

# SBLS

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BEACH, EAT, REPEAT



# BETTER THAN HOME

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When on the hunt for a quick trip I tend to gravitate towards the water, oceanfront locations to be exact. There's just something calming about the sound of rolling waves, crisp salty air biting at your cheeks in the early morning, and of course, the unrivaled sight of the setting sun over reflecting water. Hotel Casa del Mar in Santa Monica has all of the above, and so, so much more—making it a no-brainer choice for my mother-daughter weekend.

I enter the Mediterranean villa-inspired building, and its 1926 erection shines through; from the brick construction to winding staircases on either side of the art-decorated lobby, and the unparalleled service that's reminiscent of the good old days, when staff wore sharp suits and tended to one's every request. I wait for my mother's arrival in the spacious and bustling lobby—decorated

by renowned interior designer Michael S. Smith—equipped with plush chairs, printed throw pillows, rich wood accents, and both hotel guests and locals. I'm offered a complimentary cocktail, a great way to start my stay. The pear martini is sweet, with a welcoming bite of vodka. Speaking of sweet with a bite, halfway through my drink my mom arrives and we make our way to our room.

A faint sky-blue adorns the walls, while variations of ocean hues pop up in the Persian rug, Moroccan throw blanket, and oriental vases that blend in to a bookshelf stocked with beach-related memorabilia—think seashells and oceanography books. Although the accents are worldly, the overall feel of the room leans more towards an elevated-Hamptons beach house, but in an understated way. The room is calming—ideal for unwinding after a day of





business meetings or simply while on vacation. But the real gem lies in the bathroom...it's the tub of all tubs, people! From marble tiles to the serious jets, it's the end-of-day ritual we all need. Plus, the bathroom features a lovely "mini bar" of products for purchase that take bath time to the next level of relaxation.

It's 7 p.m., and that means dinner time at Casa del Mar's Catch restaurant. Presenting sweeping views of the Pacific, the restaurant is the ideal spot to indulge in the best Santa Monica has to offer, while enjoying the lobby's nightly live music. Tonight, Ember sings her rendition of today's pop hits, and I must admit, her acoustic versions are better (plus they tie the ambiance of the room together with a jazzy ribbon). The restaurant's sous chef, Octavio, comes to our table and provides recommendations and explains the seafood-rich menu, while I sip on a frothy Jasmine-tini. They say, when in Rome, do as the Romans do, so we indulged, ordering the finest of the "mar."

We commence with half-dozen Kusshi oysters, whose fruity finish lingers after the petite delights are gone. They get a ten: for both freshness and presentation. From there we move on to the sashimi—probably my favorite part of the meal. Thick cuts of blue fin tuna and hamachi (yellowtail) are presented before us on a Japanese-style dish, and I can hardly hold myself back from grabbing one while Octavio explains what's what. The tuna is to die for, really. And the hamachi's the butteriest fish I have ever tasted—it's so good, it might as well be dessert. The raw portion of our dinner is over, and I'm a bit disappointed, until I see the grilled octopus. A black garlic paste paints the side of the plate like a canvas, making for top-notch presentation, with the exquisitely grilled octopus positioned in the center atop a ratatouille-like veggie mix. The texture is tender, and absolutely not chewy like similar dishes I've tried. In fact, it's so good that my mom tries to convince Octavio to share his recipe—no luck. Instead, he brings us stories about his passion for cooking, along with scallops and a rib eye steak bone-in steak. So, all is forgiven thanks to the juicy and tender flavors.

After a beyond-filling dinner that ended with us closing the restaurant—that can happen when a mother and daughter get together for a few drinks—we head back to our heavenly blue room. I opt for continuing the "treat yourself" mantra of the dinner, and grab a "muscle ache" bath bomb from the array of options in the bathroom cabinet, and drift off into bliss. The pre-bedtime ritual sends me into an immediate dreamy state, as soon as I lay down on the cloud-like bed. It's the best sleep I've had in months.

After parting ways with my mom I grab a latte and a croissant by the pool, which is from the original construction, perhaps explaining the petite size. Nonetheless, the area is charming. Yet, the real wonder is the

fact that it basically sits on the sand, providing sunbathers with a front and center view of the grand Pacific Ocean, and the many runners, yogis, and most likely celebrities that frequent the spot. After doing a little work (read: more people-watching than work), I'm off to my massage.

From an extensive menu, which offers variations of anti-aging treatments and trendy massages, like hot stones, I select my classic go-to, a Swedish massage. Dana is sweet, attentive, and as most great sessions go, puts me into a euphoric state that teeters on the edge of sleep. I leave the spa rejuvenated, yet finding it hard to get the motivation to checkout of the hotel, in order to make my next appointment.

A night of fresh seafood dining, a glorious bath, and a massage to top it all off somehow made my traffic-ridden drive tolerable. Did I just find the solution to dealing with LA traffic?! They say, there's no place like home, but in the case of Casa del Mar, that may be a good—no, great—thing, because I'd gladly relocate for the chance to call this oceanside wonder, my own. ✨

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