

# TRAVEL+ LEISURE

I Finally Understand the Travel Wellness  
Craze After Staying at This New Laguna  
Beach Hotel



## **Call me a convert.**

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Whenever I travel, it always takes me a day or two to get into the vacation groove. I could be in the most beautiful place imaginable — say, in [Paris](#), wandering the cobbled streets of Le Marais, or in [Costa Rica](#), traipsing through the jungles — and my brain would still be fixating on the email I didn't send or the appointment I forgot to schedule.

So when I was invited on a wellness weekend sponsored by luxury active wear label [Live the Process](#) at the new [Hotel Joaquin](#) in Laguna Beach, I figured the benefits of the R&R-centered escape would be lost on me. Not only because of the brevity of the trip, but also because being surrounded by the naturally tanned and toned invariably causes my hamster-wheel brain to race faster and more ferociously than ever.



But the moment my Uber pulled up to the intimate property, a former roadside motel that dates back to the '30s, I felt my pulse slow. This was not the over-the-top Laguna Beach I knew from *The O.C.* and *The Real Housewives of Orange County*; this was the kind of dreamy beachside abode that I imagined Joan Didion and John Gregory Dunne to have lived in in Malibu circa 1970.

I walked into the breezy, sun-dappled lobby, which looks out over the verdant interior lawn and the Pacific Ocean beyond. Whereas most lobbies invite little more than a cursory walkthrough, Hotel Joaquin's exudes the kind of warm, living room vibe that makes you want to linger. I narrowed in on all the room's little details, hoping to recreate this inimitably cool vibe back home: a vinyl record player spinning Carly Simon, terracotta floors, blonde oak paneling, and the kind of oversized throw pillows that were made for mid-afternoon catnaps.

“The design was inspired by my trips to St. Bart's and the French Riviera,” Paul Makarechian, the owner and CEO of Auric Road, told *Travel + Leisure*. “Our intention was to draw from these relaxed yet sophisticated destinations while maintaining the laid-back California vibe of Laguna Beach.”



After thumbing through the lobby’s stacks of records and art books, I made my way to my room, where golden light poured through the windows and the cool Pacific breeze wafted in through French doors leading out to a Juliette balcony. Designed by Robert McKinley of Montauk's [The Surf Lodge](#), the rooms extend the lobby's Mid-century feel, with one-of-a-kind vintage pieces, abstract art by [Sean W. Spellman](#), and record players in the place of TVs.

Later that afternoon, I met the other travelers — a diverse mix of creatives, yogis, and wellness entrepreneurs — for a light hike up the hillside above the property. Sporting the eminently flattering and moisture-wicking styles from Live the Process, we quickly got acquainted while striving to keep up with the hotel’s high-spirited activities director, George.



The days that followed were a sun-soaked blur. There was morning yoga on the lawn by Sian Gordon and Kyle Miller, the all-star duo behind [Love Yoga](#); a calming tea ceremony led by holistic blogger Shiva Rose; rooftop sound baths by meditation teacher Ambi Sitham; and a facial by one of L.A.'s most in-demand skincare experts, [Nousha Salimi](#). The outdoor activities were just as impressive, with everything from surf lessons and paddle boarding excursions to picnics on the beach.



Every night, the hotel's executive chef, Leo Bongarra, formerly at the L.A.'s famed Tower Bar, whipped up farm-fresh creations that were served family-style on communal tables outside. We ate fluffy grain salads with dried fruits and nuts, crunchy coconut flatbreads topped with heaping dollops of red pepper spread, and cured tomatoes with za'atar and cypress feta. In other words, not the bland, calorie-controlled bites that I anticipated being on the menu.

Sitting near the pool on Sunday afternoon, I flipped through a magazine while munching on granola with almond milk and blueberries. My phone was buzzing with texts from friends and colleagues, but I was far too blissed out to care. Unfurled on a lounge in the sun, I closed my eyes and dozed off with a Carly Simon song in my head.

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