

September 6, 2009



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San Diego is a beautifully picturesque oceanside city boasting spectacular natural surroundings and attractions of all sorts that appeal to a wide range of travellers.

TRAVEL HORIZONS

San Diego – more than sun and SeaWorld

By **DAVE MacLEAN**

Special to The Okanagan Sunday

In 1542, when Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo sailed into San Diego Bay, he was primarily looking for gold. He named the place San Miguel and continued to explore.

Even though he was the first European to discover what was to become California, his explorations were not considered successful because he found no gold. San Miguel was later renamed San Diego. Today, there is a vast amount of tourist gold to be discovered in San Diego for those willing to explore its offerings.

With an average daytime temperature of 21 C,

more than 140 kilometres of some of the best beaches in North America and numerous major attractions, it's no wonder that San Diego is a hot spot for tourism and consistently ranked as one of the top travel destinations for families in North America. San Diego is also ranked as the best large city to live in, in North America.

A great way to get an overview of San Diego is on the Old Town Trolley Tour. It's a comprehensive narrated tour on an old-style trolley on wheels. You can hop on and off whenever you want, with the tour taking you through numerous highlights of San Diego including: the harbour, Horton Plaza Shopping Center, the Gaslamp Quarter, Coronado, Balboa Park and the San Diego Zoo, Little Italy and Old Town San Diego State Park.

Visitors can witness the living legacy of California's birthplace at Old Town State Historic Park, San Diego's first downtown. Old Town marks the site of the first Spanish settlement on the U.S. West Coast and also represents San Diego's Hispanic heritage. The six-block park features 12 acres of Mexican lore and historical sites presented in shops, restaurants, museums and several carefully preserved or restored adobe and wooden buildings. While there, experience the delightful music and tastes of Mexico at Café Coyote, located at the epicenter of Hispanic Old Town. You may even have the pleasure of being serenaded by an authentic Mariachi band.

In the 1880s San Diego's downtown shifted

from Old Town to its current location on the central shores of San Diego Bay – a massive harbour that for decades has served as the west coast haven for the U.S. navy.

Its beautiful setting is accentuated by stunning architecture of both the past and the present. The center for life downtown is the Gaslamp Quarter.

Originally set up as the heart of the city in the late 1800s, this part of the city became the red light district and fell into disrepair. However, since the 1970s more than 100 historic buildings have been renovated and now serve as the city's hottest area for nightlife with more than 100 restaurants and clubs.

A pioneer in the redevelopment of the Gaslamp Quarter is Ingrid Croce – widow of famous songwriter and musician Jim Croce. When in the Gaslamp, you must try out Croce's Restaurant and Jazz Bar. Ingrid features contemporary American Cuisine combined with live music every night. The food is spectacular, the live music is fabulous and the energy at Croce's is invigorating. If you can save time in a bottle, definitely spend some with Ingrid at Croce's. (croces.com)

When staying downtown, try out the Sofia Hotel. (thesofiahotel.com) The Sofia is a chic boutique hotel located in the historic Pickwick Hotel from the 1920's. It has been refreshingly renovated to celebrate its past with spacious modern rooms and all the amenities one would expect, at an affordable price. Its central location enables you to walk to the Gaslamp Quarter, the downtown shopping district and the Bay area where you can access many water-based attractions.

The best way to see San Diego Bay is on a harbour cruise. Hornblower Cruises will take you on a professionally narrated cruise through the Bay where you will experience phenomenal views of the city and learn copious amounts about San Diego's rich naval history.

You will tour naval row learning about the ships stationed there – ballistic missile frigates, destroyers, submarines, aircraft carriers, helicopter carriers, troop transport ships and the world's largest floating hospital, amongst many others.

You can even catch a distance glimpse of the Navy SEAL training centre. In addition to the U.S. Navy, San Diego Bay hosts 89 different fish species, 300 invertebrate and bird species, as well as sea turtles and sea horses.

Your floating tour will take you under the iconic Coronado Bridge which connects San Diego to exclusive Coronado. It is interesting to note that Coronado Bridge is configured the same way as Kelowna's WR Bennett Bridge – three lanes out and two lanes in.

Developed in the late 1880s as a world-class playground for the wealthy, the waterfront community of Coronado still exudes the care-free days from a century ago. Its most famous

resident, the Hotel del Coronado, was the largest hotel in the world when it was built in 1888 and has hosted every president of the U.S., except Barack Obama. Coronado Beach is rated as the No. 1 beach in California.

Located just a few minutes north of downtown, Mission Bay is a multi-faceted ocean playground. Mission Bay is probably best known for being the home of SeaWorld – a 189-acre marine park where Disney-esque entertainment and exhibits meets marine life – but there is a plethora of water-based activities in the slower paced Mission Bay area making it a fabulous location for holidaying families.

To explore the wonders of Mission Bay many families choose to stay at the Hyatt Regency Mission Bay. (missionbay.hyatt.com) The Hyatt has recently undergone a spectacular \$65-million renovation. It's fabulous location on the protected shores of Mission Bay afford guests glorious views of the bay, scores of stately yachts, boaters of all kinds and the setting sun over the beaches of Belmont.

The Hyatt caters to families with its three water slide equipped kid friendly pools, as well as a variety of children's programs. The Hyatt even offers a complementary water shuttle to SeaWorld. The adjoining Red Marlin Restaurant actually sits on piles hovering above the waters of Mission Bay and caters to fine dining culinary desires as well as the simple tastes of children. Enjoy sumptuous cuisine surrounded by the sparkling waters of the bay to feed all your senses.

Another major family friendly attraction a short hop from Mission Bay is the famous San Diego Zoo and Balboa Park. The zoo houses approximately 4,000 animals of nearly 800 species in its 100 acres.

Recognized as one of the world's best zoos, the Zoological Society of San Diego is accredited as a living museum by the American Association of Museums (only six other zoos worldwide have achieved this status).

Balboa Park is a 1,000-acre paradise comprised of the zoo, 15 major museums, several performing arts venues, glorious gardens and many other cultural and recreational attractions.

Originally built for the Panama-California Exposition of 1915-1916, the buildings along the Prado and their Spanish-Colonial Revival architecture are considered attractions in themselves. Visit Balboa Park and you will see why it is ranked as one of the best parks in the world.

Unlike Cabrillo in 1542, visitors flying from Kelowna can arrive in a few short hours and begin to discover all the tourism treasure that San Diego has to offer.

Travel Horizons is brought to you by Horizon/Alaska Air and Kelowna International Airport. For more information on this and other destinations served by Horizon and Alaska Air please go to www.horizonair.com or call 1-800-547-9308.

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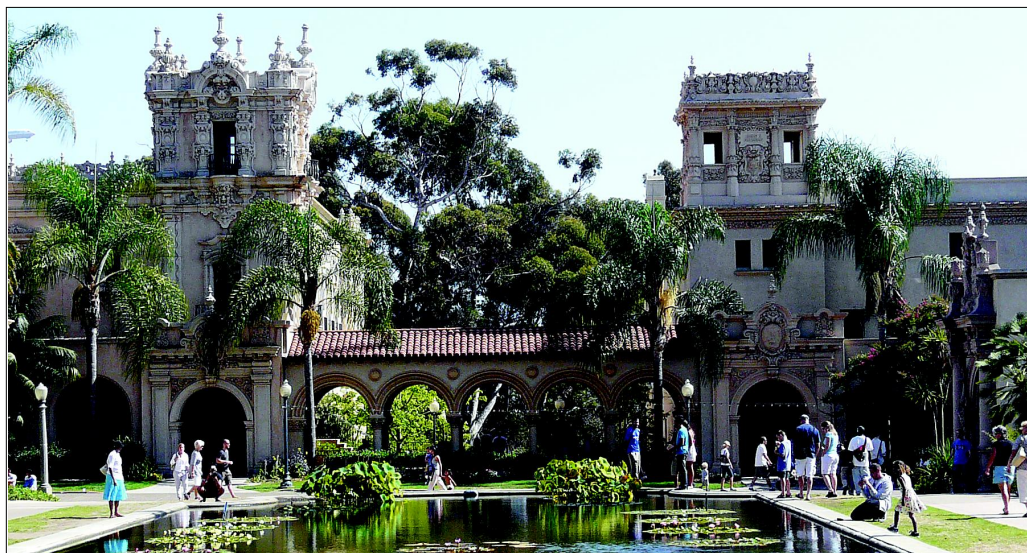
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Often referred to as the Smithsonian of the West, San Diego's Balboa Park is the largest urban cultural park in the United States.