

Redondo Beach, California: A Visitors Guide

by Dave Marx, Author of [PassPorter Travel Guidebooks](#)

Yet another business journey, to a meeting that could have happened anywhere, but fortunately, it happened in a somewhere that I'd never visited before. It would be my first meeting as a new member of the Board of Directors of the [Independent Book Publishers Association](#). As usual, I've got a half-day of free time amidst marathon meetings, a growling stomach following a four-hour jet flight, and just a rough idea of where and how I'm going to satisfy that hunger and my wanderlust.

This time, I'm in Redondo Beach, California, just seven miles south of LAX, right off the Pacific Coast Highway. For an LA-area locale within close reach of the airport, this has a lot of in-town destinations beat hands down. My temporary digs, the [Portofino Hotel and Yacht Club](#), is right inside the high, stone jetty of King Harbor, and claims to be the only oceanfront hotel in Greater Los Angeles. My oceanview room delivers cool, ocean breezes, a view of the seawall and fishing trawlers, and the round-the-clock barking of sea lions, who congregate on a mid-harbor platform built for their pleasure and protection. Generous government spending resulted in the King Harbor seawall, a delightful waterfront promenade, a handy municipal car park right on the water's edge topped by a quaint, gray clapboard district courthouse and a cluster of matching, clapboard offices for the courthouse square hangers-on. Directly below and adjacent to the car park are marinas, the two-block long boardwalk (a warren of shops and restaurants sandwiched between parking garage and marina) and a topsy turvy maze of interconnected dining/shopping/fishing piers. Just south of the piers is the broad beach, curving off into the California haze.

I'd arrived from Michigan primed for seafood, one of my life-long passions. It was nearly noon (but 3:00 pm Michigan time), and it was now my task to settle on one (or more) establishments. The hotel concierge handed me a fine Redondo Beach Harbor & Pier Walking Map, which lists nearly 50 eateries from chain establishments like Cheesecake Factory and Joe's Crab Shack, to egg roll and taco stands, pizzerias, currascarias, neighborhood luncheonettes, we'll-cook-it-for-you fish markets, and expense-account-only steak and seafood houses. I boldly stepped out into the warm sun and cool, ocean breeze. The day couldn't have been more perfect!

First stop on my travels, [Captain Kidd's Fish Market](#). Buy your fish by the pound from the market cases, and they'll cook it up for a \$3.50

surcharge that includes two side dishes. Or, order from the menu. Bring your tray out to atmospheric picnic tables with a lovely view of the parking lot (a glimpse of the marina and Pacific a bit beyond). Looks well-worn and authentic, but despite the fish market trappings, I doubt many people buy fish to cook at home. Definitely a place to try out if I return, though. I press on, in search of a holier grill. I strolled from King Harbor at the north down the boardwalk at water's edge, and looped around the sprawling [Redondo Beach Pier](#), surveying all my choices. At the far south end of the district is the beach itself, a long, broad crescent ending at the haze-shrouded Palos Verdes highlands. (Over the hill lies San Pedro, Disney Cruise Line's temporary home port when visiting California).

National chainfood? No, I've got to go "local." The fancier places? Why bother, when fish should be a bargain in a place like this? In a prime spot atop the main pier, Tony's Fish Market Restaurant didn't look like a market to me, and it was deader than a five day old mackerel, but the menu had some appealing Italian seafood specialties. Presumably it's busier at dinner and on weekends. Nearby, "Old" Tony's on the Pier has been around for over 50 years, and was just as vacant. Pier Seafood, Pacific Fish Center, Redondo Beach Crab House, Fun Fish Market? Most had tanks filled with live crabs and display cases with an assortment of fresh fish and offered an interesting collection of traditional American dishes, plus several Mexican and Korean seafood specialties and cafeteria atmosphere. But [Quality Seafood](#), tucked away at the south end of the boardwalk in the shadow of the upper level of the pier, reached out and grabbed me with both hands. This is a legitimate commercial fish market, with long lines of display cases filled with a staggering array of fresh seafood, any of which they'll cook up for you. I'd be astounded if this wasn't the source for much of the seafood sold in nearby restaurants. Unlike the other shops, which had tanks of high-priced Dungeness crab, here the "Dungies" were outnumbered by only slightly smaller local crabs from Catalina Island, at an astoundingly small \$4.99/lb. (a little sign apologized for the increased price!!). At around 2 lbs. per fat-clawed crab, I'd call that quite a meal deal! Most of the many locals were here for steamed crab, their tables spread with newspaper, strewn with wooden crab mallets, and buried in crab shells. However, I had other fish to fry. According to the sign, steamed-to-order crab and lobster took a half-hour, and I was way too hungry.

Right next to crab heaven, stainless steel vats overflowed with nearly two-dozen varieties of oysters, and another two-dozen varieties of cockles, mussels, conch, and clams. Like a kid in a candy shop I ordered-up a raw shellfish mini-feast -- two littleneck clams, and six oysters. I asked the fishmonger for a selection of local varieties, and he

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picked out two Hamma Hammas, two Sunsets, and two Bajas. They had plenty of beer on tap -- a 20-oz. Stella Artois went down nicely. I found a nice, sunny table on the boardwalk with a great view of the marina, and tucked into my little bit of heaven. I had already spent \$21, but boy, was it worth it! Still, eight shells were empty, and my beer was still half-full. What else could I find to help that beer go down? At the opposite end of the shop was the prepared/fried/grilled/smoked seafood section. I needed to go "light," since I still planned to head back to Captain Kidd's for a sampling of their wares, and dinner would come just a few hours after that. A nice little side order of fried calamari rings was just \$2.15, but then I spied a \$1 treat -- little plastic bags filled with assorted shreds, flakes and chunks of various house-smoked fish. The baggies weighed in at about a quarter-pound, while the intact fish were selling in the \$15-\$20/lb. range. I call that a bargain, and polished off the dense, smokey fish with the rest of my beer.

Already happier than the clams I'd put in my belly, I wandered back up to Captain Kidd's. Here, I compromised on a fried seafood sampler (\$11.99). When my number was called, I picked up my tray and found a nice, sunny table outside. The platter came with a couple of large, plank-shaped butterflied shrimp (unfortunately, they looked like frozen, pre-breaded, but did taste fine), a couple of very sweet house-made scallops (my mood was improving), and a medium portion of perfectly prepared fish and chips-style cod (definitely not frozen or pre-battered). I could choose two sides with that - I got hush puppies (adequate) and for a 50 cent upgrade, a cup of chowder. The counterman suggested New England style, I suspected the Manhattan would be better, but I went along with him. Like too many "New England" chowders away from the source, this one had not a drop of milk/cream and was thickened with flour rather than long-cooked potatoes. It still tasted OK, but next time, I'll try the red chowder or an even better-looking cioppino (seafood stew) at only \$6 for a 12 oz. serving.

Afterward, I strolled to the nearby sport fishing pier, a jumping-off spot for fishing excursions and home to Polly's on the Pier, a favorite spot among locals for casual breakfast and lunch. Polly's was closed (and I was already stuffed), but the luncheonette-style menu included a few items that may help explain Polly's popularity, including banana pancakes and omelets with "real" crab. Next door, the Redondo Sportfishing shop offered daily fishing excursions (\$40-\$60), charter boats, and fishing gear rentals (no license needed for fishing from the pier). I hung around for a little bit, watching the local pelicans as they watched a half-dozen anglers pull in non-keepers just slightly bigger than baitfish -- nothing the pelicans considered worth stealing.

That evening, after uniting with several compatriots from the board of

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directors, we headed to our hotel's fine dining establishment, [Baleen Los Angeles](#). The setting overlooking the yacht club is the essence of California casual elegance. Everyone was delighted with their choices, which arrived beautifully plated and easily as delicious, and a fine value for the money. Some of us sampled a marvelously savory braised lamb appetizer. My roasted beet and heirloom tomato salad was very satisfying, and I followed it up with an elegant version of cioppino, with a rich lobster, saffron, and tomato broth and impeccably cooked samples of premium fish and shellfish, topped by a pan-seared diver scallop. Dessert? You've got to be kidding!

So, the sun already having set over the Pacific, I staggered back to my room, opened the patio door, and let the cool breeze and barking seals entertain me as I watched the Olympics.

About The Author: Dave Marx is the author of many PassPorter guidebooks and a newly-elected board member of the Independent Book Publishers Association.

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