





# San Diego

## New & Timeless

**Historical sites, outdoor wonders and updated attractions in a sunny SoCal city**

By Jill K. Robinson

**“They’re cuuuute,”** squealed my 6-year-old daughter as she skipped around the panda viewing area at the **San Diego Zoo**, determined to get one of the black-and-white residents to notice her interpretive dance.

Until then, her only exposure to pandas had been from watching animated TV shows. But on that day, we had joined the zoo’s Early Morning with Pandas program to get a glimpse of the three pandas enjoying breakfast—before most zoo visitors arrived.

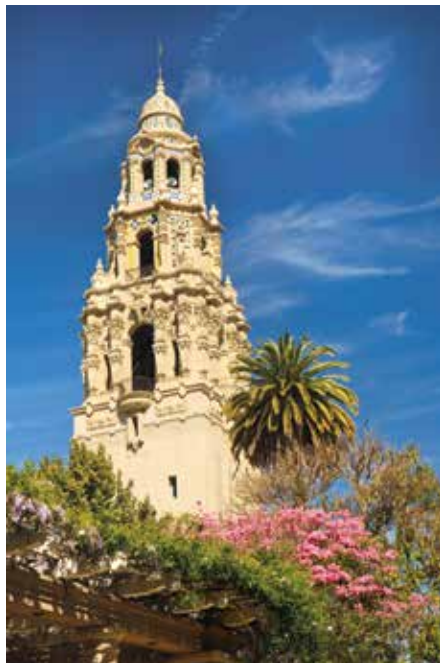
While we watched, the youngest bear, 3-year-old Xiao Liwu (also known as “Mr. Wu”), descended a tree headfirst and landed ungracefully—though apparently painlessly—on his nose, before completing his awkward dismount with a roll. Shrieks of laughter peeled through the air, as the assembled group of kids identified Mr. Wu as a favorite.

I was thankful to be able to show my daughter what the real animals are like, apart from animations and digital distractions. Aside from the children’s chatter, the sounds of the zoo were absent any human noise. It was almost like a meditation.

This moment has lingered in my daughter’s mind well after our zoo visit—it has even inspired her to request a panda costume for Halloween. To me it represents one of the magical experiences made possible by this world-class zoo—one of the most familiar and iconic attractions in San

Visitors to the Embarcadero Marina enjoy views of the bay and one of the *Unconditional Surrender* statues by Seward Johnson that memorializes the end of World War II.





Diego, though far from the only one. On our most recent visit, as always, we had many experiences—at the zoo and elsewhere—that my daughter and I will surely remember for years to come.

San Diego, which is nearly as far south as Southern California gets before you cross into Baja California and Mexico, has diverse neighborhoods and is the second-largest city in California by population. The broader San Diego County is spread out over 4,200 square miles and features about 70 miles of majestic coastline, seemingly endless mountain trails and day-trip destinations that include the largest state park in California (**Anza-Borrego Desert State Park**, about 90 miles from downtown). The area provides residents and visitors ample opportunities to encounter animals, make culinary discoveries and enjoy cultural curiosities.

### *Animal, Natural, Cultural*

The 100-acre San Diego Zoo, which is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2016, is home to more than 3,500 animals, representing more than 650 species and subspecies—many of which are rare or endangered. From the zoo's beginnings in 1916, when Dr. Harry Wegeforth started a zoo with animal exhibits from the 1915–1916 Panama-California Exposition, it has grown to become the largest zoological membership organization in the world. The parent orga-



Classic San Diego experiences include climbing to a view from the California Tower at the Museum of Man (left), watching pandas and other animals at the San Diego Zoo (top), and enjoying culinary temptations such as a sampler board from Venissimo Cheese (above).

nization, San Diego Zoo Global, now includes the zoo and the **San Diego Zoo Safari Park**, another excellent local attraction located about 30 miles to the northeast of the main zoo.

In this anniversary year, visitors are enjoying special events at the zoo and a year full of special displays on the zoo's **Centennial Plaza**. There are also new film and multimedia experiences, nighttime activities and animal-themed exhibitions at five nearby institutions.

Through January 31, 2017, the **San Diego History Center** is hosting "The Lore Behind the Roar!"—an exhibition that presents the zoo's first 100 years with interactive elements, vintage photos, oral histories and videos. The **Museum of Photographic Arts**, **San Diego Natural History Museum**, **The San Diego Museum of Art** and the **Timken Museum of Art** have a range of exhibitions featuring animals in sculpture, photography and interactive education.

These museums are part of the world-famous **Balboa Park**—the nation's largest urban cultural park by acreage. Located on a plateau that overlooks downtown San Diego, Balboa Park is home to a total of 17 museums, as well as performing-arts venues, beautiful gardens and the zoo.

After our zoo outing, my daughter and I climbed the 198-foot-tall **California Tower**,



in Balboa Park (125 steps; there is no elevator), to plan our remaining itinerary by sight. This elaborately ornamented concrete tower, which opened in 1915 with the Panama-California Exposition, was closed to the public for nearly 80 years before its reopening in January 2015.

From the eighth-floor viewing area, we had a 360-degree view of San Diego. Gliding over the canyon landscape to the north were the green cars of the zoo's **Skyfari**, and in between the chatter of other tower visitors, I heard occasional monkey screeches from the zoo. Beyond Balboa Park, downtown skyscrapers and the San Diego Bay glittered in the sun. On the far horizon, I saw the outlines of the **Cuyamaca Mountains**, **Laguna Mountains** and **Mount Soledad**. This view made everything seem within reach—as easy for me to access as it was for the red-tailed hawks soaring over the park's canyons.

## Early San Diego

The California Tower is part of the **San Diego Museum of Man**, and we explored the exhibitions in the museum after our trip up the tower. A favorite, the “Kumeyaay” exhibition, is ongoing—it celebrates the Native American people of what are now Southern California and Northern Baja. Providing a glimpse at the lives of

Outdoor enthusiasts can enjoy a coastal hike at **Cabrillo National Monument** (above left), water sports at **La Jolla Shores** (above) or a day-trip excursion to **Anza-Borrego Desert State Park** (below left).

the past residents of the area, the exhibition examines traditional Kumeyaay customs, medicines, ceremonies, pottery work, basket making and explorations of astronomy.

Travel south along the **Point Loma** peninsula, and you'll trace the next step in San Diego's history. Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, the leader of the first European expedition to explore what is now the West Coast of the United States, entered San Diego Bay in September 1542. Historians believe that he landed at Ballast Point, a tiny bit of land extending into the bay from Point Loma.

The **Cabrillo National Monument**, near the tip of Point Loma, is an ideal place for tide pooling, as well as whale-watching in winter months. When I walked along the 2.5-mile **Bayside Trail** in the springtime, I spied wildflowers among the coastal sage scrub. I enjoyed views of the Pacific to the west and of San Diego's harbor to the east.

## Liberty Reinvented

San Diego embraces its storied past while also being passionate about the future. One of the best examples of this can be found at **Liberty Station**, the redeveloped area on the site of the area's former Naval Training Center.

As the U.S. Navy's first foothold in Southern California, the training center was commissioned in 1923; it tripled in size during World War II. The region's





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military presence boomed during this time, and the San Diego area was home to the Naval Training Center, the 11th Naval District Headquarters, Miramar Naval Air Station, the Marine Corps Recruit Depot and Camp Pendleton.

After the Naval Training Center closed in 1997, the grounds were gradually transitioned to Liberty Station. With its restaurants, shops and entertainment spaces, the center feels like a town square, where visitors wander through spacious plazas, have picnics on the grass and enjoy the community.

On a visit to **Stone Brewing World Bistro & Gardens** in Liberty Station, I sat at an outdoor table and soaked up the sun's rays as I sampled one of the beers made on-site in the brewhouse (other beers are made at other facilities). The bar features 40 taps and more than 100 types of craft beer, giving brew fans plenty of options. Stone is one of San Diego's 115-plus craft breweries—it's a great place for a brew enthusiast to start exploring the best in the city.



JAMES MCCURRY

The iconic Coronado Bay Bridge is closed briefly to vehicles for the Navy's Bay Bridge Run/Walk, a military-benefit event that will celebrate its 30th year on May 15.

The new **Liberty Public Market**—with diverse tenants offering prepared foods, beer, wine, specialty cocktails, produce, fresh fish, desserts, pastries and pastas—occupies a 22,000-square-foot space, a portion of which was once used as the mess hall for the former Naval Training Center. The list of delicious options will tempt even the choisiest of

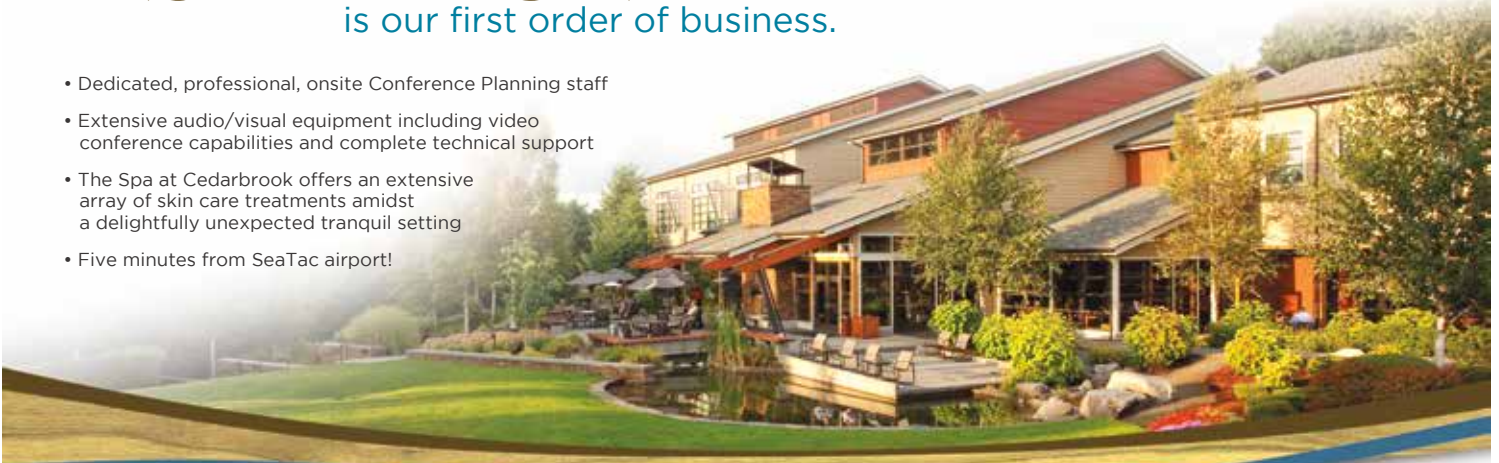
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foodies. It includes baked delicacies from Paraná Empanadas Argentinas, Hawaiian-style poke from FishBone Kitchen, French baguettes from Le Parfait Paris, comfort-food grilled-cheese sandwiches from Venissimo Cheese and

### When You Go

#### LODGING

**Horton Grand Hotel:** 311 Island Ave., San Diego; 619-544-1886; hortongrand.com. This antique-filled hotel is a comfortable retreat in San Diego's Gaslamp Quarter.

**Hotel del Coronado:** 1500 Orange Ave., Coronado; 619-435-6611; hoteldel.com. This Victorian-era luxury beachside resort on Coronado Island is just a 10-minute drive from downtown.

**Hotel Solamar:** 435 Sixth Ave., San Diego; 619-819-9500; hotelsolamar.com. The newly renovated hotel's guestrooms blend contemporary Spanish style with Southern California coastal design.

**Hotel Z:** 521 Sixth Ave., San Diego; 619-330-6401; hotelsandiego.com. This welcoming boutique hotel in the heart of the Gaslamp Quarter features cozy, contemporary rooms and easy access to many of San Diego's top restaurants and attractions.

#### DINING

**Campfire:** 2725 State St., Carlsbad; campfireprovisions.com. Scheduled to open in June, Campfire's menu will feature rustic food prepared with live-fire cooking methods.

**Craft & Commerce:** 675 W. Beech St., San Diego; craft-commerce.com. Reopening in May in the Little Italy neighborhood, this remodeled restaurant will feature new chef JoJo Ruiz; it will add False Idol, a tiki bar, in June.

**Galaxy Taco:** 2259 Avenida de la Playa, La Jolla Shores; 858-228-5655; galaxytaco.com. Dine "Cali-Baja style" at this locals' favorite restaurant, which includes tacos, grilled meats and sashimi on its menu. —J.K.R.



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### Getting Outdoors

After I visited Stone Brewing, I didn't have to wander far to get out on the water. Right on the Liberty Station waterfront, **The SUP Connection** has stand-up-paddleboard and kayak rentals, lessons and even SUP Pups tours designed for paddlers who want their canine co-pilot to come along.

One of the reasons stand-up paddleboarding is the world's fastest-growing water sport is its versatility. From lake to river to ocean, for hard-core surfers or

### Attractions and Activities

#### Cabrillo National Monument:

1800 Cabrillo Memorial Dr., San Diego; 619-557-5450; [nps.gov/cabr](http://nps.gov/cabr).

#### Legoland California Resort:

1 Legoland Dr., Carlsbad; 760-918-5346; [california.legoland.com](http://california.legoland.com); has a new Ninjago World opening in May.

**Liberty Station:** 2640 Historic Decatur Road, San Diego; [libertystation.com](http://libertystation.com).

#### Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve:

multiple park entrances, San Diego; 858-538-8066; [sandiego.gov/park-and-recreation/parks/osp/lospenasquitos](http://sandiego.gov/park-and-recreation/parks/osp/lospenasquitos).

#### San Diego Bike & Kayak Tours:

locations in La Jolla and Coronado; 858-454-1010; [bikeandkayaktours.com](http://bikeandkayaktours.com).

#### San Diego Museum of Man:

1350 El Prado, San Diego; 619-239-2001; [museumofman.org](http://museumofman.org).

#### San Diego Zoo:

2920 Zoo Dr., San Diego; 619-231-1515; [sandiegozoo.org](http://sandiegozoo.org).

#### The SUP Connection:

2592 Laning Road, San Diego; 619-365-4225; [sandiegosuprentals.com](http://sandiegosuprentals.com).

#### Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve:

Located between the communities of Del Mar and La Jolla; 858-755-2063; [parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=657](http://parks.ca.gov/?page_id=657). —J.K.R.



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leisure paddlers, the sport allows everyone to have a good time—even night owls. **San Diego Bike & Kayak Tours** has evening SUP adventures with boards with glowing LED lights. Paddlers enjoy the lights of the San Diego skyline from the launch site at Coronado and paddle under the gracefully arched Coronado Bridge on a warm night.

Land lovers also enjoy getting outdoors in San Diego. At **Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve**, hikers and walkers can get a glimpse of the nation's rarest pine tree, *Pinus torreyana*, which is said to grow only here and at one other place worldwide. At Torrey Pines SNR, gnarled trees cling to striated sandstone cliffs, yet the trees stand tall in sheltered canyons away from the ocean winds. Trails throughout the reserve offer views of wildflowers, cacti, coastal sage scrub, sculptured sandstone, marshland, beach and the Pacific Ocean.

While the ocean is prominent in San Diego's front yard, the area's beauty stretches inland, as well. **Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve** encompasses 4,000 acres of both Peñasquitos and Lopez canyons, and two separate trailheads—on the western and eastern ends—grant access to a small waterfall in the center. The Rancho de Los Peñasquitos was the first Mexican land grant in California, issued to Captain Francisco María Ruiz, and parts of the adobe he built here are still standing—just a short distance from the Ted Williams Freeway and Interstate 15.

In ever-evolving San Diego, as the city grows and adds to its history, the new always leaves room for the old. ▲

*Jill K. Robinson writes about travel, adventure, food and drink from her base in the San Francisco Bay Area.*

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# San Diego Itinerary

By Archana Ram

## New and Classic Neighborhoods

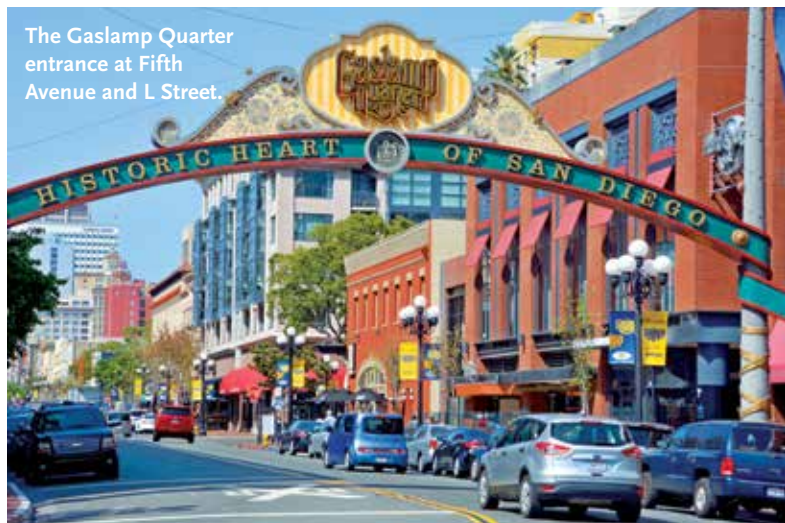
San Diego is renowned for having neighborhoods with their own distinctive sights, sounds and flavors. **Little Italy** blends urban energy with quintessential SoCal views. The main thoroughfares of India Street and Kettner Boulevard are lined with some of the city's hottest dining spots, including Juniper & Ivy and Bracero, as well as hip boutiques and the popular Saturday farmers market. • **Old Town** is where San Diego began, as a small settlement, in 1769. Today, visitors explore the preserved historic buildings, as well as restaurants and shops. • City history and modern cultural offerings are well represented in the **Gaslamp Quarter**, with its shops, galleries, museums and nightlife hot spots. • Craft brews rule in the hipster, pedestrian-friendly enclave of **North Park**, home to numerous bars, pubs and breweries. • Explore emerging art in **Barrio Logan**, anchored by the impressive outdoor murals at Chicano Park. Then pay a visit to La Bodega Gallery for art shows and the Chicano Art Gallery for gifts and decor by local artists.



Torrey Pines Golf Course.

## A Wealth of Beaches

Swimming, sunbathing and all kinds of water sports are cherished activities at beaches within San Diego's city limits, especially north of downtown. It frequently feels like a party at **Pacific Beach**, where 20-somethings and others are often found playing volleyball or swimming. The adjacent boardwalk area draws fun seekers of all ages thanks to grassy nooks, bike paths and nearby food establishments ranging from sleek restaurants to low-key coffee stands. • At the family-friendly **La Jolla Shores** (12 miles north of downtown), the gentle waves are ideal for children and newbie surfers. • La Jolla's **Windansea Beach** has generally smaller crowds and offers beautiful sands and a well-known surf break.



The Gaslamp Quarter entrance at Fifth Avenue and L Street.

## Dining Developments

Feast on San Diego's emerging Baja-Cali cuisine at **Bracero Cocina de Raíz** (619-756-7864; bracerococina.com), a 2016 James Beard Award semifinalist for Best New Restaurant, where Tijuana-born chef Javier Plascencia offers an upscale yet traditional take on Mexican cuisine, including shrimp-and-bone-marrow *sopes* and beef-cheek tacos. • At **Madison** (619-269-6566; madisononpark.com), dine on Mediterranean fare and sip craft cocktails in a stunning space with vaulted ceilings and geometric designs. • A coastal Italian menu—think wood-fired pizzas and fresh seafood—is served with an ocean view at **Catania** (858-551-5105; cataniasd.com). The restaurant's *aperitivo* event, held daily, offers discounts on food and drink as the sun goes down.

## Sports and Recreation

With the wealth of warm, sunny weather in San Diego, there are ample opportunities to get out and play sports—or to watch them. Golfers can enjoy teeing off at **Torrey Pines Golf Course**, perched on the cliffs of La Jolla, or at one of the **many other fine golf courses** in the San Diego area. • San Diegans love their baseball, and a trip to downtown Petco Park to catch a **San Diego Padres** game is a wonderful experience. • In fall, football fans will welcome the start of a new **San Diego Chargers** season at Qualcomm Stadium, in the Mission Valley area. ▲

Archana Ram is a San Diego-based food and travel writer.

## On Deck in San Diego

- ▶ **Art Alive**, April 29–May 1; floral arrangements of more than 100 permanent-collection works; San Diego Museum of Art; 619-232-7931; sdmart.org.
- ▶ **“Brush and Ink: Chinese Paintings from The San Diego Museum of Art Selected by Pan Gongkai,”** April 29–Sept. 4; traditional Chinese brush techniques from the 15th century through today; San Diego Museum of Art; 619-232-7931; sdmart.org.
- ▶ **Mission Federal ArtWalk**, April 30–May 1; more than 350 local, national and international emerging and established artists; live music; street food; and more; Little Italy; artwalksandiego.org/missionfederal.

TOP LEFT, AURORA PHOTOS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; TOP RIGHT, MEUNIERD / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM; LOWER LEFT, SEBASTIEN BUREL / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM