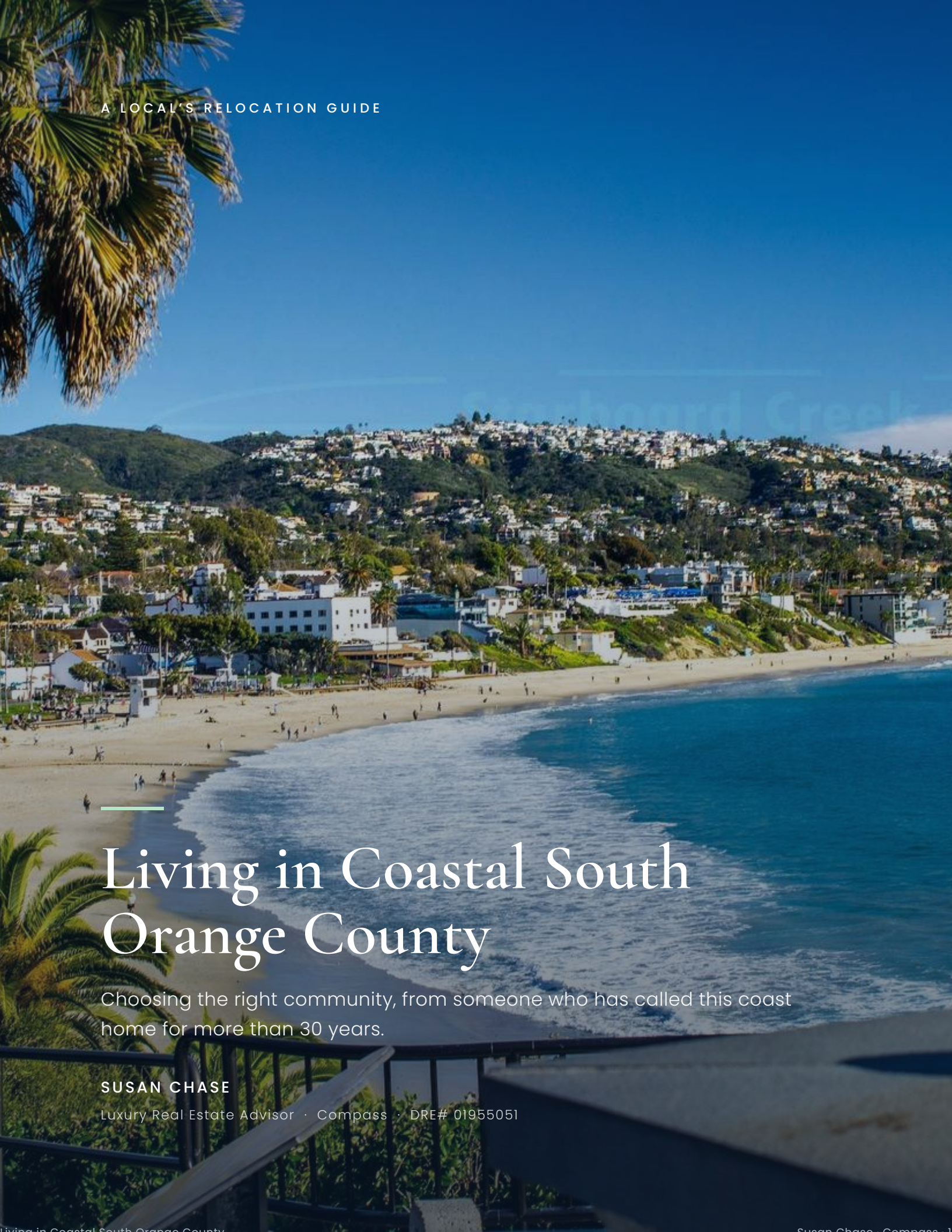




A LOCAL'S RELOCATION GUIDE

Living in Coastal South Orange County

Choosing the right community, from someone who has called this coast home for more than 30 years.

SUSAN CHASE

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FROM SUSAN

If you are thinking about moving to Coastal South Orange County and are not quite sure where to begin, I understand completely.

The people who reach out to me are a mix. Some are successful professionals, business owners, and executives. Some are couples entering their next chapter and right-sizing within California. Many are families putting down roots and looking for the right neighborhood to grow into. Some are relocating from Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle, or out of state. What they all have in common is this: they are not just looking for a house. They are looking for the right place to land.

I have lived in Coastal South Orange County for more than 30 years. I moved here while raising my three children and wanted strong schools, safe neighborhoods, outdoor living, and a lifestyle that felt less intense than Los Angeles. I have watched these communities grow from open space into the beautiful coastal towns they are today.

What I appreciate most now, and what my clients appreciate when they move here, is how livable this area truly is. You can walk the harbor in Dana Point before dinner. You can hike in Laguna Beach and still be home for a quiet evening. You can live two miles from the beach in San Juan Capistrano on a property with privacy and equestrian space. You can right-size in Laguna Niguel and still feel connected to everything.

There is real choice here. That is also what makes it confusing. The difference between one neighborhood and another can change your daily experience completely. One street may be walkable. Another may offer privacy and views. One community may be HOA driven with amenities. Another may feel more custom and independent.

This is where I come in. When someone is relocating here, I do not start with listings. I start with questions. How do you want to spend your time? Do you want to walk to dinner, or prefer space and privacy? Are you looking for single-level living? Do you entertain? Do you travel often and want lock-and-leave convenience?

My role is to help you narrow the geography intelligently before you ever begin touring homes, because in Coastal South Orange County, choosing the right community matters more than choosing the right house. This guide is designed to give you a clear, thoughtful understanding of each city, so that when you are ready to explore, you are doing it with confidence.

-
- More than 30 years on this coast, and 12-plus guiding this market
 - Top 1 to 1.5% of agents nationally (RealTrends)

- \$250M+ sold across 75+ luxury transactions
- 5.0 stars across 60+ reviews on Google and Zillow

Why Coastal South Orange County

Orange County tends to feel more organized and more navigable than larger metros. Buyers arrive here from all over. Some come from Los Angeles or the Bay Area, others from Seattle, Chicago, New York, Austin, and beyond, and many are right-sizing within California. Wherever they come from, they tend to notice the same thing first. Daily life simply functions more easily. Traffic is more localized, neighborhoods feel residential, and it becomes easier to balance work, family, and personal time.

For many, the move means more space and a genuine outdoor lifestyle without giving up excellent dining, healthcare, and culture. Beaches, trails, and parks are part of everyday life here, not weekend destinations. For those coming from colder or landlocked places, the year-round coastal climate is often the draw. For those leaving denser, more expensive cities, it is the room to breathe.

Schools are a major reason families put down roots here. Most of the region is served by the well-regarded Capistrano Unified School District, while Laguna Beach has its own highly rated district, and strong academics, athletics, and arts programs are the norm across these communities. Families who prefer private or faith-based education have excellent options nearby as well, from St. Margaret's Episcopal School and JSerra Catholic High School in San Juan Capistrano to a range of respected independent and parochial schools within an easy drive. Whether you lean public or private, education rarely asks you to compromise here.

Most of all, this region offers choice without chaos. You can live near the coast or slightly inland, prioritize walkability or privacy, choose views, trails, or amenities, all within a place that still feels cohesive and well cared for. And within the county, the south coastal communities offer some of the most compelling combinations of natural beauty, lifestyle, and livability.

Where they are, and who they suit

This guide covers five of the most sought-after communities in Coastal South Orange County. Three sit right on the water. Laguna Niguel and San Juan Capistrano are a short drive inland, which is exactly what gives them more space and privacy. Here is how they line up, north to south.



Dana Point



POPULATION

~33,000

SIZE

~7 sq mi

COAST

On the coastline

MEDIAN SINGLE-FAMILY

\$2,875,000

2025 RANGE

\$495,000 to \$34,000,000

THE FEEL

Relaxed but polished harbor town

OVERVIEW

Dana Point sits at the southern edge of Orange County, set between Laguna Beach to the north and San Clemente to the south. It is one of the few coastal cities in Southern California that truly feels centered around the ocean, built along bluffs and headlands with many neighborhoods oriented toward water views, harbor access, and outdoor living.

It is well positioned, with immediate access to Pacific Coast Highway and the 5 Freeway, making it easy to travel north toward Laguna Beach and Newport or south toward San Clemente and San Diego. John Wayne Airport is typically a 30 to 40 minute drive. What draws people here is not just proximity to the coast, but how integrated the ocean is into daily life. The harbor, beaches, trails, and neighborhoods all feel connected, and the city has kept its coastal-town identity while still offering refined homes, luxury enclaves, and resort-level amenities. People often describe it as relaxed but polished. Coastal without being chaotic, upscale without being flashy.

BY THE NUMBERS

Despite its compact size, Dana Point offers a wide range of coastal living, from harbor-adjacent neighborhoods to elevated streets with sweeping ocean views. The median sold price for a single-family home was \$2,875,000 (Orange County REALTORS, late 2025), a market highly sensitive to location, view orientation, and proximity to the harbor and coastline. In 2025 the lowest sale closed at \$495,000 and the highest at \$34,000,000. Single-level opportunities exist in select neighborhoods but are limited and highly sought after. HOA presence varies, with higher concentration in gated or planned communities and many

established streets with no HOA at all. Here, understanding the micro-neighborhood is essential, as pricing can shift dramatically from one street to the next.

WHAT DAILY LIFE FEELS LIKE

Dana Point is one of those places where you can build small rituals that genuinely improve your quality of life. People start mornings with harbor walks, coffee runs, trail loops, or a quick beach stop before the day begins. It is common to see neighbors out walking, biking, or meeting friends for breakfast. Errands tend to be simple because the city is compact, and life leans outdoors. You can be at the harbor, on the Headlands trails, or sitting at a restaurant with a view in minutes. Weekends often revolve around the coast, and it feels like a coastal town people actually live in, not just visit. Compared to larger metros, Dana Point gives you room to breathe, and many buyers tell me that daily life here feels less rushed and more connected once they settle in.

OUTDOOR LIFESTYLE

The Dana Point Headlands offer some of the most scenic coastal hiking in Southern California, with sweeping ocean views and well-maintained trails. The Bluff Top Trail is a favorite for daily walks and runs, with access points down to the beaches and the historic 1920s stone arch along the way. The Strands and Salt Creek coastal path connects to nearby coastal areas and is popular for walking, jogging, and biking. Beaches are varied and highly usable: Salt Creek and Strands for beauty and surf, Baby Beach inside the harbor for families with young children, and Doheny State Beach for camping and long shoreline walks.

GOLF & RECREATION

The city is home to Monarch Beach Golf Links, a coastal course known for ocean views and an approachable atmosphere. Set just above the shoreline, it reflects Dana Point's overall lifestyle: scenic, social, and never overly formal. Many residents fit in a round followed by lunch or time at the beach rather than dedicating an entire day to it.

FOOD, COFFEE & SOCIAL LIFE

Some of my personal favorites include Coastal Kitchen for its relaxed coastal feel, Gianna's for elevated Italian, and Glasspar for seafood and social dining with vibrant energy. These are places residents return to regularly, not just for special occasions. Dining here tends to be social and local, and the Lantern District continues to grow as a walkable dining and social hub.

NEIGHBORHOODS & HOUSING

The Lantern District is the most walkable area, close to restaurants, shops, and harbor access, with everything from coastal cottages to newer custom builds.

Monarch Beach offers a resort-oriented lifestyle near luxury resorts and golf, designed for indoor-outdoor living.

Niguel Shores is a guard-gated coastal community known for private beach access, amenities, and a true sense of neighborhood.

Other pockets near Capistrano Beach and inland Dana Point offer more flexibility in price and style.

THE HARBOR TRANSFORMATION

Dana Point Harbor is in the middle of a roughly 600 million dollar revitalization, one of the most significant coastal investments in Southern California. The plan reimagines the harbor across three parts: a fully rebuilt marina, an expanded commercial core with new waterfront restaurants, shops, and public gathering space, and two new hotels. The marina is already well along, with completion expected around 2027, and the waterfront boardwalk will nearly double in length, creating a continuous walkable path from Doheny State Beach to Baby Beach. Dana Point is also a designated venue for the 2028 Olympic Games, when the harbor will host international sailing. Existing shops, restaurants, and the sportfishing and whale watching fleet stay open throughout construction, so daily life at the harbor continues while the work is underway. For residents, the everyday experience keeps getting better, and for buyers, proximity to the harbor is becoming a more meaningful part of long-term value.

LOCAL HIGHLIGHTS

- ✓ Dana Point Harbor and its ongoing waterfront redevelopment
- ✓ The Headlands and Bluff Top Trail for daily coastal walks
- ✓ Salt Creek, Strands, Baby Beach, and Doheny State Beach
- ✓ Monarch Beach Golf Links along the shoreline
- ✓ The walkable Lantern District for dining and shops

BEST FOR

Buyers seeking a true coastal-town feel

Right-sizers who want lifestyle and convenience

Luxury buyers looking for views or gated communities

Second-home buyers who want ease and access

Buyers relocating from Los Angeles or the Bay Area who want quiet without isolation

SUSAN'S TAKE

What most buyers do not expect is how livable Dana Point feels day to day. It is easy to romanticize coastal living, but here it actually works. I help buyers think beyond views and price, about daily routines, walkability, trail access, and HOA structures, because two homes here can offer completely different lifestyles depending on location and orientation. For many of my clients, Dana Point feels like home faster than they expected.

Laguna Beach



POPULATION

~23,000

SIZE

~25 sq mi

COAST

On the coast, walkable coves

MEDIAN SINGLE-FAMILY

\$2,737,500

2025 RANGE

\$800,000 to \$22,000,000

THE FEEL

Historic, art-forward beach town

OVERVIEW

Laguna Beach is one of the most iconic and historic beach towns in California, and it lives differently from anywhere else in Orange County. Set between the Pacific and the coastal hills, it stretches along a series of coves, bluffs, and winding streets that give it an unmistakable character. Pacific Coast Highway runs through the heart of the city, but much of daily life centers on walkable neighborhoods, scenic side streets, and a downtown that prioritizes people over cars. People move here for the experience: the scenery, the walkability, the creative energy, and the sense that life moves at a more deliberate pace, where architecture, art, and nature all shape how the city feels.

BY THE NUMBERS

The median sold price for a single-family home was \$2,737,500 (Orange County REALTORS, late 2025). In 2025 the lowest sale closed at \$800,000 and the highest at \$22,000,000. Housing is highly diverse, from historic cottages to contemporary rebuilds, custom ocean-view homes, and architecturally significant properties. Condos and townhomes exist but are more limited than in neighboring cities. HOAs vary by pocket, and many of the most iconic neighborhoods are non-HOA, driven by micro-location factors like view corridors, walkability, and street positioning. Laguna Beach is less about scale and more about setting, which is exactly why local insight matters so much here.

WHAT DAILY LIFE FEELS LIKE

Living in Laguna Beach feels immersive. Mornings often start with a walk to the beach, coffee downtown, or a drive through Laguna Canyon framed by hills and light. Errands feel different here. Many people walk instead

of drive, especially in the Village. Downtown is frequently roped off for events, art walks, and festivals, creating a true pedestrian environment, and locals plan their days around the flow of the town, the ocean conditions, and the season rather than rigid schedules. Weekends are spent walking the coves, browsing galleries, meeting friends for lunch, or hiking the trails above town. It is a lifestyle built around experience rather than convenience alone.

OUTDOOR LIFESTYLE

Laguna Beach is defined by its coastline. Main Beach sits at the center of town, while dozens of coves stretch north and south, each with its own personality for swimming, tide pooling, snorkeling, or simply sitting by the water. Beyond the beaches, the trails in the hills above town deliver sweeping ocean views and a sense of escape minutes from downtown. Outdoor living here is not an activity. It is part of the rhythm of everyday life.

GOLF & RECREATION

The city is home to The Ranch at Laguna Beach, the only golf course within Laguna Beach. Set within Laguna Canyon, the course feels secluded and peaceful, surrounded by rolling hills and native landscape, and it attracts golfers who value setting over formality. The Ranch is also known for its restaurant, a local favorite and social destination even for those who do not golf. Beyond golf, residents enjoy swimming, paddleboarding, surfing, snorkeling, yoga, and wellness that take full advantage of the coastal environment.

FOOD, COFFEE & SOCIAL LIFE

Laguna Beach balances local favorites with destination restaurants, and downtown is walkable and lively, especially in the evenings and on weekends. A few I personally recommend include Nick's Laguna Beach, Oliver's Osteria, Broadway by Amar Santana, and Las Brisas, each offering a different take on coastal dining. Social life tends to center around downtown, the beach, and community events, where art walks, seasonal festivals, and outdoor gatherings create natural ways to connect.

ARTS & CULTURE

Laguna Beach is one of the country's true art towns, with dozens of galleries concentrated in and around the Village. On the first Thursday of every month, the free First Thursdays Art Walk opens more than forty galleries into the evening, with a complimentary trolley linking them and the Laguna Art Museum. In summer the city becomes a cultural destination in its own right. The Festival of Arts, established in 1932, and its world-famous Pageant of the Masters bring celebrated works of art to life on stage as living pictures, set to a live orchestra, alongside the Sawdust Art Festival and Art-A-Fair. For many residents, this calendar of galleries and festivals is not a backdrop. It is part of why they chose Laguna Beach.

NEIGHBORHOODS & HOUSING

Laguna Village offers the most walkable lifestyle, close to beaches, restaurants, galleries, and events.

North Laguna feels more residential while staying near downtown and the coves.

South Laguna is quieter and more tucked away, with beautiful coastal pockets and scenic views.

Laguna Canyon provides more space, greenery, and privacy at a different pace while staying close to town.

LOCAL HIGHLIGHTS

- ✓ Main Beach and dozens of swimmable, walkable coves
- ✓ A walkable Village of galleries, dining, and festivals
- ✓ Hillside trails with sweeping ocean views minutes from town
- ✓ The Ranch at Laguna Beach, the city's only golf course
- ✓ Art walks, seasonal festivals, and a strong creative community

BEST FOR

Buyers who prioritize walkability, scenery, and lifestyle

Second-home buyers seeking a true coastal experience

Right-sizers who value location and experience over square footage

Buyers relocating from Los Angeles or San Francisco who appreciate culture and environment

Those drawn to art, architecture, and natural beauty

SUSAN'S TAKE

Laguna Beach attracts people who want to feel connected to where they live. What surprises many buyers is how much the city shapes daily life, from how often you walk to how you spend your weekends. I help clients understand which parts of Laguna Beach truly fit their lifestyle, whether that means the heart of downtown or a quieter hillside neighborhood. It is not a one-size-fits-all city, and choosing the right pocket makes all the difference.

Laguna Niguel



POPULATION

~64,000

SIZE

~14 sq mi

COAST

5 to 10 min to the coast

MEDIAN SINGLE-FAMILY

\$2,298,571

2025 RANGE

\$430,000 to \$16,250,000

THE FEEL

Refined, residential, master-planned

OVERVIEW

Laguna Niguel holds a very special place in my heart. I have lived here for more than 30 years and raised my three children here, watching the city grow from rolling open space into one of the most thoughtfully planned and livable communities in South Orange County. People often overlook it at first because it does not sit directly on the sand, but those who choose Laguna Niguel quickly realize why so many residents never leave. It is centrally located just inland from Dana Point and Laguna Beach, bordered by Laguna Hills, Aliso Viejo, San Juan Capistrano, and Dana Point, with easy access to both the 5 Freeway and the 73 Toll Road. While the city itself does not have beaches, you are typically less than ten minutes from Salt Creek Beach, Dana Point Harbor, Strands Beach, and the Laguna Beach coves. The overall feel is refined, residential, and peaceful, with beautifully maintained streets, parks, and open space. People move here for the balance: space, greenery, and quiet, without feeling disconnected from the coast or culture.

BY THE NUMBERS

The median sold price for a single-family home was \$2,298,571 (Orange County REALTORS, late 2025). The lowest sale closed at \$430,000 and the highest at \$16,250,000. Housing includes traditional single-family neighborhoods, gated enclaves, and a meaningful mix of condos and townhomes, particularly in communities designed for low-maintenance living. HOAs are common in many planned communities, while other established neighborhoods have none. Laguna Niguel is known for its master-planned roots, which show up in wide streets, thoughtful layouts, and an abundance of parks and open space woven throughout the city.

WHAT DAILY LIFE FEELS LIKE

Living in Laguna Niguel feels grounded and easy. Mornings often start with coffee runs to local favorites, walking the neighborhood, or a trail hike before the day gets busy. Errands are simple and efficient, with grocery stores, fitness studios, medical offices, and shopping centers close by. Traffic is present at peak hours, but nothing like Los Angeles or San Francisco. Weekends center on outdoor time and community: the Badlands Trail, brunch with friends, youth sports, or a quick drive to the beach without fighting tourist crowds. Compared to big cities, Laguna Niguel gives you back your time. Days feel less reactive and more your own.

OUTDOOR LIFESTYLE

While the city does not have its own beaches, it more than makes up for it with trails, parks, and open space.

Badlands Trail is a local favorite for hiking and biking, connecting to Salt Creek with sweeping views and varied terrain.

Extensive neighborhood walking paths and greenbelts run throughout the city.

Numerous community parks are ideal for families, dogs, and casual outdoor time.

Coastal trails in Dana Point and Laguna Beach are minutes away.

GOLF & RECREATION

El Niguel Country Club is a cornerstone of the community and one of the most recognizable private clubs in South Orange County, known for its classic layout, mature landscaping, and strong member culture. Many residents are drawn as much to the social side, the dining, events, and decades of connection, as to the golf. For tennis and fitness, the Laguna Niguel Racquet Club is a popular gathering place, offering tennis, pickleball, fitness, and social programming for all ages. The city also runs a wide range of recreational facilities, from sports fields to community centers and organized programs that support youth and adult recreation alike.

FAMILIES & COMMUNITY LIFE

Laguna Niguel is especially well suited to families with young children. The city is built around parks, greenbelts, and open space, and its recreation runs deep, from youth soccer, baseball, and basketball leagues to swim, tennis, and pickleball at the Laguna Niguel Racquet Club and the community pools. Whether a child gravitates toward team sports or individual pursuits, there is usually a local program for it, along with camps, classes, and year-round city activities. The arts are part of the picture too, with community concerts, seasonal events, and art programming, and the galleries and festivals of Laguna Beach only a short drive away. For many young families, this balance of space, safety, and organized activity is exactly what they are looking for.

FOOD, COFFEE & SOCIAL LIFE

Laguna Niguel has a comfortable, local dining scene that reflects how people live here. A few of my favorites: Bottega Angelina for casual Italian and bakery staples, Peet's Coffee for everyday routines and meetups, Calo Kitchen for healthy, modern dining, and Legends Restaurant for a classic local experience. Dining here is more about consistency and community than chasing the latest hotspot. Residents have their regular places and love running into neighbors.

NEIGHBORHOODS & HOUSING

Laguna Niguel is all about micro-neighborhoods, and this is where a local guide truly matters.

Bear Brand Ranch for gated luxury and estate-style living

Marina Hills and Kite Hill for community amenities and active lifestyles

Beacon Hill and El Niguel Heights for traditional Cape Cod style homes and amenities

Monarch Summit and similar areas for single-level living, especially popular with right-sizers

Hillside neighborhoods offering views, privacy, and larger lots

LOCAL HIGHLIGHTS

- ✓ Badlands Trail and miles of greenbelts and walking paths
- ✓ El Niguel Country Club and the Laguna Niguel Racquet Club
- ✓ Single-level and low-maintenance options for right-sizers
- ✓ Less than ten minutes to Salt Creek and Dana Point Harbor
- ✓ Wide streets, parks, and a master-planned residential feel

BEST FOR

Right-sizers looking for space, comfort, and low-maintenance options

Buyers who want proximity to the coast without coastal density

Families prioritizing schools, parks, and community

Buyers relocating from Los Angeles, San Francisco, or out of state who want lifestyle without intensity

People who value privacy, greenery, and convenience over walkable nightlife

SUSAN'S TAKE

Laguna Niguel is often the city buyers did not know they were looking for. Many start their search focused on coastal cities, then realize how much they value space and daily livability. Because I have lived here for more than three decades and raised my children here, I help buyers think beyond the surface: how they want their days to feel, what kind of neighborhood energy fits them, and how different pockets support that lifestyle. That perspective makes all the difference.

San Clemente



POPULATION

~64,000

SIZE

~20 sq mi

COAST

On the coastline

MEDIAN SINGLE-FAMILY

\$1,902,500

2025 RANGE

\$405,000 to \$10,100,000

THE FEEL

An authentic Spanish Village
by the Sea

OVERVIEW

San Clemente sits at the southernmost edge of Orange County, just north of San Diego County, with the Pacific along its western border. Bordered by Dana Point to the north, Camp Pendleton to the south, and rolling foothills to the east, it has a distinct sense of separation and identity, often feeling like a coastal town that exists in its own world. Often called the "Spanish Village by the Sea," San Clemente was developed around a cohesive architectural vision of white stucco homes and red tile roofs. That influence is still very much part of the city's character, though today there is a wide mix of styles: classic beach cottages, updated coastal homes, contemporary builds, hillside properties, and newer planned communities. People move here because it feels like a real beach town, not a resort and not a suburb trying to be coastal. It offers surf culture, walkable areas, an active downtown, and established neighborhoods that feel lived-in and authentic.

BY THE NUMBERS

The median sold price for a single-family home was \$1,902,500 (Orange County REALTORS, late 2025). The lowest sale closed at \$405,000 and the highest at \$10,100,000. San Clemente offers a mix of single-family homes, condos, and townhomes, with pricing driven heavily by proximity to the ocean, walkability to downtown, view orientation, and neighborhood character. HOA prevalence varies widely depending on whether you are in a planned community, a coastal condo area, or an established street neighborhood. The city offers more variety in lot size, home style, and neighborhood feel than many coastal cities, which is one of its strongest draws.

WHAT DAILY LIFE FEELS LIKE

Daily life here has a relaxed, coastal rhythm. Mornings often start with ocean air, a walk along the beach trail, coffee downtown, school drop-offs, or an early surf session. Many residents structure their days around the outdoors rather than around traffic or rigid schedules. Errands feel manageable, and the city is easy to navigate. Weekends revolve around the beach, the pier, coastal trails, and downtown, with a strong sense of routine mixed with spontaneity. Downtown along Del Mar Street is a major lifestyle driver, where dining, shopping, and community energy create that classic walkable coastal main street. Compared to Los Angeles or San Francisco, San Clemente feels slower, more grounded, and more connected to nature.

OUTDOOR LIFESTYLE

The beaches are a major draw. Trestles is world-famous for surfing and attracts surfers from around the globe. T-Street is a local favorite with classic beach-town energy, and North Beach and the areas near the pier are popular for swimming, walking, and relaxed beach days. The San Clemente Coastal Trail runs along the ocean and is heavily used for walking, jogging, biking, and sunset strolls, with the pier as a focal gathering place. Hillside neighborhoods offer scenic walking routes and ocean views, while inland areas provide parks and open space.

SURF CULTURE

San Clemente is one of the true capitals of California surf culture. It sits at the doorstep of Trestles, a world-class series of breaks that will host Olympic surfing in 2028, and the city has deep roots in the sport, from the magazines and board shapers who helped build the surf industry to the champions who grew up in the water here. Some of my clients move to San Clemente specifically for this. They want to live where surfing is part of daily life, where an early session before work is normal, and where the culture around the ocean feels authentic rather than manufactured.

GOLF & RECREATION

Talega Golf Club is a centerpiece of the community, known for its scenic coastal foothill setting, rolling fairways, and strong neighborhood presence. It appeals to avid golfers and to residents who simply enjoy living around beautifully maintained open space. San Clemente Municipal Golf Course is a local favorite for its accessibility, relaxed atmosphere, and ocean-air backdrop, popular with long-time residents and newer arrivals alike.

FOOD, COFFEE & SOCIAL LIFE

Downtown, centered on Del Mar Street, is one of the city's most important lifestyle anchors and a major reason people fall in love with living here. It is walkable, lively, and lined with restaurants, cafes, shops, and gathering spots that feel local and approachable rather than overly polished. Some of my favorites include Vine, Nick's San Clemente, South of Nick's, and Rare Society. Downtown feels especially alive in the evenings and on weekends, often paired with a walk to the pier or along the coastal trail.

NEIGHBORHOODS & HOUSING

One thing worth understanding early is how the 5 Freeway shapes the city. On the ocean side of the freeway, neighborhoods like Southwest San Clemente, the Pier Bowl, and central downtown offer the classic beach-town experience: cottages, custom homes, and ocean-view properties within walking distance of the sand, the pier, and Del Mar Street. East of the freeway, the landscape shifts to newer, planned neighborhoods in the hills. Talega is the best known, but it is far from the only one. Forster Ranch, Rancho San Clemente, and Marblehead all offer newer construction, larger lots, cul-de-sac streets, and hillside or ocean views, often at a different value than the coastal pockets. Choosing between ocean side and inland is one of the most important early decisions here, and it usually comes down to whether you prioritize walkability to the beach or space and a newer home.

Downtown and Pier Bowl appeal to buyers who value walkability, beach access, and being close to Del Mar Street and the pier.

Southwest San Clemente is highly sought after for its proximity to beaches, charm, and established feel.

Talega offers newer homes, planned neighborhoods, trails, and golf, popular with families wanting a structured community.

North San Clemente provides more space, hillside living, and a quieter feel, often with ocean or canyon views.

LOCAL HIGHLIGHTS

- ✓ Trestles, T-Street, and the pier for surf and beach days
- ✓ The San Clemente Coastal Trail running along the ocean
- ✓ A walkable downtown along Del Mar Street
- ✓ Talega Golf Club and San Clemente Municipal Golf Course
- ✓ Spanish Village architecture and an authentic beach-town feel

BEST FOR

Buyers seeking a true beach-town environment

Families who want space, lifestyle, and community

Right-sizers who still want energy, walkability, and coastal access

Second-home buyers looking for a classic Southern California experience

Buyers relocating from LA, the Bay Area, or out of state who want less congestion and more balance

SUSAN'S TAKE

San Clemente attracts people who want to feel connected to where they live. What often surprises buyers is how strong the sense of community is. People recognize familiar faces downtown, gather naturally along the coast, and truly use the outdoor lifestyle every day. I help buyers think through where they will actually spend their time, because walkability, beach access, hills versus flat, and traffic flow matter far more than square footage here.

San Juan Capistrano



POPULATION

~35,000

SIZE

~14 sq mi

COAST

~2 mi to the beach

MEDIAN SINGLE-FAMILY

\$2,090,000

2025 RANGE

\$254,000 to \$6,700,000

THE FEEL

Historic charm with room to breathe

OVERVIEW

San Juan Capistrano is one of the most historic and charming communities in Coastal South Orange County, with a lifestyle that feels grounded, authentic, and deeply connected to place. Located about two miles from the coast, it offers easy access to the beaches in Dana Point and San Clemente while keeping a distinctly different atmosphere from its coastal neighbors. Three core elements shape daily life: its historic roots, its equestrian heritage, and its vibrant, walkable downtown. At the heart of it all is Mission San Juan Capistrano, one of California's most treasured landmarks and part of the city's everyday identity. It is also one of the most equestrian-friendly cities in South Orange County, where horse trails, equestrian zoning, and larger parcels create a lifestyle that is increasingly rare this close to the coast. Add a downtown that has evolved beautifully, with River Street Marketplace, expanded dining, boutique shops, and a new performing arts district underway, and you have a place people choose for character, space, and community, all within minutes of the beach.

BY THE NUMBERS

The median sold price for a single-family home was \$2,090,000 (Orange County REALTORS, late 2025). The lowest sale closed at \$254,000 and the highest at \$6,700,000. Housing ranges from historic-adjacent homes and village neighborhoods to gated communities, equestrian properties, and larger-lot custom estates. Single-family living dominates many pockets, while condos and townhomes exist in select areas. HOA prevalence depends heavily on neighborhood type, with more structure in planned communities and less in older or equestrian-zoned areas. What sets San Juan Capistrano apart is the availability of land, flexible zoning, and equestrian properties so close to the coast.

WHAT DAILY LIFE FEELS LIKE

Daily life here feels grounded, familiar, and intentional. Mornings often begin with quiet walks, coffee downtown, or time outdoors surrounded by hills and open space. The pace is noticeably slower than the coastal cities, but never isolated. Errands are easy, traffic is lighter, and the downtown feels like a true village where people recognize familiar faces and support local businesses. Weekends are often spent walking the Los Rios Historic District, enjoying farmers markets, dining downtown, attending community events, or heading a few minutes west to the beach. The ability to shift easily between inland quiet and coastal energy is one of the city's greatest strengths. For buyers coming from Los Angeles, San Francisco, or other large metros, San Juan Capistrano often feels like a reset: more space, less noise, a lifestyle that feels sustainable.

OUTDOOR & EQUESTRIAN LIFESTYLE

Outdoor living is central here, especially for those drawn to space and nature. The city is known for its equestrian zoning and trail systems, which allow horseback riding, larger parcels, and a more rural lifestyle without sacrificing convenience. This equestrian culture is not an accessory; it is part of the city's fabric. Beyond riding, the surrounding hills and open space offer excellent hiking, walking, and cycling, and many homes feature expansive yards, gardens, and outdoor entertaining areas. Unlike beachfront cities where outdoor life revolves around crowds, San Juan Capistrano offers a quieter, more spacious outdoor experience.

GOLF & RECREATION

Marbella Country Club is one of the area's most established private clubs, known for its classic course design, mature landscaping, and strong sense of community. It appeals to residents who value tradition, privacy, and a club environment that feels social without being showy. San Juan Hills Golf Club provides a more relaxed and accessible experience, set against rolling terrain with scenic views and a welcoming atmosphere, popular with locals who enjoy golf as part of their weekly routine.

FOOD, COFFEE & SOCIAL LIFE

The dining and social scene has grown into one of the most appealing in South Orange County. The historic downtown is now complemented by River Street Marketplace, a walkable hub of restaurants, shops, and gathering spaces that has brought new energy to the area. Local favorites include Bloom, Heritage Barbecue, Tavern at the Mission, Trevor's at the Tracks, and the cafes throughout the Los Rios Historic District. Dining here is unhurried and community-focused, a mix of historic charm and modern energy.

ARTS, CULTURE & COMMUNITY

San Juan Capistrano continues to invest in its cultural future while honoring its past. A new performing arts district is being developed downtown, adding another dimension to the city's cultural life. That commitment signals thoughtful, continued growth that supports both quality of life and long-term property values.

NEIGHBORHOODS & HOUSING

- The Los Rios Historic District appeals to buyers who love charm, walkability, and historic architecture.
- Mission-adjacent and downtown neighborhoods offer proximity to dining, events, and cultural landmarks.
- Equestrian-zoned areas attract buyers seeking land, privacy, and flexibility, including guest houses and horse facilities.
- Golf course communities near Marbella and San Juan Hills appeal to buyers who value scenic views and amenities.

LOCAL HIGHLIGHTS

- ✓ Mission San Juan Capistrano, founded in 1776 by Father Junípero Serra
- ✓ Equestrian zoning, horse trails, and larger parcels near the coast
- ✓ River Street Marketplace and a growing downtown dining scene
- ✓ Marbella Country Club and San Juan Hills Golf Club
- ✓ A new performing arts district underway downtown

BEST FOR

Buyers seeking historic charm and character

Equestrian enthusiasts and buyers looking for land

Those who want space and privacy within minutes of the coast

Families and right-sizers drawn to a true village downtown

Buyers relocating from larger metros who want a grounded, sustainable pace

SUSAN'S TAKE

San Juan Capistrano rewards buyers who want something with roots. It is one of the few places this close to the coast where you can still find land, privacy, and equestrian zoning alongside a downtown that keeps getting better. Zoning and lifestyle vary significantly from one pocket to the next, so choosing the right neighborhood matters a great deal here. When the fit is right, this city feels less like a purchase and more like a homecoming.

What to know before you start

Relocating here is different from buying in many other markets. Lifestyle and location often matter more than size alone. These are the conversations I like to have early, so everything feels clear from the beginning.

Microclimates matter

Two neighborhoods five minutes apart can feel completely different. One is warmer and sunnier, another gets more morning marine layer. It shapes how you use your outdoor space all year.

HOAs vary widely

Some communities offer strong amenities and a true neighborhood feel. Others simply maintain common areas. Fees and rules affect renovations, rentals, and resale, so it is worth understanding early.

Lifestyle drives value

Ocean views, walk-to-dinner pockets, harbor access, and trail systems often carry more weight here than an extra bedroom. Buyers consistently prioritize how a place lives.

Renovation differs by city

Laguna Beach, Laguna Niguel, and San Juan Capistrano can feel like different worlds for permitting and timelines. We talk through this early so there are no surprises.

The most common misstep. Even experienced buyers start by trying to choose the right city. The better approach is choosing the right pocket, and then the right street. Two homes in the same city can live completely differently depending on orientation, traffic flow, and walkability.

The move, step by step

No pressure and no guesswork. Here is how the process tends to unfold, whether you are local or starting from out of the area.

1

Start with a conversation

We talk through how you want to live and what matters most. No obligation, just clarity. This is where the right plan begins.

2

Get your numbers in place

A short conversation with a trusted lender gives you a clear budget and a strong position when the right home appears. I am happy to connect you.

3

Narrow neighborhoods, then tour

We focus on the pockets that fit you, then tour in person or by detailed video. Many of my relocating buyers begin entirely from out of the area.

4

Make a strategic offer

When you find the one, I guide terms and negotiation with care. The goal is the right home on the right terms, never simply overpaying to win.

5

Inspections to keys

We review inspections and disclosures together, coordinate the details, and move toward closing with confidence. Then I hand you the keys.

A track record built on relationships

Most of my business comes from repeat clients and referrals, which is the part I am proudest of. The numbers matter, but the trust behind them matters more.

\$250M+	75+	Top 1–1.5%	5.0 ★
CAREER SALES	LUXURY TRANSACTIONS	NATIONALLY	60+ REVIEWS

★★★★★

“Susan is one of the most thoughtful and kind people we have ever had the pleasure of doing business with. She is attentive and patient, and really creative with getting the deal done. We were blown away by her attention to detail and willingness to go above and beyond while we were in escrow. We have bought a few homes over the past decade, and our experience with her was truly top notch.”

LINDSAY AND LOU, RELOCATED FROM CHICAGO

★★★★★

“Susan genuinely cares about her clients and always goes above and beyond. We have been consistently impressed with her expertise, patience, and knowledge of Dana Point and the surrounding areas. She guided us through the negotiation and has stayed engaged long after the sale. She is the most engaged and responsive agent we have ever had the pleasure of working with.”

MUNIRA AND FAREED, RELOCATED FROM AUSTIN

5.0 stars across 60+ reviews on Google and Zillow · read them all at livingincoastaloc.com



FINAL THOUGHTS

When you land in the right neighborhood, everything else falls into place

Coastal South Orange County offers real choice. You can live near the harbor, in the hills, close to downtown, or tucked into a quieter residential pocket. The key is aligning geography with how you want your days to actually feel.

After living here for more than 30 years and guiding many relocations and right-sizing decisions, I can tell you this with confidence. Get the neighborhood right, and the rest tends to follow.

And for many of my clients, this is a process. It can take time to refine what feels right. Sometimes clarity comes after walking a few neighborhoods, sometimes after seeing what does not fit. That is completely normal.

Billy and Staci were relocating from New York, and they looked for the better part of two years. When the right home finally came up, it was in a neighborhood I had a feeling they would love from our very first conversation. They trusted me on it. Today they tell me they are living the dream. They adore where they live, and they have found a whole circle of friends they never expected. It was never really about the house. It was about the life that came with it.

SUSAN, ON A COUPLE WHO NOW CALL THIS COAST HOME

I have the time and the patience to guide you through it thoughtfully. There is no pressure here. My role is to simplify what feels complex, help you see clearly, and move at a pace that feels comfortable. If you are considering a move, I would love to help you build a smart plan and narrow your options, so you can make decisions with confidence and truly enjoy this next chapter.

LET'S BEGIN

Let's find yours together

You have so many good options across this coast, and that is exactly why the right guide matters. Whether you are two years from a move or ready this month, I would love to hear what you are looking for and help you find the neighborhood that feels like yours.



Scan to book a relaxed, no-pressure consultation with Susan.

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Your South Orange County Realtor and guide, helping you find a coastal home and lifestyle you'll love.



REFERENCES

About the numbers

This guide is meant as a starting point for your search, not a substitute for a current market analysis on a specific home or neighborhood.

- Median single-family sold prices and 2025 sale ranges: Orange County REALTORS, late 2025.
- Population and city size figures are approximate and drawn from public sources.
- Community details, amenities, and local highlights reflect Susan Chase's firsthand knowledge as a 30-plus-year resident and advisor in Coastal South Orange County.

For current pricing, availability, and a personalized neighborhood plan, reach out any time. I would love to help.