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Four Historic HOTELS

BY IMAAN JALALI

In *Southern California*, there are a myriad of hotels worth visiting, but there are *four* in particular that truly represent the region's incomparable scenery with its extraordinary history. These aren't just hotels, but also museums unto themselves.



COURTESY OF HOTEL CASA DEL MAR



© LISA ROMERIN (4)

#1 Casa del Mar

1910 Ocean Way, Santa Monica

www.hotelcasadelmar.com

→ It's only been since the turn of this century that **CASA DEL MAR** has been a flourishing hotel. Since opening in 1926, the beach-front "Palace by the Sea" has accrued a distinguished reputation the moment famed architect Charles Plummer carried out his vision.

The establishment has had a multipurpose existence – from being the "Grand Dame" of Southern California beach clubs during the Roaring 20s, to being a housing installation for military personnel during World War II. With the property finally restored to its original resplendence, the Slarkin Brothers opened it to the public, implementing a naturalistic blue-gray décor for the hotel's 129 guest rooms.

To a large extent, the Santa Monica gem is not only representative of SoCal culture, but European influences in the form of an Italian Renaissance-inspired ambiance, much of which was updated in 2014 by Michael S. Smith, who also redesigned the Oval Office in 2010. In addition, Executive Chef Gemma Gray of Spain helms the Terrazza Lounge overlooking the beautiful blue ocean, where diners can order palate-perfected menu items such as the flavorful Basil Gimlet cocktail, refreshing Roasted Beets, life-changing Grilled Octopus, and the expertly prepared Sashimi or Nigiri Sushi. 🍣





#2

U.S. Grant Hotel

326 Broadway, San Diego
www.usgrant.net

→ A recurring theme among these famous hotels is they have hosted several former U.S. Presidents. Perhaps no hotel can boast more about this honor than the **U.S. GRANT**, which has been the temporary residence of at least 13 leaders of the free world. It's easy to understand why – as it was President Grant's second son, Ulysses S. Grant Jr., who commissioned its 270 guest rooms in October 1910, a few of which were (and continue to be) uniquely tailored to Secret Service security standards.

More than a century ago, political luminaries entered into an enduring architectural dream (designed by Harrison Albright) and celebrated not only the 18th President, but the social change he enacted – namely passing a bill that set aside the land around the establishment to its indigenous inhabitants, the Kumeyaay Indians. Likewise, the Grant Grill, which used to be a men-only restaurant, became notable for admitting the opposite sex following a successful sit-in by influential women.

Today, it carries on its legacy with not only the icons of humanity who've spent a night there, whether it was Albert Einstein or Charles Lindbergh, but serves as a reminder that hotels can be more than their constituent building materials.





#3 *Belmond El Encanto*

800 Alvarado Place, Santa Barbara
www.belmond.com



→ Even without its historical cachet, the **BELMOND EL ENCANTO** might be Santa Barbara's most beautiful destination. Furtively nestled away in the city's luxuriously verdant hills, it seemingly exists on its own cloud in the sky, smiling down at the endless Pacific Ocean.

Built in the Spanish Colonial style, the date of the hotel's original opening is unknown due to the lack of official records. While the early 1900s is generally agreed upon, New Year's Eve 1917 is acknowledged as the ceremonial opening. It was as grand as it is now, having mesmerized Franklin D. Roosevelt, who had a favorite room in which he escaped.

Strikingly, the 92 guest rooms (70 bungalows and 22 suites) are freely spread out among the open landscape, like butterflies in a garden. Given that, it should be no surprise the winged beauties are paid homage to throughout the property, none more heart flutter-inducing than a butterfly portrait in the lobby, wrought from crushed diamonds, by artist Damian Hirst.

The restaurant, a veritable picturesque heaven, is excellently managed by Stephane Colling, who warmly looks after his guests as they indulge in Santa Barbara Spotted Prawns Crudo, King Crab Leg, Kurobuta Double Pork Chop, and the 100-year-old Enchanted Floating Island dessert (vanilla custard, twice baked meringue, caramel cage). 🍷

#4

The Mission Inn Hotel & Spa

3649 Mission Inn Avenue, Riverside
www.missioninn.com

→ In California, or anywhere else, it would be difficult to prove the existence of a hotel richer with indelible examples than this one. One hundred thirty six years ago, Frank Miller ambitiously set out to expand The Glenwood, a modest 12-room adobe boarding house, into **THE MISSION INN**.

Immediately, the property's prestige made Riverside the hub of SoCal, attracting figures like Booker T. Washington and 10 Presidents over the course of time. Stories still abound about Teddy Roosevelt, who planted two navel orange trees on the property (one of which still stands), and William Taft, who had an extra-wide chair specifically crafted for him, which currently sits in front of the Presidential Lounge – the site of Richard Nixon's wedding.

Nixon, moreover, found out he was going to be Dwight Eisenhower's Vice Presidential running mate while staying at the Alhambra Suite, which also happens to be the same room in which Ronald and Nancy Reagan honeymooned.

Undoubtedly, Miller's vision, including his love of antique bells, can be identified in many corners of the landmark amid its united four wings (Cloister, Spanish, Mission, and International Rotunda). Certainly, history aficionados will find elation at every turn, such as on the fourth floor of the Spanish Wing, which supports the centuries-old Anton Clock, and, below it, five rotating figures important to California. However, the most majestic sights are in the International Rotunda



Wing, which incorporates the Famous Fliers' Wall (where famous aerialists like Amelia Earhart and Buzz Aldrin were personally commemorated), the gold-lavished St. Francis Chapel of Assisi, and five-story spiral staircase built in 1931, where choral singers gather around during the city's holiday annual Festival of Lights. ❖

