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BEACHY KEEN

In the age of the staycation, Santa Monica's Fairmont Miramar Hotel & Bungalows offers an escape to paradise—close to home.

By Victoria Namkung

SOMETIMES YOU NEED to get away from it all but you just don't have time for a proper vacation. (And let's be honest—many of us don't have the funds right now, either.) Nestled atop the scenic bluffs of Santa Monica beach and offering panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean, the Fairmont Miramar Hotel & Bungalows is an ideal home away from home. You'll begin decompressing within minutes of arriving at the hotel, with its casually elegant vibe and exquisite manicured gardens. So banish your BlackBerry, tear up your to-do list and let the staycation begin.

A haven for celebrities since the 1920s, the Miramar has welcomed such stars as Marilyn Monroe, Cary Grant, Greta Garbo and Lana Turner (she got married at the property). In recent years you may have spotted Gwyneth Paltrow, Kiefer Sutherland, Ron Howard or former President Bill Clinton at the hotel, which features 302 soundproofed guest rooms, many with stunning ocean views. Just a stone's throw from the Third Street Promenade and Santa Monica Pier, the Fairmont Miramar is in your backyard and still manages to feel a world away.

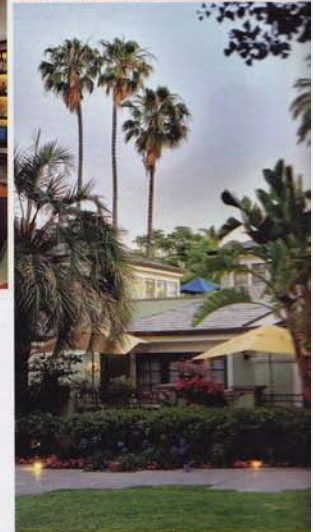
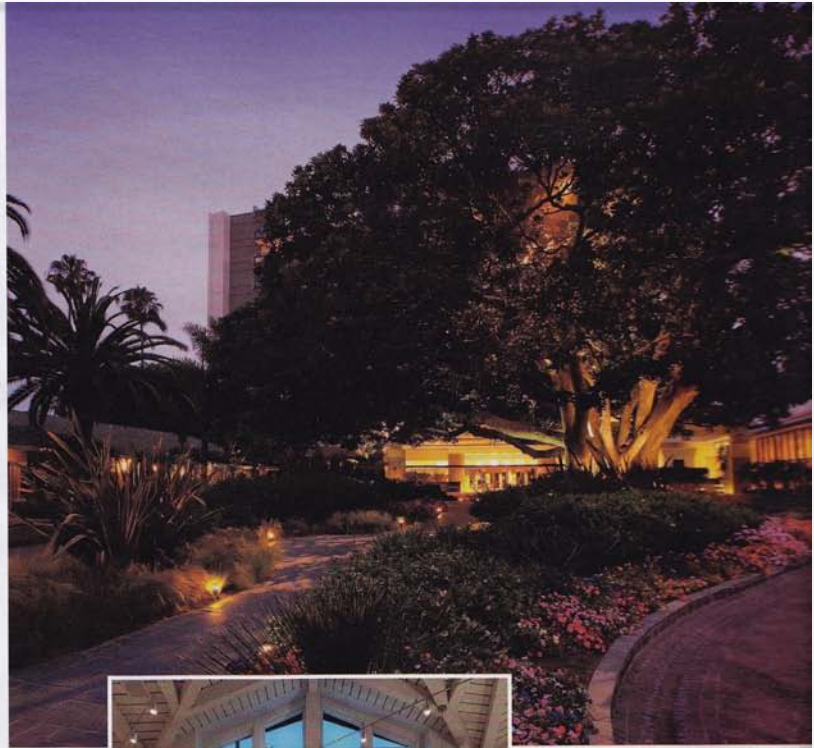
Perfect for families or couples, the 32 recently renovated bungalows (ranging from 575 to 850 square feet) and bungalow suites are quintessentially SoCal. Four bungalows are bi-level, each featuring a living room with a balcony and sofa bed upstairs and a king bedroom on the lower level. Forgot something? Need a special pillow? Bungalow personal assistants are on hand to make your stay extra comfy and carefree. Even four-legged friends are welcome and receive their own beds and bowls, dog-walking services and in-room dining from a menu featuring organic chicken, filet of beef and handmade carob truffles.

At the seasonal bistro Fig, which opened on-site this year, the focus is on fresh, unassuming and sustainable food. The menu features inspired twists on traditional French fare, with options such as tarte flambée, steak frites, coq au vin and John Dory Grenobloise. Named after the massive 123-year-old Moreton Bay fig tree that sits at the entryway to the hotel, Fig is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner, as well as Sunday brunch (don't

miss the Kegs and Eggs special, which includes a bottomless pint of draft beer). Chef and LA native Ray Garcia combs the Santa Monica farmers' markets twice weekly, grows his own herbs and peppers in the restaurant's garden and works directly with California growers to find the best local products.

In addition to top-notch cuisine, there's also luxury and pampering at the Fairmont Miramar. Visit the hotel's Exhale Spa, featuring such services as the therapeutic Deep Flow massage and True facial, along with creative fitness programs. You can spend the rest of the day by the pool, enjoying light bites and creative cocktails (alcohol-filled snow cones, anyone?). Continue the relaxation at the intimate Koi Pond Lounge, which overlooks a natural fishpond (complete with a waterfall and turtles), where you can linger over afternoon tea or a glass of Pinot Grigio while contemplating your dinner options.

Fairmont Miramar Hotel & Bungalows, 101 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, 310-576-7777; fairmont.com/santamonica



FROM TOP: The Fairmont Miramar's massive fig tree by night; the on-site French bistro, Fig; one of the Fairmont Miramar's bungalows