

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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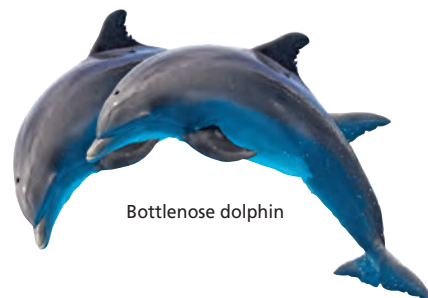
— Demea Metcalf, director of sales for Destination Irvine

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.

MISSION SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO

The “Jewel of the California Missions” is a historic landmark, museum and 200-year-old monument. Mission San Juan Capistrano, about 25 minutes from Irvine, offers docent-led tours through its 10 acres of gardens, fountains and structures. For groups of 15 or more, tours last approximately one hour.

PEDEGO ELECTRIC BIKES

Pedego Electric Bikes is located among nearly 60 miles of paved off-street bike trails. A bike tour powered by Pedego Electric Bikes provides a riding experience for visitors of all fitness levels. With the ability to pedal as hard or as little as the group would like (or not at all), guided tours show off the sites of Irvine.

CHOCXO

Take a 45-minute educational tour of chocolatier ChocXO and watch the chocolate-making process from bean to bar. Groups walk along the educational wall and see a scale model of a cacao tree, learn how chocolate is fermented and dried, then view the ChocXO factory. Participants sample raw cacao pulp, cocoa nibs, cocoa liquor, and, of course, the finished chocolate product.

DINING

The following restaurants welcome groups, both large and small, to their dining establishments:

- Bistango features a Wine Spectator award-winning wine list with revolving modern art exhibits, nightly entertainment and several private dining venues.
- Twenty Eight Restaurant & Lounge features a seasonal menu of sustainable seafood, local farm vegetables and meats, and signature cocktails.
- Andrei’s Conscious Cuisine serves fresh local and organically grown produce, as well as naturally raised meats and sustainable seafood. 🚗

DESTINATION IRVINE

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Mission San Juan Capistrano, San Juan Capistrano, Calif.



PHOTO: DESTINATION IRVINE

Pedego Electric Bikes, Irvine, Calif.



PHOTO: DESTINATION IRVINE

Giant Wheel, Irvine Spectrum Center, Irvine, Calif.



PHOTO: DESTINATION IRVINE

Farm + Food Lab, Orange County Great Park, Irvine, Calif.