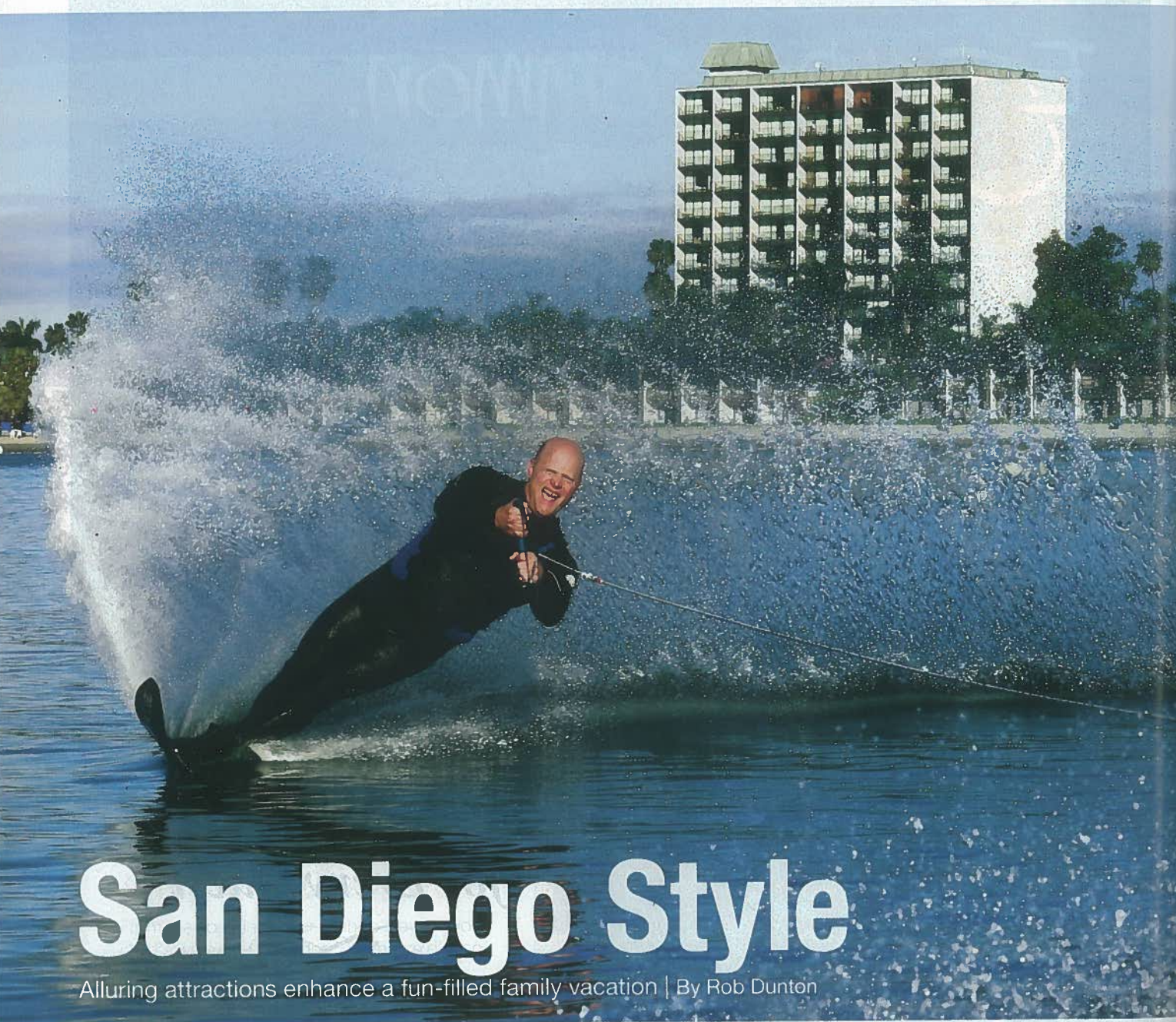


# Alaska Airlines

APRIL 2014



Family Fun  
in the Sun



# San Diego Style

Alluring attractions enhance a fun-filled family vacation | By Rob Dunton

A hint of ocean breeze rustles the fronds of palm trees that dot the miles of white sand and manicured grass wrapping around San Diego's Mission Bay. Between the trees winds a scenic path where residents and visitors of all ages stroll, skate, bike and jog. The water is a reflective sheet of glass, disturbed only by the spreading wake of a lone speedboat carrying a family and towing a teen who cuts, leaps and flips over the wake on a wakeboard. Closer to shore, a father and daughter paddle on stand-up paddleboards, while teams of women practice rowing crew in their streamlined fours and eights.

The morning air is a crisp 67 degrees. My wife and I and our two young boys climb aboard a low-profile ski boat tied to the dock of the Catamaran Resort Hotel & Spa. We don safety vests as Scott, our captain, starts up the motor. "With more than 2 million people in the county and being the eighth-largest city in America, there's still only one other ski boat out on a Saturday morning. Gotta love it," he exclaims with equal parts awe and gratitude.

Anson, our 4-year-old and designated "co-captain," woke up before dawn, still talking about his thrilling adventures at Legoland the day before, and he's ecstatic about the prospect of driving a "turbo lightning super rocket boat" today.

As we idle away from the dock, I pull on a wet suit, then jump into the bay with water ski in hand. When I shout, "Hit it!" Scott punches the accelerator until we reach about 35 mph. I cut back and forth across the bay, relishing the pristine conditions. When I climb back on board after three runs, 18-month-old Charlie shouts, "More! More!" but I have nothing left. Anson, on the other hand, is delighted I've finally quit, as he has been patiently waiting for his chance to steer the boat from my lap as we putter around the quiet bay.

With more than 70 miles of coastline and a climate renowned for year-round sunshine, San Diego offers visiting families myriad outdoor, aquatic and cultural adventures any day of the year. For the past half-century, first as a toddler, then

as a teen and a young adult, and now as a parent, I have enjoyed San Diego's ever-expanding wealth of activities for every member of the family. Many of my fondest memories were etched during vacations here: discovering sand dollars on the edge of the surf and exploring treat shops at the Hotel del Coronado while in preschool; searching the San Diego Zoo for the zookeeper and the animals that Simon & Garfunkel were singing about back in 1967; planting the seed for a lifetime of scuba diving during visits to SeaWorld; riding waves in Oceanside; learning to jet-ski and skateboard in Carlsbad—so many life-shaping experiences that I eventually made San Diego my home.

No matter how diverse the ages and interests of your family, everyone will have a blast visiting San Diego.

## Be Amused

Along with its stunning location and famous weather, San Diego is well-known as the home of numerous iconic theme and amusement parks. The granddaddy of them all, the San Diego Zoo, was born out of the exotic animal exhibitions that were part of 1915–16 Panama-



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Left: Rob Dunton carves a turn in Mission Bay. Above: A sailboat cruises before the San Diego skyline. Right: A baby zebra explores its habitat at San Diego Zoo Safari Park. Left: The Dunton family enjoys Legoland.

KEN BOHN, SAN DIEGO ZOO SAFARI PARK



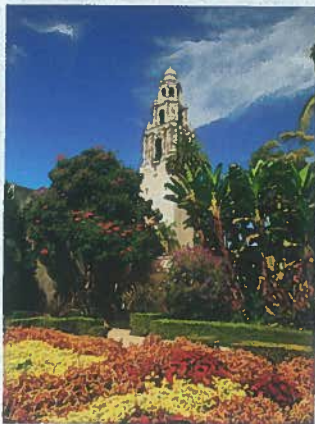
California Exposition in Balboa Park. The 100-acre zoo was one of the first to design natural settings for its animals, and its lush, parklike setting makes it a gem. SeaWorld San Diego, the first of its kind, opened on the shores of Mission Bay in 1964. Its 190 waterfront acres offer a wide variety of shows, exhibits and rides, and in celebration of its 50th anniversary, it recently opened Explorer's Reef, in which visitors enter beneath a wave structure and through a coral reef, as if walking on a seafloor. New interactive pathway experiences and more up-close animal encounters, such as the huge "Manta," keep kids of all ages entertained and active for hours, while fun shows such as *Pets Rule!* and *Cirque de la Mer* are fun additions to the famous ocean mammal shows.

The San Diego Zoo Safari Park, known as the San Diego Wild Animal Park until 2010, opened in 1972, about 35 miles north of downtown. The lighter crowds and the opportunity to see a blend of more than 2,600 animals, many of them roaming together on 1,800 acres of seemingly open terrain, gives visitors a safarilike experience close to home. Fun additions to the standard admission include taking a caravan safari into the park grounds (most guests ride a tram and view animals from above), and spending the night in a safari tent in a program called "Roar & Snore" that features an after-hours tour of the park, dinner, campfire and breakfast.

For families with younger children, Legoland in Carlsbad will likely be at the top of your list. On our

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most recent trip, it was the highlight for our young boys. Upon arrival, Anson wanted to play with the buckets of Lego blocks in the invention area, but with a light nudge, we moved on to discover the park's delightful rides, astounding cityscapes, *Star Wars* miniatures and other Lego creations, all set in a beautifully landscaped locale. With the new Lego Legends of Chima Water Park opening next month, and the Sea Life Aquarium, the Legoland California Resort is a place where a family could easily spend three days, and with the **Village of Carlsbad**, nice beaches and a fine collection of outlet shops nearby, all the better.



RON NIEBRUGGE / ALAMY

## Let Us Entertain You

For many families, catching a live game of a professional sports team can be the highlight of a vacation. Sports fans will love San Diego's open-air stadiums that are home to **Padres** baseball (Petco Park downtown; regular season home games March 30–September 24) and **Chargers** football



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**Above:** Petco Park is the home of the Padres. **Left:** Balboa Park is rich with lush, colorful gardens.

(Qualcomm Stadium in Mission Valley; regular season early September through late December). Both stadiums offer more intimate viewing than many larger stadiums found elsewhere, and adjacent trolley stops make it easy to attend without a car.

San Diego's cultural heart is Balboa Park, a 1,200-acre park in the center of the city. The stunning Spanish-Colonial-Rococo buildings are nestled in a lush botanical setting. Named after 16th century Spanish explorer Vasco Núñez de Balboa, the park is home to more than a dozen museums, the **Old Globe Theatre**, **Spreckels Organ Pavilion** and many more attractions, in addition to the San Diego Zoo. Much of the park is pedestrian-only, making it a wonderful place to explore. Street performers can be found regularly along **The Prado**. Bring a blanket and picnic, and enjoy free movies under the stars as part of the Screen on the Green (July and August) in the **May S. Marcy Sculpture Garden**. With the discounted Passport to Balboa Park, you can take up to seven days to explore all

## Family-Tested Places to Stay

Accommodations in San Diego cater to the full spectrum of travelers, from oceanfront villas and penthouse suites to modest motels and car camping. Having visited and lived in San Diego over the last 50 years, I've experienced many, and offer up my favorites for families traveling with kids.

**Hotel del Coronado:** From its classic Victorian styling to its perch on a broad white beach, "the Del" has been a magical destination for visitors since it opened in 1888. For kids, wandering through the hotel is like exploring an enchanted castle. With mild surf, the beach is one of the safest for little ones, and the staff knows how to take care of kids: a great Kids Club, s'mores bonfires on the beach, and yummy Moo Time ice cream. The breakfast buffet at Sheerwater is sumptuous (and



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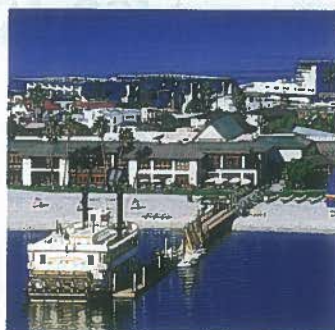
they'll make chocolate chip pancakes on request). Request rooms in the original hotel, or try the new villas ([hoteldel.com](http://hoteldel.com)).

**Catamaran Resort Hotel & Spa:** Located on a quiet corner of Mission Bay, the Catamaran is an idyllic retreat at the nexus of two of San Diego's most lively beach communities: Pacific Beach and Mission Beach. Situated where the bay is not much more than a block from the Pacific Ocean, visitors might feel as if they've landed at a luxurious tropical camp with bikes, stand-up paddleboards, pedal boats, surfboards, kayaks, ski boats and sailboats for rent on the premises ([catamaranresort.com](http://catamaranresort.com)).

### Paradise Point Resort & Spa:

A virtual island nestled in Mission Bay, Paradise Point is a private 44-acre enclave located minutes from downtown and Mission Beach. Tropical rooms and bay-front bungalows, a waterparklike swimming pool, a mile of private beach and plenty of water toys for rent make this a quiet hideaway resort in the heart of San Diego ([paradisepoint.com](http://paradisepoint.com)).

**Crystal Pier Hotel:** One of the few places in America where you can sleep over the ocean, these



COURTESY: CATAMARAN RESORT HOTEL & SPA



COURTESY: PARADISE POINT RESORT AND SPA

petite cottages are built above the sand and water on the pier at Pacific Beach. Don't expect luxury or a lot of privacy. In return you'll enjoy a wealth of charm, ocean breezes and easy access to everything in PB. Booking can be as long as 11 months in advance; two- to four-night minimum depending on the season ([crystalpier.com](http://crystalpier.com)). —R.D.

**Clockwise from left:** The Hotel del Coronado; surreys on Paradise Point Resort & Spa pathways; and a pier at the Catamaran Resort Hotel & Spa.