



Neighborhoods

Emerald Bay: A Thousand Year Look

By Duncan Forgey

They were known as hunters and gatherers. The small band stayed together and lived off of the bounty of the semi-arid land. The bulk of the Native Americans lived several miles back in the canyon where water and protection from the wind made life easier. However, a more adventurous group of about seven men, two women and a number of children lived near the green waters of the bay, an hour's walk from the main village.



Here fresh water was scarcer, but the beauty of the bay and the intoxication of the ocean, with its sights, sounds and smells was enough for these friends to live in a fraternal setting away from the others. This tribe of Gabrielenos might wander in search of water during drought years, but the antelope, deer, rabbit and seafood kept them close to the shores of the bay, which eventually came to be known as Emerald Bay.

Emerald Bay has changed guardianship time and time again throughout its history. From the Indians to the missionaries to the Spanish land grantees, to the ranchers, to the developers and finally, to the present day homeowners, each subsequent caretaker has become deeply emotional about the area. During these thousand years, a fierce loyalty has existed between Emerald Bay and its inhabitants.

Today, Emerald Bay is one of the most exclusive and reclusive of all the private communities in Southern California. If the need to work or purchase food were eliminated, like the Native Americans, the residents of this upscale neighborhood might never leave.

Possessing one of California's finest private beaches, numerous tennis courts, a swimming pool, Hanson Park, and gorgeous views from every street, it has all the amenities of a resort. Emerald Bay's more recent history shows it has grown from Mr. William Miles' private farm in 1906, to Mr. Allen's Auto Camp in 1923, to Mr. Charles Jonas' proposed breakwater, yacht club and hotel in 1929, to homes for the

adventuresome and eventually, a private environs for the wealthy.

Emerald Bay residents love to live there, but even more, they love to keep it to themselves. Can you blame them? It is possibly the most incredible development on the coast. Along with its colorful history, it is a prime example of the natural beauty that was early California.

The first homes were sold in the early years of the 20th Century. Now, at the start of the 21st Century, homes are fetching prices that make even the oldest residents smile. The average sales price in the past six months has been \$1,600,000. The current listing prices range from \$1,000,000 to \$9,995,000. The homes vary in size and stature from the basic pre-World War II remodeled beach cottage to the most sophisticated of modern homes. There is not a bad location in all of Emerald Bay, however, proximity to the beach, view, size of lot and the impact of the Coast Highway all play an important part in pricing a home in Emerald Bay.

Some of the most recent growth has come as a result of the devastating firestorm that ravaged Emerald Bay several years ago. After this great catastrophe, a number of new building opportunities arose and some architecturally unique new homes can be seen about the canyon's crown in the upper areas of Emerald Bay.

One image from the fire that comes to mind is that of the man who was stopped at Newport Coast Road by authorities and subsequently ran the entire distance in his suit and tie to ensure that his family and home were safe. Still other Emerald Bay residents stood on their roofs with feeble little hoses trying to stop the inferno brewed up by an assassin's hand and the relentless Santa Ana Winds. The walls of flame hop-scotched across rooftops, igniting some homes while mercifully letting others survive. The devastation of the fire is a scar that has all but been repaired or replaced with beautiful new homes.

Today, the pure green waters of Emerald Bay contrast the deep blue sky like a Mexican lagoon. Ringed with gorgeous homes above its pristine sandy beach and sprinkled throughout the year with volleyball players and sun worshippers, Emerald Bay is the ultimate live-in vacation lifestyle. On any given day, the residents can be seen riding their scooters up and down the gentle hillsides, hitting tennis balls with friends or simply sitting in the warm sun, always at peace with their surroundings, their skin browned like those of the Native Americans who so many years ago fished, hunted and slept with the same satisfaction as the residents today.

The cell phones, fancy cars and busy lives may be a long way from the simple lives of the Gabrielenos but today's denizens' love life and the "Bay" just as much as that small band of Native Americans who feasted on lobster and abalone. Ask any "Emerald Bayite" where else they might want to live, and they will give you an unsure look of consternation, in as much as they will not understand the question.