

# Curious Traveler

IN SEARCH OF SECRET PLACES



## Island Bliss on the Mainland

Posted by [Shannon Switzer](#) in [The Curious Traveler](#) on May 7, 2013



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An aerial view of Paradise Point with Mission Bay in the background. (Photograph by Shannon Switzer)

After drying my gills in the desert, I decided it was time for some island fun. No, Max didn't have a snorkel, and I wasn't attempting to drive to Hawaii. I was simply heading over a bridge to a private Island in San Diego's [Mission Bay](#).

The island is home to a resort called [Paradise Point](#), and despite the cooler, cloudier weather, I found it to be just that: a perfect paradise, surrounded by the Pacific on all sides.

It was the perfect homecoming. I was so ecstatic to see the ocean, it caught me off guard since I'd only parted ways with it for a few weeks.

I watched kite-surfers from my room as they zigzagged across the bay and began wondering why people are so drawn to the big blue and if it had any measurable health benefits.

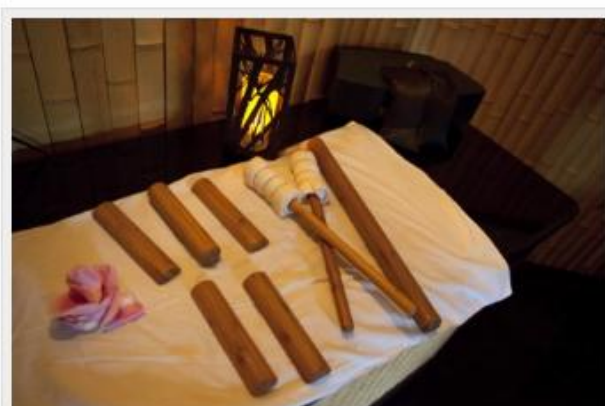
A name popped into my head: [Wallace J. Nichols](#). I'd read about him and his work at the [California Academy of Sciences](#) in an article in [Outside magazine](#) awhile back. A marine biologist, Nichols was on a mission to motivate the neuroscience community to prove this human-ocean connection by studying the ocean's effect on our brains.

[Dr. Michael Merzenich](#), a pioneer in the field of neuroplasticity, along with other notable scientists, agreed that there was value in the research Wallace proposed. Merzenich suggested that part of the ocean's allure stems from it being flat and lacking physical markers. While on land, we might be constantly scanning for danger on the horizon, gazing at the tranquil sea has a calming effect — similar to closing one's eyes.

So, as I opened the sliding glass door and soaked in the expansive (though, at the moment, not so flat!) surface just outside my room, I realized that if any of this was true, I would be getting a double whammy punch of health while in paradise.



The island décor in the Paradise Point lobby. (Photograph by Shannon Switzer)



The bamboo tools used for my sticks and stones massage. (Photograph by Shannon Switzer)

Not only would I be reducing my cortisol levels (which I learned could help ease headaches, back pain, sickness, and insomnia), by relaxing but I would also be activating my brain's pleasure center simply by being next to the sea. And all of this without the hassle of a long, expensive plane ride.

That afternoon, as I entered the spa at Paradise Point, which offers island-themed body treatments, massages, and facials, I concluded it was in fact a health trifecta. I could've gone with

Bali, Fiji, or Thailand, but on this afternoon, I decided to go with the traditional Hawaiian Lomilomi "sticks and stones" massage.



In Hawaiian culture, authentic Lomilomi is infused with prayer, called *pule*, and intention. The technique also emphasizes forgiveness and letting go, known as *ho'oponopono*.

Although I can't attest for the prayer part, I could definitely sense my attendant Lea's focus and intention as she explained each step of the massage. "The bamboo and rattan tools are used to wake up your muscles," she said. "Then the heated volcanic river rocks increase circulation and blood flow, which is great for releasing toxins." She was by far the youngest attendant I'd had during the trip, and I was hoping some of her glow would rub off on me.

After the massage, I felt the island juju wherever I roamed on the property, but especially at the **Barefoot Bar & Grill** where I was mesmerized by the leopard sharks and sting rays cruising around a nearby lagoon. Just a short walk away, Brett and Gavin at the marina got me set up in a rented 18-foot sailboat so I could explore the bay and soak up more of that ocean healing.

The sail, followed by some good old-fashioned pool lounging, piña colada in hand, and later a fresh seafood dinner at **Baleen**, the resort's fine dining restaurant, definitely had me feeling relaxed. My server convinced me to order what he called "the best scallops you've ever tasted." I was skeptical, as I'd had my fair share of delicious ones, but the tangerine glazed bivalves, nestled on a bed of corn and bacon pudding and topped with wood-roasted mushroom salad, may have won the blue ribbon after all.



The lounge outside Baleen. (Photograph by Shannon Switzer)

Finally, what better way to complete my relaxation regime than making s'mores over a beach bonfire right out in front of my hotel room? The island market run by the resort made it easy by selling firewood and a kit complete with chocolate, marshmallows, graham crackers, and roasting sticks. They were so tasty and fun to assemble that I had them for breakfast the next morning — the last one in paradise on my Road to Wellness tour.

As I munched, I readied myself for life off the road. I took stock of all I'd learned while traveling and thought about how to apply it at home.

I was pretty sure s'mores for breakfast wouldn't make the cut, so I savored every last gooey bite.

*Shannon is driving a Ford C-MAX Hybrid on her Road to Wellness tour. Follow the Curious Traveler's adventures on Twitter @CuriousTraveler and on Instagram @ShannonSwitzer.*