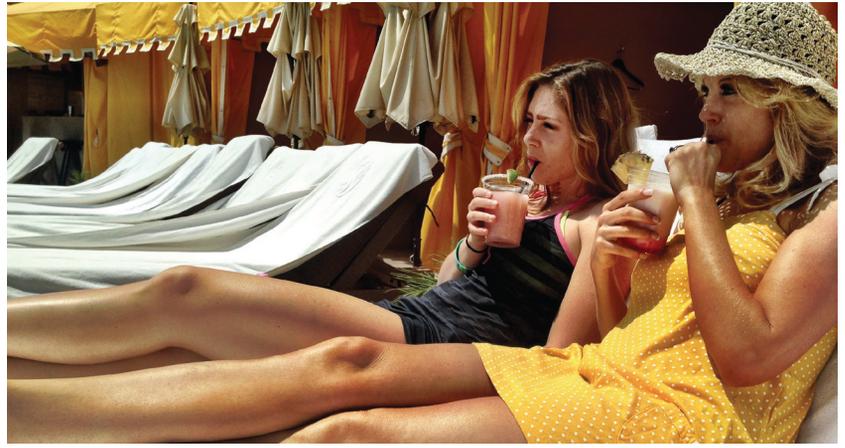




Scottsdale  
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PRESENTS



# TARA'S BIG TRAVELS

## THE SUPER STAYCATION

THE VALLEY ADVENTURIST FORAGES THE LANDSCAPE IN OUR OWN BACKYARD.

BY TARA HITCHCOCK

I'VE ALWAYS HAD A HARD TIME WRAPPING MY HEAD AROUND THE IDEA of a "staycation." How do you get in "vacation mode" when your worries and unpaid bills are just a car ride away? But that can also be my problem. Sometimes the greatest moments and memories are shared experiences that can be found right in our own backyard. Plus, there are great summer deals here and it's much cheaper than flying five people out of Sky Harbor. So I decided to tackle the staycation three ways (with a bonus overnighter in Sedona), and experiment with the people closest to me, my family.

DIGITAL

Extras! 

To watch Tara's videos and learn more about summer stuff in the Valley and beyond, visit [PHOENIXmag.com](http://PHOENIXmag.com) or download the **PHOENIX magazine app!**  
**PLUS:** See a slideshow of Tara's trip to Cannes, France!

Watch *Tara's Reel Travels* Thursday mornings on CBS 5 KPHO or visit [taraontv.com](http://taraontv.com).

# FAIRMONT SCOTTSDALE PRINCESS

In the middle of the Sonoran Desert lies the resort the PGA calls home every January for the Waste Management Phoenix Open. Having recently completed a five-year, \$60 million renovation, the Fairmont Scottsdale Princess is like your buddy who lives big, drinks big and just wants to make sure everyone around him is always having a great time. The Princess never misses a chance to party, whether it's their Kentucky Derby Lawn extravaganza, their Cinco De Mayo Fiesta, or "Christmas at the Princess." I'm eagerly waiting to see what they do for Arbor Day next fall. But it's the summer, featuring the Fourth of July Freedom Fest, where all bets are off and the Princess staff goes completely overboard to help create lasting family memories for out-of-towners and Arizonans alike. They had me at "SplashRider X-treme" and "Techno glo dance party." The Princess became base-camp for my "Boys Staycation," a chance to bond with my two favorite under-25ers, stepsons Dane (23) and Dylan (18).

## STRAWBERRIES OR GOURMET DOG FOOD? YOU BE THE JUDGE

The pickiest traveler in our family is actually Jacques, our French-Brittany spaniel. He's spoiled for sure and periodically taunts me with a sarcastic grin that says, "If I make Daddy choose between the two of us, he might actually pick me, so watch your back, TV lady." The sad thing is, he might be right. Parental rivalry aside, I brought Jacques on our staycation since the Princess loves pets and I thought I would throw him a bone (pun intended) and try to get into his good graces by including him in our fun. Plus, with 44,000 square feet of outdoor space at his disposal, Jacques was guaranteed to spot a bunny and some birds, his two other favorite things besides my husband.

Upon arrival, we were treated to delicious chocolate-covered strawberries resting comfortably against a desert landscape made of colored sugar. For Jacques? How about a spread that included a dog bed, chew toy, bones, freshly baked blueberry-moon dog biscuits with a touch of cinnamon, two sealed plastic pouches of gourmet quinoa, and chicken food. Looks like everyone gets the royal treatment at the Princess. We dumped our bags, changed into comfortable clothes and headed to the Well & Being at Willow Stream Spa for a different kind of "treatment" ... a gravity-defying one.

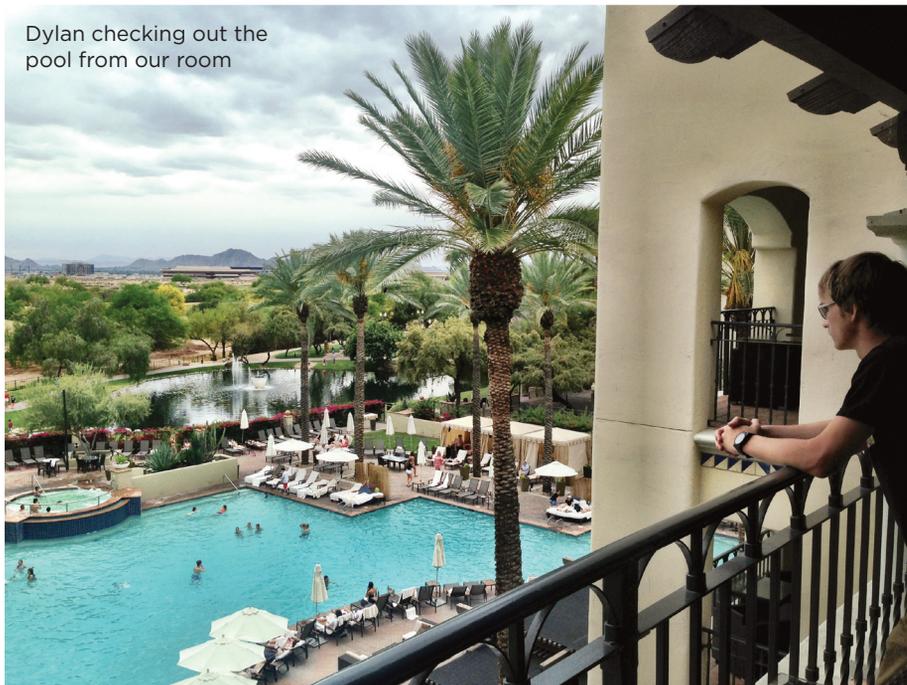


Enjoying aerial yoga

## "ARE WE IN VEGAS?"

There are a few things you should know about Dylan. 1) He's a much happier kid without his phone. Too much drama...too many distractions.

Dylan checking out the pool from our room



That's why I made him leave it at home. 2) If you want him to try something new, get his big brother Dane involved. Dylan has looked up to his brother since he first laid eyes on him at one day old. So when we walked into the aerial yoga studio complete with blue sheets dangling from the ceiling, before Dylan even had a chance to say "Yeah... this isn't happening," his brother Dane was practically upside down in silks wondering when he, too, could try out for Cirque du Soleil. That's the thing I love most about Dane: He's game for anything - and like a flawless algebraic equation, that rubs off directly onto Dylan. Yoga instructor Sierra Ramm soon had us stretching and contorting in poses aptly named "Frog Wearing a Mini-Skirt" and "the Diaper." Before I knew it, Dylan was smiling and laughing as we ended our session looking like caterpillars wrapped in large blue cocoons. Limber and hydrated after our strawberry-infused water, we headed to the Trailblazers kids club to rent a few fishing poles and a tackle box to try for the Big One. My stepsons may not be age-appropriate for a kids club, but hey - some of our best memories are attempting things normally reserved for 6- and 7-year-olds. Unfortunately, the Fairmont fish must have been on to our scheme. Or maybe they were lethargic and bloated after consuming too much white bread bait. Needless to say, we didn't catch a thing, except quality time with each other...and that was the point. It was easily worth seeing a duck quack out loud in disgust after my lame attempt at a cast.

## "SOMETIMES T NEEDS A VOICE OF REASON"

You won't go hungry at the Princess. From the AAA Four Diamond-rated Bourbon Steak to the Sonoran Splash pool bar, the Fairmont has culinary options for the most discerning eater. We opted for the rustic La Hacienda, where Chef Richard Sandoval, the "Father of Modern Mexican

Cuisine," has created such a classic Mexican eatery, little wonder it was voted the top Mexican restaurant in Arizona last year in *Ranking Arizona*. Of course, guacamole and salsa were a given, followed by an order of lobster tacos, prepared to perfection by Chef de Cuisine Forest Hamrick. It was only when I tried to sneak in some queso fundido that Dane looked up from his menu and said "Do less" - one of our favorite lines from *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*. I have a tendency to over-order and Dane had my back. He looked at Dylan: "Sometimes T needs a voice of reason." Dylan nodded as he ran his chip around the side of the guac bowl and scraped out the remaining avocado mix. We actually did save room for dessert, but not the famed churros with three kinds of dipping sauces. Instead, we tracked down one of the resort's several fire pits and created our own treat with the s'mores kits the hotel gave us. And as I watched those two battle it out for the crispiest marshmallow title, I thought how nice it is to carve out time with your boys and reconnect away from the house. I'm just glad both still ask my opinion and value my advice. It's a great part of being a mom, biological or not.



## Summer Fact Box

**MUST DO:** New Splashrider X-Treme water adventure and 240-foot zipline!

**INSIDER TIP:** Keep your eyes open for resident 14-year-old tortoise Cecil. He knows his name!

**BEST PACKAGE:** *Stay, Play & Pay It Forward Package*. 20% discount plus 10% of every dollar charged to room folio is donated to charity/school of choice.

**Sip, Savor & Splash Package**. Starts at \$169 per room and includes \$50 daily credit for dining, spa, tennis or kids club, based on space

**BOOK IT:** [scottsdaleprincess.com](http://scottsdaleprincess.com)

# JW MARRIOTT CAMELBACK INN

## WHERE TIME STANDS STILL

Nine times out of 10, when we travel with our family, we stay at a Marriott. Like a favorite pair of sweats, they're reliable, comfortable and safe. Oh, and they offer unique ways to fit three kids into a room (we've used the tub, an ottoman and a corner nook for Dylan's bed when a rollaway wasn't available).

Add the letters "J" and "W" to the mix, and throw in "Camelback Inn," and it's like you've been introduced to the hotel's older sister who just graduated from an Ivy League school with a degree in Native American history. It was a perfect place to stage a romantic staycation, which is what I decided to do with my husband of almost 10 years.

What's great about the JW is they've managed to keep the resort updated without losing its authentic Southwestern feel. Fargo, N.D., native Jack Stewart would be proud. He's the guy whose dream was to build a pueblo-style hotel in the 1930s honoring the Native American Southwest culture. He wanted something a bit classier than a "dude ranch." He found a desert spot, a place with no water or electricity, and set up shop. The adobe bricks used to build the guest casitas were made on-site. Stewart opened The Camelback Inn in 1936 with the slogan "Where Time Stands Still," and despite the Great Depression, the resort became an immediate success catering to the rich and famous. A 16-year-old who stayed at The Inn with his parents in 1948 would come back decades later and buy the property. His name was Bill Marriott.

## REVISITING THE DATING YEARS

We decided to begin our staycation with a round of golf. Sadly, the last time Kenn and I hit the links together was during our "courting" phase (give or take a few rounds of nine here and there). In fact, as he pulled his clubs from the garage, Kenn noted they were "this close to appearing vintage." I dusted off my 3 wood and irons and we headed to the new Ambiente (Spanish for "environment") course - 90 acres of maintained turf with enough wildflowers lining the holes you might think you're part of an elaborate spring floral bouquet. It was a stark contrast to what used to be the Indian Bend course, a flat and somewhat uneventful course that still managed to humble me years ago during Alice Cooper's Solid Rock tournament.

My golf partner that day was baseball great Paul Konerko, and I'm sure he's already forgotten my miserable round of bogeys and four-letter words. Since Kenn had rotator cuff surgery a few months ago, we decided to tag-team it. I'd handle the heavy lifting and he'd do the putting. We were paired with George Selby and John Machir, two pals who marveled at our team spirit and laughed out loud when I informed them that I don't play out of the sand traps, because "why should I have to do something I don't want to do?" George said I had a point. He also told me that, being from the U.K., he's played all the biggies across the pond, including St. Andrews. "This course is right up there with any of them," he said. After our round, Kenn and I headed to the Acacia Restaurant. Sipping my iced tea, I looked out at the intersection of the Padre course and the new \$10 million renovated Ambiente and thought to myself, "Konerko would love this place!"



## SCRUFF, SPA TREATMENTS

"I see you didn't shave," the facialist told my husband with a smile. My husband has never had a facial. Blessed with good genes, his only skin issues are the spots that come with an active Arizona lifestyle and thousands of mountainbike rides in the sun. What better place to try out the treatment than the 32,000-square-foot Camelback Spa, complete with 32 treatment rooms and enough saunas, tubs and steam rooms to hydrate a prune. Fortunately, Marianne didn't have to break out the garden gloves to deal with Kenn's prickly-pear of a chin. Later, he told me he had more layers of product on his face than Mario Batali's famous Del Posto lasagne. I wouldn't know. I was too busy being wrapped up in plastic, covered in a lemongrass sugar scrub and some papaya mango lotion experiencing one of the spa's Signature Body Wraps. I think I actually fell asleep at one point, dreaming of the fact that I probably shouldn't have watched season four of *Dexter* beforehand, as being wrapped in a plastic sheet usually leads to something other than hydrated and energized skin.

Sonia was gentle with me and I was so moisturized by the end that I could have slid my way back to our casita by body-boarding on the sidewalk.

## WORLD'S LARGEST POPOVERS!

You know someone French inspired the resort's steakhouse the minute your server brings over a plate of oversized Gruyère popovers. It's a true test in restraint, as the huge cheese-filled airy puff pastries are irresistible, and make saving room for a main course an exercise in war strategy. Sure, BLT features a variety of meat choices to fill

your carnivorous cravings, but you can also opt for seafood, chicken or more popovers. I chose the 8 oz. filet and paired it with the green beans and onion rings. That was after the truffle artichoke dip and thick, grilled bacon appetizer I ordered beforehand. My husband was smart not to say anything.

BLT actually stands for Bistro Laurent Tourondel - see, I told you! - a French chef who has managed to add some serious French flair and modernity to the place. The good news is the meal will stay with

you through the morning, which is why I tried to work part of it off hiking up their signature trail. Hugging Mummy Mountain, you'll pass through a charming mock Old West town only to turn around a half mile later and get to-die-for views of Camelback. Of course, you can always head back toward the lobby, passing beds of petunias, tulips and the occasional Dave McGary bronze sculpture along the way. I almost felt guilty, as our beautiful adobe suite-casita didn't see too much of us.

A few years ago, a team of expert craftsmen spent months duplicating the 1930s method of adobe brick-making employed in the original construction of the Camelback Inn. It was time for a remodel. Each brick had to be set in individual hand-made forms and baked in the sun for two weeks. Time consuming? Sure. But it was worth it. AAA Five Diamond awards aside, the biggest compliment comes from its owner. Despite managing 4,000 properties in more than 70 countries, Bill Marriott still chooses to celebrate his birthday every year on the grounds of his JW Camelback Inn. Why wouldn't he? According to the 82-year-old, it's his favorite property and "there's only one" like it.

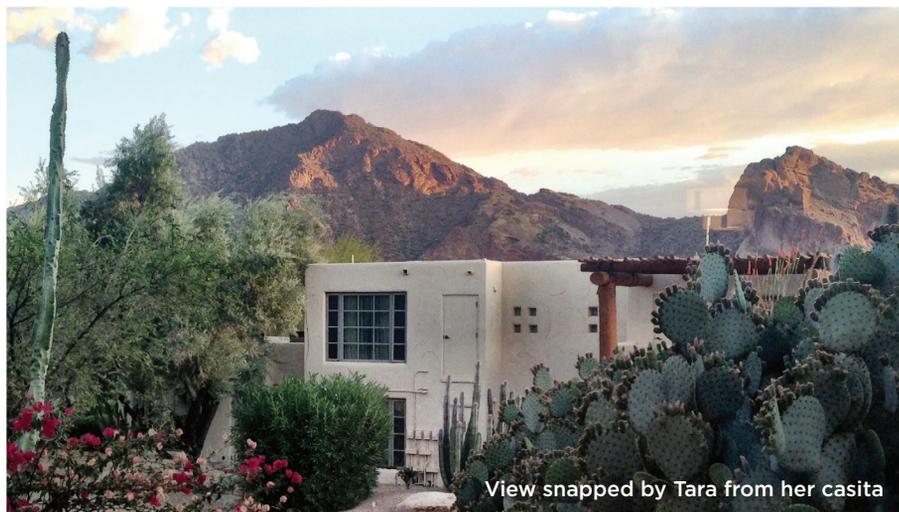
## Summer Fact Box

**MUST DO:** Play the brand new \$10 million Ambiente golf course.

**INSIDER TIP:** During the summer months, the spa offers \$50 off a one-hour treatment on weekdays. Call 480-596-7040 to book.

**BEST PACKAGE:** *Summer Signature Package*. Includes a deluxe casita room with a \$100 resort credit to spend on golf, spa or dining.

**BOOK IT:** [marriott.com/hotels/travel/phxcb-jw-marriott-scottsdale-camelback-inn-resort-and-spa/](http://marriott.com/hotels/travel/phxcb-jw-marriott-scottsdale-camelback-inn-resort-and-spa/)



View snapped by Tara from her casita

# THE PHOENICIAN

When my girlfriends were planning my bachelorette party, they asked me a simple question: “Vegas?” Nope, I answered. I wanted one thing: to gather for a day in the sun at a cabana by the Phoenician Mother of Pearl Pool. I had seen the yellow tented overhangs in pictures, with Camelback Mountain always providing a photobomb. I remember thinking, “Some day, I’ll be sitting in one of those lounge chairs.” So our small group of six spent the day getting spritzed with Evian water and making the pool attendants go back and forth fetching us pretty fruit drinks.

That was 10 years ago. The Phoenician is a behemoth that I now drive by every single day, since I live within biking distance to the resort. Despite its proximity to my daily routine, I never fail to notice it – passing the waterfalls, the Phoenix Rising insignia, and the original Jokake Inn, you’re tempted to forget the errands you were supposed to run that day. Most of my Phoenician visits have involved female bonding – my bachelorette party, the spa day with my mom and sisters – so it made sense that I’d come back for my “Girls Staycation” with my stepdaughter Alex.

## RESORT WITHIN A RESORT

Alex is a total “girly girl.” She may be 26 – one year older than the resort! – but give her a massage, some nail polish and a fun gossip magazine, and she’ll act like a 12-year-old who just walked out to find a pony with a bow on it in the front yard. Add a cabana, wine tasting and great room to the mix, and she might just get emotional. I had never actually stayed at the Phoenician and was encouraged to try out the Canyon Suites, a “resort within a resort” and Arizona’s only *Forbes* Five-Star/AAA Five-Diamond hotel. Located on separate grounds, it offers a more private, personalized experience and its lobby is one of the nicest I’ve ever seen. We were greeted by our “Canyon Ambassador,” Jordan Collier. Alex makes friends fast. She’s a true people person and loves asking questions. I found out Jordan moved to Arizona a few years ago with his girlfriend. He’s also an actor and member of a local comedy troupe, but admits he saves his shtick for his buddies. He doesn’t want to overwhelm the resort guests.

We dropped off our backpacks, changed, and immediately headed back to my bachelorette spot, the Mother of Pearl pool. Not much had changed. It’s still relaxing and beautiful, although the attendants leave the face-spritzing up to you now. Alex and I talked girls’ stuff, plotted our next family vacation and watched a few out-of-town kids try to balance on four to five blue and yellow pool noodles with their green and pink goggles and red hair blazing in the sun. It was a great, colorful afternoon.

## PEPPERMINT & WINE

I’m not a big wine drinker, but when I heard Master Sommelier Greg Tresner was in charge of that day’s Canyon Suites wine tasting, Alex and I had to join. I remember Greg from my *Good Morning Arizona* days. He would show up occasionally for a food segment and get overlooked as he suggested a wine-pairing with the more visible chef. “I’m used to it,” he says with a smile. But he should get some recognition, as he’s one of only 135 Master Sommeliers in the United States – a distinction that takes years to achieve. And he’s got a sense of humor. When I admitted I had accidentally brushed my teeth two minutes earlier, clearly affecting how his French wines would taste to my untrained palate, he told me to eat some cheese so that the “peppermint would become nuanced with the cheese and balance things out.”

“Sometimes I have to make this up as I go,” he laughed. Despite the fact that Alex was actually training for a body-physique contest during our staycation, she couldn’t help but sample Greg’s vino flights. Plus, she’ll hike up Camelback the next day and say goodbye to the calories. But not before enjoying an 80-minute holistic massage.

## HOT STONES & HOT WINGS

As a young working woman a few years out of college, Alex doesn’t get many massages. She, like many of us, prefers food and gas to such indulgences. The lone exception was during our recent Thailand trip, where hour-long massages are 10



bucks. Alex became a short-term massage addict. A temple massage? Yep. A massage on the beach? You bet. “Where’s Alex?” her brother asked at one of the domestic airports we flew through.

“Where do you think?” I answered. Since Thai airports typically feature massage services, she was just fine with flight delays.

At the Phoenician’s Centre for Well-Being Spa, she got her first exposure to hot stones. She told her therapist Kathy to “go deep or go home” and Kathy gave her one of the best massages of her life. “I loved it,” Alex beamed. “And she gave me a hug first!”

After the spa, it was time to eat. Sure, you’ve heard of legendary Five-Diamond Mary Elaine’s (now the excellent J&G Steakhouse) and Il Terrazzo (go find my pal, well-known Executive Sous Chef Lee Hillson, and tell him I said hi), but Alex has simple food tastes. Plus, she usually only packs tank tops and sweats on our vacations, clothes more befitting the burger bar at Relish Burger Bistro, which is where we headed after her treatment. One of Alex’s cute new concierge friends recommended the Cowboy, a grilled Kobe burger with fried onion rings, bacon jalapeños and house-made steak sauce. We nixed the bun and said yes to sweet potato fries and hot wings. Then we toasted our girls’ day overlooking the front nine and watched the moon slowly pass overhead.

I decided I may have to find another reason to grab my girlfriends – and maybe their male partners – and come back.



## Summer Fact Box

**MUST DO:** New SURGE interactive “spray ground” splash pad for kids and their parents at the Oasis pool complex.

**INSIDER TIP:** The Phoenician has VIP tickets to The Phoenix Art Museum exhibit *Hollywood Costume*, available upon request. The tickets provide entry to the exhibition at any time, without a reservation. Show runs through July 6.

**BEST PACKAGE:** *The Awards of Summer*. Book and stay at The Phoenician between May 30 and September 1, and be entered to win one of five two-night New Year’s Eve stays at The Canyon Suites. Rates start at \$159.

Driving into the Phoenician



# Bonus! WE DECIDED TO HEAD NORTH TO L'AUBERGE DE SEDONA

We don't have a lot of water in Arizona. So when you find it, you want to stop and stay a while. That's why it was worth the one-and-a-half hour drive to Sedona for a "bonus" couples staycation at the L'Auberge de Sedona, a gorgeous 87-room boutique hotel on the banks of Oak Creek. The most famous residents in Sedona aren't so much the artsy and erudite retirees who live there, but the red rock formations and mystical vortices that turn any skeptic into a spiritual believer. I've been through Sedona many times, and had read about L'Auberge. Consistently named by *Travel + Leisure* magazine as one of the Top 500 resorts in the world, it was long on my bucket list. At the same time, I had a notion that I wouldn't be worthy of the place unless I could clear my city mind of stresses and truly commit to "the Sedona experience." The good news is, it doesn't matter. L'Auberge will calm you without seeking your permission.



Tara and Kenn dine creekside

## MORE CARDAMOM, PLEASE

"You can do it all or do nothing at all." That's both the beauty of L'Auberge, and the 100 percent accurate line featured in their brochure. The day of our staycation, we had the option of joining award-winning photographer Mike Koopson on a guided tour of the grounds for some picture-taking tips, and later a crash-course in Sedona geology. There's even an opportunity to learn about reincarnation and past life regression with noted psychotherapist Michael Brown. Since this was a romantic staycation, I headed to the resort's new L'Apothecary to formulate my own aphrodisiac body scrub, another service available to resort guests. I may have overdone it on the cardamom, but I fell in love with the potent scent. A tablespoon of rose hips later, I had my own cacao and nutmeg concoction ready to put to good use.

But I'd have to wait until our dinner creekside at the award-winning L'Auberge restaurant, featuring some of the best wine we've ever sipped in a setting that simply can't be duplicated. I'm not sure if the experts in Sonoma County would agree, but I gave myself four stars after pairing my wine with truffled french fries. The chef in charge that night, Brian Sharrah, looked like an extra from *Sons of Anarchy*, which made me like the place even more. All tatted up, he joined us for a few moments at our table by the creek and told me his love of cooking started with his grandmother. A biochemist by major, Brian has perfected all of the restaurant's sauces. It's no surprise the place is packed nightly with guests and non-guests. I think he should add a tattoo that says "The Food Here Is Amazing."



Tara's pic along BrinsMesa trail

## FEET IN THE CREEK

The thing about L'Auberge is they don't rest on their laurels. Despite all their awards, the staff is always looking for new ways to get their guests involved. "Would you try out our new 'Feet in the Creek' treatment?" spa director Catherine Powers asked me. The experience is called "earthing" or "ground-

ing" – the simple act of placing your bare feet on the earth, walking around and transferring electrons into your body for an antioxidizing effect. I walk around barefoot in my home all the time, but I think the only thing I've transferred into my body is dust and dirt and the occasional splinter from our wood floors. Catherine convinced me the new treatment would help connect me with the earth's "primordial, healing energy to help reduce inflammation and stress." Not everyone buys into stuff like this, but I'm always game to try. So I headed to the banks of Oak Creek with my therapist, Brandon. He asked me to step into the water, walk around and really pay attention to what I was feeling. He then had me step back out on to dry land and walk around some

more. I have to say, it reminded me of my summers in upstate New York, when as kids, we'd run around barefoot and put our feet in the lake daily. That was before I grew to a size 9 and reflexology became something that mattered. The treatment took about 40 minutes and featured a scrub and amazing foot massage.

I have to admit, I did feel more relaxed and grounded, the result of one of the most

unique spa treatments I've ever experienced. Meanwhile, my husband Kenn was wrapped in a towel as Nora worked out his kinks in a creekside massage. "How was it?" I asked over drinks.

"I haven't been naked by the side of Oak Creek in years," Kenn laughed. "It was amazing."

## DUCK DYNASTY

The next morning, promptly at eight, we headed down to Oak Creek again, this time to help feed the resident ducks, another daily L'Auberge ritual. I ended up taking pictures of 6-year-old Ben from California, who heaved several loads of duck food into the water. I don't think Ben's parents have taught him about portion control. Plus, no offense, but he had the throwing precision of Randy Johnson if you got him sauced, blindfolded him, turned him around five times, and then let him loose.

But it's hard to beat starting your morning with coffee in a wooden swing on the edge of Oak Creek. Sedona is a movie set. The red rocks don't look real, and it seems as though some Hollywood crew has transferred buckets of fine, red dirt to carry the whole effect onto the hiking trails. Just a short ride from the L'Auberge is a five-mile loop called Brins Mesa. It's not too steep an uphill hike and you'll pass things like the Seven Sacred Pools and Devil's Kitchen sinkhole, and you'll feel like you're hundreds of miles away from civilization in minutes.

You'll also be covered in red dirt at the end of it all, but that's the way the L'Auberge staff wants it, so you'll be forced to step immediately into your outdoor shower and enjoy the task of getting your skin back to its original hue.

By the way, the GM of the place is a huge hiker and leads his own morning run through Sedona's trails. We would have joined him, if we hadn't been weighed down by the foie gras, salmon and venison spread the night before. We will come back to this place, if not for the great service and morning scones, than for the unmatched environs that will have you racing to your nearest Brookstone to buy one of those sound machines so the creek will stay with you even after you've left.

## Summer Fact Box

**MUST DO:** Blending Station at L'Apothecary, where you can make your own soaks and scrubs

**INSIDER TIP:** Meandering back to the Valley through Jerome and Prescott makes for a great drive home.

**BEST SUMMER PACKAGE:** *Drop it Like it's Hot.* L'Auberge will take the temperature on Oak Creek at 4 p.m. each Wednesday and compare it to the temperature at Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport. The difference between the two temperatures will be the discount on your room rate! (Counts for any room type booked at bar rate and only through Facebook, so "Like" the resort!)

**BOOK IT:** [lauberge.com](http://lauberge.com)

