



La Valencia Hotel, with its distinct pink stucco, is a landmark Pacific Coast resort in southern California. LA VALENCIA

LA JOLLA’S ‘PINK LADY’ ENJOYS ITS 90TH WITH A \$10M REVAMP

La Valencia has been at the top of its game since the Roaring Twenties



ROCHELLE LASH
Checking In

Timeless and patrician. The glorious La Valencia Hotel reflects the classic glamour and the good life of Southern California. The pink-stucco palace is a landmark of the upscale San Diego community of La Jolla, which means “the jewel” in Spanish. Embracing the best of two worlds, La Valencia fronts on tony Prospect St. and also overlooks the Pacific Ocean from its cliff-top perch. The untamed sea is a dramatic backdrop to the hotel’s civilized lifestyle and the powerful waves are a mesmerizing sight from its picture windows and terraces. La Valencia, a.k.a. the Pink

Lady, personifies the grace of a hotel built for the who’s who of the Roaring Twenties. It recently was revamped, but guests still enjoy Champagne cocktails at Café de la Rue, leisurely lunches at the Ocean Terrace and stylish gourmet dinners at The Med. I can imagine high-society couples dancing across the checkered marble floor of the Verandah Ballroom, and movie stars hiding out at the pool, fanned by palm trees. La Valencia has been at the top of its game since 1926, playing host to A-listers including Oprah Winfrey, Matt Damon, Madonna and Tom Hanks, as well as old-time Hollywood royalty such as Ginger Rogers, John Wayne and Gregory Peck. Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump both have visited Valencia — but not together. La V, as it is known in La Jolla, parted its way through its 90th anniversary during 2016 and will wind up a heady year of celebrations with a Great Gatsby Roaring Twenties Gala on Dec. 15.

\$10-million update: La Valencia’s new owner, Pacifica Host Hotels, has invested US\$10 million in a sweeping modernization of the lobby, the guest rooms, the dining room and the pool, now decked out with luxurious navy-and-white lounge chairs. The update has preserved the precious historic features — the intricate Spanish mosaics, terracotta floors and fountains; the exquisite La Sala lounge with its hand-painted ceilings; and flourishing terraced gardens, palm trees and trellises of hibiscus. But the interiors are new-new. La V has 114 accommodations — hotel rooms; spacious villas with fireplaces, vaulted ceilings and jet tubs; and the lavish Icon collection, topped by a dramatic 10th-floor Sky Suite. They all have renovated bathrooms, flat-screen TVs, and coastal-inspired decor of rattan and linen, as well as nubby bathrobes, luxurious toiletries and fine bedding with down comforters. About 60 per cent have ocean views and balconies. **Food and drink:** Executive chef Alex Emery, a star of the Southern California coast, recently

launched tantalizing new menus of creative American cuisine. His main stage is the newly redone The Med dining room, with its fireplace, stylish decor and ocean views. Emery does dinner with artful presentations of scallops, lobster, halibut and beef, plus standout dishes such as grilled octopus, honey duck with cardamom, roasted cod, branzino stuffed with saffron and lemon, risotto of the day, and La V’s superb paella, a house specialty since the early days. For its 90th year, La V also has crafted a three-course prix-fixe menu, at \$90 for two. Pastry chef Jesse McCarlte does an upbeat take on comfort desserts such as peach cream-sicle, vanilla rum crème brûlée, mango tart and everyone’s fave — toasted rice panna cotta. In fine weather, the Ocean Terrace is the place to be for Pacific Ocean vistas and breakfast treats such as crab cake Benedict, acai smoothies, steak ‘n’ eggs or waffles with strawberries and macadamia nuts. Some things never change. Guests and locals still gather at La Sala — the lobby lounge — for

IF YOU GO

La Jolla is 20 km north of San Diego International Airport and 185 km south of Los Angeles International Airport. **La Valencia Hotel:** 800-451-0772, 858-454-0771, lavalencia.com; La Jolla, Calif. Pacifica Host Hotels also owns The Inn at Spanish Bay in Pebble Beach; Post Ranch Inn and Ventana Inn & Spa in Big Sur, l’Auberge Carmel in Carmel-by-the-Sea and Ritz-Carlton Half Moon Bay in Jamaica. **Price:** Rooms start at US\$249 (suites and villas are higher); rates increase May-September; including pool, hot tub, in-room coffee, Wi-Fi, fitness room. Extra: valet parking, mini-bar. Hot Pink at 90 Celebration (two-night minimum): parking, welcome gift and cocktail, starts at US\$299 per night. **San Diego Tourism Authority:** 619-232-3101, sandiego.org; **Reservations:** 800-350-6205.

cocktail hour and after-dinner drinks. Bubbly, pink cocktails and martinis are all the rage. La Valencia’s Café de la Rue takes its French name seriously, with lunches like duck confit, salad Niçoise and steak-frites (and the fries are terrific). Happy Hour, both indoors in the handsome bistro and outside on the sidewalk terrace, features \$5 drinks, casual fare and live music. The patio’s Yappy Hour for dogs is a howl. **What to do:** La Valencia is the posh centrepiece of La Jolla, and its neighbours include Morgan Stanley, Sotheby’s and fancy locally run shops such as Norma Kay Gifts, Panerai Watch Boutique and CJ Charles Jewelers. La Jolla Playhouse, La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art and the Birch Aquarium at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography are nearby, as is the renowned Torrey Pines Golf Course, where champions such as Phil Mickelson will compete in the Farmers Insurance Open, Jan. 26-29. San Diego’s blockbuster attractions are within a 15- to 20-minute drive: the world-famous San Diego Zoo; the impressive USS Midway Museum; the breathtaking Balboa Park; SeaWorld San Diego, which offers Canadian discounts; Gaslamp Quarter and Old Town, Rochelle@rochellelash.com Twitter.com/rochellelash

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