

DESTINATION: SAN DIEGO

The Total Package

San Diego serves up more than just coastal beauty

By Talia Salem



San Diego conjures up images of sandy beaches, sunny skies and tan Californians.

But while it does offer stunning shorelines and warm weather combined with a patently laidback vibe, San Diego is more than just an oversized beach town. It is a cosmopolitan city with a strong dose of culture. World-class museums coexist with killer waves. Casual taco stands sit beside restaurants serving haute cuisine. Both dive bars decorated with surfboards and swanky nightclubs

entertain the masses. San Diego is both casual and luxurious, historic and modern—and everything in between.

The city is home to the nation's largest urban cultural park, Balboa Park, with beautiful gardens, museums and more (see sidebar on pg. 147 for more information). It is also quickly becoming known for its brewery scene and was even named the No. 1 microbrew beer town by Men's Journal. "Sustainable seafood and craft beer are what San Diego is known for," says Nicole Lazar, publicist for the Hotel Solamar San Diego.

San Diego has many international neighborhoods, and is considered to be the birthplace of California, which is why the city was dubbed the Plymouth Rock of the West Coast. Plus, it is home to more Nobel Laureates than any other city in the U.S. So, while you might meet a surfer warming up in Coffee Bean after riding some waves, you could also cross paths with a brilliant scientist or talented author.

Aimee Atwood, executive assistant for ARM, Inc. brought the company's annual three-day global sales and marketing conference to San Diego in January. Because the attendees were coming from all over the world, San Diego's accessibility was a plus. The airport is just minutes away from downtown and city attractions, and has strong airlift throughout the country.

Atwood says that San Diego is a wonderful meetings destination—the attendees felt like they were on vacation. "We have the world-famous zoo; SeaWorld is here; you've got Legoland, great nightlife, Balboa Park and lots of little communities. I am very partial to San Diego—I love it," she says.

The area's temperate climate makes it conducive to enjoying the outdoors—almost all year long. To capitalize on the weather, Atwood hosted a few lunches outside with views of the water, which gave her meeting a special feel. "We have so much outdoor space at most of our hotels," says Margie Sitton, senior VP of sales, San Diego Convention and Visitors Bureau (sandiego.org). "If you are trying to solve a problem and you sit out with your peers on a balcony—ideas emerge from that."

Plus, San Diego has 151 conference and convention hotels ranging from oceanfront luxury resorts and urban chic hotels to rustic retreats and sprawling golf resorts. "We represent the entire county, and we have a variety of price points. Our team can find a home for anyone. There are still affordable places to go that are waterfront," Sitton says.

All of these superlative features combine to provide this vibrant metropolis an energy all its own. “We know that we have incredible weather and natural beauty, but when we know that we have a free spirit and a [relaxed] vibe that permeates our region—how do we define that in business? Our destination infuses optimism and positivity that relates to more productivity,” Sitton says.

Get San Diego on your meetings calendar and experience all that the city has to offer.

Mission Bay & Pacific Beach

North of downtown, the neighboring areas of Mission Bay and Pacific Beach have a more relaxed beach feel imbued with surfer culture. Year-round, locals and visitors can be seen running, biking and enjoying the area’s beaches. Mission Bay is the largest man-made aquatic park in the country, spanning 4,235 acres, of which 46% is land and 54% water. It is also home to SeaWorld San Diego, an attraction filled with rides, shows and aquatic life that also serves as an off-site meetings destination.

With a retreat-like setting in the heart of Mission Bay, the Paradise Point Resort & Spa recently underwent a total renovation, which modernized its guest rooms and meeting space. The waterfront hotel sits on 44 acres fronting Mission Bay and offers 462 bungalow-style guest rooms, 65,000 sq. ft. of meeting space, a dedicated conference center and plenty of on-site recreational amenities from bikes—for riding around the resort and Mission Bay trails—to tennis and volleyball courts.



Sheraton San Diego Hotel & Marina.

ARM’s Atwood brought the company’s 275-person sales conference to the hotel in January. “We loved the Paradise Point. It is close to downtown, yet it feels remote, and it has a tropical feel—and it’s right on the San Diego Bay,” she says. “We were a success because of their staff. I would plan every single event there if I could.”

Located on a 14-acre peninsula, the Bahia Resort Hotel is another top option with 314 guest rooms and 20,000 sq. ft. of meeting space. The resort has a hydrotherapy pool and video arcade and offers a plethora of recreational options such as sailing, waterskiing and surfing. Also in the area, The Catamaran Resort & Spa, offers 313 guest rooms, more than 20,000 sq. ft. of space, a full-service spa and a business center.