

# Simply Smart Travel: San Diego

Jeffrey R. Orenstein, Ph.D.

*If you enjoy travel, this column is for you. My goal is helping people those over 50 (and under 50, too) leverage the most satisfaction from their precious travel time and dollars. Each column will share what I have learned on trips near and far and/or provide travel ideas and tips from experts.*

San Diego is a mountain-ringed metropolis with a pleasing personality that offers something for almost everyone, including year-round great weather and 70 miles of beaches. Despite its being a cosmopolitan and diverse city of over 4,200 square miles, it is still very much a Navy Town, with one-third of the Pacific Fleet based there. You can also feel its palpable Mexican influence (not surprising since it borders on Mexico) and although it is very urban and urbane, the desert and mountains are close by and you can find solitude, even wilderness, within its borders in close proximity to nightlife, great jazz and good food.

## Before You Go

For background and a flavor of the city, Read *San Diego Legends: The Events, People, and Places That Made History* by Jack Scheffler Innis (2004) for stories of the characters that define San Diego; *Under the Perfect Sun: The San Diego Tourists Never See* by Mike Davis, Kelly Mayhew, and Jim Miller (2003) which takes a critical look at the city's history, military economy, right-leaning politics and the local pecking order.

When you're ready for reservations, some useful websites are:

<http://www.sandiego.org>, the official visitor's bureau site.

<http://www.sandiego.com> is a solid commercial site with some deals.

<http://www.visitcalifornia.com/Explore/San-Diego> is a state site with good information.

## Getting There

San Diego's Lindbergh Field is close to downtown and is an easy bus or cab ride to most attractions. Interstates 5 and 15 provide connections from the north and I-8 goes east. Amtrak provides frequent trains from San Luis Obispo and points south. Cruise ships also dock there.

## Getting Around

Forget the car. San Diego has a superb public transportation system with frequent Coaster commuter train service, the Trolley light rail and buses everywhere. Senior fares are only \$1.20 a ride.



*Mingei Museum at Balboa Park is dedicated to art of the people (mingei) from all eras and cultures of the world.*

## When You Are There - If You Have Two or Three Days:

Must-sees for a short trip are:

- ♦ Balboa Park (Get a One Day Explorer Pass, good for five museums).
- ♦ Gaslamp Quarter (16 square blocks of Victorian buildings and modern skyscrap-



*San Diego is primarily a Navy Town with one-third of the Pacific Fleet based there. ers with restaurants, pubs, nightclubs, entertainment, culture and shopping – including tony Horton Plaza).*

- ♦ Old Town, the original Spanish settlement in California- shops, restaurants and entertainment.
- ♦ Take a harbor tour to see the skyline from a different view and to observe San



*Gaslamp Quarter.*

Please see **Simply Smart**  
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Diego as a Navy town.

- ◆ Hop-on, hop-bus (Old Town Trolley Tours).

### If You Have Several Days

In addition to the above:

- ◆ Rent a car or hire a driver and visit o Cabrillo National Monument (daytime only) and/or, in the other direction, journey along the Pacific to Oceanside in North County. Temecula wine country is an hour away.
- ◆ Go on an all-afternoon wine-tasting tour by train (<http://www.lajollawinetours.com>).
- ◆ Visit the San Diego Zoo.
- ◆ Ride the San Diego Trolley to San Ysidro, at the Mexican border. Walk to Tijuana for the adventuresome. Bring your passport and be careful!
- ◆ Visit Mission Bay, Sea World and La Jolla on the coast.



The San Diego Zoo has had a love affair with giant pandas ever since two of them came to visit for 100 days in 1987. In 1996, they worked out an agreement with China to house two adult pandas and their young offspring.

## Exploring San Diego at A Glance



- ◆ **Mobility Level:** Recommended for those who can walk short distances, climb stairs and have the ability to enter and exit buses, trains, cabs, etc. Accessibility information for the handicapped is at [www.sandiego.org/plan-your-trip/travel-guides/accessible-traveling.aspx](http://www.sandiego.org/plan-your-trip/travel-guides/accessible-traveling.aspx).
- ◆ **Senior Travel Considerations:** None. San Diego is an ideal destination for over-50 travelers.
- ◆ **When To Go:** With its perennially-mild climate, San Diego is comfortable year-round. To avoid crowds and get the best chance at lodging discounts, late spring and September are best.
- ◆ **Where To Stay:** Hotel Circle has all the national brands. Other nice places to stay are near Gaslight District, downtown and Mission Bay. For classic luxury, try Hotel del Coronado.
- ◆ **Special Travel Interests:** U. S. Pacific Fleet, photography at the San Diego Zoo Safari Park and many other locations including nearby Baja California Mexico.

Orenstein is the co-publisher and executive editor of *Living On The Suncoast Magazine*. He and his wife Virginia enjoy simply smart travel and writing about it. He can be reached at [JOrenstein@simplysmartravel.com](mailto:JOrenstein@simplysmartravel.com). Comments are welcome.

*Photographs courtesy of Jeffrey Orenstein.*

Below (left) sea lions pose in the sun on the wharf and below (right) pedestrians line up at the border crossing at San Ysidro to cross into Mexico.



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*San Diego Harbor Tour scene.*