

## Feasting at the Shore

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Posted: 11/25/2010 10:07:25 PM PST

Updated: 11/26/2010 06:53:55 AM PST

When 20-year-old Demi Willis told her family back in Fresno that she wouldn't be able to come home for Thanksgiving from Santa Monica, they decided to come closer to her.

It was a great excuse to try something new: holding the feast near the beach at the Dockweiler RV Park.

Located on a sprawling beach that is wedged between the Pacific Ocean and Los Angeles International Airport, the site just west of El Segundo has become a hot spot for families seeking to do Turkey Day the not-so-traditional way.

Willis on Thursday spent quality time with not only her mother, stepdad and younger brother, but also her grandparents, who drove their RV from California Hot Springs, a remote town of 600 people nestled near the edge of Sequoia National Forest.

"I'm just grateful to have my family come," said Willis, a hairstylist in Santa Monica who is scheduled to work on Saturday.

Her grandfather, a retired welder who built a

makeshift grill to cook their bird, nodded in contented agreement before taking a sip from his Keystone Light.

Although the RV park has become a popular Thanksgiving Day destination, this year, for the first time in a while, it wasn't filled to capacity. About 20 of the nearly 120 spots remained unfilled, according to Jose Mata, a manager at the park.

This might have something to do with how the per-night camping price recently rose. The cost of a front-row spot, for instance, went from \$45 to \$65. (The

least expensive spots currently go for \$55.)

In any case, those who came seemed to have no regrets about the steeper price. As jet airliners roared overhead - taking off from the nearby airport and disappearing high over the ocean - children sledged down a dike of sand that had been amassed to protect the campers from swells. People walked their dogs on the beach, tossed around footballs, cooked dinner or just sat around chatting.

The families of longtime Orange County friends Greta Davis and Cindy Hill have been meeting at the park on Thanksgiving for years. It started as a way to mitigate the grueling holiday commute for Hill's spouse, an airplane mechanic at LAX who often works on Thanksgiving.

But the friends say they'd probably keep doing this even if he didn't work the holiday.

"You can see the ocean, you can see Palos Verdes, you can see Malibu - and it's almost always been sunshine, though there was rain once," said Davis, sipping on a lunch-hour margarita as the turkey cooked.

Nearby, another group of friends waited as the off-duty firefighter among them cooked a deep-fried turkey with the aid of a propane tank. Ever the stickler for safety, he placed the grill out on the beach, far away from the RVs, in case something should go haywire. This group, too, has been coming every Thanksgiving for the past four years.

"This is still one of the best deals in town," said a member of that group, Paula Lerch, who came from Las Vegas with her husband. "There's nowhere else you can stay on the beach. Pismo (up in San Luis Obispo County), but nowhere else in Los Angeles."

At another campsite nearby, several women from an extended family sat at the picnic table, where they peeled potatoes, pored over newspaper coupons and shot the breeze while waiting for their ham and turkey to cook. Meanwhile, the men held court inside one of the RVs, a few young children came and went and three of the families' small dogs roamed the area, sniffing the ground for discarded goodies.

Why do they come here from West Covina, Burbank and Chino Hills?

"We love to camp, and on Thanksgiving we have a four-day weekend, so it just seems logical,"

said Charlene Tabet of Burbank.

The family was looking forward to not only eating, but also watching football on the three TVs they brought along, playing Wii video games and, to cap off the night, lighting a bonfire on the beach.

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