

INSIDER TIPS FROM THE TOP CONCIERGES

# TRAVEL + LEISURE

JUNE 2008

SPECIAL

# hotels ISSUE

30  
EXCLUSIVE  
HOTEL  
DEALS!

MEXICO  
PARIS  
CALIFORNIA  
VIETNAM  
PORTUGAL  
ST. BART'S

2008

itlist

WE PICK THE BEST NEW  
HOTELS FOR YOU

A scenic view of a forested hillside. The foreground is dominated by dense, lush green trees with some yellowing leaves, suggesting a late summer or autumn setting. In the lower-left corner, a faint rainbow is visible. The background shows a hazy, misty view of rolling hills and more trees under a soft, overcast sky. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

# CALIFORNIA DREAMING

The Golden State is home to some of the most blissfully laid-back hotels in the country. To find the perfect examples of this barefoot brand of luxury, **Oliver Schwaner-Albright** checks out six properties that deliver effortless hospitality, the intimacy of bungalows, and the lure of wide-open spaces. Photographed by **Coliena Rentmeester**



Clockwise from far left: The iconic Victorian spire of the Hotel del Coronado, near San Diego; the hotel's beachfront pool; a Pacific dip; almond brown-butter cake with seasonal berries at the Del's 1500 Ocean; inside the Horizon suite, one of the hotel's new beachfront cottages; returning to the Del after hanging ten; the hotel's new Beach Village; pool attendant Jeremy Grout greets guests with fresh towels.



**WHEN TO GO** California is blessed with balmy air year-round, though it can get cold in the northern part of the state in December and January.

**GETTING AROUND** California is a monument to the automobile, and the best way to get around is by driving. When traveling between Northern and Southern California, the fastest route is I-5; state road 101 is more scenic but slower; and the Pacific Coast Highway (Rte. 1) is the most beautiful of all, but so winding that even a short drive can take a long time.

**WHERE TO STAY**  
**Beach Village at the Del** A private enclave of cottages and villas right on the shore, the Beach Village at the Hotel del Coronado is a hotel within a hotel, and the newest part of the 120-year-old resort. 1500 Orange Ave., Coronado; 800/582-2595; [delbeachvillage.com](http://delbeachvillage.com); villas from \$2,950.

### A Classic Reinvented

The resort by the ocean: by now it's a familiar formula, but when the Hotel Del Coronado was built 120 years ago, the beach vacation was a recent invention. The hotel is one of the oldest in California, an architectural icon from a time when success was measured by the size of the crowd, and the sepia photographs in the hotel lobby attest to decades of success, hordes in bowlers and bustles parading on the boardwalk a century ago. It's still crowded. Every day the lobby is packed with vacationing families; every weekend the wood-paneled Crown Room fills with visiting brunchers.

But earlier this year the Del inaugurated the Beach Village, a lush group of cottages and villas set discreetly to the side of the towering Victorian pile. It's a hotel within a hotel: there's a private entrance (which I discovered after trying to check in at the Del Coronado's main desk), and the compound, painted the same distinctive white and rust-red as the rest of the Del, is gated and accessible only by card key.

It's less a hideaway than a country club, a private enclave on a public beach. The cottages have something of the feel of the officers' housing at the naval base nearby, only there's a good spa, a new gym, and breakfast at the Windsor Club Cottage every morning. Anybody who's seen *Some Like It Hot* knows it's a short run in high heels from the Del to the ocean, but it's another thing to experience it in person, and I felt a theatrical thrill when I stepped out on the terrace, an F-35 cracking through the sky overhead, the sand just a few feet away.

Later that night, as I walked over to the main hotel for dinner at 1500 Ocean, the Del's formal restaurant, the Pacific was always in full view. The best tables face the beach, and I could smell the salt-water as I lingered over a delicious meal of raw yellowtail with pepper jelly, and a deconstructed bouillabaisse with seared Mexican rockfish. But the scenery, for all its easy magnificence, held a deeper resonance. I was enjoying dinner, but really I was surrendering to the landscape.

The Del sometimes feels like an amusement park without the rides—a spectacle, which was more or less the idea behind the 19th-century resort. But 21st-century tastes have evolved, and the hotel has done an impressive job of absorbing the lessons of the best California hotels, turning the Beach Village into an understated retreat. The Del Coronado makes the proud claim that every U.S. president since Lyndon Johnson has stayed at the hotel during his term in office. I'm sure the streak will remain intact no matter who wins in November, but I bet there will be a small break with tradition: instead of taking a suite in the grand old building, he or she will want a private patio on the beach and stay in one of the cottages instead. +

*Oliver Schwaner-Albright writes for the New York Times, Men's Vogue, and Gourmet.*