

The Best of San Diego

Best known for its benign climate and fabulous beaches, San Diego has shed its image as a sleepy Navy town in favor of a contemporary sophistication befitting the nation's eighth largest city. With 70 miles of sandy coastline—plus pretty, sheltered Mission Bay—San Diego is one big outdoor playground where you can choose from swimming, snorkeling, windsurfing, kayaking, bicycling, skating, and other diversions in or near the water. The city is also home to top-notch attractions, including three world-famous animal parks and splendid Balboa Park, a cultural and recreational jewel that's one of the finest urban parks in the country.

1 Frommer's Favorite San Diego Experiences

- **Zippering across the San Diego-Coronado Bay Bridge:** The first time or the 50th, there's always an adrenaline rush as you follow this engineering marvel's dramatic curves and catch a glimpse of the spectacular views. See "Orientation," p. 16, for more about the city's neighborhoods.
- **Taking in the City's Best Panorama:** Cabrillo National Monument not only offers a whirlwind tour of San Diego history, it also provides unsurpassed 360-degree views of downtown and beyond. See "More Attractions," p. 117.
- **Escaping to Torrey Pines State Reserve:** Dramatically perched atop 300-foot cliffs, this state park is set aside for the rarest pine tree in North America. See "More Attractions," p. 117.
- **Watching the Sun Set over the Pacific:** It's a free and memorable experience. See "San Diego's Beaches," p. 104.
- **Communing with Seals and Sea Lions:** The Children's Pool, a picturesque cove in La Jolla, was originally named for the toddlers who could safely frolic behind a man-made seawall. A colony of pinnipeds found it equally to its liking, and now the beach is shared—sometimes a little uneasily—between humans and seals. See "San Diego's Beaches," p. 104.

- **It's Showtime:** Two Tony Award-winning theaters, the La Jolla Playhouse and the Old Globe Theatre, have sent a stream of shows to Broadway, making San Diego one of the most important theater cities in the country. Check out the lively theater scene. See "The Performing Arts," p. 162.
- **Paddling with the Fishes:** The calm surfaces and clear waters of the San Diego-La Jolla Underwater Park are the ultimate spot to do a little kayaking. See "Outdoor Pursuits," p. 137.
- **Strolling through the Gaslamp Quarter:** With many of the Victorian commercial buildings in this 16½-block district beautifully restored, the Gaslamp's excellent people-watching is given a distinct run for its money by the exquisite architecture on display. See the info on the Gaslamp Quarter Historical Foundation, p. 136.
- **Riding the San Diego Trolley to Tijuana:** The trip aboard the bright red trolley costs just \$3 from downtown, and you'll be deposited right at the gateway to Mexico's fourth largest city in about 40 minutes. See "Getting Around," p. 22.
- **Spending an Idyllic Day in Balboa Park:** Home to more than a dozen of the city's top museums, Balboa Park also has dazzling gardens and glorious Spanish Golden Age architecture. The zoo is here as well. See "Attractions in Balboa Park," p. 108.
- **Buying Some Peanuts and Cracker Jacks:** The Padres, San Diego's Major League Baseball team, play in a spiffy downtown stadium that opened its gates in 2004. Enjoy the Gaslamp Quarter's boutiques, restaurants, and bars before or after a game. See "Spectator Sports," p. 146.
- **Running with the Grunion:** These tiny fish spawn on San Diego beaches between April and June, and the locals love to be there.

2 Best Hotel Bets

- **Best Historic Hotel:** The **Hotel del Coronado**, 1500 Orange Ave. (☎ 800/468-3533 or 619/435-6611), opened in 1888 and is the grande dame of California's seaside resorts. Meticulous restoration has enhanced this glorious landmark, whose early days are well chronicled in displays throughout the hotel. See p. 63.
- **Best for a Romantic Getaway:** The **Lodge at Torrey Pines**, 11480 North Torrey Pines Rd. (☎ 800/656-0087 or 858/453-4420), one of only two AAA five-diamond hotels in

the county, sits next to legendary Torrey Pines Golf Course. You can enjoy a fireplace in your room, sunset ocean views from your balcony, and superb meals at the hotel's A.R. Valentin restaurant. See p. 59.

- **Best for Families:** The **Paradise Point Resort & Spa**, 1404 Vacation Rd. (☎ 800/344-2626 or 858/274-4630), is a tropical playground offering enough activities to keep family members of all ages happy. See p. 53.
- **Best Moderately Priced Hotel:** The **Horton Grand Hotel**, 311 Island Ave. (☎ 800/542-1886 or 619/544-1886), is a Victorian landmark full of creature comforts that belie its friendly rates. You'll also be smack-dab in the heart of the trendy Gaslamp Quarter. See p. 41.
- **Best Budget Hotel:** In San Diego's Little Italy, **La Pensione Hotel**, 606 W. Date St. (☎ 800/232-4683 or 619/236-8000), feels like a small European hotel and offers tidy lodgings at bargain prices. See p. 42.
- **Best Bed & Breakfast:** The picture-perfect **Heritage Park Bed & Breakfast Inn**, 2470 Heritage Park Row (☎ 800/995-2470 or 619/299-6832), is an exquisitely maintained Victorian house on a cobblestone cul-de-sac in a small park lined with historic buildings. The inn's lively and gracious hosts delight in creating a pampering and romantic ambience. See p. 47.
- **Best Place to Stay on the Beach:** If you really want to be in the heart of San Diego's beach culture, no place is better than **Tower 23**, 723 Felspar St. (☎ 866/869-3723). This sleek, modernist hotel—which takes its name from a nearby life-guard station—sits right on the Pacific Beach boardwalk. See p. 50.
- **Best Hotel Pool:** The genteel pool at **La Valencia**, 1132 Prospect St. (☎ 800/451-0772 or 858/454-0771), is oh-so-special, with its spectacular setting overlooking Scripps Park and the Pacific. See p. 58.

3 Best Dining Bets

- **Best Spot for a Business Lunch:** **Dobson's Bar & Restaurant**, 956 Broadway Circle, downtown San Diego (☎ 619/231-6771), has been mixing business and pleasure for more than 20 years. You'll literally rub shoulders (thanks to the restaurant's cozy set-up) with power brokers and politicians from both sides of the border. See p. 72.

The Best of San Diego Online

Here are a few helpful sites for planning and general information.

- **www.sandiego.org** is maintained by the San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau and includes up-to-date weather info, a calendar of events, and a hotel booking engine.
- **www.sandiegoartandsol.com** is the link for cultural tourism, also overseen by the Convention & Visitors Bureau.
- **www.sandiego-online.com**, the *San Diego* magazine website, features abbreviated stories from the current month's issue, plus dining and events listings.
- **www.sdreader.com**, the site of the free weekly *San Diego Reader*, is a great source for club and show listings.
- **www.signonsandiego.com** is where CitySearch teams up with the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, catering as much to locals as to visitors.
- **www.digitalcity.com/sandiego** is a lifestyle guide targeted at locals and therefore yields occasional off-the-beaten-tourist-path recommendations.
- **www.wheresd.com** provides information on arts, culture, special events, shopping, and dining for San Diego, Orange County, and Los Angeles. You can also make hotel reservations through the site.

- **Best View:** Many restaurants overlook the ocean, but only from **Brockton Villa**, 1235 Coast Blvd., La Jolla (☎ 858/454-7393), can you see sublime La Jolla Cove. Diners with a window seat will feel as if they're looking out on a gigantic picture postcard. See p. 91.
- **Best Value:** The word "huge" barely begins to describe the portions at **Filippi's Pizza Grotto**, 1747 India St. (☎ 619/232-5095), where a salad for one is enough for three, and an order of lasagna must weigh a pound. See p. 75.
- **Best Chinese Cuisine:** **Emerald Restaurant**, 3709 Convoy St., Kearny Mesa (☎ 858/565-6888), is in the most unromantic of locations, yet the culinary wizardry that transpires in the

kitchen draws the Chinese community citywide for Hong Kong-style seafood, much of it plucked from live fish tanks. See p. 97.

- **Best Seafood:** Matt Rimel, owner of **Zenbu**, 7660 Fay Ave., La Jolla (☎ 858/454-4540), loved fishing so much he bought a commercial fishing boat. Then he opened a restaurant so he could do something with the catch. Zenbu is also an excellent spot for sushi. See p. 91.
- **Best New-American Cuisine:** Young Turk Tony DiSalvo has established **Jack's La Jolla**, 7863 Girard Ave., La Jolla (☎ 858/456-8111), at the top of the San Diego food chain. This three-floor, multitasking dining-complex features a sophisticated menu incorporating plenty of local products. See p. 88.
- **Best Mexican Cuisine:** Rather than the "combination plate" fare that's common on this side of the border, **El Agave Tequileria**, 2304 San Diego Ave., Old Town (☎ 619/220-0692), offers memorable recipes from Veracruz, Chiapas, Puebla, and Mexico City—along with an impressive selection of boutique and artisan tequilas and mezcals. See p. 81.
- **Best Pizza:** You just might mistake San Diego for New York at **Bronx Pizza**, 111 Washington St., Hillcrest (☎ 619/291-3341). Don't even think about asking for a salad—this tiny pizzeria makes nothing but thin-crust pizzas and calzones. See p. 77.
- **Best Desserts:** You'll forget your diet at **Extraordinary Desserts**, 2929 Fifth Ave., Hillcrest (☎ 619/294-2132) and 1430 Union St., Little Italy (☎ 619/294-7001). Heck, it's so good you might forget your name. Proprietor Karen Krasne has a *Certificate de Patisserie* from Le Cordon Bleu in Paris and makes everything fresh on the premises daily. See p. 78.
- **Best Fast Food:** Fish tacos may sound strange to the uninitiated, but once you taste one, you'll know why locals line up for them at various casual eateries around the city. See "Baja Fish Tacos" on p. 83.
- **Best Picnic Fare:** Pack a superb sandwich from the **Bread & Cie.**, 350 University Ave. (☎ 619/683-9322), where the hearty breads are the toast of the city. See p. 79. Or head to one of several locations of **Whole Foods**, in Hillcrest at 711 University Ave. (☎ 619/294-2800), and in La Jolla at 8825 Villa La Jolla Dr. (☎ 858/642-6700).