

## At Home in the Desert's Inn

Familial baggage notwithstanding,  
Lake La Quinta Inn is a bed-and-breakfast built for romance

IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE a relaxing weekend getaway at a cozy little desert bed-and-breakfast in La Quinta, near Palm Springs. Diana was seven months pregnant and excited about a two-night stay at Lake La Quinta Inn, a four-diamond, French-style chateau. But there was one hitch: We had no one to watch our kids, Justin, 6, and Conner, 4.

So we forewarned our hosts—this is, after all, a *couples* retreat—and drove from our Carlsbad home with the little savages strapped into the backseat. The plan was for Diana to enjoy herself while I occupied the boys elsewhere. Far be it from me to shatter the other guests' serenity, particularly after reading this in the inn's brochure: "In the late afternoon, we invite you for Interlude, an hour of fine wine, hors d'oeuvres and conversation with your hosts and other guests." That didn't exactly sound like Chuck E. Cheese.

We arrived around 2:30 on a Friday afternoon. Greeting us was innkeeper Tim Ellis, an expatriate Brit who came to this country 25 years ago with high hopes and a degree in hotel management and marketing. He escorted us to the Captain's Quarters, a nautical-theme suite in the detached "boathouse" with a balcony on the lake's edge, and a private outdoor Jacuzzi. As the family settled in, Ellis and I retreated to the inn's parlor, where we were joined by Giovanni Giammarco, the owner.

Lake La Quinta Inn was built four years ago as a metaphysical retreat. After 18 months, Giammarco, a Los Angeles real estate broker, took it over and transformed it into a bed-and-breakfast inn for couples. "My concept was built around romance," Giammarco says. "I want this to be the ideal spot for a honeymoon, a wedding anniversary or just a quiet getaway without the crowds and the noise."



Above: Lake La Quinta Inn snuggles right up to the shore.

Right: The lakeside suites offer fire and water.



The feeling you get as you enter Lake La Quinta Inn is of being welcomed into someone's home—someone who has good taste and is genuinely delighted to see you. The inn has nine guestrooms, each furnished in a different theme, from jungle (the Safari Room) to golf (the St. Andrews Room, with plaids and golf-related bric-a-brac). Adjacent to the inn are the boathouse, with two larger guestrooms, and a new facility housing a pair of high-end suites.

The pool and outdoor Jacuzzi are flanked by potted flowers and a neatly manicured lawn; a large hedge ensures privacy. "We want you to relax, not fight with 20 other people for the last chaise longue," Ellis says.

The next morning, we had a wonderful breakfast of Span-

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## travel

ish frittatas and English muffins, prepared and served by Ellis wearing a sparkling white chef's getup. "I'm versatile," he quipped. On the patio, my thoughts crystallize on how Lake La Quinta Inn differed from the large resorts nearby: This is for people who prefer an old country inn to Club Med. Nothing against the big resorts. But there, you are a guest. Here, you get the feeling you are a friend.

After breakfast, I took the boys to the Living Desert, a spectacular wildlife and botanical preserve in Palm Desert. Diana lounged by the pool and enjoyed a 90-minute prenatal massage from the on-site masseuse.

For dinner, it was the Yard House at the River complex in Rancho Mirage. The start-up Southern California chain prides itself on its large selection of beers and "American fusion" style of cooking. Walk in and you feel you've entered a T.G.I. Friday's for the jet set, with a glittery center bar, a bank of TV monitors and dim lighting. The food isn't cheap, but it's tasty and well prepared. The spicy tuna roll (\$9.45), listed as an appetizer, is a meal in itself. The zesty sauce is so good someone should label it and sell it at the front counter.

We left the next morning, after a leisurely few more hours in the pool and Jacuzzi. As the boys competed for my attention, I resolved to one day come back with only my wife. But even with the kids, we had a great time. And no fighting over the last chaise longue.

**IF YOU GO:** Lake La Quinta Inn is at 78-120 Caleo Bay in La Quinta. Rates range from \$199 (\$239 on weekends) for château rooms to \$329 (\$369 weekends) for the lakeside suites. Off-season rates (mid-May through September) are somewhat less. For more information, check the Web site ([www.lakelaquintainn.com](http://www.lakelaquintainn.com)) or call 888-226-4546.

The Living Desert is at 47900 Portola Avenue, Palm Desert; 760-346-5694. The Yard House is at 71800 Highway 111, Rancho Mirage; 760-779-1415. ■