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CALIFORNIA HERE WE COME

*Fancy America but don't know where to start?
Y&YW's Libby Pagett headed to California for
relaxation, sun, shopping, celebrity... and the rest!*

Eleven hours from LHR is the

west coast of America. Palm trees; posh shops; the Hollywood Hills; Malibu; the Baywatch beach; loads of familiar spots from zillions of American films, and a nation of people who are very eager to please. You got it!

Head for the hills

If you're in need of some rest and relaxation as well as laid-back adventure, head out of LA to the tiny town of Ojai, where there's a blissful sanctuary, the Ojai Valley Inn & Spa (ojairesort.com). Set in acres of manicured lawns and a well-tended golf course, with toy-town-style paths to buzz about on (by foot or golf cart courtesy of one of hundreds of ever-helpful staff), this is a fantastic antidote to wedding planning. We fell in love with the brilliant white villas covered in hot-pink flora, the super-size beds, sunken baths, walk-in glass showers, terracotta courtyards and the endless sense of tranquillity. This is a mini Mediterranean in the heart of the OC.

SIPPING SPARKLING ROSÉ AS THE SUN SETS, TURNING THE WHOLE SKY PINK, IS A WOW-FACTOR MOMENT

Rest & relaxation

After a transatlantic flight and an hour's drive, our first port of call was the spa, offering body treatments, couples' massages, and almost anything we wanted doing to our hands, feet and faces. From the tiled mud chamber to the softly-lit therapy rooms, each treatment was tailored to our needs. A tough Jetlag massage helps to scare off any fatigue, ensures a great night's sleep and gets you ready for granola with berries, fajitas, or even steak for breakfast the next morning. We then had a treatment for the mind – a trip to the unique Artist's Cottage and apothecary. Here, you can custom-blend your own his and hers scents (just make sure they complement each other) and take an hour out to do a mandala – an art therapy-style session that lets you explore the past, present and future via crayons and chalk. It may sound bonkers but it's great fun, intimate, and insightful – sceptical grooms will be enlightened.

Howdy, cowboy

Ojai's in-house fitness expert Juliana is full of enthusiasm: we joined her for morning walks around the resort, classes in the fitness studio and hikes through the surrounding hills. A two-hour walk through the hills' narrow paths is invigorating and exciting (particularly if you go in rattle snake season: take a stick and nerves of steel!).

But if you really want to get away from civilisation, there's no better escape than horseback riding. Nearby El Rancho Grande in Santa Barbara has laid-back horses perfect for beginners (Rocco was our favourite), a fantastically rustic yard and a 6' 4" cowboy Graham – be prepared for your first post-marital crush! Our two-hour trek down to the creek was an amazing slice of outback America. Grooms – if you're trekking with your new wife, have a quiet word with Graham and he'll take you to a deserted spot, conjure up a blanket and picnic and make himself scarce. Brownie points alert! You can even stay a night on the ranch in huts complete with shabby-chic sofas and freestanding bath (visit lospadresoutfitters.com for details).

For an extra nostalgic slice of Americana, head back to Ojai, hire bikes and take a trip down the specially-developed bike path and find art and craft shops a-plenty.

Food, fabulous food

With all the rejuvenating, relaxing and exercise, dining is also a huge part of the Ojai experience. The Oak Grill is perched at the top of the resort. Dining on this beautiful terrace, overlooking the mountains and enjoying the pink moment – when the setting sun hits a point in the mountain range and the whole sky turns pink – sipping sparkling rosé, is a true wow-factor moment.

Foodies will fall in love with chef Jamie's lobster martini – which marries rich, decadent seafood with creamy mashed potato in a martini glass. It should be bottled and sold as an aphrodisiac.

For a slice of A-list life, make like Grey's Anatomy's Katherine Heigl and marry at Ojai. If you can handle the celeb price-tag of £10,000 per night you can wed at Katherine's choice: the replica Tuscan villa Casa Elar in the grounds – if not, marry by the pool, in the scented herb garden or under the 200-year old oak tree.

Beverly hills!

Beverly Hills is awesome: if you're flying into or out of LAX, a night or two here is a must.

For a celebrity-style experience, the Montage is the hotel du jour. From the rooftop pool, down through the Moroccan-styled spa, to the decadent mocha and gold-trimmed suites and the marble lobby complete with the biggest oversized centrepiece Y&YW has ever seen, this place oozes style. And it's not just inside: the hotel's private car (a Maybach waiting outside to ferry VIPs around; Jay-Z was in it the day before us!) is the icing on the cake. As the latest magnet for celebrities and VIPs, a week here may be pushing it, except for those on a very big budget, but a night or two will make you feel as A-list as Posh & Becks.

Suite love

Entering the Montage is like being Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman* – after her makeover! From the huge bed with its oh-so-soft sheets, to the monogrammed pillow, this place is all about its guests. All the rooms overlook a central courtyard and come with terraces and lounge-on-me wicker day-beds. The baths have TV screens and the glass showers have settings to suit your mood: full-on buff-up or soothing tropical rain. Gold highlights make every room feel presidential – even if you're not on the top floor.

Sitting by the pool, we enjoyed complimentary foot massages, sank iced cocktails and watched the la-la types come and go, framed by the hazy view of LA. The spa has an exotic feel with its coloured tiling and deep baths. The therapists are soft of nature but strong of body. Ever-accommodating, they made us feel like we were floating on air before anyone had even laid a finger on us. The steam room is like being in a giant

kettle: the most open-pored you will ever feel. Impurities are not welcome here.

Famous faces

Dining out in Beverly Hills, we headed to local celebrity haunt Spago – where the women look like Kirk Douglas and the men look like Joan Rivers – for a fun and reasonably priced look-at-them-is-that-you-know-who? evening: Celebrity come dine with me, indeed! The food is from the skinnier side of LA – think watercress and lobster soup rather than oversized Mexicana. Booking in advance is essential (wolfgangpuck.com). Alternative dining experiences are on every street corner, like authentic American diners, where the portions are large and the waitresses even larger.

Dining at the Montage ranges from in-room to casual brunches and decadent dinners – Muse, adorned with bright red roses, is a must for honeymooners, or Parq, with its mosaic tiles and wrought-iron features, brings the garden indoors. The French onion soup is gastronomic heaven!

The Hollywood sign, the walk of fame, a tour of celebs' houses, open-air malls and downtown bistros are all within short cab rides from Beverly Hills. A walk along Rodeo Drive is a five-minute stroll and de rigueur for checking out the snooty sales assistants and indulging in your inner I'm-ready-to-splash-the-cash moment. But prepare to see the bonkers side of LA, too: pink poodles pushed in prams, and joggers everywhere.

For a fun night or two en-route to your Route-66 moment, Beverly Hills is great fun and the people will treat you like royalty. Just don't overstay your welcome, or the Botox might catch up with you...

Rooms at The Montage from £276 per night (montagebeverlyhills.com)

Rooms at Ojai Valley Inn & Spa from £245 per night (ojairesort.com)

GET THERE...

BA offers return flights from London Heathrow to LA from £423pp (includes UK taxes) ba.com, 0844 493 0787.

WHERE NEXT?

Leave LA and expand your honeymoon horizons with a day trip or twin-centre tour

- * *Las Vegas, the City of Sin, is a four-hour drive or half-hour flight from LA – let your groom give his inner Bond a turn on the roulette table.*
- * *Just over three-hours' flight will get you to Mexico City to sample Aztec architecture and*
- tasty burritos – arrriba!*
- * *Fancy a twin-centre honeymoon? In five hours you could be bikini-clad in the sunny Bahamas, rum punch in hand.*
- * *If you don't mind long-haul, fly to Sydney and see two once-in-a-lifetime cities in one honeymoon.*