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going coastal

When the temperatures hover around 100, Tucsonans flock to the cooler climes of California. We asked travel writer Mary Peachin to share some of her favorite spots, as well as a few that are on her wish list.

BY MARY L. PEACHIN



The reef break off Windansea Beach (La Jolla) is popular with surfers.

San Diego

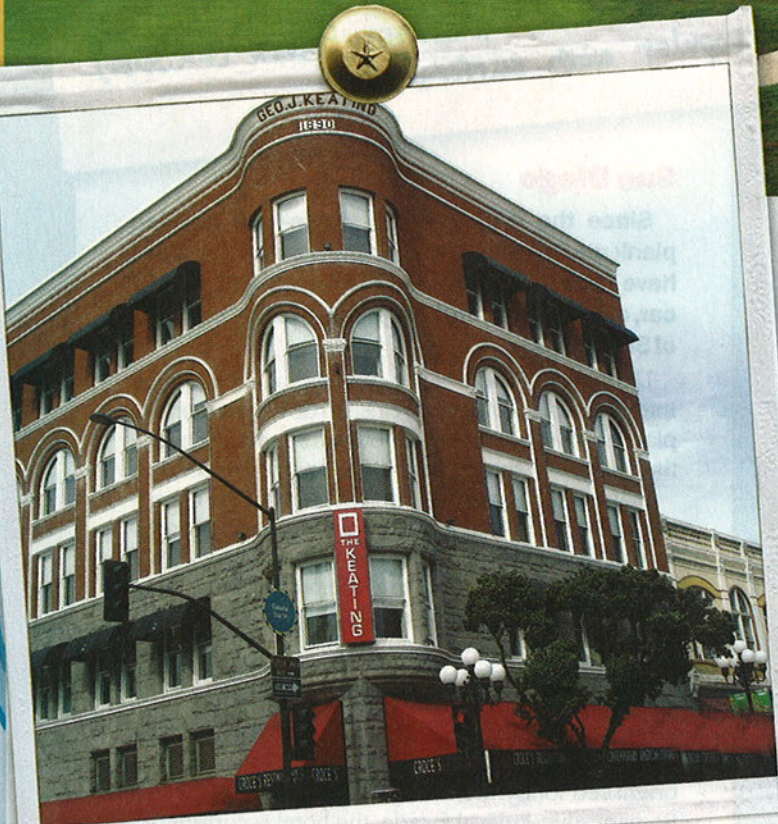
Since the days when a single-lane wooden plank road crossed the sand dunes near Yuma, we have retreated to the Pacific Coast — at first by car, and more recently by plane — to the beaches of San Diego.

Lindbergh Field, better known as San Diego International Airport, is so close to downtown on the plane's final approach that you can almost see inside the former El Cortez hotel, now converted to condos.

In the past, downtown San Diego, with the exception of a few restaurants, was not high on the radar screen, lacking the amenities that tend to draw either visitors or locals. Accelerate to the present, and if you haven't visited downtown San Diego recently, the gentrified city will blow your mind.

The accommodations alone are enough to attract you.

More of a boutique-style hotel, **The Keating** (www.thekeating.com) has a small, "in your face" bright red lobby. Retaining its original 19th century Romanesque-Revival façade, the hotel is considered chic, having "European sex appeal." Pininfarina, better known for his designs for Ferrari and Maserati, created 35 concrete-floor, brick-walled, glass-vaulted stanzas (not rooms), *without* interior walls. Room amenities include Lavazza espresso machines, ▶



The 1890 Keating Hotel now oozes "European Sex appeal."

Bang & Olufsen in-room entertainment, a glassed rainfall shower, and comfy red micro-fleece and terry robes.

After a \$16-million renovation, the Pickwick Hotel reopened in 2006 as the **Sofia Hotel** (www.thesofiahotel.com). Built in 1926, the 211-room historic structure retained its gothic architecture, changing its interior to a soothing organic theme with natural colors and art along with fossil sculptures. Moderately priced, the hotel offers a 24-hour fitness center with an on-call personal trainer and yoga instructor. Jonathan Phleuger, formerly of the respected Anthony's Star of the Sea, is executive chef of Sofia's restaurant — Current's American Brasserie.

Opening this summer, **The Ivy Hotel** (www.theivyhotel.com) was built in 1914 to host dignitaries for the Panama-California Exposition. The 159-room property features Envy, a four-level nightclub; a street-level restaurant seating more than 220 diners called the Quarter Kitchen; and Eden, a rooftop terrace bar and swimming pool. Guests on each floor have the services of a personal butler.

The US Grant hotel (www.usgrant.net) has been a downtown fixture since 1910. After a recent \$52 million renovation, the 11-story, 270-room property is now a member of the Starwood Luxury Collection. The 95-seat Grant Grill, long known for fine aged steaks, now features espresso-colored contemporary décor and is pegged as an infusion chophouse.

TOP Torrey Pines Golf Course will be the site of the 2008 U.S. Open Championship. (Photos these two pages by Mary L. Peachin.)

Downtown's Historic Gaslamp Quarter (www.gaslamp.org), which encompasses the area between 4th and 6th Avenues from Broadway to Harbor Drive, is packed with action. Pedicabs weave through the traffic, carrying visually overdosed gawkers. Old-fashioned streetlights beam over wide brick walkways. Scattered between renovated, Victorian-style hotels, built between 1873 and 1930, are more than 100 restaurants, offering every conceivable type of cuisine, and sharing space next to 35 nightclubs, bars and retail galore.

Dining & Drinking

A towering glass and steel three-story wine room dominates **Dussini Mediterranean Bistro** (www.dussini.com), along with a 10-foot-wide fireplace in its loft-type bar and billiard lounge. Formerly the Spaghetti Factory, Dussini's menu highlights Greek, Italian, Spanish, French and Portuguese recipes.

Bondi Bar & Kitchen (www.thebondi.com) serves authentic Aussie fish and seafood accompanied by imported beer and wine. Bondi, named for the famous Sydney beach, is designed with couple seating in oversized aboriginal fishnet baskets. Contemporary boomerang sculptures resemble boab trees, and visual scenes of Australia subtly change like a slide show on walls. Offering high-tech service, waitstaff "beam" orders via Palm Pilots to the bartender, so you don't have to wait long for a cocktail.

Brians' Eatery and Drinkery (www.stjameshotel.com/dining) on 6th Avenue is a place that features a bar that once belonged to Joan Crawford, and where you'll find more locals than visitors. They serve large portions at low prices.

Stingaree (www.stingsandiego.com) is located in a historic warehouse that stands three stories tall and features floor-to-ceiling waterfalls and translucent floating staircases that lead to a rooftop bar retreat.

Side Bar (www.sidebarsd.com), a laid-back, retro, sophisticated lounge, is a favorite for hipsters looking for hot music and cool cocktails.

Confidential (www.confidentialsd.com), considered a hush-hush spot, is a loft where well-heeled 20-somethings mingle around sleek, white cocktail tables or on leather couches.

Onyx and Thin (www.onyxroom.com) allows patrons to perch on polished steel barstools in a futuristic setting (Thin) while sipping Cadillac margaritas. Downstairs, the Onyx Room has a speakeasy type entrance where the urban beat moves an energetic crowd.

Sports

San Diego offers many options to avid anglers willing to take on the tough swells of the Pacific Ocean. Charter boats head out from La Jolla Cove for a half- or three-quarter day of bottom fishing. Long-range boats motor south toward Mexico's Coronado Islands for several days of albacore pursuit. About 10 miles off Point Loma, adventurous fly fishers might want to try for a mako shark.

Point Loma Sportfishing (www.pointlomasportfishing.com)

H & M Landing (www.hmlanding.com)

Seaforth Sport Fishing (www.seaforthlanding.com)

Bowman Bluewater Guides & Outfitters (www.bowmanbluewater.com)

San Diego La Jolla Underwater Park Ecological Reserve attracts beach-entry scuba divers willing to venture into the beauty of a swaying kelp forest. Orange garibaldi and leopard sharks are frequent sightings. A mako and blue shark nursery lies 10 miles west of Point Loma. Caged shark diving trips are offered to experienced certified divers.

Mission Bay and San Diego Bay, as well as La Jolla Cove and the Shores, offer good sit-on-top or ocean kayaking.

San Diego Kayak (www.hikebikekayak.com)

San Diego Bike and Kayak (www.sandiegobikeandkayaktours.com)

Aqua Adventures Kayak (www.aqua-adventures.com)



Pedicabs await tired tourists in San Diego's Gaslamp District.

South Mission Beach jetty near Belmont Park is "lights out," a great left curl that's fast. Only competent surfers might want to join the "territorial" locals at this little known spot. Other good breaks include **Sunset Cliffs** and **Ocean Beach Pier**. **The Reef** break at Tourmaline Canyon in Pacific Beach is easy access and great for long boards. **Windansea** in La Jolla is world class and **15th Street** in Del Mar, in front of Jake's restaurant, is very user-friendly. Several surf schools and board rentals are nearby. Further north, **Cardiff Reef**, **Swami's**, **Pill Box** in Solana Beach, **Beacon's**, and **Tamarack** in Carlsbad are good surfing areas.

With 92 golf courses in San Diego county, and greens fees considered reasonable, some of the highest rated courses include the **Four Seasons Resort Aviara in Carlsbad** (www.fourseasons.com/aviara/golf) and **Torrey Pines Golf Course in La Jolla** (www.torreypinesgolfcourse.com).

Summer Events

La Jolla Rough Water Swim (www.ljrws.com). If you can remain in San Diego until the weekend after Labor Day, don't miss this 90-year-old event where swimmers can choose to race either a mile or three from La Jolla Cove.

U.S. Open Sandcastle Competition (www.usopensandcastle.com). In late July, visitors can view hundreds of sand-sculpting artists at this annual competition near the Imperial Beach Pier.

The San Diego Natural History Museum (www.sdnhm.org). The museum will exhibit the Dead Sea Scrolls from July through December 2007. Widely acknowledged as world archaeological treasures, the scrolls were written on leather parchment, papyrus and even copper in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. ▶