

SPOTLIGHT | CALIFORNIA

Nights at the Iguana

The Emerald Iguana Inn, one of Southern California's best-kept secrets, sits tucked away on a quiet lane off the center of the artsy town of Ojai.

It's near a plethora of activities, restaurants and galleries.

A heavenly oasis with a Spanish feel, this unusual boutique hotel sits in a lush tropical setting of flowing fountains and gardens.

"We created a tropical Mexican oasis in counterpoint to the dry Ojai climate," says owner Julia Whitman.

What makes this establishment so special is the enchanting craftsman/art nouveau-style architecture. Extensive stone and tile work are accented by dramatic archways, all influenced by architect-owner Marc Whitman's fascination with Spanish surrealist Gaudi.

The mosaic fountain of an emerald iguana and colorful broken tiles embracing the entranceway are reminiscent of the Gaudi-style architecture seen amid the main boulevards and parks of Barcelona.

The Emerald Iguana offers a variety of accommodations, from single rooms and suites to two-story private cottages with full kitchens and fireplaces. I stayed in the Cricket, a two-level suite that includes a patio and two terraces, with sunlight streaming through the upstairs-bedroom skylight.

Julia Whitman traveled to Europe and Asia to find one-of-a-kind, hand-carved furniture pieces, exotic rugs and comfy couches to furnish the four spacious guest rooms and nine cottages and suites. The Whitmans are adamant about only showcasing local artwork on the walls.

A nice touch is the poolside continental breakfast of cereal, hard-cooked eggs, yogurt and fruit — served with a view of the towering Topa Topa mountain range.

*Beverly Mann,
Special Contributor*

When you go

Ojai is 65 miles north of Los Angeles, 30 miles south of Santa Barbara. The inn is at 108 Pauline St. in Ojai. Rooms range from \$169 to \$229 a night. For reservations call 805-646-5277. www.emeraldiguana.com



The Emerald Iguana Inn in Ojai, Calif., offers suites with patios and terraces, along with single rooms. Stone and tile work are accented by archways.



Beverly Mann/Special Contributor

A mosaic fountain of an emerald iguana graces the entrance of Julia Whitman's "tropical Mexican oasis."

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