

>girlfriend getaway: North San Diego Coast



**Where:** The north coast of San Diego hugs 40 miles of surf between Oceanside (about 83 miles south of LA) and Mission Beach (about eight miles north of downtown San Diego), linking a series of iconic beach cities and towns whose vibes run the gamut from hang ten to Fortune 500. Sprawling up through leaf-tangled canyons or shrugging down to the sea, these towns harken back to the more mellow-yellow days of California that prevailed before they repaved paradise and put up a parking lot.

The tangy salt air and laid-back pace wraps the coast in a hypnotic trance that belies the existence of 21st-century California just a few miles inland, with its 12-lane frenzy, fumes and supersize shopping malls.

**Why Go:** Cliffs carpeted in wildflowers plunge to gleaming sands and thundering waves, all bathed in sunshine 75 percent of the year, making this stretch of coastline a perennial playground for surf and turf recreational enthusiasts of all stripes. With average temps mirroring a proverbial day in May, a vacation along this dazzling stretch of coastline is like a summer holiday on the French Riviera — minus the jet lag.

**Fake it in Oceanside:** Wish you could be a California girl but have an Iowa zip code? No biggie! Practically everyone here is from somewhere else anyhow, so spray on that tan, tie on that string bikini, pop on some shades, press on those peel-off tattoos and cop a SoCal 'tude (a tad bored and blasé). Polish it off with a downward dog before dawn at **The Yoga Body** in Oceanside and no one will ever believe you're really from Des Moines.



After class, follow your yoga instructor to the **Oceanside harbor** and **Beach Break Café**, a combo diner/museum where the walls pay tribute to surfing's glory days and the customers pay homage to the eatery's homemade coffee cake. If the yoga didn't get the sand out of your eyes, try the On Fire scrambled-ins made with Louisiana hot links and jalapeno peppers, an edible four-alarm wake-up call.

**Unwind:** Check into **West Inn & Suites**, a sleek, sun-dappled boutique hotel in south Carlsbad where everything but the room is free: the fitness center, the beach loaners, the town shuttle, the bedtime milk and cookies and a seriously sumptuous breakfast buffet. Do dinner a few steps away at **West Steak and Seafood**, a local fave for prime beef tenderloin and filet mignon.

If it's Thursday night, hang with the locals (and their dogs) at **Sunset Market** in neighboring Oceanside, a weekly tradition featuring live music, dancing, street performers and food stands serving all things edible. Later, enjoy a creative nightcap in an industrial-cool setting at **Master's Kitchen and Cocktail** (housed in a 1938 Oceanside car shop) or sample Oceanside's hip-and-happenin' craft beer scene at the **Local Tap House**, offering 32 craft beers on tap.

**Rise and Shine:** After breakfast, rent an electric bike at **Pedego Carlsbad**, head south to next-door **Leucadia** and cruise up through residential 'hoods to the sea cliffs — you'll be grateful for the backup juice! Back down in town, revive yourself on lofty coffee at **Pannikin Coffee & Tea**, housed in a retired 1888 railroad station. If it's Sunday, wander the **Leucadia Farmers Market**, where 75-plus vendors sell fresh flowers,



CENTER PHOTO COURTESY WEST INN & SUITES; BELOW COURTESY LEUCADIA FARMERS MARKET

organic veggies, homemade breads and more. Then continue south to the coastal beach city of **Encinitas**.

**Cleanse in Encinitas:** Encinitas has oodles of organic restaurants that roam the globe. Try the organic wood-fired pizza at **Blue Ribbon Artisan Pizzeria**, the Peruvian wood-fired empanadas at **Casa del Q'ero** or the fresh sushi at **Kaito Sushi**. Then follow the "oooooms" to the **Self Realization Fellowship Retreat** (it's the place with the golden domes). Wander the meditation gardens before taking the long staircase to the sea for a contemplative beach stroll along "**Swamis Beach**," which connects with miles of uninterrupted strands. Then head to **Sonima Wellness Center**, a stylin' sanctuary that



will purify you to the yin-yang with juice cleanses, wellness consultations and walk-in classes such as flow yoga, guided meditation, active alignment, hip

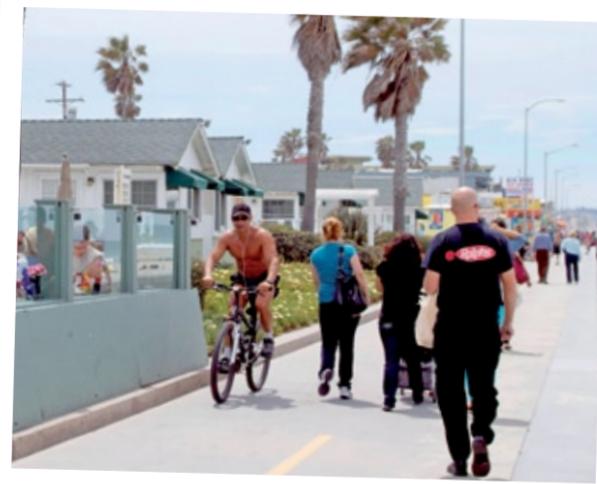
hop and boot camp.

**Luxury digs in Del Mar:** Settle in at **L'Auberge Del Mar**, an impossibly picturesque seaside spa resort with a summer-in-the-Hamptons beach cottage vibe. Follow the pathway to the waves and squish your pinkies in San Diego's softest sand, get smoothed and soothed with a Sea Salt Citrus Glow full-body scrub at **The Spa at L'Auberge** or take a dip and surface for a Berry Crush cocktail at the poolside **Bleu Bar**. (Don't worry, the antioxidants in the berries balance out the booze). At the resort's **Kitchen 1540**, private dining cabanas overlook tangerine sunsets and Chef Brandon Fortune, who hails from the South, gives gourmet fare his version of a down-home twist with entrees such as "Not Momma's Meatloaf" and "Memphis-Style" Pork Ribs. Don't pass on the Fried Green Tomatoes and save room for the Sweet Potato Pot de Crème.

**Breakfast at the cottage:** It's only a mile to **Solana Beach**, Del Mar's laid-back sister, so save your breakfast appetite

for **Claire's on Cedros**, nestled in a quaint, LEED-certified cottage with an herb garden and parade of bikes out front. The farm-fresh gourmet cuisine includes Tuscan Benedict, French toast made with homemade Brioche bread and yummy Clairecakes — multi-grain, lemon ricotta or gluten-free pancakes.

From Solana Beach, it's a scenic cruise up and over the villa-studded hillsides of La Jolla to Mission Beach, a funky beach town overlooking Mission Bay where you're never far from a tattoo parlor, head shop, second-hand store or drive-thru taco stand.



From Solana Beach, it's a scenic cruise up and over the villa-studded hillsides of La Jolla to **Mission Beach**, a funky beach town overlooking Mission Bay where you're never far from a tattoo parlor, head shop, second-hand store or drive-thru taco stand. Think



Coney Island on the Pacific with a SoCal twist.



**Head for the isle on the bay:** **Paradise Point Resort & Spa** is a classy resort that occupies a private 44-acre island in Mission Bay and features cushy lodging in Balinese-inspired beach bungalows overlooking the beach, bay or gardens. You can rent a beach cruiser and pedal along the beach and bay, learn to surf at **Paradise Surf Academy**, go sailing, speed boating, water skiing or wake-boarding or take a jet taxi to **Sea World**. Come back for dinner at **Tidal**, a '60s waterfront beach house where the fish is

so fresh it was still swimming an hour ago. Then do a night on the town. Start by walking the **Mission Beach Boardwalk**, where gear rental shops, seafood restaurants, cafes, kiosks, skateboarders, surfers, hippies, beach bums and cyclists all jockey for space. Cap the night with a visit to **Belmont Park**, an old-fashioned amusement park with arcades, cotton candy and blast-from-the-past rides like Tilt-a-Whirl, bumper cars and the Giant Dipper. Outlined in twinkling lights, the 1925 wooden roller coaster may be an antique but it's no slouch in

the adrenalin department, so get set for a high-speed thrill ride. Scream "THIS IS FRIGGIN' AWESOME!!!" as the high-speed coaster makes sudden dips and hairpin curves, and no one will believe you're anything but a totally stoked California girl. — *Carole Jacobs*

**Start Here:** [www.sandiego.org](http://www.sandiego.org), [www.visitcarlsbad.com](http://www.visitcarlsbad.com)



Opposite page from top: Sunset on the Oceanside Pier; West Inn & Suites is just steps from surfer girl waves, killer shopping and dining. Locally-grown flowers and produce at The Leucadia Farmers Market. This page from top left: Get your body and soul cleansed at Sonima Wellness Center; Mission Beach, a great place to rent wheels and experience San Diego like a local; Spinach salad at Claire's on Cedros in Solana Beach; At Belmont Park you can scream on a roller-coaster or take a boat ride back to your childhood days.

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