

THREE

Perfect Days

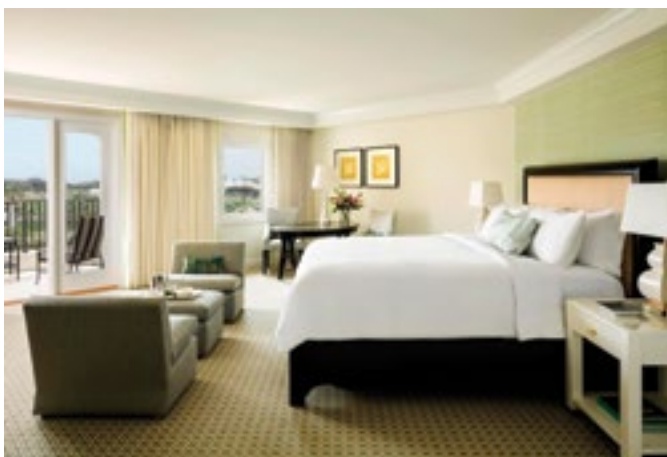
Romantic Getaway

Monarch Beach Resort's experts put together the perfect three-day itinerary for couples heading to the seaside destination.

BY ASHLEY BURNETT

Couples vacationing in Dana Point, California, have plenty of options when it comes to planning a romantic respite. This Southern California location promises fine dining options, world-class attractions and, of course, the coastal charms the region is known for.

And for couples staying at Monarch Beach Resort, there are plenty of extra amenities to make your getaway together even more special, whether it's indulging in the Couples Retreat Package or attending a wine tasting at STONEHILL TAVERN, A Michael Mina Restaurant. Below, resort experts have put together a three-day itinerary for pairs looking to make the most of the area's attractions.



Rooms at Monarch Beach Resort make for a great home base during your Orange County getaway.



Dining options at the resort boast great views and romantic set-ups, including access to fire pits..

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Take advantage of Monarch Beach Resort's ocean-side location with water sports.

DAY ONE

Arrive at Monarch Beach Resort and settle in—rooms were recently redesigned and feature refreshed palletes and private balconies or patios, perfect for the visiting couple. Take time to collect your thoughts as you gaze out the window at the resort's seaside views.

After you've unpacked and rested, it's time to hit the beach. Monarch Beach is ideal for water sports, whether you and your sweetheart want to paddleboard or kayak, and the Monarch Beach Resort Surf Hosts can provide rentals, as well as body boarding and private surf lessons. Chef Concierge Gogi Dallis also recommends trying out Dana Point Harbor, another great option for pairs looking to try their hand at various water-based activities. Rental options near the harbor include Capo Beach Watercraft Rentals and Dana Point Jet Ski and Kayak Center. Afterward you can wander around the harbor, which plays host to several souvenir and gift boutiques, as well as laid-back cafés and sweet shops.

If sitting back and relaxing is more your style, Dallis also points to renting a Duffy boat in Newport Beach as a great option. Check out the Duffy Electric Boat Company to rent a boat

you can take around the Newport Bay. Operating a Duffy boat is easy and you can cruise wherever you and your significant other choose to go. You can also tie up in Newport Harbor and stop at one of several seaside dining options for lunch, such as Newport Landing Restaurant and Oyster Bar or Bluewater Grill, which boasts delicious seafood options. Alternatively, bring your own picnic to enjoy on the boat while you sail on the water.



A suite at the resort



Book a reservation at Stonehill Tavern.

Once you're back at the resort, it's time to take in the best part of the day: sunset. There are plenty of alfresco dining options at Monarch Beach Resort where you can take advantage of the view, sharing a bottle of wine while you watch the sky turn orange and pink. Book a dinner reservation at AVEO Table + Bar, one of the property's signature eateries, for dishes with seasonal ingredients and a Californian influence, in addition to the beautiful outdoor space.

DAY TWO

Dedicate your second day to the Miraval Life in Balance Spa—your body will thank you. Director of Spa Michelle Frye recommends trying out the couples retreat packages, which include private rooms that come complete with a Jacuzzi bath and fireplace. Options include the Restoring Retreat, which is comprised of a therapeutic bath and full body salt and oil scrub, or the Relaxation Retreat, a soothing bath ritual surrounded by flickering candles, followed by a hot stone massage.

The resort's spa also has a Coed Tranquility Lounge where the two of you can relax together before your scheduled treatments, as well as a Couples Personalized Massage, where you can enjoy a side-by-side massage in the privacy of the Spa Suite. And if there's anything you'd like to try that's not on the menu, according to Dallis, the staff is eager to help make your wish come true: "Our team is happy to assist in creating a personalized couples-only activity. We pride ourselves in creating a memorable, non-cookie cutter experience for ... guests." For some extra pampering, try out the on-property Drybar to receive a blowout or updo, all with a glass of complimentary Champagne. Active couples might also want to try



A round of couples' golf is a great way to bond.

out a few fitness classes together, such as Aerial Yoga or Cardio Drumming.

After you've finished your pampering, add some art to your day with a show at one of the numerous world-class venues around Dana Point and the resort itself. "Monarch Beach Resort is surrounded by a thriving art community with seasonal festivals and amazing museums," Dallis explains. "The Segerstrom Center for the Arts, Laguna Playhouse, South Coast Repertory and numerous other

theater venues provide year-around entertainment." These venues regularly host world-class acts such as the Pacific Symphony or plays and musicals straight from Broadway.

In nearby Laguna Beach, an artists' colony, there are also plenty of galleries and the Laguna Art Museum for those who want a taste of the fine arts. Check out Peter Blake Gallery, Dawson Cole Fine Art or Forest & Ocean Gallery, to name just a few. Orange County Museum of Art is also not too far in Newport Beach, and features work by artists both local and international, while Bowers Museum in Santa Ana often features historical exhibitions.

Conclude your day with dinner at STONEHILL TAVERN, A Michael Mina Restaurant, where dishes include indulgent delicacies such as lobster pot pie, Hudson Valley foie gras and Colorado lamb shank. As for nightcaps, the restaurant has an extensive wine list, as well as a bevy of unique cocktail offerings, that make for a perfect end to your second day.

DAY THREE

On your last day, sleep in and order breakfast via room service—fresh-squeezed orange juice, coffee and a variety of pastries will make sure your day begins on the right foot.



Interiors reflect a new coastal palette.

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Segerstrom Center for the Arts

From there, it's time to explore one of SoCal's best features: the world-class shopping. There are a variety of boutiques on property, including iStore, and just a short drive away is South Coast Plaza. This world-class mall located in Costa Mesa boasts designer stores such as Louis Vuitton, Ermenegildo Zegna and Gucci. Afterwards, grab lunch at Vaca, a Spanish-style eatery and the brainchild of celebrity chef Amar Santana, a "Top Chef" finalist. A few must-try dishes on the menu include the various paellas and roasted cauliflower.

You can also head to Newport Beach, where Fashion Island awaits. This outdoor mall has shops as varied as Alice + Olivia, Trina Turk and



Shop at Fashion Island



A beachside dinner is the perfect end to your vacation.

Rebecca Taylor, as well as gourmet dining options like Great Maple, which offers modern American options, and Red O, with a menu full of authentic Mexican staples conceived by chef Rick Bayless, a "Top Chef Masters" alum. For those looking for a more casual shopping experience, head to Balboa Island, also in Newport Beach, which is full of charming seaside boutiques and stands selling snacks such as the famed Balboa bars—chocolate-dipped ice cream bars smothered in sprinkles and perfect for sharing.

Alternatively, for couples looking for another outdoor excursion, try a round of couples' golf at Monarch Beach Golf Links. The 18-hole course was designed by the famed

Robert Trent Jones, Jr. and has won numerous awards. If the two of you are new to the sport, book a lesson with one of the course's top-notch instructors—they'll have you teeing off like a pro in no time. And if you're already familiar with the sport, try getting a golf physical, a unique experience where one of the course's experts will analyze your game and provide tailored instruction based on how you already play and your mental approach, as well as suggestions for better clubs and referrals to specialists and trainers.

As the sun begins to set, end your three-day getaway at the Monarch Bay Club. With patio seating and a private fire pit, the club is the perfect romantic setting, while still being coastal casual. Dine on char-grilled meats and seafood as you listen to live music and the sound of the waves crashing onto the sand. Don't forget to finish off by roasting a few s'mores and toasting to your perfect vacation—the two of you have earned it. 🦋

For more romantic ideas, check out the resort's Three Perfect Days video, which highlights other couple-friendly activities. You can find the video at Monarch Beach Resort's YouTube channel: youtube.com/monarchbeachresort.