

Las Rosas Hotel & Spa offers fine dining, relaxation at a bargain

Dining San Diego

By David Rottenberg

When I suggested we drive to Ensenada for Thanksgiving, my companion asked, "Are we going to be eating turkey or tortillas?" I wanted to spend the holiday at the Las Rosas Hotel & Spa, to start a new tradition of celebration.

Residents of San Diego have the opportunity to experience a different country and culture by driving just a half an hour. The U.S.-Mexico border is close and easy to cross. Ensenada is only 70 miles south of San Diego, a 90-minute drive down good roads that bypass Tijuana.

It costs only \$6.45 to drive down the well-maintained toll road, which is an absolutely gorgeous highway. There are lookout points, where one may look at the sea and occasionally see a dolphin or whale cruising by. The toll also pays for insurance against accident or breakdown while driving on the toll road stretch.

The highway drives past the Fox Studios, where the motion picture

"Titanic" was shot. Tours are now offered of the sound stages.

Ensenada has 500,000 residents, a cruise terminal, shipping harbor and busy downtown.

The turnoff to Las Rosas Hotel & Spa is about three miles north of Ensenada. Named "The Roses," the hotel is a pink color that looks more Mediterranean than Mexican, with its sweeping, graceful lines.

The hotel is at the water's edge. Waves crash on the rocks below as one gazes out onto the Todos Santos Islands. The pool has an "infinity edge" that blends into the ocean. Each guest room has a stunning view.

The Las Rosas Restaurant shares the beautiful ocean vistas. Diners can enjoy the scene while dining on wonderfully prepared cuisine from the hotel's award-winning chef.

The dining room is long and narrow, with the kitchen off to the side. Two large paintings of roses decorate the far wall, commemorating the hotel's name. A large vase filled with gorgeous blooming roses sits on a stand in an alcove. The bar area at the end of the room is a great place for

drinks, appetizers and watching a glorious sunset. Entertainment and dancing are offered several nights a week.

Chef Jose Cruz Nieto Carmona has been at the hotel a short time but has infused new spirit into its breakfast, lunch and dinner menus. Dishes are imaginative and beautifully presented. Even my breakfast omelet seemed to have special appeal. I enjoyed an amazing Chef's Salad with crisp bacon, flavorful meats and fresh produce. The Spinach Salad is a work of art: large spinach leaves coated in a mild dressing made of Balsamic vinegar and honey, with chunks of soft bleu cheese and a sprinkling of honey-baked walnuts. An entree of sea scallops featured gently grilled, large, succulent and fresh chunks of scallops served on a bed of rice in a butter sauce. All seafood — lobster, shrimp, scallops and swordfish — are fresh.

The 47-room "boutique" hotel is small enough to feature personalized attention but large enough to offer many amenities. Deep-sea fishing, golf and tennis are avail-

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able, and a full-service spa can dissolve aches and pains. The hotel has a big repeat-customer base. One guest told me that she and her family have been coming for six years to celebrate the holiday.

"We emphasize service," said hotel owner Marco A. Novelo. "We instruct our staff to learn the names of our guests and to be very responsive to their needs."

This became immediately evident when the maitre d' soon began to call me by name and remembered what I liked to drink.

"Are we going to have turkey or tortillas?" my companion asked again as we entered the Las Rosas Restaurant on Thursday evening. To her great delight, we dined on a special Thanksgiving Day menu while watching the sun's golden glow become extinguished. The meal began with a glass of wine, the fabulous spinach salad, went on to roast stuffed turkey with green beans, sweet potato and cranberry sauce and ended with a tasty pumpkin cheesecake.

We could imagine we were dining in a famous restaurant in San Diego, until the check came. The cost of the festive holiday dinner was only \$18 each, a fraction of what it might have cost here. The strong American dollar makes visiting Las Rosas Hotel & Spa a real bargain. Staying in its comfortable ocean-view rooms and enjoying dining and spa services is relaxing, rejuvenating and much less expensive than a comparable experience in San Diego.

For more information about Las Rosas Hotel & Spa and in its restaurant, visit the Web site at www.lasrosas.com or call toll-free at (866) 337-6727. For more information about Ensenada, visit www.enjoyensenada.com.

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FRIDAY, DEC 3 - THEATER

THE LAST FIVE YEARS

A fresh, contemporary musical from Tony Award chronicles a young couple's romance from two di- North Coast Repertory Theatre **Information:** (858) 4 **Cost:** \$27.00- \$32.00 **Where:** North Coast Repertory Drive, Solana Beach, 92075, Venue Phone - (619) 48

FRIDAY, DEC 3 - THEATER

DR. SEUSS' HOW THE GRINCH STOLE CHRISTMAS!

This wonderful musical jumps right off the pages onto the Globe's stage. Show times vary; call th Christmas Eve and Christmas day. **Organization:** The 2255 **Cost:** \$19.00- \$59.00 **Where:** The Old Globe, Venue Phone - (619) 239-2255

FRIDAY, DEC 3 - THEATER

WIZARD OF OZ

The enchanted Emerald City of Oz returns to Cor Ferry Landing at the exotic tent structure that is the 1 Playhouse. **Organization:** Coronado Playhouse **Inform** nadoplayhouse.com **Cost:** \$10.00- \$20.00 **When:** St Playhouse, 1775 Strand Way, Coronado, 92118, Ven

FRIDAY, DEC 3 - THEATER

JERSEY BOYS

The story of how four blue-collar boys from the wr biggest doo-wop sensation of all time. A Tony, Emr writing and design team will bring to life the early day fame for four guys who had everything — and nothing Playhouse **Information:** (858) 550-1010 jplayhouse.com **When:** Starts: 8:00 PM **Where:** La Jolla Playhouse, 21 campus), San Diego, 92037, Venue Phone - (619) 550

FRIDAY, DEC 3 - SPECIAL EVENT

DOWNTOWN LIGHTS UP FOR THE HOLIDAYS

Friends and families are invited to experience the show, which will feature an incredible blend of holi graphics, as well as a real snowstorm. Call or cl **Organization:** Downtown Center Business Improvem 2146 www.downtownla.com **Cost:** No Cost **Where:** Street, Los Angeles

SATURDAY, DEC 4 - BAZAAR

KADIR NELSON AT WHERE THE WORLD MEETS

Artist Kadir Nelson will unveil his newest paintings in which his art appears at the anniversary celebration Diego's innovative multicultural gift store. Guests w from Nelson, and hors d'oeuvres from newly opene Dining. **Organization:** Where the World Meets **Cost:** N 6:00 PM - 9:00 PM **Where:** Market Creek Plaza, 336 f

SATURDAY, DEC 4 - DANCE/PERFORMING ARTS

THE NUTCRACKER

Experience a sense of wonder along with Tchaiko panied by a professional orchestra. Show times at California Ballet Co. **Information:** (858) 560-6741 **Cost** Center for Performing Arts, 15498 Espola Road, Pow 748-0505

A complete listing of the Arts and Entertain at San Diego Source — www.sddt.com/Arts. Se events to jennifer.chung@sddt.com for a free lis — *Compiled by Jennifer Chung*