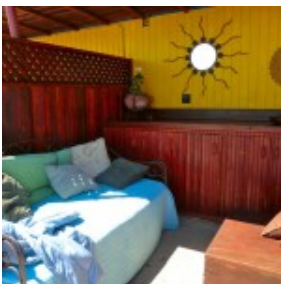


Heaven is a hotel rooftop overlooking the Pacific Ocean

By Paula Peterson

AVILA BEACH – To sum it up: heavenly. I found a place to unwind, relax, disappear into my own world, and yet, my daughter can have fun and enjoy it as well. And, I don't have to leave the hotel.

When traveling with your kids there aren't many places that can give everyone in the family the same vacation value. But the Inn at Avila Beach, Avila Beach and the central coast certainly fit that bill.



Cabanas on the roof at the Inn at Avila Beach mean not needing to leave the hotel.

Photos/Paula Peterson

I usually take a vacation to enjoy a region, but after finding the Inn at Avila Beach in 2009, I have found that I can enjoy a hotel as my vacation destination. Don't get me wrong, the whole central coast is full of great things to do, and I enjoy them when I'm there. But my rooftop heaven is always waiting

for me.

I attended Cal Poly in San Luis Obispo during the late '70s and frequently visited Avila Beach. This big pink building on the hill housed apartments and I never paid much attention to it. But with remodeling and its reincarnation as a hotel, I definitely pay attention now. Terra cotta tiles on the floors, colorful hand-painted tiles around the property and a homey atmosphere greet you as you check in (but yes, it still sports a pink exterior). Oceanfront rooms with nice patios allow the visitor to hear the waves pounding on shore all day and night. They have interior courtyard view rooms, but I wasn't very impressed with the rooms without an ocean view where one can enjoy the view and the sounds of the waves.

So now, for the best part ... the rooftop. They have created a paradise on the roof, complete with cabanas, barbecues, tables, hammocks, counters, sinks, blenders, sofas, televisions and comfy chairs and couches. You can sit and relax in a cushioned wicker chair and read your favorite book while listening to the beach action. You can bring up that bottle of wine you bought during your day of wine tasting, uncork it with some cheese and crackers and enjoy the sunset. You can stay away from restaurants and barbecue your dinner, from steaks to the fresh fish you just bought on the pier. Or, when the sun goes down, bring up the bag of complementary popcorn you just popped and watch a movie under the stars.

Everyone in the hotel shares the space, but there has always been plenty of room for everyone each time I've been there. I was impressed the maids made regular rounds and straightened up the blankets and cushions so all was fresh for the next person to enjoy the space.

Avila Beach is small and quaint.

It's changed a lot since my college days. In the late 1990s Unocal started to clean up decades-old oil seepage from their

pipes under the town and where a massive oil spill was found. A half-mile stretch of town was leveled in order to clean up the mess and a \$30 million lawsuit helped rebuild the town. The small beach shops were old and homey before, but what replaced them are stylish and pleasing shops, deli, store, beach front restaurants, coffee shop, a wine shop and bar. You can walk from your hotel room and have a coffee at Joe Mamma's (where the sign reminds you that each cup of coffee is personally crafted and that they aren't at Starbucks). You can sit in the beach chairs outside or stroll on the beach or pier with your java.

The newly redesigned Avila Market & Deli is quite charming and offers a great menu. You can eat upstairs, take it outside, or downstairs where they'll pour you a glass of wine to go with your meal. As with each beach town, there are souvenir shops my daughter can't stay out. During late spring, summer and early fall there is a fun farmers' market where you can sample seafood from the local restaurants, buy fruit and veggies or stop by the outside bar and enjoy a cocktail. Then you just walk home to the Inn at Avila Beach a block away.

I'm happy on the rooftop, but there are so many nearby choices on where to go touring and exploring. Rent a local bike and go out the Bob Jones Trail from the beach by the golf course out to the Avila Valley Barn and enjoy a treat, drive in to See Canyon for apples or wine, venture south to Pismo Beach or the other direction to San Luis Obispo. One can go wine tasting in the ever expanding Paso Robles region, exploring and shopping in Morro Bay, Cambria and Cayucos or go on Hearst Castle tours and the list goes on.

Something I never miss on my trips to the central coast is the fabulous year-round Thursday night farmers' markets in San Luis Obispo (SLO) ... a must see and do. City streets close every Thursday for three hours from 5 to 8pm and you can eat from a multitude of restaurants, fruit and veggie stands, and buy clothing and just about anything you're looking for. Bands

are also playing on several of the side streets and the energy in the area is easy to catch.

Another stop we never miss is to Splash Café. Their bread bowl clam chowder is out of this world. Their main restaurant is in Pismo Beach near the pier. Don't let the long line wrapping around the funky building scare you. It moves quickly. They just added a location in SLO, too.

But there is always my rooftop at the Inn at Avila Beach. Late spring is my favorite time to be in Avila, but there really is no wrong time. Parking gets a little crazy on busy summer days, but if you're parked in the lot at the hotel you're good, though there aren't enough places for every room.

More hotel and town information are online.

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