



### **Historical Profile of Laguna Beach**

Laguna Beach is a luxurious coastal village with a history that dates back more than 2,000 years when the area's first known inhabitants, the Ute-Aztecas Indian tribe, roamed the land. Others followed, including the Shoshones, who dubbed the region "Lagonas," the Indian word for lakes, after eyeing a pair of fresh-water lagoons in the nearby canyon. When the Spaniards arrived, they referred to the land as Cañada de las Lagunas or "Canyon of the Lakes." Finally, in 1904, the town was re-christened Laguna Beach after mail was reportedly being misdirected to Long Beach, a much larger city to the north.

Laguna Beach was a haven of tranquility for many. The Mormons arrived in the late 1880s and stayed for the next 14 years, while others simply stopped for a night or two to pitch a tent along the beach. Laguna's reputation as an artists' colony began with the arrival of Norman St. Claire in 1903. St. Claire arrived from San Francisco by train and stagecoach to capture Laguna's dramatic surf, sand and picturesque hillsides. After eyeing his work, and more importantly, learning of the comfortable climate that was the hallmark of Laguna, many of his artist friends made an exodus to Laguna Beach as well.

These early artists, many of whom remain at the top of the list of Who's Who in California Art, were known primarily for their plein air art, a style of painting similar to that of the French impressionists. The town's first art gallery was opened in 1918 by Edgar Payne, who formed the Laguna Beach Art Association that is now known as the Laguna Art Museum. By the late 1920s, more than half of the 300 year-round residents were artists, and in 1932 the Festival of Arts was founded and held near the Hotel Laguna. A decade later the Irvine Bowl was dedicated and the Festival added the Pageant of the Masters, a tradition where live art re-creations are presented on stage.

In 1920, a group of local citizens convened in a living room to establish a theater which eventually was built in 1924. Readings and performances took place in private homes and storefronts before The Playhouse on Ocean Avenue, now relocated to Broadway, was constructed at a cost of \$5,000. Famous alumni include Harrison Ford, who appeared on stage in John Brown's Body in 1965.

With the theater up and running, many of Hollywood's elite found Laguna Beach to be a welcome respite from Los Angeles. Some of the silver screen's biggest stars-maintained homes here, including Bette Davis, Mary Pickford, Victor Mature, Judy Garland, Rudolph Valentino, Charlie Chaplin and Mickey Rooney. President Franklin D. Roosevelt was also enamored with Laguna Beach, as was John Steinbeck, who penned his classic novel *Tortilla Flats* while residing at 504 Park Avenue. Laguna Beach even had its own greeter, Eiler Larsen, who waved each day to passersby along Pacific Coast Highway. His scruffy presence and crooked grin are immortalized in bronze in front of the Greeter's Corner Restaurant. A second, larger than life stone likeness welcomes visitors to the Shops at the Old Pottery Place.

Many of the village's establishments, such as Hotel Laguna, La Casa del Camino and The White House Restaurant, have endured the test of time. Laguna Beach remains a playground for all. Its broad appeal is perhaps best illustrated by the sentiment expressed on its famous gate, which was erected in 1935 and still stands at the corner of Forest and Park avenues. It is inscribed with these words: "This gate hangs well and hinders none, refresh and rest, then travel on."

And, while many do come to Laguna Beach to refresh and rest, those who "travel on" anticipate the day when they can return to this coastal Eden.

### **About Visit Laguna Beach**

Visit Laguna Beach is a 501 (c)(6) not-for-profit destination marketing organization that promotes Laguna Beach as a premier leisure and small meeting destination. Formed in 1986, Visit Laguna Beach is celebrating 33 years of commitment to Laguna Beach and the tourism industry, with its offices located at 361 Forest Avenue, Suite 200 and the Official Visitors Center at 381 Forest Ave. The Visitors Center is open daily, Monday - Sunday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. For more information, visit [www.visitlagunabeach.com](http://www.visitlagunabeach.com). Get social with @VisitLaguna on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Be sure to use our citywide hashtag #MyLagunaBeach.

### **About Laguna Beach**

Laguna Beach is Southern California's premier coastal destination located midway between Los Angeles and San Diego and along the southern coast of Orange County. Known as home to hundreds of local artists, and set amid 20,000 acres of wilderness, Laguna Beach is primarily served by John Wayne Airport Orange County (SNA) located just 20 minutes away.

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