

The Best of San Diego

Over the last 2 decades, San Diego has evolved past its old reputation as a slow-growth, conservative Navy town graced with 70 miles of fabulous sandy coastline. Amid all the change, San Diego is still first and foremost a big outdoor playground. You can swim, snorkel, windsurf, kayak, bicycle, in-line skate, and partake of other diversions in or near the water, as well as in the mountains and desert. But if you think this place is just about wiggling your toes in the sand or cooing over panda bears at the justly famous zoo, prepare to be surprised by San Diego's big-city style. Beyond the stunning natural beauty, you'll find high-octane nightlife, world-class cultural organizations, family-friendly attractions, and sophisticated dining. And the city is perched on the world's busiest international border, with the sights, sounds, and tastes of Mexico just a Chihuahua's length away. Welcome to San Diego—California's grown-up beach town.

1 THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE TRAVEL 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 panoramic view to either side. Driving west, you can easily pick out the distinctive **Hotel del Coronado** (p. 89) in the distance.
- **Escaping to Torrey Pines State Reserve:** Poised on a majestic cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, this state park is set aside for the rarest pine tree in North America. The reserve has short trails that immerse hikers in a delicate and beautiful coastal environment. See p. 153.
- **Communing with Seals at the Children's Pool:** This tiny La Jolla cove was originally named for the young bathers who could safely frolic behind a man-made seawall. These days, seals and sea lions sunning themselves on the sand are the main attraction. The beach had been off-limits to humans since 1997, but following much public debate was reopened to swimmers in 2005. Keep a safe distance—these are wild animals—and you'll be rewarded with a unique wildlife experience. See p. 134.
- **Taking in the City's Best Panorama:** Cabrillo National Monument at the tip of Point Loma offers an unsurpassed 360-degree view that takes in downtown, the harbor, military bases, Coronado, and, in the distance, Mexico and San Diego's mountainous backcountry. It's also a great vantage point from which to watch migrating Pacific gray whales in the winter. See p. 144.
- **Renting Bikes, Skates, or Kayaks at Mission Bay:** Landscaped shores, calm waters, and paved paths make Mission Bay Park an unsurpassed aquatic playground. Encompassing 4,600 acres and featuring 27 miles of bayfront beaches and picnic areas, there's plenty to explore on both land and water. See p. 133.

- 4 • **Strolling Through the Gaslamp Quarter:** You'll be convinced you've stepped back in time when you walk through this 16½-block area lined with Victorian commercial buildings. The beautifully restored structures, in the heart of downtown, house some of the city's most popular shops, restaurants, and nightspots. See "Walking Tour 1: The Gaslamp Quarter," on p. 179.
- **Spending an Idyllic Day in Balboa Park:** This is San Diego's crown jewel and the largest urban cultural park in the nation. The buildings that grew out of Balboa Park's two world's fairs (1915–16, 1935–36) create a vision of Spanish Golden Age splendor and provide a home for 15 of the city's best museums. The park also features gardens, walking trails, theaters, and recreational facilities, and is the location of the San Diego Zoo. See p. 136.
- **Being a Groundling:** You won't have to stand as they did in William Shakespeare's day, but you can see the Bard's work alfresco at the Old Globe Theatre's Summer Shakespeare Festival. The Tony Award-winning Old Globe hosts performances of Shakespeare's work in repertory, alternating three productions at its open-air theater in Balboa Park. See p. 22.
- **Floating Up, Up, and Away over North County:** Sunset hot-air-balloon rides carry passengers over the golf courses and luxury homes north of the city. Do it while you can—open space for landings has been fast disappearing—making ballooning an endangered species here. See p. 166.
- **Witnessing the Desert's Spring Fling:** Anza-Borrego Desert State Park, California's largest state park, attracts most of its visitors during the spring wildflower season, when a kaleidoscopic carpet of blooms blankets the desert floor. Others come year-round to hike more than 100 miles of trails. See p. 269.
- **Paddling With the Fishes:** The calm surfaces and clear waters of the San Diego–La Jolla Underwater Park are the ultimate spot for kayaking, snorkeling, or scuba diving. This ecological reserve features sea caves and vibrant marine life, including California's state fish, the electric-orange garibaldi. See p. 150.
- **Teeing off at Torrey Pines Golf Course:** These two 18-hole championship courses in La Jolla overlook the ocean and provide players with plenty of challenge. In January, the Buick Invitational Tournament is held here. The rest of the year, these popular municipal courses are open to everybody. See p. 171.
- **Spending a Day at the San Diego Zoo, Wild Animal Park, or SeaWorld:** At the zoo, animals live in naturalistic habitats; at the Wild Animal Park, most of the 3,500 animals roam freely over an 1,800-acre spread. SeaWorld is an aquatic wonderland of pirouetting dolphins and 4-ton killer whales with a fetish for drenching visitors. See p. 127.
- **Making a Run for the Border:** What a difference a line makes. Once you cross it, you're instantly immersed in the chaotic vibrancy of Mexico's fourth-largest city. Just a 20-minute drive from downtown, Tijuana has a raucous tourist zone with plentiful shopping, as well as an array of cultural and culinary delights. See p. 274.
- **Toasting the Good Life:** Just across the county line in Temecula, about 60 miles north of downtown San Diego, are some two-dozen wineries. They range from mom-and-pop operations with minimal amenities to slick commercial ventures with fancy tasting rooms, retail boutiques, and restaurants. See p. 249.
- **Buying Some Peanuts and Cracker Jack:** San Diego's Major League Baseball team, the Padres, plays at PETCO Park, a state-of-the-art ballpark that opened in 2004. Incorporating seven buildings that date as far back as 1909,

PETCO's clever design and downtown location have made it a fan favorite. See p. 176.

- **Getting in Touch With Your Pioneer Spirit:** The mountain hamlet of Julian was founded as a gold-mining town in

the 1860s, but it eventually gained fame for a different kind of mother lode: apples. Today, this rustic community has a distinctly Victorian, Old West charm, redolent of hot apple pies. See p. 263.

2 THE BEST SPLURGE HOTELS

- Resembling an ornate Tuscan villa, the **Grand Del Mar**, 5300 Grand Del Mar Way (☎ 888/314-2030 or 858/314-2000), is an aptly named resort tucked into the foothills of Del Mar. Opened in 2007, it features exquisite terraces, fountains, gardens, and amenities galore. Its stand-alone restaurant, Addison, is the first San Diego dining establishment to receive a AAA 5 Diamond Award. See p. 232.
- **Ivy Hotel**, 600 F St. (☎ 877/489-4489 or 619/814-1000), exudes warmth, modern style, and class, and features such amenities as a personal butler and luxury cars to tool guests around downtown at no charge. The Ivy knows how to party, too—not only is there a jamming nightclub on-site,

but one of the suites also includes a stripper pole. See p. 64.

- **Four Seasons Resort Aviara**, 7100 Four Seasons Point (☎ 800/819-5053 or 760/603-6800), is a AAA 5 Diamond resort in Carlsbad that pulls off the hat trick of encompassing one of the best restaurants, spas, and golf courses in the county. See p. 240.
- San Diego's other AAA 5 Diamond property is the **Lodge at Torrey Pines**, 11480 N. Torrey Pines Rd. (☎ 800/656-0087 or 858/453-4420). Painstakingly designed in the Craftsman style, the Lodge features an elegant restaurant and a blissful spa, and elbows up against renowned Torrey Pines Golf Course in La Jolla. See p. 85.

3 THE BEST MODERATELY PRICED HOTELS

- You won't find a better location than the **Horton Grand**, 311 Island Ave. (☎ 800/542-1886 or 619/544-1886). This historic Victorian beauty has called the Gaslamp Quarter home since 1886, and some otherworldly guests have reputedly been hanging around since then, too. See p. 68.
- 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. There's an

abundance of great dining in the surrounding blocks, and you'll be perfectly situated to explore the rest of the city by car or trolley. See p. 70.

- Like some other recent hotel projects around town, the **Hotel Occidental**, 410 Elm St. (☎ 800/205-9897 or 619/232-1336), is a refurbished old beauty, built around 1923, and has a great location (near Balboa Park). Unlike those other properties, though, the Occidental is incredibly affordable. See p. 70.

4 THE BEST DINING EXPERIENCES

- Supper clubs have proliferated in San Diego, but none have matched the panache and sophistication of **Anthology**, 1337 India St. (☎ 619/595-0300). It's hard to say what takes center stage here—culinary pooh-bah Bradley Ogden's excellent new American fare or the live music performed by an eclectic lineup of international artists. See p. 100.
- **Blanca**, 437 S. Hwy. 101 (☎ 858/792-0072), may be located in a strip mall blocks away from an ocean view, but this Solana Beach restaurant flies its foodie flag high. It's one of the best upscale establishments in the county. See p. 242.
- If you want to know what San Diego tastes like, you can find out at **Market**, 3702 Via de la Valle (☎ 858/523-0007). Native son Carl Schroeder finds the best local ingredients, creates his menu daily, and serves it all in a casually elegant space in Del Mar. See p. 236.
- At the **Marine Room**, 2000 Spindrift Dr. (☎ 866/644-2351), executive chef Bernard Guillas's creative, modern French cuisine provides ample evidence of how far the city's invigorated dining scene has come. See p. 117.
- **Jack's La Jolla**, 7863 Girard Ave. (☎ 858/456-8111), is a three-story epicurean fun house featuring a trio of restaurants and five lounges. Chef/owner Tony DiSalvo, a veteran of Jean-Georges in New York City, oversees the menus, which range from Italian fare to sushi. See p. 118.
- **Georges California Modern/Ocean Terrace**, 1250 Prospect St. (☎ 858/454-4244): These two longtime favorites in La Jolla share an *aah*-inspiring ocean view. Georges underwent a \$2.5-million renovation and re-imagining (and a slight name change), but powerhouse chef Trey Foshee is thankfully still working his magic here. See p. 118.
- **Addison**, 5200 Grand Del Mar Way (☎ 858/314-1900), is San Diego County's one and only AAA 5 Diamond restaurant. This sumptuous dining destination is grandly European, offering daily tasting menus of modern French cuisine and featuring a jaw-dropping wine list that's more like a wine book. See p. 234.
- You can't visit San Diego without trying a **fish taco**. If the city has an official food, this is it. See p. 114 for suggestions on where to get one.

5 THE BEST THINGS TO DO FOR FREE

- **Timken Museum of Art**: It's a small collection, and the museum's modern architecture is distinctly out of place in Balboa Park, but the always-free Timken (☎ 619/239-5548) houses 600 years of art history. Masterpieces by Rembrandt and Rubens, as well as works by such seminal American painters as Eastman Johnson and John Singleton Copley, are among the holdings. See p. 143.
- **Organ Pavilion Concerts**: Organ recitals have been staged at the **Spreckels Organ Pavilion** (☎ 619/702-8138) in Balboa Park almost without interruption since 1915. With 4,530 pipes, this is one of the world's largest outdoor organs. Free concerts are presented every Sunday at 2pm. See p. 143.
- **Chicano Park Murals**: More than 70 works of art grace the support structure of the Coronado Bridge in **Barrio**

Logan's Chicano Park, National Avenue at Crosby Street (☎ 619/563-4661). The images celebrate and honor Latino culture, and are considered the largest and most important collection of outdoor murals in the country. See p. 155.

- **Self-Realization Fellowship Hermitage and Meditation Gardens:** This retreat in Encinitas, 215 W. K St. (☎ 760/

753-2888), with its distinctive lotus-shaped towers, was built by a yogi in 1937. Its cliff-side meditation gardens overlook the Pacific and offer incredible vistas. Visitors are welcome free of charge, and no one will give you a spiritual sales pitch. See p. 239.