

Pier Pleasure

Each Ocean Structure Has Personality of Its Own

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By JAMES M. GOMEZ
TIMES STAFF WRITER

NEWPORT BEACH—Joe Pruzinski drank in the lazy, late-afternoon scene of couples strolling past the grassy concourse and swaying palm trees at the foot of Balboa Pier.

"This is it, man," Pruzinski said as his eyes followed a lone roller blader. "I don't like Newport Pier. We call that one the War Zone."

About 25 miles south, James Boliek patiently helped a young vacationer tie a hook onto her fishing pole and cast the line over the rail at San Clemente Pier.

"I wouldn't fish anyplace else," said Boliek, who has dropped his line from the South County



ORANGE COUNTY
S U M M E R

pier at least three times a week for the past eight years. "This water is the cleanest in the county. That makes the fish taste better."

Orange County's six ocean piers have long been important landmarks that draw thousands of assorted fishermen, tourists, joggers

and pigeon feeders. And over time, each has developed a distinct personality and a loyal following.

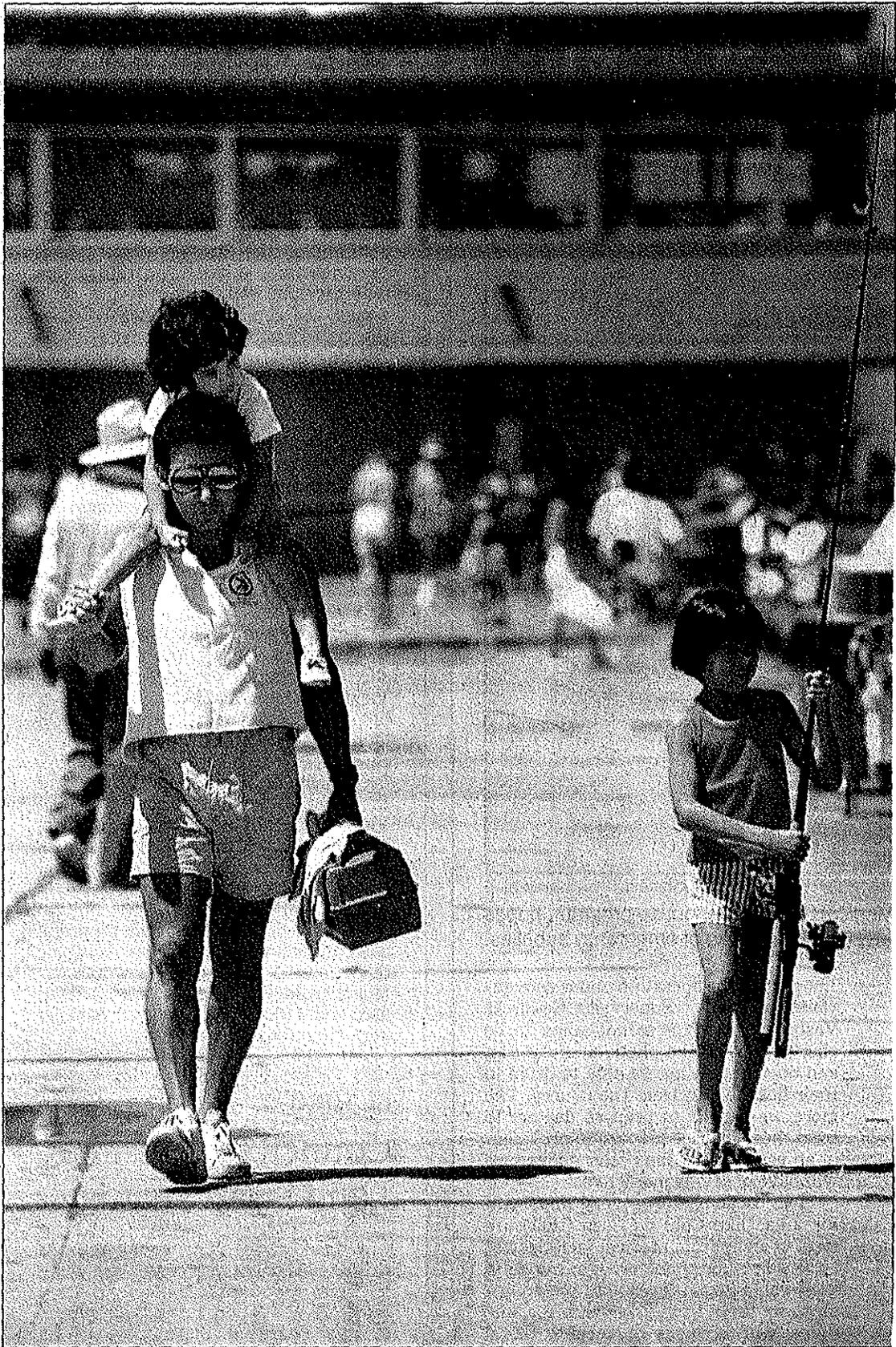
Newport Pier seems to be the favorite of tourists and teen-agers, who together create an almost frenetic atmosphere during the summer. Laguna Beach's tiny Aliso Pier is strictly for the hard-core fishermen who prefers a little solitude. Seal Beach, with its 1940s style diner at

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Three sightseers catch the last rays of sunlight at the Balboa Pier in Newport Beach.





PETER ROSS / Los Angeles Times

Ken Guerrero, with daughters Tiffany, 3, and Talia, 8, head home after day at Newport Pier.

PIERS

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the far end, tends to draw families, while the San Clemente pier attracts people who like to sit back and watch the surfers below.

"There certainly is something for everybody," said Eric Jessen, administrator for the county Department of Harbors, Beaches and Parks, who authored a 1974 study of the county's piers. "There are very distinct differences in atmosphere at each pier."

Whatever the differences, though, all the piers are a symbol of civic pride as well as a sizable source of tourist dollars and tax revenue for the beach cities.

"The pier is a major focal point for the community," said James Palin, deputy city manager of Huntington Beach.

Indeed, Huntington Beach knows all too well the value of a pier. The city is spending \$12.5 million to build a new, state-of-the-art structure. The Huntington Beach pier, built in 1914, has been closed since it was severely damaged in a January, 1988, storm. It is scheduled for demolition in the fall, and a new 1,840-foot pier is expected to be completed in 1992.

Many fans of the Huntington Beach Pier express disappointment that the pier is no longer usable and are frustrated by delays in building the new one.

"It's really a pain," said roller blader Mike Ragsdale. "It was a much better pier [than Newport Beach]. I just wish they'd fix it."

The Newport Pier, built in 1888 as a shipping port and railroad station, has long been one of the most popular attractions in the tourist-oriented city. This summer, the tourist business appears to be booming, said Dave Harshbarger, who is city Marine Department director. More than 5,000 people a day are expected to walk the length of the 1,036-foot pier, he said.

During the early morning hours, grizzly fishermen dominate the scene, but as the day wears on, they begin to mingle with camera-toting tourists and skateboarding teen-agers.

"People come from all over the world to see Newport Pier," said "Ski" Meinshein, the white-haired "Bird Man of Newport," who sits under a shade tree at the base of the pier and amuses groups of tourists with his trained parrots. "There are all kinds here."

At Aliso Pier, located in a scenic cove in South Laguna, fishermen gloat that it is their best kept secret. In fact, Jessen said, the 800-foot-long pier does have the best fishing in the county because of a kelp bed, coral formation and breeding area that is located between Corona del Mar and Dana Point.

Jack McCabe, 63, dropped his line off the concrete pier on opening day in 1972 and almost gave up fishing altogether when the pier closed for almost two years to repair crumbling concrete footings.

But since its reopening last December, he and other dedicated Aliso Pier fishermen have returned to their old ways.

"It's a good place to think, stare at the ocean and meet some good people," McCabe said.

Aliso, the least commercialized pier in Orange County, was built specifically to serve the local fish-

ing crowd. It includes an unusual diamond shaped tip that allows fishermen to drop their lines into the water from the center of the pier.

All piers were built with a specific function in mind, be it commerce, fishing or just pleasure. In 1928, San Clemente's founder, Ole Hanson, commissioned construction of the 1,200-foot all-wood pier to attract people to his new city, "The Spanish Village by the Sea."

"It was always considered a pleasure pier," city Marine Safety Capt. Lynn Hughes said. "It still is one of the nicest and more unique places to go in the county."

Don and Shirley Stanley, owners of the pier's Bait and Tackle Shop, bought the business two years ago to immerse themselves in the local, small-town atmosphere.

"Everybody knows everybody here," said Shirley Stanley as she stored a package of cut-up mackerel in her large refrigerator for

one local fisherman. "It's a whole different way of life out here."

At the Seal Beach Pier, the atmosphere has been changing as fast as the area's downtown district. Once mainly a fisherman's pier—there are still daily fishing boats that depart from the pier—Seal Beach is nonetheless cleaning up its act, longtime local pier-goers noted.

"This place used to be pretty idiosyncratic, kind of bohemian, in the 1960s," said Rockwell employee Ned Cherry, 52, who sat on a pier bench with a co-worker one recent lunchtime.

The two come to the pier at least once a week to "watch the waves, the girls and get some fresh air," said co-worker Greg Richford, 33. "It's got pretty good access, so we don't waste time parking."

Now, Cherry said, the pier attracts a "more well-to-do crowd. Like the city."

The turning point for the Seal

Beach Pier came in 1983, when a violent storm destroyed two portions of the structure.

But an aggressive fund-raising campaign by local residents and businessmen was launched, and two years later, the pier was reopened.

It now sports a Ruby's Diner, one of a chain of eateries that serves old-fashioned hamburgers and thick shakes. The restaurant has helped draw more families to the renovated pier, said Ruby's manager Mike Ellis.

"A lot of people now come to the pier just to walk out to Ruby's and have a nice lunch," Ellis said.

Up and down the coast, people venture onto the piers for a variety of reasons: to relax to the sound of the waves pounding the sand, to people-watch, to check out what the fishermen are reeling in.

"There's a certain aura to being on a pier," Huntington Beach's Palin said. "Each person wants to describe the experience a little differently."

County's Piers Are No Match for the Elements

By JAMES M. GOMEZ
TIMES STAFF WRITER

The past decade has not been kind to Orange County's piers.

The now-abandoned Huntington Beach Pier stands as a testament to the destructiveness of several storms in the 1980s that mercilessly battered those sturdy platforms of wood, cement and steel that stretch into the Pacific.

During a pounding by 30-foot waves two years ago, a 250-foot portion of the concrete pier was torn off and the rest so badly weakened that it was closed. The pier will finally be dismantled in the fall.

The 1988 storm also inflicted damage on the Newport Beach, Balboa and San Clemente piers, but not enough to close them.

In 1986, storm damage forced the temporary closure of the Seal Beach and Huntington Beach piers for repairs.

And three years earlier, a fierce storm caused

major damage to the Huntington Beach, San Clemente and Seal Beach piers, tearing off portions of the platforms and uprooting the deep pilings. All three were closed months for repairs.

Huntington Beach plans to build a new pier that should be open to the public in 1992. "If we do it right, it should last us 100 years," Deputy City Administrator Jim Palin said.

In truth, none of the county's piers have lasted anywhere near 100 years.

Each pier has undergone extensive repairs and piling and platform replacements over the years. In fact, city officials say that there are no original materials left on any of the piers except Aliso Pier, which was built in 1972.

And even Aliso Pier was closed all of last year for renovation.

"Piers are much like the human body, where all the cells die and are replaced within seven years," San Clemente Marine Safety Capt. Lynn Hughes said.

ORANGE COUNTY OCEAN PIERS

SEAL BEACH PIER
 Length: 1,865 feet; Built: 1938; Construction: Concrete, Steel, Wood;
 Hours Open: 24 Hours

A B C D E F G

HUNTINGTON BEACH PIER
 Length: 1,840 feet; Built: 1914; Construction: Concrete, Steel, Wood;
 Will Reopen In 1992

A C D E F G H

NEWPORT BEACH PIER
 Length: 1,032 feet; Built: 1888; Construction: Wood - Concrete Deck;
 Hours Open: 24 Hours

A C D E F H

SALBOA PIER
 Length: 919 feet; Built: 1906; Construction: Wood - Concrete Deck;
 Hours Open: 24 Hours

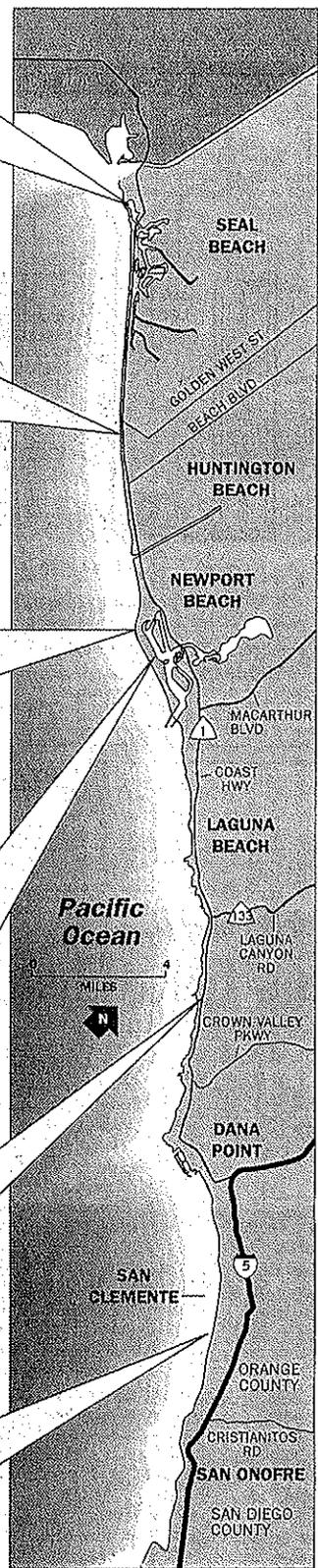
A C D E F H

ALISO PIER
 Length: 800 feet; Built: 1972; Construction: Concrete, Steel; Hours
 Open: 6 a.m.-10 p.m.

A B C D E H

SAN CLEMENTE PIER
 Length: 1,200 feet; Built: 1928; Construction: All Wood; Hours Open: 4
 a.m.- Midnight

A B C D E F G



Present

Legend

- | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|
| A Restrooms | E Souvenirs |
| B Tackle Shop | F Restaurants |
| C First Aid | G Lifeguard Station |
| D Telescopes | H Arcades |

Pier facts

Longest: Seal Beach, 1,865 feet
Shortest: Aliso, 800 feet
Oldest: Newport Beach, 1888
Newest: Aliso, 1972