

A Sense Of Place

An Interview with Eric Jenkins, General Manager, Estancia La Jolla Hotel & Spa

EDITORS' NOTE *Embodying the concept of “where passion meets profession,” Eric Jenkins is a seasoned expert who has made a significant impact in the hospitality industry throughout his 20-year career. In September 2020, Jenkins joined the Estancia La Jolla Hotel & Spa team as its general manager. He led Estancia La Jolla through a comprehensive \$26 million renovation from 2023 to 2024, coinciding with the hotel’s 20th anniversary celebrations. Prior to joining Estancia La Jolla, Jenkins’ career highlights include his tenure as the hotel manager at Loews Hotels & Co. in San Diego, where he managed day-to-day resort operations resulting in over \$60 million in revenue. He was also awarded The San Diego Union-Tribune’s “Top Workplace” twice during his time at Loews Hotels & Co. and again in 2022 at Estancia La Jolla. Jenkins was named one of Hotel Management’s 2022 “GMs to Watch.” An advocate for giving back, Jenkins helped raise over \$75,000 for DonorsChoose.org through hotel charity events and has received the company’s “Good Neighbor” award for his community involvement. Prior to taking on the role as Hotel Manager at Loews Hotel & Co., Jenkins was the Director of Food & Beverage, where he oversaw the outlet and banquet operations. Jenkins attended Mercer University and Florida Southern College where he earned a BS degree in business administration, finance, and human resource management.*



Eric Jenkins

desirable communities. We’re unique in that we appeal to guests visiting for a variety of reasons – we’re a popular destination for leisure travel in addition to locals looking for elevated staycations and have maintained a solid presence in the meetings, groups, and weddings sector, all of which have been even further enhanced with our recent renovation project. There’s something for any type of guest, from our food and beverage experiences to our pool, spa and the garden grounds and artwork that set us apart.

What can guests expect from the recent renovation project at Estancia La Jolla?

Estancia La Jolla offers a welcoming yet luxurious escape with a guest experience dedicated to connection, thoughtful service, and storytelling around our place in La Jolla. 2024 marks our 20th anniversary and our renovation project is the culmination of our commitment to our heritage as well as our future. The transformation includes redesigned guest rooms and suites that blend our equestrian roots with modern luxury; a brand-new lobby experience including The Trading Post Bar which serves small plates and inspired cocktails; and The Palma

Bar & Grill, which is our signature pool experience and features new cabanas and a new food and beverage experience. We also made a few eco-conscious enhancements including the introduction of an apiary, herb garden, and butterfly garden, which are personal passion projects of mine. We use our herbs and honey throughout our food, beverage and spa programs – personal, localized touches can be seen around the property and play a pivotal role in the guest experience.

How valuable is it for Estancia La Jolla to have such a strong suite product?

A strong suite product is essential to our ability to cater to travelers seeking further elevated accommodations and additional space. We have 11 total suites that not only attract high-end leisure guests, but are frequently booked by business travelers who might need the added space to work from their room or are staying for an extended period. As we do a lot of weddings at Estancia La Jolla, a strong suite product also enhances our appeal as the ideal setting for preparations and post-wedding celebrations or mini-moons. Having a standout suite experience allows us to maximize revenue potential and further enhance our luxury positioning within a highly competitive leisure and business market.

PROPERTY BRIEF *Nestled between San Diego’s seaside villages of La Jolla and Del Mar, Estancia La Jolla Hotel & Spa (estancialajolla.com) exudes warm service, sun-drenched in charm with rancho-inspired architectural design. The standout SoCal oasis features 210 elegant guest rooms and suites, multiple dining destinations with flavors inspired by both Napa Valley and Mexico, 47,000 square feet of indoor and outdoor event space, a tranquil full-service spa and a rotating calendar of signature events and inspired experiences. Estancia La Jolla Hotel & Spa is the ideal destination for travelers both near and far seeking a comfortable respite set to the backdrop of West Coast sunset views.*

Will you provide an overview of Estancia La Jolla and how the property is positioned in the market?

Estancia La Jolla is a 210-room resort between La Jolla and Del Mar, two of San Diego’s most



The Trading Post Bar



Estancia La Jolla pool

How has Estancia La Jolla approached its culinary offerings and what are the keys to being successful in this part of the business?

We have four on-site food and beverage venues, each taking a different approach to ensure variety in the guest experience. Our signature full-service restaurants are Mustangs & Burros which offers Baja-inspired cuisine and cocktails, and Greenfinch Restaurant & Bar which serves American classics by day and innovative cocktails by evening. New concepts include The Trading Post Café & Bar – the bar is adjacent to the lobby and offers a craft cocktail and small bites menu and just around the corner, the café services artisan coffees, pastries and smaller breakfast items for guests on the go. The Palma Bar & Grill offers bites and cocktails poolside and draws inspiration from locally sourced ingredients and complements the laid-back vibe of the pool area. In addition to our venues, we're also known for our annual culinary events including Agave Fest and Whiskey & Wine that create opportunities for guests to further immerse themselves in our offerings and celebrate fine spirits and cuisine. In order to be successful with food and beverage at a hotel, it's critical to have a team that understands and can execute upon the vision, and is open to thinking creatively and trying new things. Consistency in quality and attention to sustainable sourcing are also incredibly important as these aspects are key drivers in ensuring guest retention.

Will you highlight Estancia La Jolla's spa and the focus that the property has placed on wellness?

Spa and wellness is a key pillar in the Estancia La Jolla guest experience and is an area where we're constantly working to elevate and evolve. Spa Estancia offers a variety of rejuvenating massages, facials, and body therapies designed to promote relaxation and restoration and features an outdoor area and boutique space that's expertly curated with top-tier brands. Beyond Spa Estancia,

we host rotating "Self-Care Sundays" activations open to locals and guests with rotating fitness and wellness experiences including yoga, meditation, and beyond.

What do you tell people about the strengths of San Diego from a tourism perspective?

In my role, I'm regularly asked what I love about San Diego and am often a guest's first interaction with a local. We have beautiful year-round weather, world-class beaches, an amazing food and beverage culture and so many different activities, niches, and neighborhoods to explore and experience the city from a different perspective. San Diego is also a very accessible city so it's easy to

spend part of the day at the beach and the evening downtown. When you're here, you know you're in a big city, but still feel its laid-back nature and slower pace shine through which creates a balance that you can't find everywhere.

How do you define the role of a general manager and how do you approach the role?

The easiest way to define my role is that I generally manage. I'm tasked with taking care of three main areas – our guests, our team, and our asset. By ensuring our asset is in pristine condition and by crafting the best possible experience for our guests and team, I am able to deliver the best possible financial performance for our stakeholders. My approach to this has always been to take care of our team first – they are the entry point to the Estancia La Jolla experience and ensure both our guests and property are cared for at the highest level. It's my biggest priority to prioritize our culture and the personal and professional well-being of our team to ensure we're successful at every turn.

What advice do you offer to young people interested in pursuing a career in the hospitality industry?

There's something intrinsically rewarding to the human spirit when you serve others. Many people find that through community and charity, and I happen to work and thrive in an industry where taking care of others is the sole function. This industry is challenging, exciting, fun, and most importantly deeply rewarding and for anyone who thrives in that type of environment, my biggest piece of advice is to find a home and a mentor. Finding the right culture to be a part of is so important to your development and in my career, the mentors I've had have played a significant role in my journey and my approach to managing people. Find someone that can help set your path, offer advice and guidance, and can be a role model to you, and be open to the learning moments and opportunities that arise along the way. ●



Garden View King room