wrapped hostess and teacher presents. (949-715-8143; mollywoodgardendesign.com) —S.S.



COURTESY OF MOLLY WOOD GARDEN DESIGN

Molly Wood's pop-up shop offers fresh decor.

MACGILLIVRAY FREEMAN FILMS, BASED IN LAGUNA BEACH, WON FOUR TOP HONORS FOR ITS "HUMPBACK WHALES" IMAX-FORMAT MOVIE, SNAGGING BEST FILM-SHORT SUBJECT, BEST FILM FOR LIFELONG LEARNING, BEST CINEMATOGRAPHY AND BEST MARKETING CAMPAIGN BY A DISTRIBUTOR AT THE GIANT SCREEN CINEMA ASSOCIATION'S ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS ON SEPT. 9 IN SAN FRANCISCO.

Cutting-Edge Creations

After joining Surf & Sand Resort in September, Executive Chef Ron Fougeray released a new Splashes Restaurant and Bar menu in October featuring a variety of fresh seafood. One of the most popular dishes is an Icelandic cod loin wrapped in brick dough, a thin crepe-like pastry “paper” brushed with clarified butter, that is first pan-seared then finished in the oven. Served with purple sweet potato, baby carrots, snow peas and smoked potato milk, it pairs perfectly with the elegant richness of Hubert Meyer Winzenberg Grand Cru pinot gris.

Other highlights include beer-battered lobster beignets with jalapeno aioli, peach jam and shishito peppers—a tempting combination of savory and sweet that must be tried with Saint M riesling—as well as crisp octopus with fingerling potatoes, fennel, salsa verde and lemon zest; the meat is placed in a pressure cooker for eight minutes and rests for an additional five in the court bouillon to retain tenderness before a quick fry upon pick-up.

And for dessert, the pumpkin cheesecake is not to be missed, boasting maple-bourbon caramel, candied bacon and pecans, and topped with pumpkin spice whipped cream. Nosh it with Justin Vineyards & Winery Obtuse dessert wine to welcome the holiday season to Laguna. (949-376-2779; surfandsandresort.com)
—Kristin Lee Jensen



Splashes Restaurant and Bar's pumpkin cheesecake

INDIAN

NATRAJ CUISINE OF INDIA

998 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-497-9197;
natrajlagunabeach.com

IRISH

HENNESSEY'S TAVERN

213 Ocean Ave.; 949-494-2743;
hennesstavern.com

ITALIAN & PIZZA

ALESSA BY CHEF PIROZZI

234 Forest Ave.; 949-497-8222;
alessalaguna.com

GINA'S PIZZA

610 N. Coast Hwy.; 949-497-4421;
1100 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-494-4342;
ginaspizza.com

MARE LAGUNA BEACH

696 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-715-9581;
mareculinarylounge.com

NEAPOLITAN

31542 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-499-4531;
nealaguna.com

PIZZA LOUNGE

397 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-497-2277;
pizzalounges.com

POLINA'S SALERNO ITALIAN RESTAURANT

220 Beach St.; 949-497-2600;
polinassalerno.com

RISTORANTE RUMARI

1826 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-494-0400; rumari.net

ROMEO CUCINA

249 Broadway; 949-497-6627; romeocucina.com

ZPIZZA

30822 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-499-4949; zpizza.com

JAPANESE

GU RAMEN

907 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-715-0825

HAPI SUSHI

250 Beach St.; 949-494-9109

O FINE JAPANESE CUISINE

30872 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-715-5551;
ofinejapanesecuisine.com

OKURA ROBATA GRILL & SUSHI BAR

858 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-793-4320;
okurasushi.com

SAN SHI GO

1100 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-494-1551

SUSHI LAGUNA

231 Ocean Ave.; 949-376-8786

242 CAFE FUSION SUSHI

242 N. Coast Hwy.; 949-494-2444; fusionart.us

MEDITERRANEAN

ADONIS MEDITERRANEAN GRILL

202 Park Ave.; 949-715-4581

GG'S BISTRO

540 S. Coast Hwy., Ste. 108;
949-494-9306; ggscafebistro.com

ZÉYTOON CAFE

412 N. Coast Hwy.; 949-715-9230;
zeytooncafe.com

MEXICAN

ADOLFO'S

998 S. Coast Hwy., Ste. A;
949-497-2023

AVILA'S EL RANCHITO

1305 S. Coast Hwy.; 949-376-7040;
avilaselranchito.com