


## PART ONE

# SAN DIEGO COUNTY

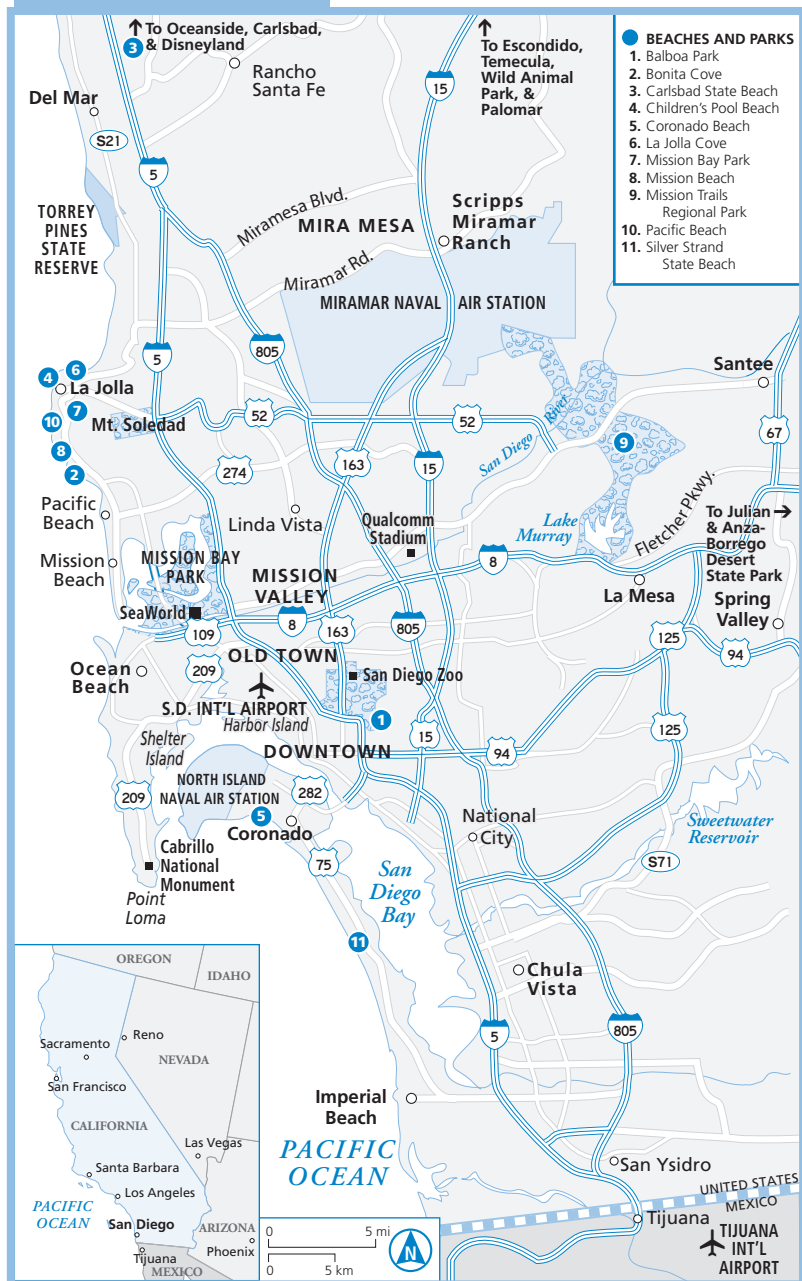
WHAT AN INTERESTING TOEHOLD SAN DIEGO COUNTY has on the continent—right at the edge, where travelers must choose between the ocean and a foreign country if they keep going. The eastern part of the county is home to the enormous **Anza-Borrego Desert State Park**. The coastal area is the population center, with the city of **San Diego** (the second-largest municipality in the state) dominating. The northern part of the county (before the huge military base at **Camp Pendleton** takes over the map) is dotted with golf courses. To the south, of course, is Mexico.

We've taken our kids to San Diego County in all seasons and for lots of different kinds of vacations. We've ridden the train from **L.A.** and stayed in downtown San Diego, riding the trolley to the **San Diego Zoo** and shopping in **Horton Plaza**. We based ourselves in **Carlsbad** to visit the **Wild Animal Park** and **Legoland** and enjoyed a bonus of gorgeous beach time. We've lollied in a fancy **Coronado Island** resort's outdoor spa after biking all over the island and taking the ferry back and forth just for fun. And we've sat in the gentle tidal waters of **Mission Bay** while a happy toddler splashed next to us. You see where this is headed, of course. It'll take more than a single vacation to even begin to sample San Diego's charms.

If it's your first visit to the San Diego area and you're arriving in summer, a four-day itinerary with a base at one of the Mission Bay resorts is ideal. **SeaWorld** is right in Mission Bay, so that's one day's outing. Pick among the zoo, Wild Animal Park, a Balboa Park museum or two, **Old Town**, and **Legoland California** for another two days of fun. Finish with a day dedicated to water sports and beach fun. If the attractions that most interest you are Legoland and the Wild Animal Park, and you like a small-town setting, consider staying up the coast

 **unofficial TIP**  
Families will find San Diego County easy to like. It has everything California is supposed to have—palm trees, beaches, a multicultural population, unlimited outdoor recreation, sophisticated cultural offerings, and good Mexican food.

## san diego county



in **Carlsbad**. Families traveling with convention-goers won't be disappointed with the ever-improving downtown area and can try out the car-free itineraries described below. Visitors with another day should add a **Borrego Springs** visit, a **Tijuana** excursion (*note*: passports are required to enter Mexico starting January 1, 2008), or (in early spring) a whale-watching boat trip.

## GETTING THERE

**BY PLANE** **San Diego International Airport** is served by most major airlines; **Lindbergh Field** (☎ 619-231-2100; [www.portofsandiego.org](http://www.portofsandiego.org)) is just a few miles northeast of the city.

**BY TRAIN** **Amtrak** makes its final southbound stop in San Diego, delivering travelers from as far north as Seattle. From L.A., the trip is about two hours on the popular, well-patronized Surfliner commuter line (frequent departures morning and afternoon). Excellent public transportation from the train station makes a trip without a car possible. Call ☎ 800-USA-RAIL; [www.amtrak.com](http://www.amtrak.com).

**BY CAR** **Interstate 5**, which runs from Canada to Mexico, is the main freeway heading into San Diego. It's also reached from the north by **Highway 15**, which comes from the Riverside area and connects to **Interstate 10**, and by **Interstate 8**, which heads east to Arizona. A car is not necessary to enjoy central San Diego, but it's great to have if you want to explore the farther reaches.

## Car-free Sightseeing

Although San Diego and its suburbs are spread generously over many acres, and motorists will find their way along good roads and modern freeways, the city has also created a network of public transportation that permits easy access to major attractions, many of which are in a comparatively concentrated geographic area. The weather's almost always sunny and mild, so the journey from place to place is a pleasant jaunt; and because the city does a brisk convention business, the various trams, trolleys, and ferries have enough patronage to justify frequent, convenient runs.

If you think you'd like to do San Diego without a car (arriving by train, for example), you'll need to stay downtown, in Coronado, or near Old Town, in order to easily combine the attractions mentioned here into a network. You can also simply take a taxi or municipal bus to the first boarding point of the day.

Here's a sample no-car itinerary: Board the **Old Town Trolley Tours** bus at your hotel in Coronado and ride it (enjoying the guide's descriptions of passing sights) to **Balboa Park**. Enjoy a morning at the zoo, then take the free Balboa shuttle to the **Space Museum**, then reboard the Old Town Trolley and continue to Old Town. Save the historic buildings for another day, but enjoy a Mexican meal and some shopping, then take the **San Diego Trolley** to downtown, changing to another trolley to

**Seaport Village.** At Seaport Village, let the kids play some games and get an ice-cream cone, then get on the ferry to cross the water to Coronado and your hotel.

You might think the Old Town Trolley Tours bus (with narration and music) is corny, but it sure is convenient. It goes to most of the major attractions, and you can get on and off at eight stops, including Old Town, the **Embarcadero**, **Seaport Village**, Horton Plaza, Coronado, and Balboa Park. Call ☎ 619-298-8687 or 800-868-7482, or on the Web, visit [www.historictours.com](http://www.historictours.com) for locations of stops and a timetable. \$30 adults, \$15 ages 4 to 12, age 3 and under free.

**Metropolitan Transit Service's Transit Store** (102 Broadway, downtown San Diego; ☎ 619-234-1060; [www.sdcommute.com](http://www.sdcommute.com)) is a center of information about buses, **Coaster** (Coastal Light Rail), and the San Diego Trolley. The Day Tripper Transit Pass, available as a one- (\$5), two- (\$9), three- (\$12), or four-day (\$15) pass, is sold here. There is no charge for children age 6 and under. One-day passes can also be purchased at trolley stations and the ferry landing.

The **San Diego Trolley** (☎ 619-233-3004; automated info line, ☎ 619-685-4900) operates daily from 5 a.m. to midnight, with service every 15 minutes most of the time. Tickets are dispensed from automated machines at each station. The **Blue Line** extends from Old Town through downtown to the Mexican border. The **Bayside Line** covers the Harbor Drive area and goes to Seaport Village, to the convention center, and through downtown and the **Gaslamp Quarter**. Another line heads for **Petco Park**, home of the San Diego Padres baseball team, via Mission Valley. Fares are \$1.25 to \$3.

There is free daily tram shuttle service around Balboa Park.



The **San Diego–Coronado Ferry**, ☎ 619-234-4111; runs between downtown San Diego's Broadway Pier (1050 North Harbor Drive, at Broadway) and the Ferry Landing Marketplace on Coronado at First Street and B Avenue. The crossing is 15 minutes, and it leaves San Diego every hour on the hour from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., returning from Coronado every hour on the half hour. One-way fares are \$3 per person and 50¢ per bike, and reservations are not needed.

The **San Diego Water Taxi** (Fish Harbor Pier, Seaport Village, 891 West Harbor Drive; ☎ 619-235-8294) offers on-call service from Monday through Friday, 2 p.m. to 10 p.m., and Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m., and transports people to various spots around the bay, including Shelter Island, Harbor Island, Coronado, and Chula Vista; fares start at \$6 but can vary by destination.

## HOW TO GET INFORMATION BEFORE YOU GO

- **Anza-Borrego State Park Visitors Center** ☎ 760-767-4205; [www.anzaborrego.statepark.org](http://www.anzaborrego.statepark.org).
- **Balboa Park Visitors Center** ☎ 619-239-0512; [www.balboapark.org](http://www.balboapark.org).
- **Border Station Parking and Tourist Information** A commercial

park-and-shuttle service at the Mexican border; 4570 Camino De La Plaza, San Ysidro; ☎ 619-428-1422.

- **Carlsbad Convention and Visitors Bureau** ☎ 760-434-6093; [www.carlsbadca.org](http://www.carlsbadca.org).
- **Coronado Visitors Bureau** ☎ 619-437-8788; [www.coronadovisitorcenter.com](http://www.coronadovisitorcenter.com).
- **San Diego Convention and Visitors Bureau** ☎ 619-236-1212; [www.sandiego.org](http://www.sandiego.org).
- **Tijuana Tourism and Convention Bureau** ☎ 888-775-2417; [www.seetijuana.com](http://www.seetijuana.com).

## CHILD CARE AND BABYSITTING

**Kiddiecorp** (10455 Sorrento Valley Road, Suite 103, San Diego; ☎ 858-455-1718; [www.kiddiecorp.com](http://www.kiddiecorp.com)) offers on-site group child care and special events for kids. **Marion's Childcare** (10491 Pine Grove Street, Spring Valley; ☎ 619-303-4379 or 888-891-5029; [www.hotelchildcare.com](http://www.hotelchildcare.com)) has in-room child care from a licensed, bonded, insured service of 18 years.

## The BEST BEACHES *and* PARKS

**ANZA-BORREGO DESERT STATE PARK** This 600,000-acre park is home to bighorn sheep, roadrunners, and, in the spring, amazing wildflower displays; it's rich with riding and hiking trails for families with desert and wilderness experience. For a stop on a driving tour of San Diego County, the visitors center offers a fine slide presentation and lots of great children's books on desert flora and fauna. Open daily October through May, on weekends and holidays only June through September. Visitors center: 200 Palm Canyon Drive, Borrego Springs; ☎ 760-767-4205; [www.anzaborrego.statepark.org](http://www.anzaborrego.statepark.org).



**BALBOA PARK SAN DIEGO** has taken the urban park to new heights, going beyond outdoor recreation to create a compact cultural hub that no other American city can rival (except, of course, Washington, D.C.). In the heart of the city, not far from downtown, Balboa is home to 14 museums (many are reviewed later), the world-famous San Diego Zoo, and five theaters (including the Old Globe). You'll also find outdoor pleasures, including picnic areas, three playgrounds, and botanical gardens, along with amusements such as a miniature-train ride, a carousel, and butterfly rides for kids age 5 and under. Open daily 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., 5 p.m. from June 26 to September 6; free parking. The Web site offers packages such as the Best of Balboa Park Combo for \$55, which gets you into 13 attractions plus the zoo. Visitors center: House of Hospitality building, 1549 El Prado; ☎ 619-239-0512; [www.balboapark.org](http://www.balboapark.org).

### *unofficial* TIP

Before you visit any of Balboa Park's destinations, hop on the free tram that cruises the park, both to get oriented and to give your kids a cheap thrill.

**BONITA COVE** Within Mission Bay Park, near Belmont Park and Mission Beach, you'll find this outdoor paradise for young children. The calm, shallow water is friendly even to toddlers, and there's a playground, a grassy picnic area, and sand to dig. For information, call ☎ 858-694-3049.

**CARLSBAD STATE BEACH** A broad sand beach with a wide concrete bike/skating path, this is a great summertime beach for families—there's typically enough surf to have fun in, but it's rarely rough. Just south of the beach is Agua Hedionda Lagoon, a calm, wave-free spot for swimming, fishing, and boating. Lifeguards, restrooms, showers. For information, call ☎ 760-438-3143; [www.carlsbad.ca.us/beaches](http://www.carlsbad.ca.us/beaches).

**CHILDREN'S POOL BEACH** Still known by the name given it by locals who brought kids to play in the quiet surf, this beach is now home to herds of sea lions. Families stop by to look down on the hundreds of huge, protected creatures from a high vantage point. End of Jenner Street, 850 Coast Boulevard, La Jolla.

**CORONADO BEACH** San Diego's widest beach, Coronado is so big that it absorbs even the largest crowds comfortably. Good for swimming, body boarding, people watching, and basic beach fun, it is guarded by the looming Hotel del Coronado. There are volleyball courts, fire pits on the north end, changing rooms, lifeguards in summer, showers, and pay parking at the hotel or free parking on the streets. For beach information, call ☎ 619-437-8788.

**LA JOLLA COVE** A drop-dead gorgeous jewel of a beach, in a cove protected by cliffs, La Jolla Cove seems smaller than ever in peak season, when crowds get intense. But don't let that keep you from enjoying the tide pools, the calm, clean water, the excellent snorkeling, and the grassy picnic areas. Next door is Boomer Beach, an expert bodysurfing spot that's dangerous for most but great for pros, or for watching the locals put on a show. Changing rooms, lifeguard. Coast Boulevard to Scripps Park, La Jolla. For information, call ☎ 619-221-8901.



**MISSION BAY PARK** Although there are major resorts and hotels lining Mission Bay, a calm-water tidal area that curls and curves for many acres, the bay's park is a huge public playground, with grassy meadows and picnic areas sloping down to sandy beaches (many areas with no waves!), as well as several marinas servicing the 4,600-acre aquatic sports area. There are designated areas for each sport (swimming, sailing, windsurfing, kayaking, waterskiing, and fishing). And paved bike paths dot the grassy areas and run along the shore. Free parking lots adjacent, no overnight parking or camping. Fires allowed in designated fire containers on beaches. The playground at Tecolote Shores was especially designed for disabled children. For more information, call ☎ 619-221-8900 or 858-694-3049, or log on to [www.aboutmissionbay.com](http://www.aboutmissionbay.com).

**MISSION BEACH** If you have older kids who want to be where the action is, head to this two-mile-long shoreline on the ocean side of Mission Bay. Teenagers are plentiful here, playing volleyball, skating on the boardwalk, body-boarding in the sometimes-rough surf (riptides are common), and flaunting the latest surf wear. On the boardwalk right in the center of the beach is Belmont Park amusement park (see profile). Changing rooms, showers, lifeguards. Mission Boulevard, Mission Bay; For information, call ☎ 619-221-8900.

**MISSION TRAILS REGIONAL PARK** See “Hiking” under “Family Outdoor Adventures.”

**PACIFIC BEACH** Locals call it the Strand, and locals are plentiful on hot summer days, of which San Diego has many. (Consequently, parking is a challenge.) It has everything a big public beach should have, from a fishing pier to a biking and skating path to body-board rentals to lifeguards; surfers are limited to one area, so swimmers don’t have to battle them for wave space. The many restaurants and shops of the neighborhood of Pacific Beach are a short walk away. Changing rooms, showers, restrooms (but no public restrooms between Pacific Beach Drive and Mission Beach). Mission Boulevard, San Diego; for information, call ☎ 619-221-8900; [www.pacificbeach.org](http://www.pacificbeach.org).



**SILVER STRAND STATE BEACH** Three things make this state park a good beach for families: The surf and riptides are fairly calm; parking is plentiful here, unlike at the city beaches; and the shoreline sparkles with millions of tiny silver shells, which enchant many children. This two-mile-long beach connects the isthmus of Coronado (no, it’s not really an island) to the mainland’s Imperial Beach, and it’s quieter than the beach in front of the Hotel Del Coronado. The broad, shallow shoreline allows for lots of safe scampering in gentle waves (or in no waves on the bay side), as well as good clamming and surf fishing. If you visit in winter, know that the location invites wind and chill, so dress warmly. Dogs are not allowed on the beach, in the tunnels, or on the bay side. Parking is free, and RV camping (reservations required) is available for \$25 to \$30; no tent camping. Restrooms, showers, lifeguards. Follow signs off Highway 75; for information, call ☎ 619-435-5184; [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov).

## FAMILY OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

**BICYCLING AND SKATING** On some bright summer days, it seems that every San Diegan is on skates, bikes, or skateboards, making good use of the endless paved paths that wend around Mission Bay and along the beaches. Mission and Pacific Beaches are particularly fun to cruise, but in season they can get intimidatingly crowded and speedy for the training-wheel set. For a quieter, beautiful, long ride,

follow the path along the Coronado shoreline through Silver Strand State Park. The Mission Bay paths are also good for younger children. On Coronado Island, you can rent bikes and skates from **Bikes and Beyond**, Ferry Landing Marketplace; ☎ 619-435-7180. In the Mission Bay area, get gear from **Mission Bay Sportcenter**, 1010 Santa Clara Place; ☎ 858-488-1004; [www.missionbaysportcenter.com](http://www.missionbaysportcenter.com).

**BOATING** Even novices can learn to sail in the calm waters of Mission Bay, and every weekend, they're out there doing it. Boats and lessons are offered at **Mission Bay Sportcenter**, 1010 Santa Clara Place; ☎ 858-488-1004; [www.missionbaysportcenter.com](http://www.missionbaysportcenter.com). At the Dana Inn and Marina (1710 West Mission Bay Drive), there's **Adventure Watersports**; ☎ 619-226-8611; [www.adventurewatersports.com](http://www.adventurewatersports.com)), offering sailboats and lessons as well as kayaks, aqua cycles, and windsurfing gear.

**FISHING** Oceangoing fishing charters are plentiful in San Diego, but with kids we prefer a cheaper, lower-key outing—we head for one of the several fetching piers, where licenses are unnecessary and fish are often caught. The piers at Pacific Beach and the Coronado Ferry Landing are good ones, and both have bait-and-tackle shops.

**HIKING** Serious hiking opportunities abound in the region, but with kids in tow, our favorite destination is **Mission Trails Regional Park** (Father Junipero Serra Trail, San Diego; ☎ 619-668-3275; [www.mtrp.org](http://www.mtrp.org)). This inland, 5,800-acre urban park has 35 miles of trails for hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding, and some of the trails are paved to accommodate strollers and wheelchairs. Pick up a map at the visitors center. If your kids are sturdy, tackle the trail to San Diego's highest peak, a 1,600-foot climb that pays off with a 360-degree view of the city.

**SNORKELING** California's clearest waters are found in **La Jolla Cove**, a protected part of the San Diego–La Jolla Underwater Park. For swimming children old enough to manage a mask and snorkel (typically age 7 and up), a snorkeling adventure is mind-blowing, as interactive a nature experience as they'll ever have. See La Jolla Cove listing in "The Best Beaches and Parks" for location details; if you don't have snorkel gear, you can rent it from **Adventure Watersports** at the Dana Inn and Marina in Mission Bay (☎ 619-226-8611; [www.adventurewatersports.com](http://www.adventurewatersports.com)).



**SURFING** Surfing's popularity has exploded in the last few years, and so the choices for surf lessons and camps are numerous. One of our favorites is the **San Diego Surfing Academy** (☎ 800-447-SURF or 760-230-1474; [www.surfsdsa.com](http://www.surfsdsa.com)), which makes fine use of the gentle waves at South Carlsbad State Beach in its private lessons for kids (age 8 and up) and adults; also note that its summertime surf camps can be attended for just a day or two. On Mission Beach, Pacific Surf School (☎ 619-742-2267; [www.pacificsurf.org](http://www.pacificsurf.org)) offers frequent group lessons



for a reasonable \$50 to \$70. Also highly recommended is **La Jolla's Surf Diva** (☎ 858-454-8273; [www.surfdiva.com](http://www.surfdiva.com)), known for its classes for girls and their moms, but boys are welcome, too. If you want to try it on your own, rent a soft-foam longboard from the rental concessions at Pacific Beach and go for it.

**WATERSKIING AND WINDSURFING** On the ocean side of Mission Bay is some of the best windsurfing in California; on the bay side is superb waterskiing. For instruction and equipment for both sports, you can contact the **Mission Bay Sportcenter** (1010 Santa Clara Place; ☎ 858-488-1004; [www.missionbaysportcenter.com](http://www.missionbaysportcenter.com)); open daily, 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. They can also get you started on a surfboard, Jet Ski, or kayak. Another good spot for waterskiing lessons and rentals (as well as whale-watching excursions) is **Seaforth Mission Bay Boat Rentals** (1641 Quivira Road; ☎ 619-223-1681; [www.seaforthboatrental.com](http://www.seaforthboatrental.com)). Yet another windsurfing outfitter and instructor is **Windsport Kayak and Windsurfing Center** (844 West Mission Bay Drive; ☎ 858-488-4642; [www.windsport.net](http://www.windsport.net)).



**WHALE WATCHING** The Pacific gray whale swims past San Diego from December through mid-March, and blowhole and breach sightings are common. In fact, so confident is one outfitter, **H&M Landing** (2803 Emerson Street, San Diego; ☎ 619-222-1144; [www.hmlanding.com](http://www.hmlanding.com)), that it guarantees a whale sighting or you get a voucher for another outing. Family trips are typically three hours long. If you'd rather scout whales from dry land, head to the Cabrillo National Monument on Point Loma (see profile).

## A CALENDAR of FESTIVALS and EVENTS

### January

**WHALEFEST** Birch Aquarium at Scripps La Jolla. January and February. Special exhibits and hands-on activities teach kids about whales; ☎ 858-534-FISH; [www.aquarium.ucsd.edu](http://www.aquarium.ucsd.edu).

### February

**HERITAGE DAY PARADE** San Diego. Late February. Celebrates the city's rich ethnic diversity; ☎ 619-286-9989.

**WILDFLOWER BLOOMS** Anza-Borrego. The blooms hit sometime between February and April, and they last only for a few weeks; ☎ 760-767-4205.

### March

**OCEAN BEACH KITE FESTIVAL** Ocean Beach. Sponsored by the Kiwanis for more than 50 years. Kite decorating (9 a.m. to noon) and flying,

as well as parade (plus free hot dogs). Bring your own kite; ☎ 619-531-1527.

## April

**GASLAMP QUARTER EASTER BONNET PARADE** Fifth and L Streets, San Diego. A charity event held the weekend before Easter. Hat-making workshop, Easter egg hunt, parade, and treats; ☎ 619-233-5227; [www.gaslamp.org](http://www.gaslamp.org).

**OPENING DAY, SAN DIEGO PADRES** Petco Park; ☎ 619-795-5000.

**SAN DIEGO EARTHFEST** Balboa Park. Earth Day festival with lots of activities for children; ☎ 858-272-7370; [www.earthdayweb.org](http://www.earthdayweb.org).

## May

**FIESTA CINCO DE MAYO** Old Town State Park, San Diego. A two-day party with music, entertainment, food, booths, and kids' activities; ☎ 619-296-3236.

**CARLSBAD VILLAGE STREET FAIRE** Carlsbad. Some 90,000 people fill this small town for its annual one-day blowout, which includes children's rides, a pancake breakfast, farmer's-market-style vendors, live music, and international foods; ☎ 760-931-8400; [www.carlsbad.org](http://www.carlsbad.org).

## June

**AMERICAN INDIAN CULTURAL DAYS** San Diego Museum of Man, Balboa Park. Native Americans from across the country gather to share tribal ceremonies, stories, music, foods, and crafts, with hands-on projects for children; ☎ 619-239-2001; [www.museumofman.org](http://www.museumofman.org).

**SAN DIEGO COUNTY FAIR** Del Mar. Carnival rides, flower shows, animals, arcades, and nationally known musical performers; ☎ 858-755-1161; [www.sdfair.com](http://www.sdfair.com).

## July

**ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF THE BELLS MISSION** Basilica. Weekend-long festival celebrating the anniversary of the founding of Mission San Diego de Alcalá. Includes food, music and dance performances, llama rides, and games; ☎ 619-283-7319.

**FOURTH OF JULY EVENTS** La Jolla: a free concert at Scripps Park followed by a fireworks show; ☎ 858-454-1600. Coronado: a parade, free concert in Spreckels Park, and fireworks; ☎ 619-437-8788.

**U.S. OPEN SANDCASTLE COMPETITION** Imperial Beach Pier. Sand castles like you've never seen 'em, along with a parade and evening fireworks. Children have their own competition; ☎ 619-424-6663.

**MOVIES BEFORE THE MAST** *Star of India*. Nautically themed, family-friendly movies are screened on board this historic sailing ship in July and August; ☎ 619-234-9153; [www.sdmaritime.org](http://www.sdmaritime.org).

## August

**CHULA VISTA ANNUAL DOWNTOWN LEMON FESTIVAL** Food and crafts; ☎ 619-422-1982.

**WORLD BODY SURFING CHAMPIONSHIPS** Oceanside Pier and Beach. Body surfers from around the world put on a show; ☎ 760-722-1534.

## October

**FLEET WEEK** A weeklong tribute to the military with many events, including ship and submarine tours, a ship parade, and an air show; ☎ 800-353-3893; [www.fleetweek.com](http://www.fleetweek.com).

**OKTOBERFEST** Holiday Park, Carlsbad. Since Carlsbad was originally a German settlement named Karlsbad, this is the Oktoberfest event to attend; ☎ 760-434-6093.

## November

**DEL MAR FAIRGROUNDS** Holiday of Lights. Drive your car around the racetrack and view 250 holiday displays; ☎ 858-793-5555.

**MOTHER GOOSE PARADE** Main Street, El Cajon. Hundreds of thousands of spectators jam into El Cajon for this decades-old parade honoring fairy tales, children, and Mother Goose rhymes; ☎ 619-444-8712.

## December

**LA JOLLA CHRISTMAS PARADE AND HOLIDAY FESTIVAL** Downtown La Jolla. Floats, marching bands, and Santa, followed by a carnival and street fair; ☎ 858-454-5718; [www.lajollabythesea.com](http://www.lajollabythesea.com).

# SAN DIEGO

**San Diego** is the one destination in California that combines an ocean-resort feel with big-city culture and activities. You can lie on the beach at **Coronado** and 20 minutes later be downtown at a major rock concert. You can spend the morning in a museum as you might in other cities, but after lunch you'll be inline-skating along **Mission Bay**. While you watch your little one ride the carousel at **Shoreline Village**, you'll admire the bay on one side and the skyscrapers of the financial district on the other.

More cosmopolitan than Santa Barbara and easier to maneuver than L.A., San Diego is an ideal introduction to Southern California.

## *unofficial* **TIP**

If you'll be in San Diego for at least a week, renting a beach house is the way to go.

The big-deal attractions (**San Diego Zoo**, **Wild Animal Park**, **SeaWorld**) are indeed world-class; the historic areas (**Old Town**, the **Maritime Museum** ships) are colorful and inviting; there are wonderfully located concentrations of hotels and motels (Mis-

sion Bay, Coronado); north of town are some beautiful, laid-back beach towns for day trips or overnight escapes (**La Jolla**, **Carlsbad**); and the residents are relaxed and casual.

## **FAMILY LODGING**

### **Best Western Blue Sea Lodge**

**707 Pacific Beach Drive, San Diego; ☎ 858-488-4700 or 800-BLUE-SEA; [www.bestwestern-blueseas.com](http://www.bestwestern-blueseas.com); \$139–\$249 off season, \$159–\$279 in summer**

The external architecture may be hideous, but the location can't be beat: The boardwalk and the soft sand of Pacific Beach are right in front, Mission Bay is just around the corner, and the neighborhood is full of cafes, restaurants, and beach shops. Furthermore, a recent remodeling spruced up the interior, adding a colorful surfer theme and 26 new rooms, bringing the room count up to 126. The ocean-view suites are big enough for families,

and many rooms have kitchens. Extras include a small pool, a spa, a cheerful cafe, and rental bikes. Reserve at least two months in advance for summertime visits.

### **Catamaran Resort Hotel & Spa**

**3999 Mission Boulevard, Mission Bay; ☎ 858-488-1081 or 800-422-8386; [www.catamaranresort.com](http://www.catamaranresort.com); \$165–\$600; packages with SeaWorld or various sporting adventures offered**

This large Mission Bay resort has live parrots in the tropical-décor lobby, spacious rooms (many with sliding glass doors to patios and bayside), outside pizza delivery service, and a location convenient to SeaWorld. It's not as glitzy as some other San Diego area resorts, but it is a beach and water-sports paradise—wear your bathing suits and board shorts and head for the hotel pier for rentals and lessons in kayaking, windsurfing, diving, and more, or go to the bayfront beach for swimming and volleyball; wave lovers can just walk across Mission Boulevard to get to Mission Beach. Among the offerings for adventurous teens is sea-cave kayaking.

### **Embassy Suites San Diego Bay**

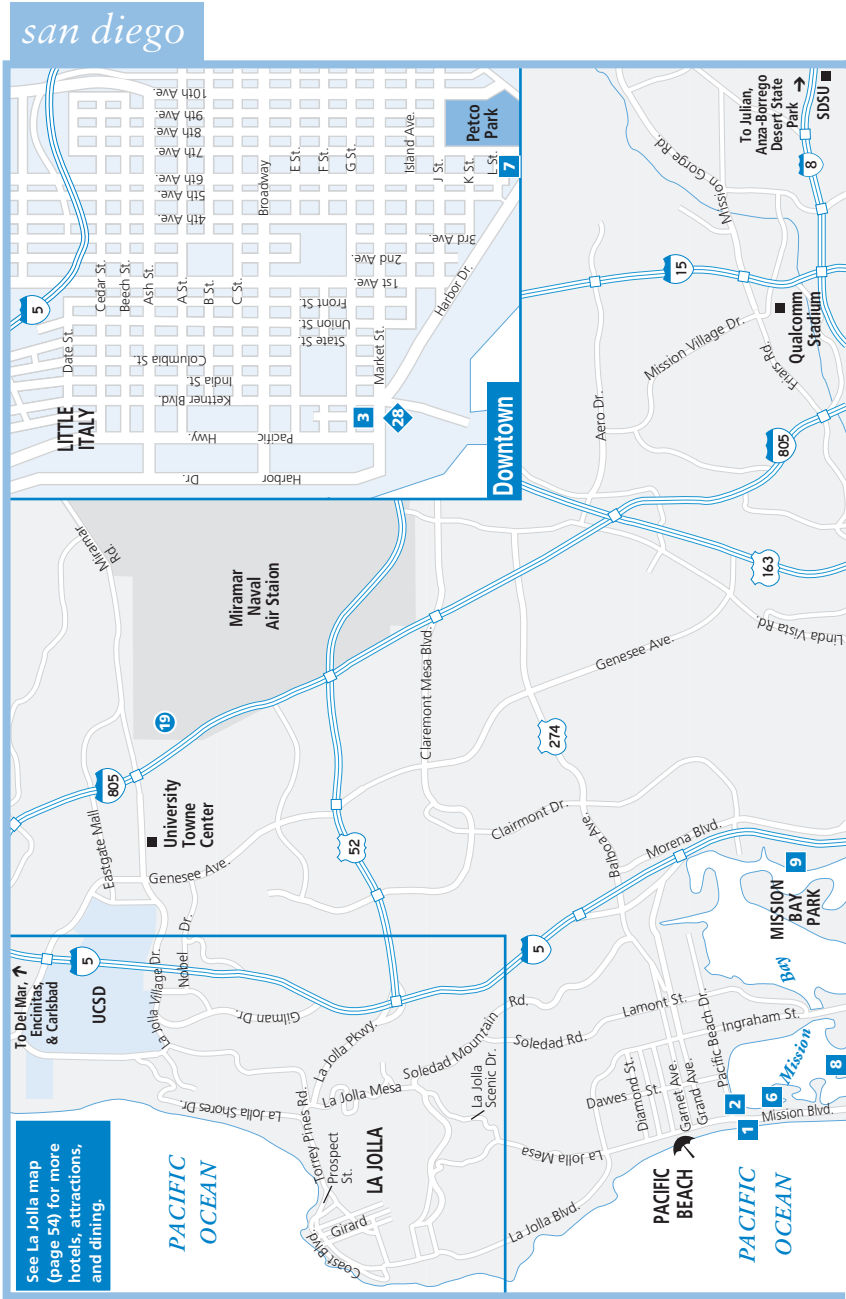
**601 Pacific Coast Highway, San Diego; ☎ 619-239-2400 or 800-EMBASSY; [www.essandiegobay.com](http://www.essandiegobay.com); \$199–\$319**

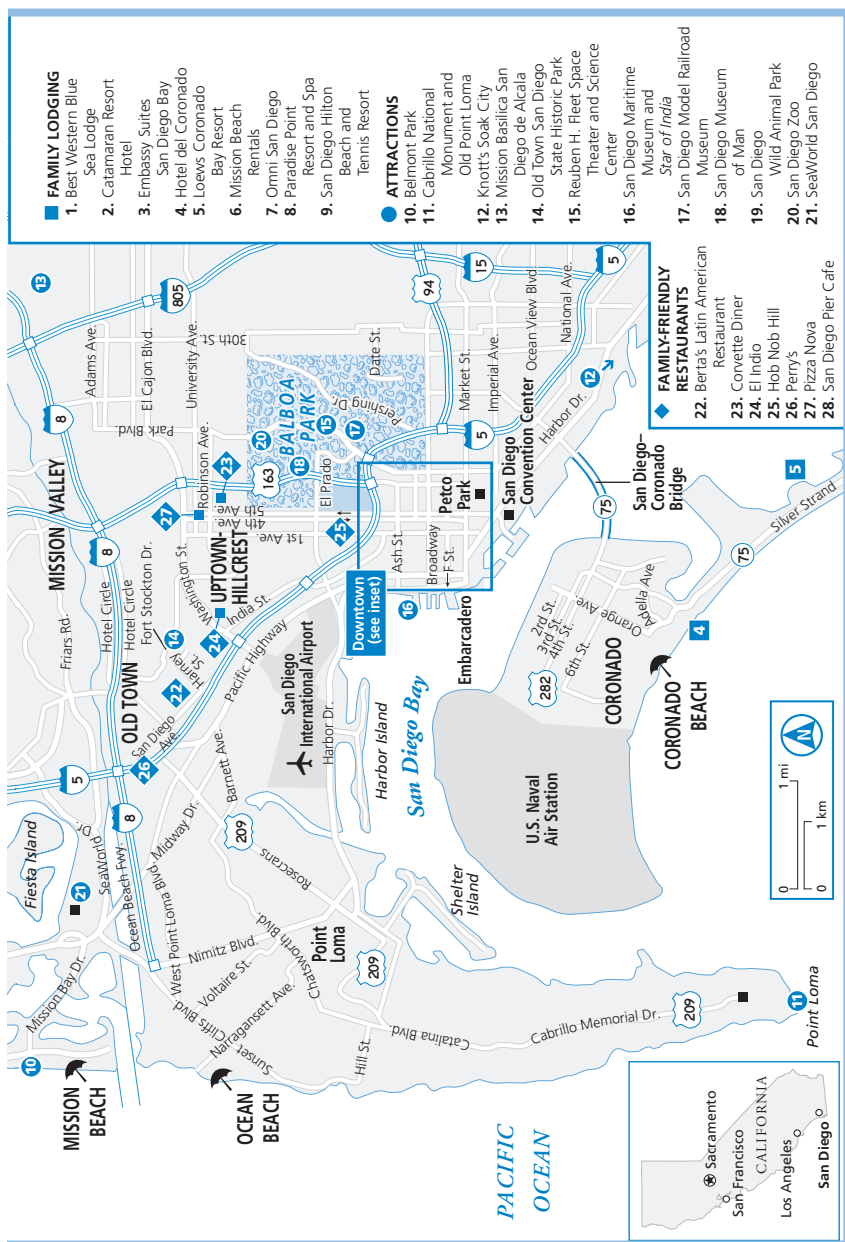
If you want to be downtown (not a first choice for beach-loving families, but it has its appeal), this is a good place to stay. It has all the family comforts that the chain is known for (two-room suite, two TVs, sleeper sofa, refrigerator, microwave, free breakfast); it's close to the trolley line, the Embarcadero, and Seaport Village; and it's not far from Balboa Park. There is a pool, but, curiously, it is indoors.

### **Hotel del Coronado**

**1500 Orange Avenue, Coronado; ☎ 619-435-6611 or 800-HOTEL-DEL; [www.hoteldel.com](http://www.hoteldel.com); \$250–\$600; suites \$700 and up**

Incredibly popular with many travelers, this huge (692 rooms, six restaurants) resort complex on Coronado Island offers lodgings from vintage-historic rooms to modern beachfront suites. Some kids find the main Victorian building kind of creepy, its dark hallways often crowded with busloads of day-trippers. But there's plenty of sunshine out by the (crowded) pool and on the beach, where supervised kids' programs and activities (some free, most costing \$15 to \$45, depending on activity) are held in spring and summer and during the Christmas holidays. Teens have a new lounge, with computers, video games, a pool table, and music, and they get such active options as surf lessons, kayaking, and biking. The full line of sports and water equipment is available to rent, and there are child-care services and children's menus. This is no place for the budget conscious—you'll pay dearly for everything from parking to food—but for some it's worth it to be in the middle of the history and the beach action.







## Loews Coronado Bay Resort

**4000 Coronado Bay Road, Coronado; ☎ 619-424-4000 or 800-23-LOEWS; [www.loewscoronadobay.com](http://www.loewscoronadobay.com); \$265–\$369; suites \$525 and up**

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This upscale, modern, 440-room resort looks at first like a business hotel, but it is actually totally family friendly. Located on its own little peninsula on Coronado Island, it's far from the taco bars and shops of Coronado Village, but there's plenty to keep families happy right at the resort. There's a nice pool area (three pools, one of which is adults-only) with a great snack bar; on Friday nights, a 9- by 12-foot screen shows family movies while kids float on inner tubes. You'll also find a spa (for grown-ups), a playground, a game room, PBteen lounge/spa, and sailboat and bike rentals; beautiful Silver Strand State Beach is a short walk. The Loews Loves Kids activities program for ages 4 to 12 (summers and holidays) is \$40 for a full day and \$25 for a half day, with sibling discounts, and there is an in-room babysitting service as well as babyproofing kits. The casual restaurant and room service have kids' menus, but save the fine-dining room for adults.

## Mission Beach Rentals

**747 San Fernando Place, Mission Beach; ☎ 858-488-3100; [www.missionbeachmanagement.com](http://www.missionbeachmanagement.com); weekly rentals in summer \$550–\$6,000 per week**

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A long-established rental agency with a good supply of beach houses, apartments, and condos. All but the smallest studios are ideal for families, with kitchens, living rooms, and homelike comfort; some condos have amenities like pools and spas. Locations include Mission Bay and Pacific Beach.

## Omni San Diego

**675 L Street; ☎ 619-231-6664 or 888-444-6664; [www.omnihotels.com](http://www.omnihotels.com); \$239–\$329; suites \$500 and up**

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Linked by a skybridge to Petco Park (home of Padres baseball), this gleaming new tower has a great location for those who need to be near the Convention Center and/or want to be in the Gaslamp Quarter or at a baseball game (some rooms even look right into the stadium!). Its 511 rooms include 27 family-fitting junior and one-bedroom suites, all decorated with a cool white-on-beige palette and all complete with such modern frills as video games, pay-per-view movies, and wireless Internet. The pool deck is decidedly urban, with modern buildings all around, but it's kid friendly and has a good cafe with a children's menu. The San Diego Trolley stops right in front, so you can easily get to Old Town, Seaport Village, and the Mexican-border transit center.



## Paradise Point Resort & Spa

**1404 West Vacation Road, San Diego; ☎ 858-274-4630 or 800-344-2626; [www.paradisepoint.com](http://www.paradisepoint.com); \$259–\$895 summer, \$229–\$509 off season**

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This is no place for fans of intimate little hotels—462 low-slung, recently rehabbed 1970s-vintage rooms, five pools, tennis courts, a volleyball court, an 18-hole putting course, and much more are spread over a tropically landscaped 44-acre island in Mission Bay. But it's a good place on a lovely bayside beach for an active family resort vacation. Summertime brings the daily Kids Camp, where kids ages 3 to 12 do everything from learn to Hula Hoop to make ice cream; the cost is \$50 for a full day, including lunch (the littlest ones have a morning program only). Teens get nighttime activities and lots to do on their own, from sunbathing at the beach to cruising the video arcade. Many rooms have kitchens; all have patios or terraces. Bike and pedalboat rentals, children's menus, sauna, fitness center, packages with local attractions.

### San Diego Hilton Beach and Tennis Resort

1775 East Mission Bay Drive, San Diego; ☎ 619-276-4010 or

800-221-2424; [www.sandiegoresort.hilton.com](http://www.sandiegoresort.hilton.com); \$249 (and up)

off season, \$279 (and up) in season; children stay free in parents' room

Part high-rise, part bungalow complex, this 357-room resort hotel on Mission Bay caters to families, with all sorts of kid-friendly amenities. Every day in summer, and on weekends during the rest of the year, the Kids Klub program is free by day and \$30 for the nighttime dinner activities. (It's less like day care and more like organized fun, so many kids just join in for an hour or two to take part in the activities that most attract them.) The over-11 set gets its own Teen Time program, which includes mixers. Fun facilities include the huge swimming pool, the little-kid wading pool, biking and skating on the pathways (rentals available), the beach, the tennis, the water-sport rentals. Many of the large rooms have terraces or patios, as well as wet bars and refrigerators. Children's menus are available.

## ATTRACTIONS

### Belmont Park

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★

GRADE SCHOOL ★★★★★

TEENS ★★

YOUNG ADULTS ★★

OVER 30 ★★

SENIORS ★★

West Mission Bay Drive and West Mission Boulevard, Mission Bay;

Belmont Park; ☎ 858-488-1549; [www.giantdipper.com](http://www.giantdipper.com)

**Hours** Summer: Sunday–Thursday, 11 a.m.–11 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m.–midnight. Off season: Sunday–Thursday, 11 a.m.–8 p.m., Friday and Saturday, 11 a.m.–9 p.m. **Admission** Free to park; ride prices vary. **Touring time** Average 3 hours with swimming; minimum 1 hour. **Rainy-day touring** Yes, for indoor facilities. **Restaurants** Concessions. **Alcoholic beverages** No. **Disabled access** Limited on rides. **Wheelchair rental** No. **Baby-stroller rental** No. **Lockers** No. **Pet kennels** No. **Rain check** No. **Private tours** No.

**DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS** Part old-fashioned seaside amusement park, part modern playground, this fun zone is particularly appealing to school-age kids and teens; many of the games and rides are too difficult or scary for

young children, though there is a small kiddie area. The showpieces are the 1925 wooden roller coaster and the wooden replica of a Looff carousel; our kids particularly liked steering the little remote-control boats around the miniature harbor. The Plunge, a gigantic indoor salt-water pool, is worth a dip, if only to experience Wyland's impressive underwater whale mural. Arcades, video games, a movie theater, and shops ring the rides.



## Cabrillo National Monument and Old Point Loma

APPEAL BY AGE	PRESCHOOL ★★★	GRADE SCHOOL ★★★★★	TEENS ★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★	OVER 30 ★★★★★	SENIORS ★★★★★	

**Point Loma, south on Catalina Boulevard, San Diego; ☎ 619-557-5450;**  
**www.nps.gov/cabr**

**Hours** Daily, 9 a.m.–5:15 p.m.; open later in summer. **Admission** \$5 per car or \$3 per person walk-in, children under age 17 free when accompanied by adult. **Touring time** Average 2 hours; minimum 1 hour. **Rainy-day touring** Not good. **Restaurants** Vending machines. **Alcoholic beverages** No. **Disabled access** Yes. **Wheelchair rental** Yes, free. **Baby-stroller rental** No. **Lockers** No. **Pet kennels** No. **Rain check** No. **Private tours** No.

**DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS** This falls under the scenery category, which typically bores kids, but ours enjoyed this outing as much as we did. Reached after driving past the airport through Shelter Island, a huge Navy base (some of which is operational and some abandoned), and Point Loma, this point of land several hundred feet above the ocean seems like the end of the world. As you stand on the point's bluff, the Pacific stretches eternally to your right, while the whole of San Diego Bay spreads out straight ahead and to the left. The kids loved looking through the coin telescope for close-ups of the many incoming and outgoing military ships and planes, commercial planes, and pleasure boats (in winter and spring, this is also a great vantage to spot gray whales). Then we walked higher up the point to the tiny old 1856 lighthouse; what enthralled our 8-year-old was not the light itself, but the preserved (behind glass) living quarters of the lighthouse captain, his wife, and two sons. A steep trail down to tide pools is a worthy outing with older kids, and the visitors center has displays on the history of Juan Cabrillo's discovery of San Diego.

## Knott's Soak City

APPEAL BY AGE	PRESCHOOL ★★	GRADE SCHOOL ★★★★★	TEENS ★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★	OVER 30 ★★	SENIORS ★	

**20525 Entertainment Circle, Chula Vista; ☎ 619-661-7373;**  
**www.soakcityusa.com**

**Hours** May, June, and September: daily, 10 a.m.–6 p.m.; July and August: daily, 10 a.m.–8 p.m. **Admission** \$27 adults, \$15 children ages 3–11; after 3 p.m., \$15 for adults and kids; parking \$7–\$12. **Touring time** 4–6 hours; minimum 1 hour.

**Rainy-day touring** Yes. **Restaurants** Snack bar. **Alcoholic beverages** No. **Disabled access** Yes. **Wheelchair rental** No. **Baby-stroller rental** No. **Lockers** Yes. **Pet kennels** No. **Rain check** No. **Private tours** No.

**DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS** This 1950s-themed water park celebrates the surf-loving California fantasy. A highlight is the Coronado Express, a family raft ride that rushes down almost 700 feet of twists and turns into a splashdown pool. Among the 22 other rides are tube slides, body slides, speed slides, a wave pool, and a lazy river for folks who just want to kick back and float.

## Mission Basilica San Diego de Alcalá

APPEAL BY AGE	PRESCHOOL ★	GRADE SCHOOL ★★	TEENS ★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★	OVER 30 ★★★	SENIORS ★★★	

**10818 San Diego Mission Road, San Diego; ☎ 619-281-8449;**  
**www.missionsandiego.com**

**Hours** Daily, 9 a.m.–4:45 p.m., except Thanksgiving and Christmas. Tours are Tuesday and Thursday, 10 a.m.–noon; call ☎ 858-565-9077 between noon and 2 p.m. on Monday and Thursday only for reservations. **Admission** \$3 adults, \$2 seniors, \$1 children ages 6–12. **Touring time** Average 1 hour; minimum 30 minutes. **Rainy-day touring** Yes. **Restaurants** No. **Alcoholic beverages** No. **Disabled access** Yes. **Wheelchair rental**. No **Baby-stroller rental** No. **Lockers** No. **Pet kennels** No. **Rain check** No. **Private tours** Self-guided audio tour.

**DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS** This was the first of the California missions, and it still serves as an active parish church. It's a short stop for most families, because the museum area is small, but the grounds are lovely, and the church sanctuary is a fine example of the folkloric quality of mission architecture.

## Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

APPEAL BY AGE	PRESCHOOL ★★	GRADE SCHOOL ★★★★★	TEENS ★★★★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★★★	OVER 30 ★★★★★	SENIORS ★★★★★	

**Bounded by Wallace, Congress, Twigs, and Juan streets;**  
**☎ 619-220-5422; www.parks.ca.gov**

**Hours** Daily, beginning at 10 a.m. for historic houses; most shops open until 9 p.m. **Admission** Free; donations appreciated. **Touring time** Average a half day; minimum 3 hours, with a meal and minimal shop browsing. **Rainy-day touring** Not great; outdoor paths, unpaved areas. **Restaurants** Surrounding. **Alcoholic beverages** In some restaurants. **Disabled access** Yes. **Wheelchair rental** No. **Baby-stroller rental** No. **Lockers** No. **Pet kennels** No; leashed pets allowed. **Rain check** No. **Private tours** Yes.

**DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS** Shops and restaurants occupy many of the landmark buildings that surround the official state-historic-park section of Old Town, so the kids may never know they're being educated when you come here. The park showcases aspects of San Diego's past from 1821 to 1872, when the area was first under the Mexican and then later

the American government. The original town plaza is the focal point of the pedestrian-only zone; it is surrounded by restored homes with furnishings of the period, a smithy and stable, a courthouse, a schoolhouse, a dental museum, a drugstore museum, and a newspaper museum. Free tours are conducted daily at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. by costumed docents at the visitors center in the Robinson-Rose House (4002 Wallace Street). The Bazaar del Mundo, shops and cafes surrounding a courtyard, often has mariachis and costumed dancers performing.



## Reuben H. Fleet Space Theater and Science Center

APPEAL BY AGE    PRESCHOOL ★★★    GRADE SCHOOL ★★★★★    TEENS ★★★★★  
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★★★    OVER 30 ★★★★★    SENIORS ★★★★★

**1875 El Prado, near San Diego Zoo; ☎ 619-238-1233; [www.rhfleet.org](http://www.rhfleet.org)**

**Hours** Monday–Thursday, 9:30 a.m.–5 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 9:30 a.m.–8 p.m.; Sunday, 9:30 a.m.–6 p.m. Summer hours vary. **Admission** Price varies depending on IMAX movies attended: \$8–\$15 adults, \$6–\$13 seniors 65 and over, \$6–\$12 children ages 3–12, free for children under age 3; first Monday of each month (holidays excluded) is Senior Day, with \$5 admission to exhibits and 1 IMAX film. **Touring time** Average 2 hours; minimum 1 hour. **Rainy-day touring** Yes. **Restaurants** Yes. **Alcoholic beverages** No. **Disabled access** Yes. **Wheelchair rental** No. **Baby-stroller rental** No. **Lockers** No. **Pet kennels** No. **Rain check** No. **Private tours** No.

**DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS** Of the many, many fine museums in Balboa Park, this is the hardest to find—despite its tremendous appeal to families, it is not mentioned on any of the directional signs posted in the park. (*Hint: It's across the fountain plaza from the Natural History Museum, en route to the zoo.*) This is an excellent hands-on science museum, where kids can touch, feel, experiment, and explore. The special exhibits are always first rate, and they sometimes stay for a long time; recent examples included interactive exhibits on high-definition television, the science of seeing, and a “flight” through the human heart. Big-screen Omnimax (like IMAX) films, usually about nature and/or space, are shown daily in the adjacent theater, and they are invariably worth seeing—but note that the noise and special effects may scare small children. This place can get mobbed, so try to visit on a school day after lunch, when the field trips have all returned to school.



## San Diego Maritime Museum and Star of India

APPEAL BY AGE    PRESCHOOL ★★★    GRADE SCHOOL ★★★★★    TEENS ★★★★★  
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★★★    OVER 30 ★★★★★    SENIORS ★★★★★

**1306 North Harbor Drive, San Diego; ☎ 619-234-9153; [www.sdmartitime.com](http://www.sdmartitime.com)**

**Hours** Daily, 9 a.m.–8 p.m.; Memorial Day through Labor Day, open until 9 p.m. **Admission** \$12 adults, \$9 seniors 62 and older, \$9 active military with valid ID,

\$8 ages 6–17, free for children age 5 and under. **Touring time** Average 3 hours; minimum 1 hour. **Rainy-day touring** Not good. **Restaurants** No. **Alcoholic beverages** No. **Disabled access** Limited. **Wheelchair rental** No. **Baby-stroller rental** No. **Lockers** No. **Pet kennels** No. **Rain check** No. **Private tours** No.

**DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS** The picture in our minds of the cozy passenger cabin of the square-rigged *Star of India*, an 1863 merchant sailing ship, is as fresh as the day we stepped into the officers' and passengers' area. As we talked to the children about what it might have been like to sail across an ocean on a ship like this, the wooden floor beneath us gently rose and fell with the waves. *Star of India* is one of three historic ships that together constitute the Maritime Museum; the others are an 1898 ferryboat and a 1904 steam-powered luxury yacht. Visitors walk or scramble up and down the ships, in and out of decks and holds, seeing ropes and engines and sailors' bunks. In summer, nautical film classics like *Captain Blood* are projected onto the ship's sail for an evening of unusual entertainment.

## San Diego Model Railroad Museum

APPEAL BY AGE	PRESCHOOL ★★	GRADE SCHOOL ★★	TEENS ★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★	OVER 30 ★★	SENIORS ★★	

**1649 El Prado, San Diego; ☎ 619-696-0199; [www.sdmodelrailroadm.com](http://www.sdmodelrailroadm.com)**

**Hours** Tuesday–Friday, 11 a.m.–4 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, 11 a.m.–5 p.m.  
**Admission** \$6 adults, \$5 seniors over 65, \$3 students 15 and over, \$2.50 military on active duty, free for children under age 15; free first Tuesday of the month.  
**Touring time** Average 2 hours; minimum 1 hour. **Rainy-day touring** Yes. **Restaurants** Sandwich shop. **Alcoholic beverages** No. **Disabled access** Yes. **Wheelchair rental** No. **Baby-stroller rental** No. **Lockers** No. **Pet kennels** No. **Rain check** No. **Private tours** No.

**DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS** We've seen many a grown man get far more excited about model trains than any kid does, and this museum caters to both groups. The country's largest collection of model trains winds through elaborate miniature countrysides and towns, some of which represent historical periods in Southern California. This fascinates some kids but makes others insane, because they're not allowed to touch—so take them to the Toy Train Gallery, where they can work the controls of Lionel O-Gauge toy trains and push Brio wooden trains on their tracks.

## San Diego Museum of Man

APPEAL BY AGE	PRESCHOOL ★	GRADE SCHOOL ★	TEENS ★
YOUNG ADULTS ★	OVER 30 ★	SENIORS ★	

**1350 El Prado, Balboa Park; ☎ 619-239-2001; [www.museumofman.org](http://www.museumofman.org)**

**Hours** Daily, 10 a.m.–4:30 p.m.; closed Christmas, Thanksgiving, and New Year's Days. **Admission** \$6 adults, \$3 children ages 6–17, \$5 seniors 65 and over, free for children under age 6. **Touring time** Average 3 hours; minimum 1 hour. **Rainy-day touring** Yes. **Restaurants** No. **Alcoholic beverages** No. **Disabled access** Yes.

**Wheelchair rental** No. **Baby-stroller rental** No. **Lockers** No. **Pet kennels** No. **Rain check** No. **Private tours** No.

**DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS** If your kids aren't fascinated with the history of man and woman, they will be after a visit to this cool museum, home to mummies, skeletons, and life-size, very realistic (often naked) re-creations of our predecessors going back to early Africa. Weekends bring live demonstrations of crafts and cooking from cultures around the world, and the Children's Discovery Center offers changing hands-on displays keyed to the museum's collection, allowing kids to, for instance, dress up like ancient Egyptians.

## San Diego Wild Animal Park

**APPEAL BY AGE** PRESCHOOL ★★ ★★ **GRADE SCHOOL** ★★ ★★ ★★ **TEENS** ★★ ★★  
**YOUNG ADULTS** ★★ ★★ ★★ **OVER 30** ★★ ★★ ★★ **SENIORS** ★★ ★★ ★★

**15500 San Pasqual Valley Road, Escondido; ☎ 760-747-8702 or TDD 760-738-5067; www.sandiegozoo.org**

**Hours** Summer: daily, 9 a.m.–8 p.m. (grounds open until 9 p.m.). Winter: daily, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. (grounds open until 5 p.m.). **Admission** \$28.50 adults, \$17.50 children ages 3–11, free for children ages 2 and under, \$25.65 seniors age 60 and over; combination tickets for the Zoo and Wild Animal Park: \$54.45 adults, \$33.55 children ages 3–11; parking \$8 and \$10 for RVs. **Touring time** Average two-thirds of a day; minimum a half day. **Rainy-day touring** Some shows and exhibits close. **Restaurants** Yes. **Alcoholic beverages** Yes. **Disabled access** Yes. **Wheelchair rental** Yes. **Baby-stroller rental** Yes. **Lockers** Yes. **Pet kennels** Service animals only. **Rain check** No. **Private tours** Photo Caravan, ages 8 and over, \$90–\$130 plus admission.

**DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS** Although it's actually in Escondido, about 45 minutes northeast of downtown, we're putting this in the San Diego section because San Diego heads up the name and it'd be confusing otherwise. This is a unique animal-viewing experience, designed to replicate what you'd see if you were visiting animal parks in Africa. The animals roam freely in herds over many acres of land similar to an African savannah, and the visitors observe from a monorail that travels through the park's 21,000 acres. The 55-minute ride (usually too long for toddlers) departs from a theme park–like Nairobi Village and Mom-basa Lagoon area, where more traditional exhibits as well as animal shows are presented in an African-village setting, and visitors can relax at cafes—and, of course, shop. A walk-through exhibit, Condor Ridge, showcases endangered North American bird species; more heart-pounding is the new Cheetah Run Safari, where you get to watch cheetahs run at full speed up close (limited hours; call for reservations). There's also a pleasant play area for younger kids, with slides and climbing equipment, also themed. For a more in-depth adventure, consider the Beastly Bedtime Sleepovers (☎ 619-718-3000), an overnight family camping program for parents and children age 8 and over; the cost

is \$129–\$199 adults and \$109–\$129 for children, depending on the package you choose.

We like to sit on the right side of the monorail car, and we always bring binoculars, so when someone shouts “Look over there!” we can actually see the animal they’re pointing to. We also advise that you watch little children carefully on some of the viewing platforms; one is a three-story-high circular platform with wood railings that attracts climbing kids like magnets.

If you’re planning to visit both the San Diego Zoo and the Wild Animal Park more than once a year, consider a membership for yourself and your children—it’s probably cheaper, and you get other benefits as well. For details, call or go to the Web site.



## San Diego Zoo

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★★★★ GRADE SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★  
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

**2920 Zoo Drive, Balboa Park, San Diego; ☎ 619-234-3153 or 619-231-1515; [www.sandiegozoo.org](http://www.sandiegozoo.org)**

**Hours** Daily, 9 a.m.–4 p.m. (grounds open until 6 p.m.). Summer: open to 9 p.m., but animals generally go to sleep at dusk; call ☎ 888-MY-PANDA for current panda-viewing schedule. **Admission** Regular admission: \$22 adults, \$14.50 children ages 3–11, free for children age 2 and under. Deluxe admission (includes bus tour and sky tram) \$32 adults, \$29 seniors, \$20 children ages 3–11, free for children age 2 and under. **Touring time** Average 6 hours; minimum 2 hours. **Rainy-day touring** Some shows and exhibits close. **Restaurants** Yes. **Alcoholic beverages** Yes. **Disabled access** Yes. **Wheelchair rental** Yes. **Baby-stroller rental** Yes. **Lockers** Yes. **Pet kennels** Service animals only. **Rain check** No. **Private tours** Kangaroo Bus: call ☎ 619-685-3264.

**DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS** This legendary zoo has been exhibiting rare species since 1915 and now has more than 4,000 animals of 900 species. Unbarred enclosures and sensitive landscaping (Dr. Seuss used to sketch in the cactus gardens here) have been the norm at this 100-acre facility for many years, but trying to see everything means a lot of walking. The narrated bus tour gives a good overview in just 35 minutes; best viewing is from the left side. The giant pandas, Bai Yun and Shi Shi, became parents in 1999 to Hua Mei, the first panda cub born in captivity in the West since 1990, and their home is well worth a look. Also don’t miss the new Monkey Trails and Forest Tales, a naturalistic home for more than 30 rare African and Asian monkeys, reptiles, pygmy hippos, and birds. Between June and September, the zoo opens at 9 a.m. (great if you have your own early birds) and stays open until 9 p.m. for nocturnal animal viewing and special entertainment programs.

**unofficial TIP**  
Trying to see everything at the San Diego Zoo means a lot of walking—we head right for the Children’s Zoo, built to a 4-year-old’s scale; here, kids can pet creatures and see the newborns.



## SeaWorld San Diego

APPEAL BY AGE PRESCHOOL ★★★★★ GRADE SCHOOL ★★★★★ TEENS ★★★★★  
YOUNG ADULTS ★★★★★ OVER 30 ★★★★★ SENIORS ★★★★★

**1720 South Shores Road, Mission Bay; ☎ 800-25-SHAMU or 619-226-3901; [www.seaworld.com](http://www.seaworld.com)**

**Hours** Fall–spring: daily, 10 a.m.–dusk. Summer: daily, 9 a.m.–10 p.m. **Admission** \$54 adults, \$44 children ages 3–9; parking \$10. **Touring time** Average 6 hours; minimum 3 hours. **Rainy-day touring** So-so; most attractions are outdoors. **Restaurants** Yes. **Alcoholic beverages** Beer garden. **Disabled access** Yes. **Wheelchair rental** Yes. **Baby-stroller rental** Yes. **Lockers** Yes. **Pet kennels** Yes. **Rain check** No. **Private tours** Yes.

**DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS** Part theme park, part zoo, part serious animal rescue and research program, SeaWorld has an appeal that cuts across age groups and interests—just try to find someone jaded and cynical enough to not be thoroughly wowed and charmed by the dolphin show, in which smiling dolphins perform amazing acrobatic feats and deliberately splash the audience. Over in Shamu's stadium, a huge crowd roars its approval when the killer whales leap far into the sky, ask for the extra-large bucket of fish, and serve as living surfboards for trainers. Popular attractions are "Fools with Tools," a sea lion, walrus, and otter show, and *R. L. Stine's Haunted Lighthouse 4-D*, a just-spooky-enough film-and-special-effects experience based on an old fishermen's tale.

Our 5-year-old loved adventuring through the aquarium tunnel under the shark tank, and the sight of our shivering but deliriously happy 8-year-old after a Shamu soaking will stay with us for years. (Her little sister, however, was shocked into shrieking tears by the coldness of the water, so don't forget a change of clothes for less-tough little ones.) Even the less popular exhibits are worthwhile—we stopped at the bird show because the stadium was empty and we needed a rest, and were then dazzled by hawks and falcons dive-bombing into the audience from a 300-foot-high balloon.

SeaWorld also gets points for going a little beyond the deep-fried, junk-food theme-park basics—over by the penguin house, you can get a tasty fresh-fruit smoothie for a cooling, healthy snack that kids love.

In summer, the park stays open later and jazzes things up with live music, a circus show, and special night performances. But we prefer getting dolphin-splashed under a hot San Diego sun.

## FAMILY-FRIENDLY RESTAURANTS

### Berta's Latin American Restaurant

3928 Twiggs Street, Old Town; ☎ 619-295-2343;

[www.bertasinoldtown.com](http://www.bertasinoldtown.com)



**Meals served** Lunch and dinner. **Cuisine** Mexican. **Entree range** \$6–\$16. **Kids' menu** No. **Reservations** Recommended for 6 or more. **Payment** All major credit cards.

Berta goes way behind the tourist-Mexican standards to offer the best from Chile (lamb stew), Guatemala (shrimp in spicy salsa), Spain (paella), and practically every Spanish-speaking country. Kids will like the cheese empanadas, quesadillas, and flan, and parents will like the Argentinean rib-eye steak and Brazilian seafood with tomatoes, peanuts, ginger, coconut, and chiles. Beer and wine only.

### Corvette Diner

**3946 Fifth Avenue, San Diego; ☎ 619-542-1001 or 619-542-1476**

**Meals served** Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. **Cuisine** American. **Entree range** \$7–\$13 (lunch and dinner). **Kids' menu** Yes. **Reservations** Not accepted. **Payment** All major credit cards.

Hugely popular with local families, this 1950s diner camps it up with a live DJ, a magician, wisecracking waitresses, and blaring oldies rock. The décor is equally over the top: neon, chrome, a soda fountain, and an actual Corvette. The food is retro diner: meat loaf, chicken-fried steak, burgers, corn dogs, PB&Js, and root beer floats. Our kids beg to go back.



### El Indio

**3695 India Street, Old Town; ☎ 619-299-0333**

**Meals served** Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. **Cuisine** Mexican. **Entree range** \$6–\$11. **Kids' menu** Yes. **Reservations** Not accepted. **Payment** MC, V.

Tortilla chips are the claim to fame of this beloved chain—they're so good that people buy them as souvenirs and ship them home. Originally a tortilla factory in 1940, the Old Town location is the parent restaurant, and it's notable for its bare-bones outdoor seating, as well as its claim to have invented the word *taquito*. Other than the fabulous chips, the food is workaday (but tasty) Cal-Mex; try the carne asada, the vegetarian tamale, the nachos deluxe, and, of course, the handmade tortillas. Beer and wine only.

### Hob Nob Hill

**2271 First Avenue, downtown; ☎ 619-239-8176**

**Meals served** Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. **Cuisine** American. **Entree range** \$10–\$20. **Kids' menu** Yes. **Reservations** Recommended. **Payment** All major credit cards.

Since 1944, Hob Nob Hill has been dishing out home cooking, and it still looks as though it's 1944 inside: red Naugahyde booths, chintz curtains, glass pie cases, and waitresses who know their way around a coffee pot. The location is convenient to nowhere, but that doesn't stop this place from being San Diego's favorite breakfast restaurant, home to very good Western omelets, pancake sandwiches, roast-beef hash, and cinnamon rolls.

Dinner is of the turkey-croquette variety, and it's popular with the early-bird-special crowd.

### Perry's

**4610 Pacific Highway, Old Town; ☎ 619-291-7121**

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**Meals served** Breakfast and lunch. **Cuisine** American/Mexican. **Entree range** \$5–\$9. **Kids' menu** Yes. **Reservations** Not accepted. **Payment** MC, V.

The best place in Old Town for breakfast, Perry's serves an odd but appealing mix of Mexican (huevos rancheros), Italian (frittatas), and American (French toast) cooking; the children's menu is the usual pancake–hot dog roster. The food is cheap, tasty, and generously served, and there's a crowd on weekends.



### Pizza Nova

**3955 Fifth Avenue, downtown; ☎ 619-296-6682; 5050 North Harbor Drive, Mission Bay; ☎ 619-226-0268; 954 Lomas, Solana Beach; ☎ 858-259-0666**

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**Meals served** Lunch and dinner. **Cuisine** Italian/Californian. **Entree range** \$7–\$13. **Kids' menu** Yes. **Reservations** Recommended. **Payment** All major credit cards.

Winner of *San Diego* magazine's Best Pizza award, this small chain makes very good wood-fired pizzas, ranging from classic pepperoni to pizza pies with lox or Mexican lime chicken. Pastas, salads, and special-occasion desserts are also offered, along with kid-sized pizzas. The original branch in Mission Bay has water views and an appealing funkiness.

### San Diego Pier Cafe

**885 West Harbor Drive, downtown; ☎ 619-239-3968 or 619-232-7981**

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**Meals served** Breakfast, lunch, dinner, and Sunday brunch. **Cuisine** Seafood/American. **Entree range** Lunch, \$8–\$15; dinner, \$13–\$23. **Kids' menu** Yes. **Reservations** Only for 6 or more. **Payment** All major credit cards.

It may look like a tourist trap, given the Seaport Village location, but the food is better than it needs to be at this family favorite. Perched on the end of a small pier next to an old boathouse, it's a wonderful place for watching seagulls fly past, with the Coronado Bridge in the background; try to snag an outdoor table, especially if you have restless kids. The clam chowder, fresh fish, and fish tacos are all tasty, and the all-American breakfasts are particularly good; the children's menu includes fish 'n' chips.

# LA JOLLA

A SOPHISTICATED VILLAGE PERCHED ABOVE A DRAMATIC PUBLIC BEACH, **La Jolla** isn't the kind of place you might think to take your kids—unless they are precocious, design-conscious shoppers. But look beyond the expensive shops and restaurants to discover La Jolla's spectacular cove (see "The Best Beaches and Parks") and the low-key, family-friendly resorts right on the gorgeous main beach. And the aquarium at **Scripps Institute** is worth a stop if you haven't seen one of the larger aquariums in Monterey or Long Beach. La Jolla is a few miles north of central San Diego, about a ten-minute drive.

## FAMILY LODGING

### **La Jolla Beach and Tennis Club**

**2000 Spindrift Drive, La Jolla; ☎ 858-454-7126 or 800-640-7702; [www.lbtc.com](http://www.lbtc.com); \$219–\$809 off season, \$299–\$1,229 summer**

This is the sort of old-money beach retreat that Pasadena families have been summering at for decades. It's decidedly unglamorous, even motel-frumpy, but once you get to know the place, its charms are seductive. The best draw is its own gorgeous beach, close to but just far enough away from the mob scene at La Jolla Shores public beach, and notable for one of the shallowest, family-friendly shorelines in California. There's also a large pool tucked into a wind-protected courtyard. Supervised activities in summer for kids age 3 and up include swim meets, treasure hunts, and craft making. The club can set you up so you can have your own beach barbecue. Other on-site fun includes a large collection of quality tennis courts (tennis is taken very seriously here) and a par-three golf course. Avoid the fancy restaurant; the more casual cafe is decent.

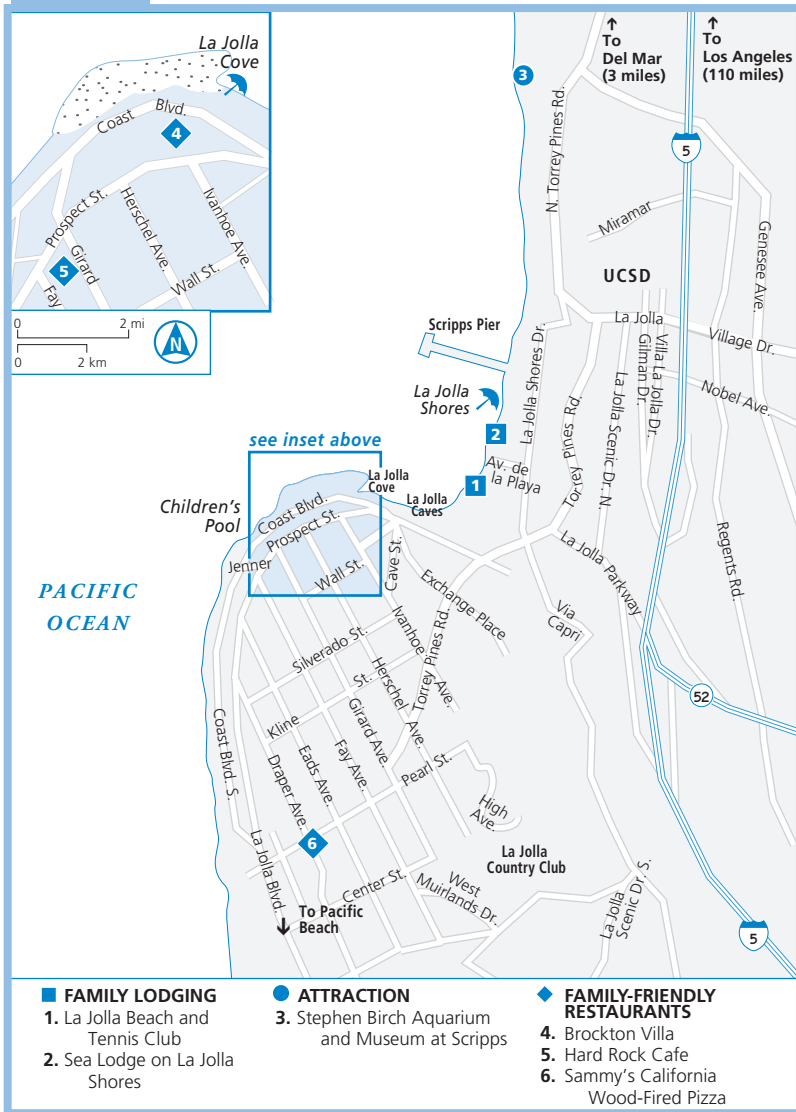


### **Sea Lodge on La Jolla Shores Beach**

**8110 Camino del Oro, La Jolla; ☎ 858-459-8271 or 800-640-7702; [www.sealodge.com](http://www.sealodge.com); \$219–\$399 off season, \$239–\$699 in season; children under 12 stay free**

Sea Lodge doesn't have supervised children's activities, which is just fine with its many loyal patrons—with a beach this lovely and kid friendly, who

## la jolla



needs a kids' program? The tile-roofed, Spanish-style hotel, a sibling of the La Jolla Beach and Tennis Club, is right on the same wonderful beach (with a boardwalk, good body boarding, and a gentle shoreline for little kids) and next door to a public park and playground; families also make good use of the pool, whirlpool, two tennis courts, Ping-Pong, and upscale restaurant, which has a children's menu. Wet, hungry kids can get a grilled-cheese sandwich delivered poolside. The 128 rooms have a no-frills, beachy-rattan décor, with refrigerators, coffeemakers, and wooden balconies; 19 of the larger rooms have kitchenettes. Be warned that rooms next to the public park can be noisy (scuba divers arrive at 5 a.m.).

## ATTRACTION

### Stephen Birch Aquarium and Museum at Scripps

APPEAL BY AGE	PRESCHOOL ★★ ★★	GRADE SCHOOL ★★ ★★	TEENS ★★ ★★
YOUNG ADULTS ★★ ★★	OVER 30 ★★ ★★	SENIORS ★★ ★★	

**2300 Expedition Way, La Jolla; ☎ 858-534-3474;**  
**www.aquarium.ucsd.edu**

**Hours** Daily, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.; closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.

**Admission** \$11 adults, \$9 seniors, \$7.50 college students, UCSD staff, and children ages 3–17, under age 3 free; 3-hour free parking. **Touring time** Average 1 hour; minimum 30 minutes. **Rainy-day touring** Yes. **Restaurants** Concessions. **Alcoholic beverages** No. **Disabled access** Yes. **Wheelchair rental** Yes. **Baby-stroller rental** No. **Lockers** No. **Pet kennels** No. **Rain check** No. **Private tours** Yes.

**DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS** The museum is perched on a bluff high above the blue Pacific, and the outdoor touch tank is on a balcony boasting one of the most extraordinary views ever. Parents will find themselves admiring their offspring as the strong sunlight glints on their heads while they concentrate on sea stars and gulls circle overhead. Meanwhile, inside, dramatically dark hallways are lined with glowing aquariums, lit from behind to best showcase the jellyfish, lobsters, and other marine species. There's also a theme-park moment—a simulated submersible ride—but be warned that the ride might be too scary for kids under age 6. If your kids want to prepare for a visit, have them go to the Web site.

## FAMILY-FRIENDLY RESTAURANTS



### Brockton Villa

**1235 Coast Boulevard, La Jolla; ☎ 858-454-7393;**  
**www.brocktonvilla.com**

**Meals served** Breakfast, brunch, lunch, and dinner. **Cuisine** American. **Entree range** Lunch, \$5–\$12; dinner, \$15–\$30. **Kids' menu** Yes. **Reservations** Recommended; a day in advance. **Payment** All major credit cards.

The perfect funky beach restaurant, the Brockton Villa is pure San Diego. Breakfast or lunch at this 1894-vintage white clapboard beach house perched over La Jolla Cove will evoke beach summers of your childhood, or at least of your fantasy childhood. While you take in the ocean view, you can feast on the city's best French toast, scented with orange; warming oatmeal; a great turkey meat-loaf sandwich; or fresh grilled albacore with ginger-cilantro butter.

### Hard Rock Cafe

**909 Prospect Street, La Jolla; ☎ 858-454-5101**

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**Meals served** Lunch and dinner. **Cuisine** American. **Entree range** \$9–\$17. **Kids' menu** \$6–\$8. **Reservations** For groups of 8 or more only; expect to wait. **Payment** All major credit cards.

If you've been to one Hard Rock, you've been to them all. But for a 12-year-old, there's no such thing as too many trips to the Hard Rock. Like the others, it's a loud place, perhaps too loud for the very young; the small patio is a bit quieter. The ribs, burgers, and chicken are tasty, but it's the T-shirts that most kids remember.

### Sammy's California Wood-Fired Pizza

**702 Pearl Street, La Jolla; ☎ 858-456-5222**

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**Meals served** Lunch and dinner. **Cuisine** Californian. **Entree range** \$10–\$17. **Kids' menu** \$5–\$9. **Reservations** For 6 or more only. **Payment** All major credit cards.

This is the parent of a bright, yuppified San Diego chain dedicated to the California pizza: small pies flavored with things like goat cheese, grilled zucchini, and barbecued chicken. They are utterly delicious and can be paired with tasty Caesar salads. Kids have their own menu of mini-pizzas, and they can decorate a paper pizza with crayons. Come early to beat the considerable crowds.

# DEL MAR *and* CARLSBAD

THE RACETRACK AT **Del Mar** is the famed adult draw here, but plenty of families frequent Del Mar and never place a bet. Instead, they head for the broad, white-sand beach between 15th and 29th streets, and the quaint little downtown area. We've used it as a base for visiting the **Wild Animal Park**—still a half-hour drive, but along scenic country roads from here. Downtown San Diego is a 15- to 20-minute drive south outside of rush hour, but be warned that increasing traffic on I-5 can greatly lengthen that trip.

A half hour north of San Diego, **Carlsbad** is a quiet community that has typically attracted the upscale-golfing set (think George Bush), but it became more family friendly when **Legoland** came to town. Between this major theme park, the clean and beautiful state beach, and two swell kid-friendly resorts (the upscale Four Seasons and the charming Carlsbad Inn), Carlsbad is turning into a lovely family destination away from the San Diego crowds. If you're in town in spring (March through May), don't pass up a quick trip to the 50 acres of colorful blooms at **The Flower Fields** (Carlsbad Ranch); ☎ 760-930-9123; [www.theflowerfields.com](http://www.theflowerfields.com).

 **unofficial TIP**  
Carlsbad is turning into a lovely family beach destination away from the San Diego crowds.

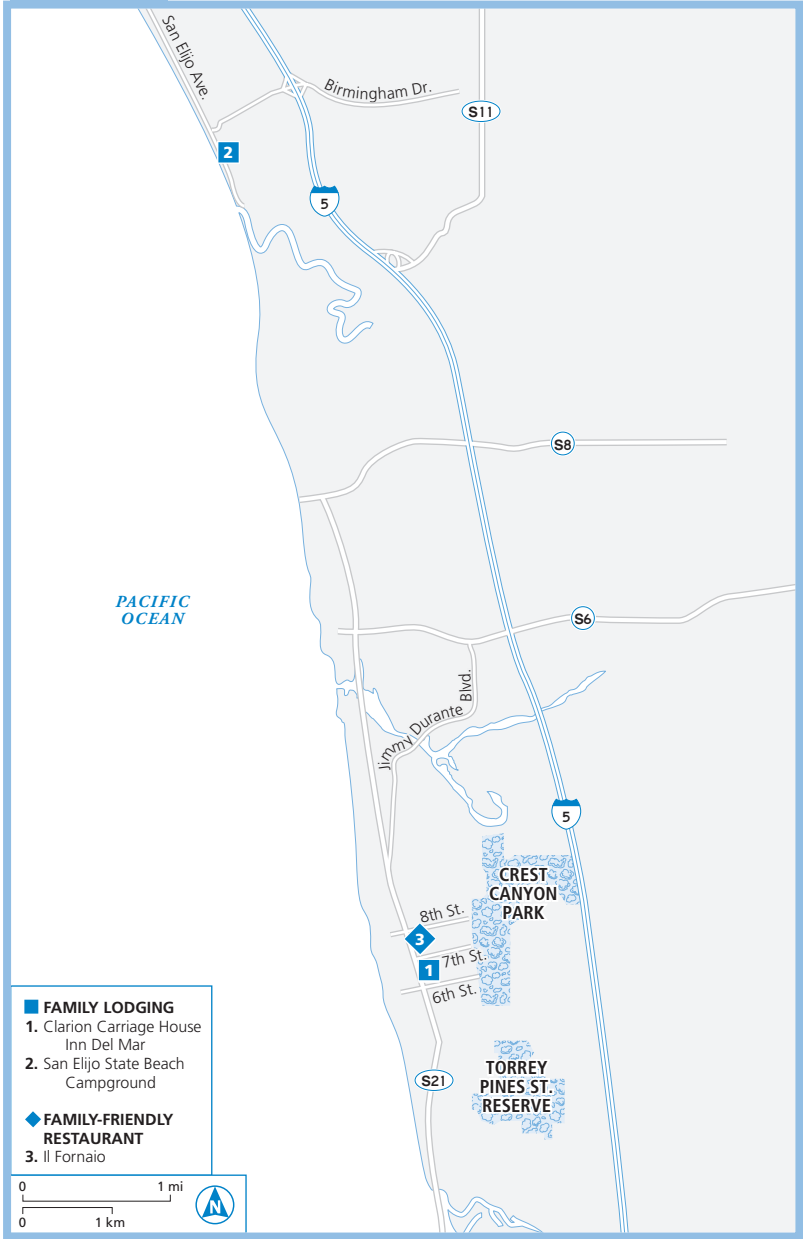
## FAMILY LODGING

### Carlsbad Inn

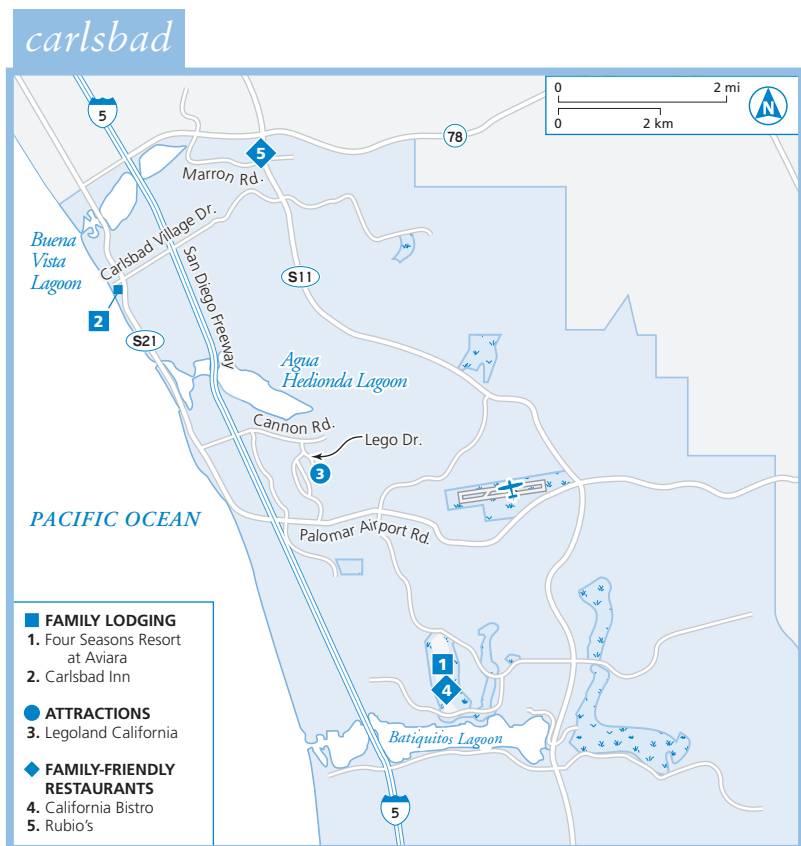
**3075 Carlsbad Boulevard, Carlsbad; ☎ 760-434-7020 or 800-235-3939; [www.carlsbadinn.com](http://www.carlsbadinn.com); \$159–\$205 summer; \$159–\$179 off season**

A charming if quirky (what's with the Tudor thing in sunny California?) beach resort, the Carlsbad Inn offers a lot of bang for the buck. Accommodations include family-size junior suites and spacious condos; the pool and spa area is fronted by a broad green lawn; and terrific Carlsbad Beach is just across the road. On site are a playground, frozen-yogurt shop, Mexican restaurant, Ping-Pong, fitness center, bikes, and beach toys, and Carlsbad's shops and restaurants are an easy walk. The hotel organizes activities for

*del mar*







kids (sand-dollar painting, root-beer-float making) and seniors (financial planning, bus trips to Mexico).

### Clarion Del Mar Inn

720 Camino del Mar, Del Mar; ☎ 858-755-9765 or 800-252-7466;

[www.delmarinn.com](http://www.delmarinn.com); \$117–\$180 summer; \$89–\$150 off season

There's a snapshot of our kids in the pool area of this motel, and the brightness of their smiles is matched by the bright flowers everywhere around them—real home gardens, not institutional landscaping. A landmark along the Pacific Coast Highway and popular lodging for the horse professionals frequenting the racetrack (just count the trailers in the parking lot), this 80-room faux-Tudor place has some unusual homey touches. Afternoon tea is served in real china cups by a woman with a genuine

English accent; the pool area is splendid with flowers; décor is heavy on horse pictures and red plaid. The beach isn't too far of a walk.



### Four Seasons Resort at Aviara

**7100 Four Seasons Point, Carlsbad; ☎ 760-603-6800 or 800-819-5053; [www.fourseasons.com](http://www.fourseasons.com); \$305–\$585 low season, \$405–\$685 high season, special packages sometimes available; children stay free in parents' room**

It may not have a beach—South Carlsbad beach is a couple of miles away—but this expensive resort has just about everything else: a gorgeous golf course, tennis, a swimming pool, a health club, a spa, high-end restaurants, ocean views, walking/jogging trails around the neighboring Batiquitos lagoon and bird sanctuary, and luxuriously outfitted rooms. Like almost all Four Seasons resorts, this one is out to corner the upscale family market. Children are won over from the moment of check-in: waiting for them in the room are cookies and milk, and their names are spelled out with sponges in the bathroom. The free Kids for All Seasons program goes far beyond the video-room basics—warm, well-qualified counselors take kids on nature walks and swimming in the pool; kids also enjoy storytelling in a teepee, make their own postcards, and pet and feed the program's mascot, Avie the frog. Available for kids ages 4 to 12, the program is offered daily in summer, weekends and school vacations in spring, and weekends the rest of the year.



### San Elijo State Beach Campground

**On Highway 1, Cardiff-by-the-Sea; ☎ 760-753-5091 or 800-444-7275; [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov); campsites \$25–\$44**

Located in spiffy Cardiff-by-the-Sea, just south of Carlsbad and about 20 minutes north of San Diego's Mission Bay, this campground is beautifully set on a small bluff above the beach, with most of the tent campsites overlooking the ocean. You won't get any privacy out here in the open (the beachfront road runs right by), but you'll get a lot of beach beauty and fun for very little money. Summertime always books up seven months in advance, so reserve early. Hot showers, flush toilets, lifeguards, barbecues, lots of nearby restaurants.

## ATTRACTIONS

### Legoland California

APPEAL BY AGE	PRESCHOOL ★★★★★	GRADE SCHOOL ★★★★★	TEENS ★
YOUNG	ADULTS ★★	OVER 30 ★★	SENIORS ★★

**1 Legoland Drive, Carlsbad; ☎ 760-918-5346; [www.legoland.com](http://www.legoland.com)**

**Hours** Vary daily; call ahead or check Web site for correct hours. **Admission** \$53 adults, \$43 children ages 3–12 and seniors; discounts for parents and/or Southern


California residents are sometimes offered. Parking is \$8 cars, \$10 campers/RVs, \$5 motorcycles, preferred \$15. **Touring time** Average 5 hours; minimum 3 hours. **Rainy-day touring** Limited. **Restaurants** Yes. **Alcoholic beverages** No. **Disabled access** Yes. **Wheelchair rental** Yes. **Baby-stroller rental** Yes. **Lockers** Yes. **Pet kennels** Yes. **Rain check** No. **Private tours** No.

**DESCRIPTION AND COMMENTS** When it first opened several years ago, this theme park held little appeal for older kids, especially older kids who aren't into Legos. There were no thrill rides, and to a 14-year-old, thrill rides are the only reason to go to a theme park. Over the last few years, however, the Legoland folks have added attractions to broaden the park's appeal, and it seems to be working. But for the most part, this friendly place remains best suited for kids under 12—and, of course, Legomaniacs of all ages.

The theme here, of course, is Legos, the little primary-colored plastic bricks out of which children (and adults) make everything from houses to *Star Wars* vehicles. The showpiece is Miniland, which is perhaps the most appealing part of the park for adults and older Lego-loving kids, if a bit frustrating for little ones, who aren't allowed to touch. Many regions of the United States have been meticulously re-created with more than 20 million Lego bricks. Lego boats chug in the New England harbor, subway trains run under Rockefeller Center in Manhattan, rockets get ready to launch from Cape Canaveral, and cars drive down the streets of Beverly Hills. It's pretty astounding. In the new Florida Miniland, kids can race remote control minicars around a replica of the Daytona Speedway.

Our kids' hands-down favorite attraction is the driving school, which takes Disneyland's Autopia to the next level. Kids from 6 to 13 attend a brief class on driving safety and rules of the road and are then rewarded with a driver's license (these are treasured by 6-year-olds). In a Volvo-sponsored Lego car, they drive scaled-down city streets, stopping at signals and staying in their lanes like real drivers. Kids ages 3 to 6 get their own smaller-scale driving school as well.

Otherwise, your child's favorite area will depend on age and interests. The littlest ones like the Duplo building area, while the oldest ones like Mindstorms in the Imagination Zone, where they can build robotics vehicles. In this same area, kids are often allowed to help the master builders with whatever they're currently creating. After a session of quiet building, head over to the Hideaways in Castle Hill, a terrific climbing and play structure, or to the new Pirate Shores—and make sure to change into bathing suits! This new water-play area is a huge hit for 8-year-olds and up, offering waterslides, mock pirate battles, water jets, and a water-play place stocked with soaker devices galore. Younger kids might be happier at Explore Village, which includes the Dino Island,

 **unofficial TIP**  
Arrive right at opening time, do the Sky Cruiser, driving school, and rides first, indulge in some quiet-time building activities, have lunch, explore Miniland, burn off lunch in the Hideaways and Pirate Shores, then leave at the hottest part of the day, in the early afternoon, to hit the beach in Carlsbad for a refreshing family swim.

where they can dig for “remains” of prehistoric dinosaurs and ride the moderately thrilling Coastersaurus.

Other rides include the fairly tame Castle Hill roller coaster (an ideal thrill for 5- to 8-year-olds), the very tame Lake (great for preschoolers), and the fun Aquazone Wave Racer Jet Ski ride, a good one for older kids. The new Technic Coaster will amuse the big kids, though it's still no match for Magic Mountain's megacoasters. The Sky Cruiser, which putters around high over Fun Town, isn't worth it if the line is long, which it often is. If your kids really want to ride Sky Cruiser, head over there as soon as you arrive.

Legoland gets huge kudos for making the food far more palatable and healthful than at any other theme park. Pastas, sandwiches, and salads (including a great fruit salad for kids) are made fresh to order, and the various restaurant spaces are inviting, with plenty of shade from the often-hot Carlsbad sun.

## FAMILY-FRIENDLY RESTAURANTS

### California Bistro

**Four Seasons Resort at Aviara, 7100 Four Seasons Point, Carlsbad;**  
**☎ 760-603-6800**

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**Meals served** Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. **Cuisine** Californian, American. **Entree range** Lunch, \$10–\$20; dinner, \$15–\$20. **Kids' menu** Yes. **Reservations** Recommended. **Payment** All major credit cards.

A rare “nice” restaurant that's as comfortable for children as adults, the Four Seasons' more casual eatery is a real find for families seeking a relaxed dinner out. In a beamed, high-ceilinged, California-chic dining room with an ocean-view terrace, the staff dotes on kids, bringing them little frog key chains and even escorting them to the bathroom when necessary; babies and toddlers get a high chair, snack box of Cheerios, and spill mat. Our kids flipped for the tortilla chip–crusted crab cakes from the grown-up menu, then returned to the safety of the children's menu for burgers and fries; we loved the herb-seared Atlantic salmon and the Aviara sandwich of juicy rosemary chicken and melted Brie on honey-sunflower bread.

### Il Fornaio

**Del Mar Plaza, 1555 Camino del Mar, Del Mar; ☎ 858-755-8876**

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**Meals served** Lunch, dinner, and Sunday brunch. **Cuisine** Italian. **Entree range** Lunch and dinner, \$10–\$25. **Kids' menu** Yes. **Reservations** Advised. **Payment** All major credit cards.

For an upscale family meal out with a sunset ocean view you won't soon forget, head to this accomplished chain. A different region of Italy is featured monthly, and those specials are always the best, but the regular menu of risottos, pasta, bruschetta, grilled fish, and salads is delicious, too. Children are welcomed and given their own menu, with things like Italian-style macaroni and cheese.

**Rubio's****2604-A El Camino Real, Carlsbad; ☎ 760-434-6298**

**Meals served** Lunch and dinner. **Cuisine** Mexican. **Entree range** \$4–\$12. **Kids' menu** Yes. **Reservations** Not accepted. **Payment** MC, V.

Born in San Diego, this order-at-the-counter chain is now found all over the West, and for good reason: the food is fresh, healthy, cheap, and tasty, appealing to kids and grown-ups alike. Known for its soft fish tacos, it also has a good grilled-chicken Caesar salad, peppery beans, and burritos and tacos filled with grilled mahimahi, savory carnitas, and hearty *machaca* (beef and eggs).



## SIDE TRIP:

### *Anza-Borrego Desert State Park*

MANY SOUTHERN CALIFORNIANS MANAGE to achieve middle age without even realizing that this 600,000-acre desert park is hiding right in their midst. Inland about two hours from San Diego, Anza-Borrego is a wilderness preserve, desert playground, and wildflower paradise in spring; the only town, Borrego Springs, still doesn't have a traffic signal, though it has a few hotels and amenities. Our favorite excursions are the extremes: either sleeping in relative luxury at La Casa del Zorro or sleeping under the stars at the state campground. Either way, pack a picnic (including lots of drinking water), have the kids wear swimsuits under their clothes, and spend a day hiking up the Palm Canyon Trail. This child-friendly destination was overwhelmed by a flash flood in 2004 that took out many of the palms and swimming holes, but the intrepid scrambler will still find a few palm oases and water. Before your hike, stop by the visitors center in Borrego Springs so your kids will know which sorts of cacti, birds, and wildflowers to hunt for. Avoid the area from June through October, when the heat can be brutal. Visitors center is at 200 Palm Canyon Drive, Borrego Springs, ☎ 760-767-5311; [www.anzaborrego.statepark.org](http://www.anzaborrego.statepark.org). Open daily October through May; on weekends and holidays only June through September.

## FAMILY LODGING

### **Borrego Palm Canyon State Campground**

**2 miles north of Borrego Springs (check Borrego Springs visitors center for directions); reservations: Reserve America, ☎ 800-444-7275, [www.reserveamerica.com](http://www.reserveamerica.com); campsites \$15–\$20 without hookups, \$20–\$29 with hookups. Note: This park is located inside Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.**

Quiet campsites are scattered among the ocotillo, mesquite, and barrel cactus, close to the trailhead to Palm Canyon, an easy hike that kids love.

When not on the trail, they can scramble up the hillside, hunt for lizards, and, at night, count the shooting stars. Hot showers, flush toilets, barbecues, fire pits, and drinking water are available.

### **La Casa del Zorro Resort Hotel**

**3845 Yaqui Pass Road, Borrego Springs; ☎ 760-767-5323 or  
800-824-1884; [www.lacasadelzorro.com](http://www.lacasadelzorro.com); \$295–\$1,220 off season;  
\$360–\$1,500 high season**

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More luxurious than the no-frills town and empty expanse of state park would suggest, this is a fine place to recover from a long, hot hike up Palm Canyon. Swim in the pool, play tennis, rent a bike, or stay cool in one of the large, handsome family-size villas or casitas, many of which have one or two bedrooms, refrigerators, and microwaves. Children's activities are sometimes scheduled on weekends. Rates plummet in the depths of summer. Good restaurant.