

IRVINE

• The ultimate
• California
playground

By Mira Temkin

A bundant sunshine, near-perfect weather, warm beaches and plenty of outdoor recreation make Irvine the premiere Southern California destination. Conveniently located in the center of Orange County, Irvine is only 45 miles south of Los Angeles and 90 miles north of San Diego.

“Irvine offers groups a range of outdoor recreation opportunities, globally diverse cuisine, lots of shopping and exclusive entertainment venues,” said Demea Metcalf, director of sales for Destination Irvine. “The city’s accessibility and close proximity to area attractions and beaches make it the ideal destination to experience Orange County.

“Groups can experience Irvine’s natural beauty along miles of hiking and biking trails. The city features more than 12,000 acres of preserved natural habitats — the most in Orange County.”

ORANGE COUNTY GREAT PARK

An arts and recreational sports hub, Orange County Great Park features the Great Park Balloon, Palm Court Arts Complex, a Sunday farmers market, sports fields and activities, outdoor concerts and movies

on the lawn. An interactive, outdoor area, The Farm + Food Lab, educates visitors on gardening, inspires innovative ideas and facilitates a thriving community with themed raised-bed gardens, fruit trees and vertical gardening.

The Great Park Balloon is the park’s iconic attraction, which can hold up to 30 passengers and soars 400 feet above the ground for expansive views. Group rates are available.

Other park amenities include a carousel and a walkable historical timeline. The Palm Court Arts Complex is home to the Great Park Gallery (free admission) and the Great Park Artist Studios.

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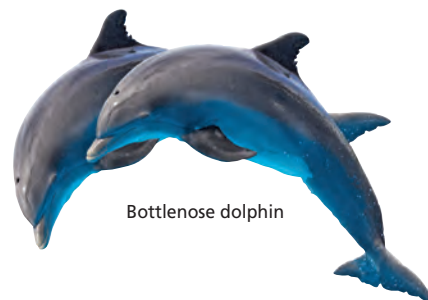
— Demea Metcalf, director of sales for Destination Irvine

IRVINE SPECTRUM CENTER

A bustling shopping destination, Irvine Spectrum Center offers more than 100 boutiques, 30 restaurants, an Improv Comedy Club and an IMAX theater. Take the group high in the sky on the 108-foot Giant Wheel. At night, the Giant Wheel is especially magical with twinkling lights. Group rates are available.

MARCONI AUTOMOTIVE MUSEUM

Marconi Automotive Museum features an exciting collection of more than \$30 million in historic, exotic and classic cars. Groups can admire Fox Fire firetrucks, plus unusual Ferraris and Jaguars. Thirty-to 90-minute self-guided tours can be arranged. Suggested donations go toward children’s charities in the local community. The museum supports the Marconi’s Foundation for Kids.



Bottlenose dolphin

NEWPORT LANDING

Less than a half hour outside of Irvine, Newport Landing offers multiple whale-watching trips year-round. December through April is prime gray whale migration. From May to November, groups can spot blue whales, dolphins and seals.

Hop aboard daily cruises or privately charter a boat. Crewmembers provide full narration as passengers take in the exquisite views with cameras in hand, on the lookout for breaching whales.