

Car-free and Happy

Coronado Island can be enjoyed by bike and on foot

My family wanted a getaway, some place within driving distance where we wouldn't have to get back in the car once we arrived. And with two kids home from college for a short break, we only had time for a two-day/one-night vacation.

We found what we wanted on Coronado Island, a 2½-hour drive south of L.A. Although Coronado is called an island, it's actually a 13½-mile peninsula bordered by San Diego Bay on one side and the Pacific on the other. The community of 25,000 residents has a relaxed atmosphere but lots of things to do.

And, most important, once you arrive, no car is needed.

Local tourism officials call it a "walker's paradise." Many residents drive electric carts around town, said Becky Emerson, the Coronado Visitor Center's manager. Visitors follow suit, renting bicycles, surreys, Segways and electric carts from shops on the peninsula.

"One of the most charming features of our beachside village is how unnecessary a car is here. Visitors can walk or bike anywhere in town and feel safe because of our island-wide 25 mph speed limit," Emerson said. "Plus it's flat and the weather's great."

One can also leave the island without a car. A 20-minute ferry takes travelers across the bay to San Diego.

As we crossed the majestic 2.3-mile-long San Diego-Coronado Bridge that connects the mainland and the "island," we took in the picturesque view of the water, boats and land. Once off the bridge, we arrived at our hotel, the Coronado Island Marriott Resort & Spa. We parked our car in the hotel's underground garage and did not see it again until we left to return home the following night, 28 hours later.

After dropping off our things in the room, we started off on foot on a wide walkway with scenic views to the Ferry Landing Marketplace — a nautical-themed plaza with restaurants, art galleries and boutiques — and chose Village Pizzeria Bayside for dinner. "I like how they put extra cheese on the pizza," said Noah, 11, the youngest of my four kids, before he bit into a thick slice.

For dessert we stopped at



BRETT SHOAF, ARTISTIC VISUALS

Bikers enjoy the Coronado Ferry Landing.

Coronado Cupcakery for confections and hot chocolate.

The following morning, we rented bicycles through the hotel fitness center for \$10 an hour. We began on the adjacent bay front promenade, passing 22-acre Tidelands Park with its playgrounds, ball fields and golf course. Then it was on to the Glorietta Bay Marina with its Coronado Boathouse, a Victorian structure built in 1887 that is now a restaurant; and the Coronado Playhouse, a cabaret-style theater. At one point, we were so caught up in the sights that we missed our turn but continued to enjoy the sights along the way.

At the main street, Orange Avenue, we picked up the correct route, stopping to have a look at the sprawling Hotel del Coronado, the grand 120-year-old resort famous for its red-shingled roofs. After browsing the quaint Orange Avenue shopping area, we packed up panini sandwiches and rode to the beach to enjoy our lunch and dip our toes in the water.

"This is different from our usual vacations," said my daughter, Brianna, 18, referring to the trips in which we try to see and do everything. "It's really quiet, laid-back, nice."

Back at the hotel we spent the rest of the day at the pool. Our three younger kids rented a surrey and rode along the bayside promenade. At one point as they passed the pool deck, we heard them laughing and saw two of them pedaling furiously, while the youngest ran to catch up.

Danny, 20, our oldest, worked out at the fitness center machines then rejuvenated in the poolside spa. "Perfect day," Danny said, submerged in the water to his chin.

On the way home, we talked about how going car-less had made the getaway a perfect combination of activities and relaxation. "Even though it was a short visit, it really felt like we were away on an island," said my husband, Mike.

— *Sophia Fischer*

Special Advertising Sections Writer

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Questions or comments? Contact **Darlene Gunther** at 213.237.3133 or darlene.gunther@latimes.com.

For advertising inquiries, please contact **Maria Riley** at 213.237.7212 or maria.riley@latimes.com.

