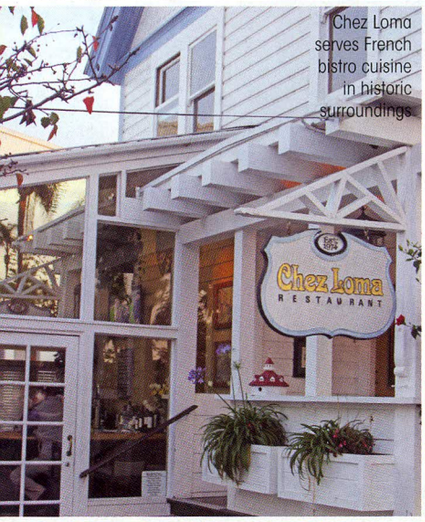
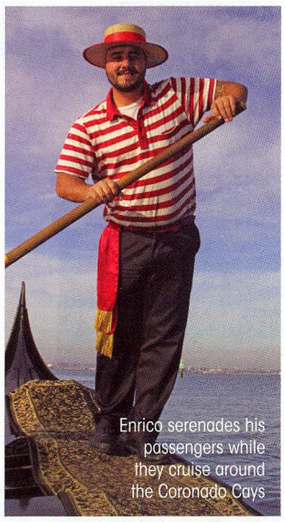
Two Great San Diego Staycations

Loews Coronado Bay Resort provides a great view of the San Diego skyline



Chez Loma serves French bistro cuisine in historic surroundings



Enrico serenades his passengers while they cruise around the Coronado Cays

Leroy's Kitchen + Lounge in Coronado offers 16 craft brews on tap

I wanted to take a trip after the holidays, but the polar vortex made many of my favorite places unappealing. Instead, I took advantage of our great local weather and traveled within sunny San Diego County.

First Stop: Coronado

It's only two miles across the bridge, but somehow Coronado feels a world away from San Diego. Historic mansions and small town coziness make life "on the island" feel more like the Midwest or the East Coast than the rest of California.

It's easy to understand why numerous U.S. presidents, including Ronald Reagan, Bill Clinton, and George W. Bush, have chosen to vacation here with their families. (Chelsea was cited for not wearing a helmet while bike riding; Bill loved the municipal golf course and broke 80 for the first time.)

The landmark Hotel del Coronado sits on a beautiful beach, but this time we chose to stay four miles south of the village at Loews Coronado Bay Resort. The sense of seclusion on a 15-acre peninsula makes this a great spot for a relaxing getaway. Many rooms at Loews overlook the hotel's 80-slip marina, but we opted for a luxurious Bayside Suite with a panoramic view back to the bridge and the San Diego skyline.
(www.loewshotels.com/coronado-bay-resort)

I felt like we were in an exotic location — especially when we stepped into a gondola in front of the hotel and started a relaxing glide around the Coronado Cays. We sipped Champagne and admired the scenery as our gondolier Enrico explained that our vessel was made in Venice and plied the waters of those famous canals before being retired to Coronado. Later he serenaded us with an Italian love song.
(www.gondolacompany.com)

The gondola ride was a great mental massage, and during our time at Loews we experienced several great body massages in their excellent spa. The hotel also offers three pools, tennis courts, bike rentals, and resort services at the adjacent Silver Strand State Beach.

During our time in Coronado we enjoyed dinner at Chez Loma, a French bistro in a cozy house that dates from 1889. Owner/chef Chef Alex Martinez is known for his wonderful escargot starter and *boeuf bourguignon* main

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course. *(www.chezloma.com)*

In contrast, Leroy's Kitchen + Lounge is Coronado's hip, farm-to-table restaurant. Think sports bar meets fine food. Craft beer (16 on tap) and signature cocktails complement the globally-influenced menu. *(www.leroyskitchenandlounge.com)*

Next Stop: Borrego Springs

The famed La Casa del Zorro resort re-opened in 2013 and former owners Helen Copley and David Copley would be pleased with the renovations that have taken place. New investors (San Diegans Jack McGrory, Casey Brown, and Jack Giacomini) have added modern furnishings and amenities while keeping intact the property's strong sense of history. Our spacious Deluxe Poolside King overlooked one of the 26 pools and spas on the grounds and offered a large marble bathroom, great bed, plantation shutters, and a cozy fireplace. *(www.lacasadelzorro.com)*

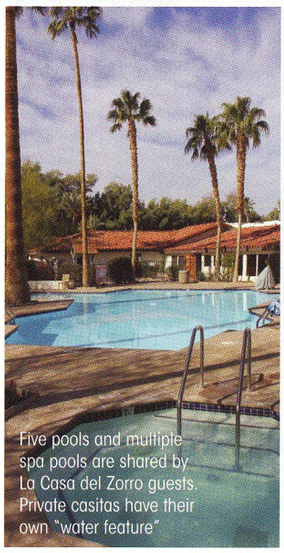
La Casa del Zorro still offers the option to relax in the sunshine with a good book, but tennis courts, a lap pool, and fitness center are also available. Yoga, Zumba, and aqua-aerobics classes take place throughout the week, and a beautiful spa is scheduled to open soon. Borrego Springs is also a renowned destination for stargazing and birding — and, of course, blooming desert wildflowers.

Chef Kurt Hauser's menu includes a couple of nods to the past (Helen's favorite black bean soup and the delicious Kit Fox Salad) as well as innovative additions. My husband and I shared the Melting Cambazola appetizer and the salad, followed by main courses of porcini dusted diver scallops and lamb chops served with Brussels sprouts and faro. We paired these with our favorite Iron Horse wines.

Many guests flock to Borrego to play golf, but we prefer the hiking trails in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. I was also surprised to discover the new Borrego Art Institute, which offers rotating exhibits as well as workshops and classes. Also very impressive, Ricardo Breceda's large metal sculptures of dozens of fanciful creatures that dot the desert along Borrego Springs Road. This magical menagerie is a gift from town benefactor Dennis Avery (Avery Labels) and resides on his land known as Galleta Meadows Estate. *(www.borregoartinstitute.org, www.galletameadows.com)*

While less than two hours from the coast, Borrego feels a world away and — like Coronado — is a great place for a San Diego staycation. ELIZABETH HANSEN

La Casa del Zorro is a serene desert retreat



Five pools and multiple spa pools are shared by La Casa del Zorro guests. Private casitas have their own "water feature"

The lobby at La Casa del Zorro, with a wood-burning fireplace and antiques, is both elegant and rustic

The Serpent is the most famous of Ricardo Breceda's metal sculptures on display around Borrego Springs