

TEAM KIDS: EMPOWERING IRVINE CHILDREN • ROCKREATION OFFERS FULL CLIMBING EXPERIENCE • HIKING IRVINE: SHADY CANYON TRAIL

IRVINE WEEKLY

JANUARY 8, 2020 • VOL. 2, NO. 6



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COVER: • Photo Courtesy of Bret Kavanaugh

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EUREKA! IS PURE GOLD

WHETHER IT'S BEER, LAVENDER LEMONADE OR DEVILED EGGS, IT'S HARD TO GO WRONG AT THE IRVINE EATERY.

BY: BRET KAVANAUGH

PHOTOS: BY BRET KAVANAUGH

I walked into Eureka! recently and sat down with my bag, pulling out my laptop to draft up some articles for work. I began writing, and after a while, I began wondering why no one had taken my order yet.

I got up to use the bathroom, and a man sitting at a nearby table let me know that, in fact, the restaurant wasn't open yet. Oops. My bad. Even though I had very rudely, albeit accidentally, showed up 20 minutes before Eureka

opens for the day, he let me know that I was welcome to stay and that he could take my drink order, which I of course very much appreciated. Even though it was 100 percent my mistake, they did me a favor and let me stay, which is

more than I would have asked for.

I've gone to Eureka for beers before, and have even had a cocktail or two there. The options are endless, and everything I've tried there is great, but 10:40 a.m. is a little too early to start hitting the bottle, in my opinion. I decided to go with something alcohol-free.

I ended up ordering the "signature" lavender lemonade, which I highly recommend for those who love strong botanical liquors like gin. Instead of serving up an overwhelming, syrupy drink like I had feared, Eureka delivers a slightly bitter drink. It resembles a good cocktail, visually and taste-wise.

After the kitchen opened, I had my lunch order taken by Yessenia, who was also extremely gracious about me being there before the restaurant actually opened.

It was a difficult choice to make. The deviled eggs on their appetizer menu are one of the best bar snacks I've ever had – creamy, mustardy and topped with smoky pancetta. I've eaten them many times, and I don't think I could possibly get tired of them, but I wanted to try something new.

It was a hard choice between the salads and the tacos. Each dish is filled with bold complementary flavors, and they all sounded interesting. Ultimately, I decided to go for California's greatest food tradition and get the blackened fish tacos.

They were wonderful, with spicy charred whitefish smothered in a zingy mango slaw and served on corn tortillas. Despite the smattering of diced mango, the tacos are well-balanced and not overly sweet. They aren't painfully spicy, but they do have a pleasant kick.

The tacos come with a side of tortilla chips and salsa. The salsa container is much smaller than I had hoped, but I ate every last drop. It's a pretty mild fire-roasted sauce, dark-colored with bits of char and tomatillo throughout. I could probably have eaten three containers of it.

After I finished munching on my chips and went back to working on my laptop, Yessenia came by to see if I needed anything else, then let me know that she wasn't going to rush me, which I appreciated. I ended up paying and scrambling to get to an interview I had for another article, but I liked that I had the option to stay if I chose to.

I was considering going back to Eureka for drinks later. Seriously, their beer selection alone is too tempting to pass



up, not to mention the array of mixed drinks on the menu. Unfortunately, rain started pouring down. Drivers in Irvine aren't always the most attentive, and there always seem to be more crashes when it's raining.

I ended up skipping my Eureka revisit that night, but I did go back the next morning with a group for their famous brunch. Our waitress suggested we try the cold brew coffee they had on hand, and I'm glad we did. The coffee was made by ThunderKing Brewing Co. and came in a slick black-and-gold labeled brown bottle, like a fancy craft beer. It didn't just resemble one visually – the smooth taste indicated that the same amount of care as a small-batch IPA is put into ThunderKing's coffee.

I ordered the chilaquiles with a fried egg over-hard, which was fine. I wasn't a huge fan of the sauce-to-dish ratio, by which I mean that the bottom half of the dish becomes a sauce-and-tortilla slurry pretty quickly. Regardless, I got pretty full off the top half – the portion sizes are great here. I wouldn't order it again, but it was still a good breakfast.

The main highlight of the breakfast menu seems to be the cheap mimosas and bellinis, but their French dip sandwich is also a winner. The meat quality is noticeably high, which is a welcome change from your typical diner-style

dip. It's juicy on its own, but the salty, flavorful jus served on the side is still a fantastic addition.

By default, the French dip comes with fries, which I tried and can also vouch for. They're crispy, salty and nicely seasoned. There's nothing gimmicky about them, they're just good.

Overall, I'd have to recommend Eureka to anyone who finds themselves near the UCI campus, especially if they're a fan of interesting beers. The back of the restaurant features a long row of taps – the longest I've ever seen – and a floor-to-ceiling blackboard with more beers listed on it than I can count.

It's a great rest stop to enjoy a creamy ale or a bright, bitter IPA – just make sure you wait until they've opened to grab yourself a seat. I'd recommend them for any day when you feel like being cozy, especially if you're feeling snackish. Like I said earlier, it's not my first time around the block, and it's always nice to pair an alcoholic beverage with their appetizers. I love gin, but I'm not much of a liquor fan besides that; however, the word on the street is that their selection of small-batch whiskeys is also worth checking out.

Whatever you choose to order, it's going to turn out fine. The service is fantastic, friendly and quick, and almost everything on their menu is pure gold.

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HOW TEAM KIDS IS EMPOWERING CHILDREN TO CHANGE THE WORLD

THE NONPROFIT ENSURES THAT AGE DOESN'T KEEP ANYONE FROM MISSING OUT ON HELPING MAKE THE WORLD BETTER.

BY: TARA FINLEY

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF TEAM KIDS

Team Kids is on a mission, empowering children to change the world. Founded in 2001, this nonprofit organization works alongside partners such as Irvine Unified, the Irvine Police Department and the Orange County Fire Authority to address a serious gap in services for our youngest citizens.

As a mother of five herself, Team Kids founder and CEO Julia Hudash understood the importance of teaching young minds the value of empathy, team-

work and a drive to help others. Frustrated with a lack of nonprofits that would allow her young children to volunteer, Hudash created her own. The program has been a success from day one – her flagship challenge galvanized 600 Vista Verde Elementary School students to raise more than \$20,000 to help save the life of a local child.

“Children naturally want to change the world and help those in need, yet in our country there are few ways for them to serve,” explains Hudash.

“Due to liability issues, most charities don’t allow volunteers younger than 15 to volunteer. So when the window of compassion is wide open and kids want to send their sandwiches to Africa or save the panda bears, we send a message that they are too little [to help]. Sadly, they soon believe that message. Later in high school, teens are encouraged to volunteer to help get accepted to a good college, but all too often, the original drive to serve with compassion and empathy shifts to a self serving motivation,” furthers Hudash.

It was for these reasons that she committed to bridging the gap, giving young people the vital opportunity to engage in solutions for today’s issues.

Team Kids’ youth-led, school- and community-based service programs encourage participants to become the next generation of compassionate leaders, entrepreneurs and philanthropists. The programs focus on building positive assets for youth while protecting against harmful behaviors.

"It is critical to connect children, when the window of compassion is wide open, to critical issues in the community and provide powerful experiences like the Team Kids Challenge Program, to build empathy and self-efficacy," says Hudash.

The innovative and award-winning Team Kids Challenge is a five-week experience given to elementary school students, taught with the help of local police officers, firefighters, educators, parents and business partner volunteers. Throughout the program the children are challenged to "do great things through compassionate service to those in need."

A simple program with complex results, the challenge is delivered during school hours, making it possible for every child to participate.

One of the assets promoted by Team Kids is a positive relationship with community stakeholders, such as police and firefighters. By bringing kids and civic mentors together through participatory elementary school programming, students are provided with more than traditional, ineffective messages.

Less "don't do this" and more "by working together you can accomplish anything," Team Kids helps local youth to see adults in their schools and communities as supportive role models.

O.C. Fire Authority captain (ret.) and Founding Team Kids Board President Steve McHale states that working with Team Kids "is the best part of my career. If I do nothing else, here on out, I'm OK with that. This is the best."

"The feedback we receive from partners is always extremely positive as it unites the community to invest in kids," agrees Hudash.

The success of Team Kids has enabled it to further its reach, providing support for children across the nation and reaffirming the positive impact role models can have on today's children.

Team Kids' founder is proud of how far they've come, sharing: "As a result of our recent Team Kids research publication in the *American Psychological Association Journal of Psychology, Public Policy and Law*, there is a growing national interest in how to align community partners to support youth. After our successful replication of the Team Kids Challenge alongside the New York Department of Education, NYPD and FDNY, it is clear that this community collaboration and investment in youth can be replicated in any city."

"Our flagship Team Kids Challenge Program provides opportunities for multiple agencies to collaborate to protect and empower youth," expounds Hudash. "Whether we are teaching in Los Angeles or New York City, we constantly receive feedback that Team Kids provides the vehicle for agencies to be mentors for kids. For example, in today's climate around law enforcement, Team Kids mobilizes officers as compassionate mentors for elementary students and our outcomes are now empirically



validated to build trusting relationships between youth and law enforcement."

Children aren't the only ones benefiting from the program.

"The feedback we receive from parents is gratitude that our program is delivered in school, during the day, so parents don't have to add another activity to their busy schedule," shares Hudash.

How does Team Kids impact the local communities in which it serves? By focusing their lessons around mutual respect and prevention.

"The Team Kids Challenge Program empowers students as advocates to address critical community issues, while also mobilizing public safety mentors into school campuses to invest in our youngest leaders," furthers Hudash.

"Team Kids' programs provide our young people with opportunities to learn about community, leadership, teamwork, compassion and making healthy choices. This is prevention, as kids who feel connected to their community and are involved in positive social action are less likely to engage in destructive behavior. Team Kids' programs build self-respect – and respect for others in need."

The work they do is so impactful that graduates are coming back to teach the programs that helped shape them as students. Team Kids shares the story of one stand-out student that has made them proud:

"Keiko Arzouman participated in the Team Kids Challenge in elementary school and truly had a passion for helping others. Then as a high school and college student Keiko stepped up to mentor our youngest

Team Kids leaders. Keiko joined our Team Kids staff after graduating from college and taught the very Team Kids program that inspired her as a young student. After attending graduate school Keiko decided she truly wanted to make a difference in the lives of children with special needs. Today Keiko is working for Special Olympics and continues to inspire and empower thousands of deserving children. The mission of Team Kids is to help children identify issues they are truly passionate about, then providing the experiences for them to create a life of purpose."

Keiko did just that.

With such great benefit to our youth and local community, what can Irvine do to help Team Kids?

"The greatest way to support our innovative mission is through making a tax-deductible donation," supports Hudash.

"At Team Kids we don't believe that leadership should come with a price tag. For this reason, we do not charge schools or students to participate in the Team Kids Challenge. To honor the philanthropic spirit of children, we also donate 100 percent of youth led proceeds to charities that they vote on themselves."

Since it began in 2001, more than 100,000 students have completed the Team Kids Challenge. The program has been replicated in cities nationally, including Arlington, Virginia and Brooklyn, New York. The team is currently working to expand to new schools in their Southern California and East Coast communities. Committed to continued growth, they are also excited to be launching in Tempe, Arizona in early 2020.

Youth-driven and adult-supported, Team Kids is here to remind us all that at the end of the day, "It's all about the kids!"



A DAY IN THE SHADE: SHADY CANYON TRAIL

THE HIKE OFFERS A WELCOME ESCAPE FROM SUBURBIA AND INTO NATURE FOR NOVICES AND THE MORE EXPERIENCED ALIKE.

BY: RYAN NAJJAR

PHOTOS BY: RYAN NAJJAR

**This is the first in a series of articles where we discuss the many beautiful trails Irvine and the surrounding area have to offer.*

As I got out of my car at Turtle Rock Community Park, one of the main access points for Shady Canyon Trail, I looked around and

wondered where the actual trail was. It just seemed like suburban sidewalks at either end, and I started to get worried. I decided to take a breath and put my headphones on to shake my impatience and negativity. After all, how can a day go wrong when you have Young Thug as the soundtrack?

With all that sorted, I went along the sidewalk that

cuts into the trail, which extends to the north and south. I went for the southbound path because it seemed to cut through a more scenic section. For a time, as I sauntered along the dirt path, it seemed like I was correct. I admired the variety of trees and plants that decorate the sides, and the ducks swimming around in a large pond nearby put a big smile on my face. The sound of nearby cars, however, would often pull me from the headspace of a natural experience.

Upon checking my map, I discovered I was nearly at the end of the trail, rather than the beginning. Unperturbed, I headed back to explore the other 90 percent of the adventure waiting for me.

Like the section I had just walked, a dirt path lay in front of me for the northbound section. Trees and shrubbery decorate the left side, which are pleasant to glance at while walking along. To the right, though, cars pass along the road of their private community, which a small fence warns hikers to not trespass into. Thankfully, this image was soon replaced by tall and wide shrubbery as the trail diverges away from the

OUTDOORS



road. Even though there were houses I could see along the top of a hill to the left, I still got the feeling I had been shielded from civilization.

Now that I could stop thinking about cars, I could focus on the merits of the trail itself. Fortunately, there are many.

As someone who isn't the most athletically inclined, but still wants to keep himself in shape, I found this to be a prime balance of leisure and challenge. Flat sections made up a good amount of the trail at the start, and inclines begin to pop up within the second mile or so out of Turtle Rock. These inclines in turn have varying intensities, although there's nothing that would leave an ordinary person out of breath. For those looking for an extra challenge during their daily run or bike ride, this is very much the place to be.

The fourth wall of natural serenity breaks from time to time as the trail merges closer to the road. This, however, doesn't bother me too much for a couple of reasons. For one, the community itself is quite calm, and there aren't many noises emerging from it that take me out of my focus (besides the occasional car). Secondly, I figured people in this area didn't have time to go all the way down to Turtle Rock to start their hike or bike ride. Therefore, multiple entry points could be considered more of a blessing than a curse.

Breaking away from the suburb again, the trail took me along a wooden bridge, the sort of structure I have a soft spot for. After passing along this, I was given a view of a golf course, not my favorite view on the hike.

As the trail began to dip and rise, the golf course was graciously removed from my line of sight and replaced

with more beautiful rolling hills, showing off more green than you'd expect to see in December. It wasn't a lot, but it was enough to make each of the many plant varieties stand out in a special way. As far as what types of plants these were, you'll have to consult *Botany Weekly*, our sister publication that doesn't exist (but honestly should).

The surprises continued as I began to hear the calls of at least three different types of birds ring through the air. "Well it's way too cold for these little guys to be out," I thought, "so they must have really wanted to say hi to me!" My Snow White fantasy was dimmed, however, when I remembered that 60 degrees is only considered cold if you're from ... well ... here. Regardless, knowing the variety of life that graced this trail enhanced it in my eyes.

It wasn't just wildlife or plant life, either! Every human and adorable dog that passed by me was an absolute pleasure, and the few words I exchanged with them were filled with warmth. Whether they were taking a peaceful stroll, doing some nature-watching, or getting their workout in, people wanted to be on the Shady Canyon Trail for all sorts of reasons.

After this experience, you can bet I count myself amongst them. Offering plenty to novice hikers and non-athletes, while throwing in more than enough challenges for intensity-seekers, there's something for everyone here. Also, if you're coming in from the north end and looking for more of a workout, you can swing right back into Turtle Rock Community Park and enjoy their fields and courts before hitting the trail's southern tip.

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SLIGHTLY STOOPID TALKS 20-PLUS YEAR LEGACY

THE VENERABLE SOCAL BAND PLAYS LONG BEACH REGGAE FESTIVAL.

BY: SHIRLEY JU

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST

Slightly Stoopid has been around for decades and they're still going strong. On Sunday, February 9, they'll perform at One Love Cali Reggae Fest at Queen Mary Park in Long Beach. Hailing from Ocean Beach near San Diego, the beach-friendly band-mates consist of founders, multi-instrumentalists and childhood friends Miles Doughty and Kyle McDonald, along with drummer Ryan "Rymo" Moran, percussionist Oguer "OG" Ocon, saxophonist Daniel "Dela" Delacruz, keyboardist Paul Wolstencroft, and trumpet and trombone player Andy Geib.

The diverse musical ensemble came into fruition in 1994, quickly catching the attention of Sublime frontman Bradley Nowell. After discovering the band, he asked them to perform at Foothill Tavern in Long Beach. Eventually, Nowell went on to sign them to his Skunk Records label while they were still in high school. (Crazy!)

The band's claim to fame has everything to do with their sound – a fusion of eclectic genres spanning folk,

rock, reggae, blues, hip-hop, funk, metal and punk – along with their mantra: Spreading positivity in all ways they can.

While their lyrics and music speak for itself, the group's humble journey took them from performing small, intimate bars to touring the world. Since then, they have done almost every major festival, from Coachella to Harmony to Lollapalooza to Austin City Limits.

Last year in July, the group unleashed their ninth studio album titled *Everyday Life, Everyday People*, a testament to their normalcy, independence and humility. The 13-track project features appearances from Ali Campbell (UB40), Alborosie, G. Love, Chali 2na (Jurassic 5), Don Carlos, Yellowman, and Sly Dunbar (Sly and Robbie).

Still going strong after more than 20 years, Slightly Stoopid has created their own counterculture at the intersection of music, art and social action. Their philanthropic efforts do not go unnoticed, with the band

oftentimes working and raising money for various charities and nonprofit organizations.

Irvine Weekly caught up with lead singer Miles, who cherishes his off days with his three beautiful daughters, as he prepares for the One Love Cali Reggae Fest in Long Beach.

Irvine Weekly: You guys came into fruition in 1995, how have you evolved since with the times and the social media era?

Miles Doughty: Well in my mind, we're a little bit behind the ball of the social media world [chuckles]. Just because we grew up the old school way of touring: nonstop, flying in the towns, our street teams always taking care of stuff. The wave of social media, that's basically what people are on 24/7 nowadays.

We've been trying to step up the game a little bit and be more conscious of it. Because the way we grew up touring, we never really had that in the beginning. We're behind the ball just because we started the grind a little early.

What are your fondest memories of the early days and just coming up?

Just mashing in the van all over the country with your boys, having some of the craziest shows and bars all over the country. Starting out in those small bars, it's so intimate and just rad because the fans are up close and the chaos is right in front of you. You miss those days a little bit because when you're playing the bigger venues, the stages are always a little bit further

from the crowds.

There's something to be said about that whole circa 1,000-capacity rooms or smaller, where it's just really tight and right. The pits are dope. The dancing's crazy. The fans are right up in your face, so it's pretty rad.

How has the energy in the group shifted as a dynamic between the members. The same? Is it different now?

Me and Kyle, we grew up since we were 1 or 2 years old. We're basically brothers from other mothers and we've been making music since the start. For us, we've just evolved as people and musicians over the years. Like anything, you mature in what you're doing. Still have the same mentality, but more aware of what's going on around you. Not always the chaos at the party and whatnot.

Ceatively if you listen, every record sounds completely different except for it still has the staple sound of Stupid. We always try as many styles of music as we can, because we enjoy it as fans of music ourselves. Just not being stuck in one little genre, we like to play it all.

What are you most excited for with One Love Cali Reggae Fest approaching?

I mean, it's always raging when you're playing in SoCal. Damian Marley is going to be nuts. Iration, J Boog, Common Kings, there's so many killer bands. The whole weekend's rad really: Dirty Heads, Rebelution, Stick Figure, Atmosphere. It's going to be killer.

What's dope is that the scene has just gotten so big and crazy. The people that come out are amazing, just all the fanbase. You've seen this culture and movement stretch across the country. It's really dope to see as someone who's toured for a couple of decades around the States. Just to see it grow like it has, it's turned into something special.

Growing up in San Diego, which is super close to O.C., how do the two counties compare?

Each kind of has their own vibe. I grew up in a town called Ocean Beach, which is a very hippie kind of town. Still kind of true to its roots, one of the last old-school vibe towns. What's good about the O.C. is just the energy that people bring always. In general the beach culture and Southern California, everyone rolls together in that vibe.

That's also something that's spread around the world globally, the SoCal beach culture, surf roots, rock/reggae vibe. It's pretty cool to see.

What's your favorite part about Long Beach?

My favorite part about Long Beach is just the whole Skunk Records crew. Growing up, seeing those guys back in the day from teenagers till now. Miguel Hapoldt, Opie Ortiz, all those guys. It's just cool to go up

there every time we're there, to hang out with our boys that we've known for a couple decades. That's really what we look forward to.

Favorite song to perform in a set?

That's a tough one. I always like playing "Officer." "Wicked Rebels" is fun. "Wise Man" is a fun track to play. "Closer to the Sun." Those are four songs that are always fun, just the message in them and the energy you get from the people. When those songs start to play, there's something about the songs that elevates people to a certain energy level. It's fun to play them.

Your last project was Everyday Life, Everyday People. What's one thing you want fans to get from this one?

Well if you listen to the words of the songs, it's our experiences through life. What and how we see things, what we've gone through from our experiences on the road through our experiences raising our own families. Just like anything, music evolves and people evolve.

Like the title says, we're just regular beach kids that surf, skate, grew up hanging out together and we just happen to play music. There's nothing different about us except that we're on a stage preaching a certain message about a lifestyle that we enjoy, that we embrace and try to push to the people.

Talk about creating your own counterculture following through music, art, social action.

We let everything speak for itself as far as not necessarily creating the culture, but just absorbing and embracing it. The way we lived growing up, surfing and skating. Me and Kyle we literally spent our whole lives at the beach as kids, and you can feel it in the music. When we walk out on stage, what you see is what you get. We're going to be wearing probably some Vans or some Converse. Whatever we wore all day, we just walked right on the stage with the same stuff on. We're there to have a great time with the fans, party as hard as we can while we're there with the fans and hit the next town. [laughs]

Best encounter you had with a fan?

Honestly, there's too many. We have a really amazing fan base: the Stoopidheads. It's a very organic, grassroots fan base that's been with us a long time. They travel all over the country. All-year long, they're at multiple shows so it's hard to say the best experience.

We're on a first name basis with hundreds of people that we've seen along the way over the years. It's pretty special that

what we're doing affects their lives in a certain way, but we're also friends with them outside of the music. It's pretty cool to have that engagement with a lot of the fans.

Your fans have been with you for 20 years, what is it about Slightly Stoopid they love?

I think just our attitude and what we're talking about. Our energy that we put out. What we've talked about in our music, people come up and say it does certain things for their lives. For us, that means everything because what we're saying that's affecting our lives, is affecting their lives. It's really cool to see the message being absorbed the way it is.

Ideal day off?

Being home with my family: my kids and my wife. Let and watch the kids play, surf, whatever they want to do. Go to the beach, play ball, everything. Family time is not to be taken for granted when you live on the road. You miss a million moments. When I'm home, every day off I have a chance I literally try to fly home so I could try to catch a couple of moments.

What are some goals for yourself at this point of your career?

My goal is always just to keep bringing music to the people and keep the energy the same level. I don't want to be out there just to play. We love to be on stage and play music, so I want it to continue like that as far as my passion for it and always loving what you're doing.

I don't want to just do it for the sake of doing it, you know? It's not worth it. Music is a special thing. I don't care who you are, music reaches everybody. It's something that's universal. There's no borders anywhere in the world that can separate music from people, so it's pretty cool to see that.

Slightly Stoopid performs at One Love Cali Reggae Fest on Sunday, February 9 at Queen Mary Park in Long Beach.





AIM FOR THE TOP AT ROCKREATION

THE GYM OFFERS CLASSIC CLIMBING EXPERIENCES WITH MODERN AMENITIES AND A VARIETY OF PROGRAMS.

BY: RYAN NAJJAR

PHOTO BY: BRANDY YOUNG

Ever since the massive success of films like **Free Solo**, more and more people have turned their eyes to the world of climbing. Amongst them, many have decided to give it a try for themselves, filling up gym walls in cities across the country. Since it's a sport I hold near and dear to my heart (I've lost over 25 pounds this past year while doing it), I've felt obligated to let people know about the best places to climb in our area. With that mission in mind, I recently paid a visit to the Rockreation gym in nearby Costa Mesa to see what they have to offer.

From the second my brother, our friend and I step in, we're met with a warm energy from the gym's staff. They guide us to the waiver we need to fill out (standard practice for any climbing gym you're using for the first time), and welcome us in after we pay \$20 for a day pass.

Looking at the walls, the first description that came to our minds was "old school." Their walls, outside of the brightly colored holds, mimic natural rocks, even including the sort of features you'd see on rocks outdoors. Excited to see how these could be utilized, we headed over to the lockers to get changed and start our climb.

Heading toward these lockers, we passed through a beautifully modern exercise area, complete with hang boards, sturdy pull-up bars, weights and even treadmills and bikes. Depending on your fitness goals, this section alone could replace your standard (non-climb-

ing) gym. They keep up the modern trend with their bathrooms and showers as well, which are pristine and well stocked.

Walking back toward the walls, we were hit with a pleasant surprise: fresh air. Until then, we hadn't noticed the massive garage door built into the side of the gym. What was once a leftover feature of the previous business in this space was now this gym's most unique asset, as they were able to crack it open to bring in some fresh air for us and our fellow climbers.

We decided to start in the bouldering section of the gym. For those unfamiliar, "bouldering" refers to climbing a shorter wall without the assistance of ropes. There, we were welcomed by a wide array of settings, featuring a strong variety of inclines and route types meant to test the full scope of a climber's strengths.

We also recognized a wide variety of difficulties, although the difficulty markers were unfortunately missing the day I came. The staff explained that they had a competition the night before, and had the categorized the routes based on a point system. We figured this would be sufficient, but the amount of points wasn't always proportional to difficulty (to me, at least), and they hadn't put up the standard markers for at least two hours after they opened.

That being said, it encouraged us to try the sorts of routes we wouldn't normally attempt, and our workout was uninhibited overall. They utilized their space to

the fullest, and features like the arch made their facility stand out amongst many others I've visited. We also appreciated that they had individual fall mats that we needed to move around. One might think this is inconvenient at first, but the fact that mat adjustment is essential in outdoor climbing made this feature stand out as an excellent way for people to practice placement.

Moving over to the rope climbing section, which takes up a majority of the space in this gym, there were very few complaints to be had. Besides the fact that they don't lend out lead ropes, which is standard in other gyms, this section has plenty to offer. Besides the wide variety of standard routes, which bore standard difficulty labels, there were also quite a few options for crack climbers too (for the unfamiliar, this simply involves climbing by sticking your hands and feet in a crack that goes all the way up the wall). Even routes that were at and below my skill level provided interesting challenges, engaging my brain along with my muscles.

So now you might be wondering: How much does a membership at this place cost? Well, given the offered amenities, the \$75 monthly membership for adults, with a \$100 start fee, is not too surprising. Considering the day pass costs \$20, this is pretty sensible for those planning on regular visits. The membership also includes free yoga classes and unlimited use of the exercise area, so the bang for your buck is certainly there.

Their program offerings are something to note as well; they offer climbing classes for kids and adults alike, a homeschool program, a climbing camp, fitness classes, yoga classes, team building exercises for companies, and more. They even host birthday parties if you're looking to spice things up on your kid's special day.

If you're looking to get your kids into team sports outside of school, look no further than Rockreation's Rock Warriors program. For kids that are just starting out or focusing on the fundamentals, the Club Team provides a fun yet structured environment for them to hone their skills. When they want to take things to the next level, though, they can try out for the Advanced Team, where they'll be training to participate in local and regional USA Climbing-sanctioned competitions. Lastly, for those a few cuts above the rest, the Elite Team is reserved for aspiring champions, enduring a rigorous training program that'll help them excel in competitions ranging from the local to national level. Inclusion on these teams isn't covered by the membership fee, though, so make sure you take a look at the rates on their website.

Overall, if you're craving a classic climbing gym experience that doesn't forego modern amenities, I definitely recommend you give this place a shot. From the friendly staff, to the extensive variety of routes, to the wide assortment of programs, there's an awful lot to love here.

Rockreation
1300 Logan Ave, Costa Mesa
714-556-7625
rockreation-cm.com

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