

See You in San Diego

Often overlooked in lieu of its star-studded SoCal neighbor L.A., the city has a historical charm all its own – and a view of the Pacific Ocean to die for. It's a great site for the GCSAA show

BY MARK LUCE

Show at a Glance

The GCSAA Conference and Show, set for Feb. 9 through Feb. 14 at the San Diego Convention Center, will feature an array of educational seminars and a trade-show floor containing more than 700 exhibitors. For more information, contact www.golfcourseshow.com.

Even from its earliest days, people seem to overlook San Diego. When Portuguese explorer Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo was searching for a quicker route back to Europe, he spent some time there and quickly moved along. Sixty years later, Sebastian Vincaino arrived in harbor, named it San Diego and left. It wasn't until 1769, when a mission was set up by Franciscan monk Juipero Serra, that the area stopped being a place for small numbers of native tribes, and modernization began rearing its sometimes gorgeous (and sometimes ugly) head.

Even though most folks think of Los Angeles when they hear the phrase Southern California, let's get something straight — San Diego is about as far south as you can get in California. The metro area of nearly 3 million people is more than just a navy town. It hosts a variety of historical treasures along with an array of shopping and dining options all set amidst a backdrop of stirring sunsets, stunning beaches and citizens that have a far more

laid-back attitude than their La-La land brethren. It's a town of charm and increasing sophistication with good weather and better eats. It will, as it has done to so many, make you never want to go back home. As you traverse the annual GCSAA Conference and Show, set for Feb. 9 through Feb. 14, make a point to get out and about. To help, *Golfdom* has culled and cajoled some of the best-kept secrets of the San Diego area.

Getting downtown

The landing is rather scenic and is one of the toughest descents in the United States for pilots. But now that you are on the ground, look for the taxi stand to get to your hotel. It will take about 10 minutes (more during rush hour) and around \$10 to get downtown from San Diego International Airport. If you plan ahead, you'll know whether your hotel has a shuttle to drop you at the door for free (and a tip, of course). There are a variety of other shuttles, such as **Cloud 9 Shuttle** (800-9-SHUTTLE), that will get you downtown for about \$5.

The biggies

San Diego loves its animals, even if they are from far across the globe. The world-famous **San Diego Zoo** (2929 Zoo Drive, 619-234-3153) may be the best menagerie in the world, and it's set in the large and lovely Balboa Park. The



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place, set on 100 acres, houses 4,000 critters — great and small — including the oh-so-cute and very rare pandas and playful polar bears. If you go, try the “best value” (\$32) approach on your tickets, since it includes a guided bus tour to keep your dogs from getting worn out.

The cousin to the Zoo is the **San Diego Wild Animal Park** (15550 San Pasquel Valley Road, Escondido, 760-747-8702), an 1,800-acre behemoth that lets its 3,500 animals roam freely. The best way to see the park is the Wgasa Bush Line Railway, which is included in the park's \$27 admission. The hour-long monrail tour affords great views, but you should arrive early since the lines can get super long.

If landed animals aren't your bag, head up to **Sea World** (500 Sea World Drive, Mission Bay, 619-226-3901), a 165-acre theme park dedicated to all things swimming and jumping. Killer whales, dolphins, sea lions leap and laugh through a variety of shows. The Shamu Adventure, the park's signature show that takes place in pool that hold 7 million gallons of water, will douse anyone sitting in the first several rows.

Two neighborhoods

Gaslamp Quarter — This exciting area is literally across the street from the San Diego Convention Center. This area used to be urban blight,

but now it's one of the hottest spots in San Diego — dining and drinks and shopping are everywhere. Russell Lewis, senior editor of San Diego's KPBS radio, the NPR affiliate, says he enjoys the bustle, charm and architecture of the Gaslamp district. To put your feet up and maybe grab a corned beef and cabbage or fish and chips, Lewis suggests **The Field**, (544 Fifth Avenue, 619-232-9840), a friendly neighborhood pub that had all its furnishings shipped from Ireland.

If you have money to burn — and we do mean, literally, burn — step up to the ultimate test at one of the three locations of **Fred's Mexican Café** (527 Fifth Ave., Gaslamp Quarter, 619-232-8226; 1165 Garnet Ave., Pacific Beach, 858-483-8226; or 2470 San Diego Ave., Old Town, 619-858-8226). While they've got bar fare with Pacific flair, the real deal is the \$284 margarita. That is not a misprint. Two shots of Jose Cuervo 1800 Collection, a 25-year old tequila, in margarita mix. To date, say the bartenders, one has been sold. However, if you choose not to sully your fine tequila with sweet and sour, one shot of the 1800 collection will set you back \$145.

Old Town — To the north and west of Gaslamp rests historic Old Town, home of the gorgeous

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San Diego has turned itself from a city that most people overlooked to a vibrant, eclectic town that's sure to entertain.



The Gaslamp Quarter (above) is the place to find the best restaurants and nightlife in the city. Balboa Park (below) is the location of the world-famous San Diego Zoo.

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Presidio Park and the hub of one of the best ways to see the various parts of the city quickly, the **Old Town Trolley** (619-298-TOUR). Kim Almquist, a resident of Lawrence, Kan., and several-time visitor to San Diego (she dreams of retirement there), says the trolleys (\$24 for a 30-mile loop) allow her to see most of the city in a day. "It was great," she says. "You can get off, shop, eat or just look around as long as you want and then just hop on the next one."

Lewis, though, treasures one of Old Town's most popular restaurants, **El Agave Terquilaria**

(2304 San Diego Ave, 619-220-0692). The food may be a little pricey, Lewis says, but the *molé* made with chocolate is unbelievable.

Other eats

For upscale eclectic fare, Lewis suggests the **Kensington Grill** (4055 Adams Ave., 619-281-4014). The Kensington is next door to the **Ken Cinema** (4061 Adams Ave. 619-283-5909), where film lovers go to see revivals, cult classics and avant-garde movies. Down Adams is the **Adams Avenue Grill** (2201 Adams Ave. 619-298-8440), a great place for breakfast or dinner. "It has great American fare from macaroni and cheese to a spicy Kickin' Chicken sandwich," Lewis says.

To feel like he's are sitting atop the Pacific, La Costa Resort superintendent Steve Auckland likes to head down to **Cane's Bar and Grill** (3105 Ocean Front Walk, 858-488-1780) on the boardwalk in Mission Beach. "It gets a little wild at night, so I like to go in the afternoon, sit outside and look at the ocean," Auckland says. The grill's Baja Sampler provides a good variety of the flair of Southern California's fare.

Up the coast

Auckland, who moved to the area two years ago, can't say enough about how much he likes the laid-back style and gorgeous views throughout the *real* Southern California. If you can get away, Auckland says, try out the downtown of Carlsbad, which he calls "a nice, quaint, romantic spot." The town is about 40 minutes north of San Diego. Auckland likes to hit **Coyote Grill**, which features live jazz, blues and rock, as well as a diverse clientele and outdoor fire pits. (300 Carlsbad Village Drive, Carlsbad, 760-729-4695)

Shopping

If you need to get the goods to take back home to your better half and the kiddies, there is no shortage of places to go. For the Beverly Hills of San Diego, head up to **La Jolla**, a tony town with plenty of sophisticated shops and boutiques. The streets are loaded with stores, and the bibliophiles must be sure to stop at **John Cole's Bookshop** (780 Prospect, La Jolla, 858-454-4766), where you can browse through a novel in the patio garden.

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Until Franciscan missionaries like Juipero Serra created missions in the city (like the one above), San Diego was more often a pass-through city than a destination. But with a view of the shoreline like this (below), it was only a matter of time until it grew.

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Almquist found Seaport Village, just north and west of the Convention Center, among her favorites, with plenty of charming shops and the must-ride **Broadway Flying Horses Carousel**. Those in search of a more rambunctious experience might want to brave the **Bazaar del Mundo** (2754 Calhoun, 619-296-3161), where you'll find types of arts, crafts and clothes in an almost-festival atmosphere.

The scenic

To take in a sparkling sunset and maybe catch some whale watching, Auckland suggests getting to **Cabrillo National Monument** (1800 Cabrillo



Memorial Drive, Point Loma, 619-557-5450). This long, narrow peninsula sits on the western edge of north San Diego bay and is accessible only by driving through the U.S. Naval Air Station.

"The drive there is quite enjoyable," Auckland says. "The sunsets are spectacular, as you are high above and looking over the ocean."

It costs \$5 to get in with a carload, or \$3 if you walk in. At Cabrillo, park rangers will lead walks around the grounds, and there is a wonderful restored lighthouse in the park.

The historic

San Diego has an incredibly rich military pedigree, with no less than six bases, including the *Top Gun*-famous academy at Miramar and the behemoth U.S. Naval Air Station. The area is the home port for 50 ships, nearly one-sixth of the U.S. fleet. It is also home to 100,000 active-duty Marines. Just north of the airport is the **Marine Corps Recruit Depot**, which includes a 110-acre historic district that features 25 buildings that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. You may recognize many of the sites from *Gomer Pyle, USMC*. To learn more about the history of the Marines, visit the **MCRD Command Museum** (1600 Henderson Ave., Building 26, Suite 212, 619-524-6038).

The beach

Setting one's bare feet to sand and staring at the Pacific is always time well spent, and **Mission Beach and Pacific Beach** are two of the more popular places for water fanatics of all stripes. Whether people watching, strolling, surfing or taking a ride on the Giant Dipper roller coaster at Mission Beach, San Diego offers 70 miles of coast. Ask a local to give you the low-down, as sometimes surfers can be a bit territorial. The beaches are also a great place to find hole-in-the-wall taco stands that are cheap and good.

Keep in mind

Like any other major urban area, San Diego is not without crime. Know where you are going before you go there, make reservations for restaurants, don't drink and drive and, as always, don't flash around your wallet. Pack wisely and enjoy the show and the sun of San Diego.

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