

LIVING IN COASTAL OC

SUSAN CHASE GROUP AT COMPASS

Moving to Coastal South Orange County

The 2026 Relocation Guide

A CITY BY CITY COMPARISON • WHICH COMMUNITY FITS YOU

A NOTE FROM SUSAN

You are not just buying a house. You are choosing *where to land.*

Most of the buyers who reach out to me are successful professionals and couples entering a new chapter. Some are relocating from Los Angeles, the Bay Area, Seattle, or out of state entirely. Others are right sizing within California. 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 over thirty years. I raised my three children here and watched these five cities grow into some of the most sought after communities in Southern California. What I can tell you, from both experience and observation, is that the geography here is deceptively varied. Streets live differently. Orientation matters. Community structure matters. Those nuances shape your everyday experience far more than a listing photo ever shows.

This guide is my attempt to lay the five communities side by side, honestly, so you can begin to feel where you belong before you ever start touring. My role is not to show you listings. It is to help you understand the geography intelligently, so that when you do start touring you are doing it with confidence and clarity.

There is no pressure and no timeline here. Just a thoughtful look at where you might want to land next.



CHOOSING WHERE YOU WANT TO LAND NEXT

Susan Chase

SUSAN CHASE GROUP AT COMPASS • DANA POINT
THE COASTAL SOUTH OC RELOCATION GUIDE

LIVINGINCOASTALOC.COM



EVERYDAY LIFE ON THIS COAST

BEFORE YOU TOUR

Start With How You Want Your Days to Feel

The most common mistake relocating buyers make is starting with the house. The buyers who land well start somewhere else. With the shape of an ordinary Tuesday in the life they are moving toward.

The questions that actually narrow it

- Do you want the ocean woven into daily life, or a quieter retreat a short drive from it
- Does walkability to a harbor or downtown matter, or do space and privacy matter more
- How much land do you want, and do you have a use for it
- Do you want a lively, established community rhythm or a calmer residential one

Why the geography rewards patience

These five cities sit within a short drive of one another, yet they offer genuinely different daily experiences. A hillside address and a beachfront address are not two versions of the same life. One is defined by privacy and long views. The other by direct contact with the water and everything that comes with it.

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED IN THIRTY YEARS

When buyers land in the right neighborhood, everything else tends to fall into place. This is not a market where you want to guess.

THE FIVE COMMUNITIES

Side by Side

A quick orientation before the detailed profiles. Each of these cities can be the right answer. The question is only which one matches the life you are moving toward.



FIVE COMMUNITIES, ONE STRETCH OF COAST

1 Dana Point

THE HARBOR TOWN

A working harbor in the middle of a major revitalization, a walkable Lantern District, and premier resort coastline. Coastal energy with a small town core.

2 Laguna Beach

THE ART COLONY

Coves, galleries, and dramatic oceanfront on winding hillside streets. The most scenic and the most premium of the five, with a distinctive creative identity.

3 Laguna Niguel

THE MASTER PLANNED INLAND COAST

Coastal adjacent, well planned, and green, with trails, open space, and more home for the money. Regularly underestimated, then chosen.

4 San Clemente

THE SPANISH SURF VILLAGE

Spanish architecture, a beach trail, and a laid back surf town character, often at relative value compared to Dana Point and Laguna Beach.

5 San Juan Capistrano

THE HISTORIC MISSION CITY

A walkable historic downtown, equestrian neighborhoods unlike anything this close to the coast, and the widest range of property types in the region.



DANA POINT HARBOR AND THE HEADLANDS

01 A COMMUNITY PROFILE

Dana Point

Harbor life, resort coastline, a small town core

Dana Point is the community that most fully lives with the water. A working harbor sits at its center, currently in the middle of a roughly 600 million dollar revitalization, with the marina now more than two thirds rebuilt and a new commercial core taking shape over the coming years. Around it, a walkable Lantern District downtown and a stretch of premier resort coastline give the city an easy blend of coastal energy and everyday livability.

What defines it

- > A revitalizing harbor and the walkable Lantern District downtown
- > Premier resort coastline along the Strand and Headlands
- > A genuine small town core within a coastal setting
- > Strong long term demand tied to the harbor transformation

Where people land

- > Monarch Beach and Niguel Shores for gated coastal living
- > The Lantern District for walkable, in town character
- > The Strand and Headlands for premier oceanfront
- > Capistrano Beach for a quieter coastal pocket

MARKET CONTEXT

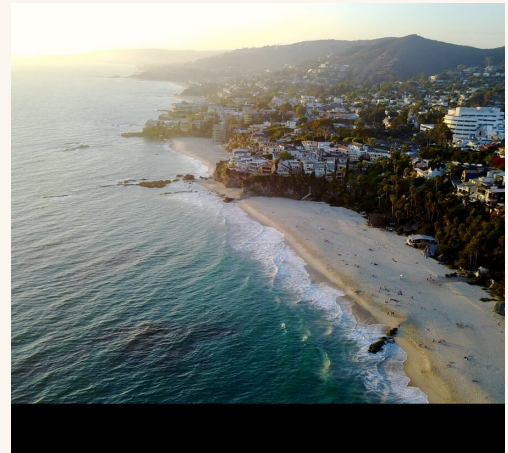
Dana Point spans in town condos through premier oceanfront estates, so pricing varies widely by pocket and proximity to the water. Current figures for a specific neighborhood are available on request, and the Dana Point community page at livingincoastaloc.com goes deeper on each area.

02 A COMMUNITY PROFILE

Laguna Beach

Coves, galleries, and dramatic oceanfront

Laguna Beach is the most scenic and most distinctive of the five, a longtime art colony built into hillsides that fall toward a string of coves. Life here is shaped by direct contact with the water and by a creative identity that runs through the galleries, the festivals, and the rhythm of the town. It is also the most premium of the five markets, and its winding streets and limited parking are part of the trade for that setting.



LAGUNA BEACH COVES AND COASTLINE

What defines it

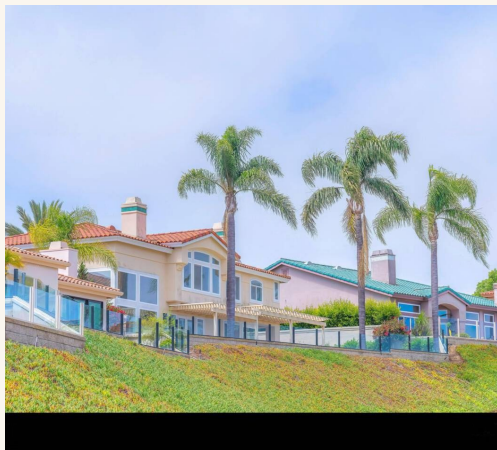
- A celebrated art colony with a creative civic identity
- A string of coves and dramatic oceanfront settings
- Hillside streets with long ocean views
- Among the region's most premium coastal markets

Where people land

- North Laguna for walkable, in town coastal living
- The village core near the galleries and beaches
- Gated enclaves such as Emerald Bay and Three Arch Bay
- Hillside pockets for elevated ocean views

MARKET CONTEXT

Laguna Beach sits among the region's premium oceanfront markets, and pricing reflects the setting and scarcity of true coastal parcels. Because value here is so location specific, I recommend a pocket by pocket read rather than a citywide average when you are ready to focus.



LAGUNA NIGUEL, MINUTES FROM THE WATER

03 A COMMUNITY PROFILE

Laguna Niguel

The master planned coast, quietly underrated

Laguna Niguel is regularly underestimated by buyers newer to the region, precisely because it does not sit directly on the sand. It is a comprehensively master planned city, green and well organized, typically five to ten minutes from Salt Creek Beach, Dana Point Harbor, and Laguna Beach. Many buyers who skip it early circle back once they experience the balance it offers. More space, more open land, and often more home for the money, without giving up quick coastal access.

What defines it

- A comprehensively master planned city with strong infrastructure
- Trails and open space, including the Badlands Trail to Salt Creek
- Coastal adjacent, roughly five to ten minutes from the water
- Often more square footage and land for the budget

Where people land

- Bear Brand Ranch and Monarch Point for gated hilltop estates
- Niguel Summit and view neighborhoods for elevated outlooks
- El Niguel Country Club neighborhoods
- Planned communities for entry level condos and townhomes

MARKET CONTEXT

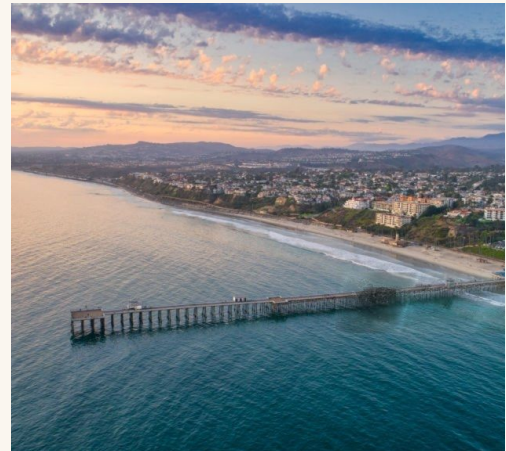
Based on Orange County REALTORS data, the December 2025 median sold price for a single family home in Laguna Niguel was approximately 2.3 million dollars, with the full year ranging from roughly 430,000 dollars to 16.25 million. That spread reflects a genuine diversity of housing types. The city is served by the Capistrano Unified School District. Figures are approximate and subject to change.

04 A COMMUNITY PROFILE

San Clemente

Spanish village character, surf town ease

San Clemente carries a distinct Spanish village identity, protected by architectural standards that shape the look of the town, paired with a genuine surf culture and one of the best coastal trails in the region. It is consistently one of the more balanced coastal markets in South Orange County, often offering relative value compared to Dana Point and Laguna Beach, wrapped in a laid back, unhurried rhythm.



SAN CLEMENTE PIER AND BEACH TRAIL

What defines it

- A protected Spanish village architectural character
- The San Clemente Beach Trail and a real surf culture
- Relative value compared to Dana Point and Laguna Beach
- A range from walkable beach pockets to planned communities

Where people land

- The Riviera District in the southwest, closest to the sand
- Talega, a master planned golf community with newer homes
- Sea Pointe Estates for gated hilltop views
- Cyprus Shores and Cotton Point for private coastal enclaves

MARKET CONTEXT

San Clemente spans walkable beach cottages through gated hilltop estates and newer master planned homes, so pricing depends heavily on which San Clemente you are after. The city is served by the Capistrano Unified School District. Current figures for a specific neighborhood are available on request.



SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO, HISTORY AND SPACE

05 A COMMUNITY PROFILE

San Juan Capistrano

The historic mission city, wider than it looks

San Juan Capistrano is the city that most consistently surprises buyers who discover it for the first time. They expect a quiet inland town and find something far more layered. A historic mission city with a walkable downtown, equestrian neighborhoods unlike anything else this close to the California coast, a revitalized dining scene, and a pace that feels intentional rather than simply slow. It is coastal adjacent, only a few miles from Doheny, and connected by both freeway and rail.

What defines it

- > A walkable historic downtown and the Los Rios district
- > Equestrian zoning and horse neighborhoods near the coast
- > Coastal adjacent, a few miles from the beach, rail connected
- > The widest range of property types of the five cities

Where people land

- > Marbella, The Hunt Club, and Hidden Mountain gated estates
- > Historic village and downtown flats
- > Equestrian and canyon parcels with acreage
- > Master planned golf course neighborhoods

MARKET CONTEXT

Based on Orange County REALTORS data, San Juan Capistrano showed the widest pricing variance of the five cities in 2025, with sales ranging from roughly 254,000 dollars to 6.7 million. That range is not inconsistency. It reflects genuine diversity, from village condos to multi acre equestrian estates. Zoning distinctions matter more here than anywhere else in the region, so confirming what a parcel allows before you fall in love with it is essential. Figures are approximate and subject to change.

RELOCATING FROM AFAR

Yes, You Can Do Much of This Remotely

Many relocating buyers begin the process virtually, and it works well when it is structured. The key is narrowing your neighborhood focus before you fly out, so that when you do visit, your time is productive rather than overwhelming.



NARROWING THE SEARCH FROM A DISTANCE

What can happen before you arrive

- Narrowing from five cities to a short list of neighborhoods that fit your life
- Live video tours of homes and the streets around them
- Detailed disclosure and cost of ownership reviews
- A focused itinerary so an in person visit confirms rather than explores

What to look for in an advisor

- Someone who has lived the area long term, not just sold in it
- Real specialization in the specific cities you are weighing
- A process that starts with your lifestyle before showing a single listing
- Honesty about trade offs, including the ones a listing photo hides

A SIMPLE WAY TO BEGIN

Tell me how you want your days to feel and roughly when you hope to land. From there I can build a smart, personalized plan that respects your timeline, whether that is next quarter or next year. Details matter here, and a little geography intelligence up front saves an enormous amount of time later.

QUESTIONS RELOCATING BUYERS ASK

Answered, Plainly

Can I really relocate here without living here first?

Yes, and many buyers do. With video tours, thorough disclosure reviews, and strategic coordination, a great deal of the process can happen remotely. The work is in narrowing your neighborhood focus first, so your in person visit is focused and effective rather than a scramble across five cities in a weekend.



THE COAST YOU WOULD CALL HOME

Which city is the best value?

It depends entirely on what you want. Laguna Niguel and San Clemente often deliver more home and land for the money, while Laguna Beach and premier Dana Point coastline sit at the top of the range. San Juan Capistrano has the widest spread of all, which means both entry points and estates exist within the same city.

Is San Juan Capistrano really inland?

No. It sits just a few miles from the coast, minutes from Dana Point and Doheny, with a real historic downtown and rail access. Almost every relocating buyer assumes it is far inland, and almost every one is surprised. It is coastal adjacent, not coastal remote.

How do I choose between a hilltop home and a beachfront one?

Start with your daily life, not the view in the photo. A gated hilltop estate offers space, quiet, and long views, but every beach outing takes intention. An oceanfront home puts the water into your daily rhythm, along with salt air, wind, and nearby activity. Both are legitimate. The right one is the one that matches how you actually want to live.

LET US TALK

Let us build your plan.

If you are considering a move, I would be glad to help you build a smart, personalized plan. There is no pressure and no timeline. Just a thoughtful conversation about where you want to land next.

»» **Schedule a private consultation**

calendly.com/susan-chase-1/real-estate-consultation

»» **Explore the five community pages**

livingincoastaloc.com

»» **Start your home search**

livingincoastaloc.com/listing

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