

# SAN DIEGO NOW

SoCal's big city by the sea has come of age in recent years. What's there to love? Quite a few things, actually.

**Leslie A. Westbrook** reports on the region's modern offerings

**S**AN DIEGO IS NOT L.A.'S TOURISTY, UNSOPHISTICATED LITTLE SISTER ANYMORE. The county boasts 70 miles of gorgeous California coastline, from Oceanside to Imperial Beach and the Mexican border, and the city has grown to be the eighth largest in the nation.

Most travelers are familiar with downtown and the Gaslamp Quarter, the San Diego Zoo, Legoland, and the now-controversial Sea World. Admittedly, I never tire of many tried and true attractions, especially the museums in Balboa Park, but it wasn't until this trip that I experienced the magnificent park at twilight for the first time, while en route to a terrific theatrical production at The Old Globe Theatre within the park.

But there's a whole lot more to explore, including an explosion of farm-to-table eateries, 75 local breweries, and Mexican restaurants galore. Accommodations are wide ranging in style and price. I don't have space to touch on everything, but this will get you started.



## OCEANSIDE

Oceanside ([visitoceanside.org](http://visitoceanside.org)), the first town you'll hit after crossing the San Diego County line, is a cool little beach burg that still has some edge. There's a sweet harbor, a historic wooden pier for walking or fishing, a contemporary art museum, and the comprehensive California Surf Museum.

**STAY:** Don't be deterred by the misnomer of the new Marriott SpringHill Suites ([marriott.com/hotels](http://marriott.com/hotels)); it's not on a hill or near a spring, but one block from the Pacific Ocean and the pier. You'll find well-designed rooms and a terrific staff, not to mention a sixth-story Jacuzzi with sweeping views of the Pacific. Speaking of views, be sure to book an ocean-view room with patio—otherwise, expect to hear train whistles, as the hotel sits conveniently at the train stop. This is an excellent choice for families, and the place was swollen with travelers from around the globe during my recent stay. The hotel features local art, a succulent plant wall, and airy, contemporary decor. Buffet breakfast is included, and the Hello Betty Fish House restaurant and bar ([hellobettyoceanside.com](http://hellobettyoceanside.com)) next door is a good stop for freshly shucked Baja Sol Azul oysters and a glass of sauvignon blanc.

**EAT:** The Flying Pig ([flyingpigpubkitchen.com](http://flyingpigpubkitchen.com)) is a gastro pub with great food at reasonable prices. My favorite item was a pork muffuletta sandwich, but the chicken and dumplings, and a beet and burrata salad, were also winners. In the harbor, the old school Jolly Roger restaurant ([jollyrogerrestaurants.com](http://jollyrogerrestaurants.com)) offers a satisfying, veggie-filled tortilla chicken soup and million dollar views. There's also a weekday happy hour.

**DON'T MISS:** Oceanside Museum of Art ([oma-online.org](http://oma-online.org)) showcases cutting-edge contemporary art, including work by regional talent of international caliber such as fine sculptor Kenneth Capps and the current exhibition titled "DNA of Creativity," a collaboration with the scientific community.

At Old Mission San Luis Rey ([sanluisrey.org](http://sanluisrey.org)), "The

King of the California Missions," explore the historic cemetery, admire the décor of the peaceful chapel, tour the museum, and visit a gift shop that's home to orphaned pet finches and cockatiels. The Mission Retreat also has sparse rooms for contemplative respite at \$75 per day including meals.

## NORTH PARK

North Park derives its name from its terrific location: north of Balboa Park, home to fabulous museums for all ages, the Old Globe Theatre—where I saw a beautifully staged production of an unearthed J.B. Priestly play, "Time with The Conways"—and stunning architecture. The park is an urban oasis any time of day, but it's most amazing at twilight (allow yourself a few minutes for a pre-theater stroll). The heart of North Park centers around University Avenue and 30th Street: a gritty, urban mix

of California bungalow-style neighborhoods, dog-walking residents, and folks checking out the great restaurant, libation, and boutique shopping scene.

**STAY:** The Lafayette Hotel, Swim Club & Bungalows ([lafayettehotelsd.com](http://lafayettehotelsd.com)) is a revitalized historic hotel, opened in 1946, with a ton of Hollywood history. Local hipsters come to hang around the Olympic-size swimming pool designed by Johnny Weissmuller (the original Tarzan) and mingle with guests ranging from friends and families to boomers and young couples with babes in arms. Locals and tourists alike indulge in special events (a cool California designer clothing pop-up event packed the lobby when I visited for Sunday brunch) or nighttime swims with pool movies, or gather at the schmaltzy piano bar at Red Fox, an old-timey steakhouse located inside the hotel. Rooms in the main building and around the pool are closer to the action, but stylish two-story bungalows offer more quietude and privacy.

**EAT:** HOPE 46 (named for Bob Hope, the hotel's first guest) is the new restaurant manned by chef Nino Zizzo, who makes some of the meanest butternut squash ravioli



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**OPPOSITE TOP:** A symbol of San Diego, the iconic California Tower provides a majestic entry to Balboa Park.

**OPPOSITE BOTTOM (L. TO R.):** Escondido's Stone Brewing Co., the cutting edge of California's craft beer movement; Oceanside Museum of Art; the Lafayette Hotel, Swim Club & Bungalows.

**ABOVE:** North Park, a culturally diverse neighborhood rich with art galleries, boutiques, and foodie-approved eateries.



Paradise Point Resort & Spa.

in San Diego. The Sicilian-born chef should know what he's doing: his family has owned restaurants in Little Italy since he was a bambino.

Or you could motor over to Adams Boulevard for tostadas and chile rellenos at my dad's favorite place, Ponce's ([poncesrestaurant.com](http://poncesrestaurant.com)), founded in 1969, with its fun décor of vintage Mexican paintings hung floor to ceiling.

Better yet, do an urban food crawl among the seemingly endless North Park possibilities along 30th Street and University Avenue. North Park has so many amazing restaurants that are not to be missed. University Avenue discoveries include Carnitas' Snack Shop ([carnitassnackshack.com](http://carnitassnackshack.com)); queue up with fans of the eatery, then grab a spot on the back patio.

One of my favorite finds was a new and amazing hole-in-the-wall called JU/KE ([eatjuke.com](http://eatjuke.com)). The small kitchen, ingeniously set up in the back of a beer shop called Bottlecraft, grew out of the popu-

lar food truck MIHO. Seating is limited but friendly, at a window counter or at a long wooden table on busy University Avenue. The deep-fried duck confit (\$4 as a side) is to die for, as is the cauliflower steak.

Farm-to-table cuisine at Urban Solace ([urbansolace.net](http://urbansolace.net)) on 30th Street is also terrific; the three-course vegetarian dinner (\$30) on Thursday nights would turn any meat eater into a veggie—as long as they didn't mind loud rock and roll music. (Jazz lovers, while you're in the area be sure to tune in to KSDS: San Diego's 88.3 FM; Chris Springer's Saturday noon to 3 p.m. Latin jazz program is tops.)

And you can't go wrong with outrageous ice cream flavors like toasted coconut and maple bacon from Calexico Creamery ([calexicocreamery.com](http://calexicocreamery.com)), a roving truck that you can track down on Twitter ([twitter.com/calexicosd](http://twitter.com/calexicosd)).

## PARADISE POINT

After all the food, drink, and revelry, consider wind-

ing down at Paradise Point ([paradisepoint.com](http://paradisepoint.com)): an urban oasis set on a charming island in Mission Bay. The 44-acre property is lovely, with original yet updated architecture from the early-1960s and five restaurants ranging from a pizza cave to an upscale dinner house. There's a gift shop, bicycles, sun, sand, and surf lessons—everything you need from an island paradise. And it's cheaper than Hawaii, though you'll have to mingle with ducks instead of swim with the *honu* (turtles).

Even if you don't check in to one of the resort's cool bungalows, you can indulge in "Island Origins," a spa experience that includes an informative botanical tour of the lush grounds, a relaxing massage and tea tree oil scalp treatment, and use of the sauna. ▣

For more information, including great local tips, visit [sandiego.org](http://sandiego.org) and order a free Visitor Planning Guide.