

HER FAMILY / HIS

Reviewing Family Entertainment



by Suzanne & Chris Shoemaker

A New Us in a New Year

HERS

It may sound trite to suggest that time has flown by, but we are already 60% into the first decade of this new millennium. My family has resolved to make 2006 all about “seizing the day” and adopting a wide-angle view of the world.

In keeping with this New Year’s resolution, we embarked on a three-day family get-away that combined romance, adventure, and thrills, and sent all of us home refreshed and satisfied. Amazingly we accomplished all of this just an hour and a half from home!

We started our New Year’s trek at the Ritz Carlton in Laguna Niguel. For the teen-agers there is the beach just below the hotel. And while the kids were body surfing, my husband and I enjoyed our first couple’s massage. At first I had trouble imagining my body being kneaded by a stranger with my husband, a mirror image, next to me. Then I was immersed in the sensation of accomplished hands molding with elegant creams, in a room filled with exotic fragrances, rhythmic music and breathing in harmony with my husband. Romance while the kids were surfing- now that is a wide-angle view of a family vacation.

The second day was a cultural encounter spending the daylight hours exploring San Juan Capistrano and enjoying the history of this beautiful town, the mission and the old city. Lunch was a fiesta of great food, especially the authentic Mexican dishes, mixed with the history of a California Mission community at the El Adobe Restaurant. The night was spent at the South Coast Plaza with its cosmopolitan blend of restaurants, comedy clubs, theater, movies, shopping and people watching. The day ended in a hot tub with a spectacular view of the ocean.

Finally, the long trip home after a wonderful weekend of romance and culture, was turned into a thrill ride to remember. The day started with breakfast at the Ritz Carlton looking out over their spectacular ocean view, then a quick drive to Disneyland and our first ride through the new Space Mountain. Disneyland is still unchallenged as the King of family fun!

Thanks to this new 2006 perspective, the traditional family get-away turned out to be a rejuvenation of romance, an exotic step into history and an action-packed thrill ride in just three short days. If nothing else, I have great hope for 2006.

HIS

This year’s holiday season left my family somewhat exhausted, so we took three days to escape to the OC and re-energize our collective souls.

First off, I couldn’t more highly recommend a truly remarkable hideaway hotel than the recently renovated and luxurious Ritz-Carlton Laguna Niguel at Dana Point. For some it may cost a bit more than the post-holiday budget can bear, but you certainly won’t begrudge its healing effects. You might even take a few months to save up for this retreat.

Because of its dramatic perch on a 150-foot high promontory overlooking the Pacific, the hotel’s unencumbered ocean view is stunning if not breathtaking. Taking advantage of this exceptional view is the hotel’s Restaurant 162’ (thusly named because its 162-feet above sea level) featuring California cuisine and seafood. Aside from the chef’s expertly prepared meals, the restaurant’s ambiance is classy, casual and comfortable – a winning combination.

Suzanne and I visited the hotel’s spa and took advantage of what is billed as a “couple’s massage.” Take it from this massage neophyte- find a way to include the art of message into your mortal existence as often as possible. Trancelike, the massage was superb. Because we experienced it together, it allowed for some humorous conversation that evening over dinner with our son. Try explaining a massage experience with a straight face to your teenager – its comical.

Exceptional communities such as Laguna Beach, Newport Beach and the historical San Juan Capistrano are less than an hour’s drive away. For a moderately priced and relaxed meal, check out El Adobe restaurant, an area favorite just one block from San Juan Capistrano’s famous mission (which was unfortunately closed during our visit). Housed in a California State Historical Landmark built in 1797 (originally a courthouse and jail), El Adobe features a mesquite grill that barbeques some mouthwatering steaks and seafood to order. Down the hill from El Adobe, you’ll find the town’s train depot surrounded by a charming collection of bohemian shops, a local museum and several fine dining restaurants worth exploring.

Being so close to Anaheim, we spent an extremely crowded yet superlative day at Disneyland. In the theme park cosmos, those folks still do it best. The updated version of Space Mountain was simply spellbinding. Maintaining the same track pattern, this newer version offers a faster, smoother and more realistic blast through outer space you won’t forget.

Three days away from whatever you call “the norm” goes fast, but this short OC getaway was just what the doctor ordered.