

Off to the Races: Del Mar's Extended Racing Season

Written by David M. Brown

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Luxury boutique hotels anchor the coastal paradise of Del Mar, which just introduced an extended racing season this fall.



If it's July, it's time for horse racing at Del Mar Race Track. Beginning this year, extend that seasonal reminder to November. For the first time, Del Mar, Calif.—“Where The Turf Meets The Surf”—will be running a fall season, Nov. 7–30, at the historic track, just a few months after its famous July through September summer schedule, which annually attracts equestrian fans worldwide to this super-cool seaside village just 20 miles from San Diego International.

Welcoming them will be the area's fine hotels, in particular, L'Auberge Del Mar and the different but also highly regarded Hotel Indigo Del Mar. Both properties are about a quarter-mile walking distance west to the beach and steps away from the designer shopping and dining that has made Del Mar so attractive to those seeking a quiet upscale getaway.

Reopened in November 2008 after a luxurious renovation, the 120-room/suite L'Auberge Del Mar offers dining options like the casual oceanview Waterfall Terrace. And, just across from that restaurant's optional cabana and waterfall outdoor dining setting, Spa L'Auberge, guided by its inspired director, Leah Strohecker, is creating a menu of ocean-inspired and other treatments to refresh those fortunate enough to book some well-deserved pampering.

More vibey and trendy, a hip boutique hotel than luxury destination resort, the nearby 94-room Hotel Indigo Del Mar is unabashedly young-people and family-focused, with its California-cuisine Oceanview Bar & Grill, opening out to the lobby and to an beachview balcony, and the European style day spa, overseen by Kara Willingham.

Fall Racing at the Gates

When the fall season runs for the first time at the track, it will continue an almost 80-year-old legacy of Del Mar hospitality. At the same time, it meets a need following the recent closing of Hollywood Park in Los Angeles.

Opened in 1937, the Del Mar Race Track was built by a partnership of actors Bing Crosby, who greeted everyone at the gates opening day, Pat O'Brien, Gary Cooper, Joe E. Brown, Oliver Hardy and businessman Charles S. Howard. A year later, one of the great match races took place Aug. 12, 1938, when the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club hosted a \$25,000 winner-take-all match race between Howard's immortal Seabiscuit and the Binglin Stable's colt, Ligaroti, with Seabiscuit taking honors.

The track will showcase its Hollywood past by naming the new fall season Del Mar Bing Crosby Season. In addition to the weekday and weekend racing (see www.dmtc.com for schedules), guests can also attend a Gatsbyesque Opening Day red carpet party, Nov. 7, and enjoy free concerts throughout the month.

“Most may not realize but one of San Diego's nicest months is actually November, and we're excited to make Del Mar a destination in the fall when temperatures average mid-70's and the rest of the country is starting to get that winter chill,” says Craig Dado, executive vice president

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and chief marketing officer for the Del Mar Racetrack. Because of this second season, he notes, the track will host the prestigious Breeders' Cup World Championship in 2017.



Finish Lines are Just the Beginning at L'Auberge Del Mar

When the daily racing is done, the many premiere attractions of Del Mar, including L'Auberge Del Mar, await. Opened in 1910, the Stratford Inn, on the site of today's property, attracted silent film stars, who spoke eloquently about its serenity and proximity to the beach. In 1927, the landmark became the Hotel Del Mar and was closely tied to the draw of Crosby's new Del Mar Race Track.

During WWII, the inn welcomed soldiers and their families and, when peace returned, the hotel did as well. In 1969, the old property was razed and the Inn L'Auberge built in 1989. Six years ago, L'Auberge Del Mar opened after a \$26-million renovation on 5.2 lushly landscaped acres.

"Celebrating 25 years in Del Mar, L'Auberge Del Mar has been the cornerstone of this community. Our hotel embraces the location of Del Mar through its stylish yet relaxed design and ambiance, and our exceptional dining venues are favorites among the residents," says Michael J. Slosser, vice president and managing director, L'Auberge Del Mar. Nearby are the magnificent Torrey Pines Preserve, with the rarest pine in the world; world-famous SeaWorld; and the many museums and attractions of Balboa Park, including the San Diego Zoo.

For sure, L'Auberge Del Mar is coastal estate rather than hotel, a friend's home on the ocean, with a front entry that opens right to the sights, sounds and smells of the ocean. "The emphasis was on the 'sense of place' that was created in the living room with the nano doors opening to the ocean view and fresh air," says Bob Harter, L'Auberge Del Mar sales and marketing director. He explains that the Newport Beach office of Barclay Butera Interior Design created spaces for a warm "residential" environment that guests are always noting on their evaluations.

They're also talking about Chef Fortune's KITCHEN 1540 (the street address of L'Auberge), combining Modern American with an upscale Southern influence from his past, while supporting sustainability and local farmers and their products. Stylistically inspired by the work of New York architect Andre Kikoski, the restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner daily in a décor of chic sophistication.

These dinner enticements include his signature shrimp and grits, with organic heirloom grains and a roasted corn and chorizo crème. "I wooed my wife with this dish," he says, smiling. Also: Cold-smoked trout and organic beets, with Steelhead saltwater trout cured in salt, brown sugar, bay leaves, zest and juniper, then cold smoked with skin on, with picked greens of flat leaf parsley, hearts of fire and micro citrus mix and a whipped cheese made from Point Reyes Blue cheese and crème fraîche.

Before or after any meal, make sure you make an appointment with the spa therapists at their delicious retreat. Designed by Cary Collier of Blu Spas Inc., the 5,000-sq.-ft. Spa L'Auberge has a beach cottage spirit, connecting it thematically with the laid-back sophistication of the hotel.

Using organic and vegan product lines, as well as exotic plant extracts, she and her team have assembled a group of ocean-inspired treatments. To celebrate the new fall season, Spa L'Auberge has also debuted race-inspired treatments. Choose, for example, the Daily Double, a choice of two 25-minute express spa services, or the Exacta, including a Mint Julep Scrub made of Bourbon Bubbler full-body scrub comprising Kentucky Whiskey and brown sugar, which stimulates and renews dull and dry skin. Just introduced, too, are Spa Rituals incorporating healing practices from cultures around the world, like the Hamman Ritual and Moroccan oil Head to Toe.



Gold-Plated Del Mar

Walk to the beach along a private path from L'Auberge Del Mar. Walk across the street to Del Mar Plaza. Either way are culinary treasures.

With ironwork, tiled fountains and cobblestone pathways reminiscent of a European market, the Del Mar Plaza offers village guests high-end

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retailers, services and ocean-view restaurants. Opened in April, the El Agave Restaurant and Tequileria specializes in traditional "Hispanic-Mexican" cuisine, prepared by Executive Chef Mario Montes, inspired by the cooking styles of ancient native cultures like the Aztecs and Mestizos. Popular items are the lobster meatballs, a variety of mole sauces and the signature filet mignon in tequila with a red wine reduction sauce. El Agave Del Mar also features a "tequila museum" from which guests can sample 1,000-plus varieties from around the world.

Also at Del Mar Plaza, El Fornaio, serving Chef Roberto Carboni's award-winning Italian cuisine, recently reopened after a complete remodel, adding outdoor seating and interior view space to maximize the ocean views.

On the beach next to Powerhouse Park (the area's old power station) is Jake's, recently renovated in its interior and menu. Enjoy sunset views and excellent seafood and American cuisine—a Del Mar favorite for years. delmarplaza.com; dreamdelmar.com.

To Learn More

Del Mar Race Track dmtc.com.

Hotel Indigo Del Mar hotelindigo.com.

L'Auberge Del Mar laubergedelmar.com.