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THE PACIFIC COAST & BEYOND

Greetings from SAN DIEGO

48 hours, solo, at your own pace

POCKET EDITION · 2027

48-HOUR GUIDE · SAFETY GUIDE · PLANNING CALENDAR

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Welcome to San Diego

San Diego is a sunny city of canyons, beaches, and Spanish Colonial arches, close to the Mexican border and the Pacific. Its climate is famously mild, its neighborhoods are distinct, and its biggest attractions are scattered across a handful of easy bus, trolley, and ferry routes.

Traveling alone here is simple. Balboa Park rewards slow wandering, the beach towns are full of solo surfers and walkers, and a taco shop counter or a sunset bench suits one person well. The pace is relaxed, and the weather rarely gives you an excuse to stay in.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Read through once before you go. Day One covers Balboa Park, Old Town, and the Gaslamp. Day Two covers La Jolla, Torrey Pines, and Coronado, ending at Point Loma. Section 03 is the new-for-2027 story of the 1915 exposition that created Balboa Park. Mornings can be foggy near the coast, a pattern locals call May Gray and June Gloom, so bring a light layer.

ESSENTIAL QUICK FACTS

CURRENCY
US dollar (cards accepted nearly everywhere)

TRANSIT
MTS trolley and bus · about $2.50 a ride

TIME ZONE
Pacific (UTC–8; UTC–7 in summer)

EMERGENCY
911 · Poison Control 1-800-222-1222

TIPPING
18–20% in restaurants

WEATHER
Mild year-round; coastal fog in late spring

01 DAY ONE

Balboa Park · Old Town · The Gaslamp

The first day centers on Balboa Park, then travels back in time to Old Town and forward to the Gaslamp Quarter.

MORNING · 8:30 AM – 1:00 PM

8:30 AM

Balboa Park

A 1,200-acre urban park of gardens and Spanish Colonial buildings, built for the 1915 Panama-California Exposition. Walk across the Cabrillo Bridge and down the Prado. Section 03 tells the story.

Many museums open at 10, so spend the first hour outdoors.

10:00 AM

The Botanical Building

A lath-covered building beside a lily pond, filled with ferns, orchids, and tropical plants. Admission is free; check hours.

A quiet, shaded place to sit.

12:00 PM

Lunch at the Prado

A restaurant in the House of Hospitality, with a patio on the park's main promenade. Order a Mexican-inspired plate and a cold drink.

Reserve ahead on weekends.

AFTERNOON · 1:30 PM – 6:00 PM

1:30 PM

A Balboa Park museum

Pick one of the park's many museums, such as the San Diego Museum of Art or the Museum of Us. On Sundays, a free organ concert plays at the Spreckels Organ Pavilion; check times.

Choose one museum, not three.

4:00 PM

Old Town State Historic Park

The site of the first European settlement on the West Coast, with adobe buildings, shops, and restaurants. Free to enter.

Watch tortillas being made at one of the Mexican restaurants.

5:30 PM

Sunset on Harbor Island

A short ride away, a waterfront park with views of downtown and the harbor as the lights come on.

Bring a light jacket; the breeze off the bay is cool.

EVENING · 7:00 PM – 10:00 PM

7:00 PM

Dinner in Little Italy

A walkable neighborhood of Italian restaurants, bakeries, and sidewalk cafés. Many places have bar seating for one.

Check the weekend farmers market if you are there in the morning.

9:00 PM

The Gaslamp Quarter

A historic district of Victorian buildings, now filled with bars and restaurants. Walk a few blocks and listen for live music.

It gets loud on weekends. Stay on the busy blocks.

02 DAY TWO

La Jolla · Torrey Pines · Coronado · Point Loma

The second day heads to the coast, with sea lions, cliffs, a beach resort, and a lighthouse.

MORNING · 8:30 AM – 1:00 PM

8:30 AM

La Jolla Cove

A small, sheltered cove with sea lions, seals, and clear water, beneath a bluff-top park. Watch the animals from the rocks or the walkway.

Keep your distance from the wildlife.

10:30 AM

Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve

A coastal reserve with rare Torrey pines, sandstone cliffs, and trails to the ocean. Parking fees apply.

Wear sturdy shoes and bring water.

12:30 PM

Fish tacos for lunch

San Diego's signature dish is a fish taco, with battered or grilled fish, cabbage, and salsa. Eat at a casual stand or beach shack.

Order two, with a squeeze of lime.

AFTERNOON · 2:00 PM – 6:00 PM

2:00 PM

Coronado

Take the ferry from the Broadway Pier or drive across the bridge to the island resort town, with a wide beach and the Victorian Hotel del Coronado.

The ferry is scenic and often quicker than traffic.

4:30 PM

Cabrillo National Monument

A park at the tip of Point Loma, with a historic lighthouse, tide pools, and a sweeping view of the harbor and the city.

Check the tide times if you want to see the tide pools.

EVENING · 6:30 PM – 10:00 PM

6:30 PM

Sunset at Point Loma or Sunset Cliffs

Watch the sun drop into the Pacific from the cliffs. The light is soft and gold.

Stay behind the fences; the cliffs are unstable.

8:30 PM

Dinner in Ocean Beach or Point Loma

Laid-back neighborhoods with casual seafood spots and bars.

A counter seat is easy to find.

03 1915

The Exposition That Built Balboa Park

DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know Balboa Park's arches and towers were built for a fair that was meant to be temporary?

In 1915, San Diego held the Panama-California Exposition to celebrate the opening of the Panama Canal and to put the city on the map. Architect Bertram Goodhue designed a Spanish Colonial Revival city of arches, towers, and gardens. Many of the buildings were meant to be torn down afterward, but San Diegans loved them and kept them.

WHAT REMAINS

The Botanical Building, the Spreckels Organ Pavilion, the Cabrillo Bridge, and the California Tower all date from the exposition. The organ pavilion is home to what is described as the largest outdoor pipe organ in the world.

A PARK OF MUSEUMS

The exposition's buildings now house many of the park's museums, gardens, and theaters. The park is one of the largest urban cultural parks in the country.

HOW TO SEE IT

Start at the Cabrillo Bridge and walk the Prado. Go early, before the museums open, to enjoy the arches and gardens in the soft light. Check for a free organ concert on Sundays.

04 WHERE TO EAT

Fish tacos, burritos, and Little Italy

San Diego eats casually and well. Taco shops and counters are everywhere, and the city's Mexican food is some of the best in the country.

BREAKFAST & LUNCH

Mitch's Seafood
POINT LOMA · $12–20
A waterfront counter with fish tacos and fresh poke on the bay.

Oscar's Mexican Seafood
VARIOUS · $8–15
A casual taco shop with grilled and battered fish tacos.

Liberty Public Market
LIBERTY STATION · $10–18
A food hall with a range of vendors under one roof.

The Prado
BALBOA PARK · $18–30
A restaurant on the park's main promenade with a patio.

DINNER & LATE NIGHT

Old Town Mexican Café
OLD TOWN · $15–28
A busy restaurant that makes tortillas by hand in the window.

Filippi's Pizza Grotto
LITTLE ITALY · $15–25
A family-run pizza spot in a deli, open since 1950.

Underbelly
LITTLE ITALY · $14–20
A popular ramen counter with a long wait on weekends.

Mona Lisa Italian Foods
LITTLE ITALY · $10–18
A deli and restaurant with sandwiches and Italian groceries.

05 GETTING AROUND

Navigating San Diego

San Diego is spread out. The trolley, buses, and ferries serve the main sights, and rideshare fills the gaps.

MTS trolley and bus	about $2.50	Trolley lines link downtown, Old Town, and the border. Pay with the Pronto app or a card.
Airport (SAN)	Rideshare or bus	About 10 minutes by car to downtown.
Coronado ferry	by trip	Ferries leave from Broadway Pier and the Convention Center.
Rideshare	by trip	The simplest way to reach La Jolla, Point Loma, and Ocean Beach.
Park trams	Free	A free tram circles Balboa Park on some days; check the schedule.
Walking	Free	Downtown, Little Italy, and Balboa Park are walkable on their own.

Coastal fog is common in late spring and early summer. Check the forecast before planning a view.

06 BACKUP PLANS

San Diego on a rainy afternoon

Rain is rare, but showers happen in winter. These are good indoor options.

BALBOA PARK
San Diego Museum of Art
A large collection of European and Spanish art.

BALBOA PARK
Museum of Us
Anthropology in a landmark tower building.

BALBOA PARK
Natural History Museum
Local wildlife and geology.

DOWNTOWN
Maritime Museum
Historic ships on the bay.

LIBERTY STATION
Liberty Public Market
A big food hall with plenty of seating.

LA JOLLA
Birch Aquarium
A marine science center with a view of the coast.

07 NEIGHBORHOODS

Know your neighborhoods

GARDENS & MUSEUMS
Balboa Park
Arches, gardens, and more than a dozen museums.

HISTORY
Old Town
Adobe buildings and the first settlement.

NIGHTLIFE
Gaslamp Quarter
Victorian buildings, bars, and restaurants.

ITALIAN
Little Italy
A walkable neighborhood of cafés and pizzerias.

ISLAND
Coronado
A resort town with a wide beach and a famous hotel.

COVE
La Jolla
Sea lions, tide pools, and a cliffside park.

08 GOOD TO KNOW

What nobody tells you

- Balboa Park is huge. Choose one or two museums, and spend the rest of the time outdoors.
- Fish tacos are the local classic. Order two, and ask for salsa on the side.
- Fog is common near the coast in May and June. The sun usually breaks through by afternoon.
- Keep your distance from sea lions at La Jolla Cove. They can bite.
- Tip 18–20% in restaurants. Sales tax is added at the register.
- Never leave valuables visible in a parked car, especially at beaches and trailheads.

WHEN TO GO

Sep–Nov	Best overall	Warm, clear days, warm water, and fewer crowds.
Mar–May	Second best	Mild weather and spring blooms, with some coastal fog.
Jun–Aug	Peak season	Warm and busy, with Comic-Con in July.
Dec–Feb	Off-season	Mild and quiet, with whales passing the coast.

09 SOLO TRAVELER SAFETY

Is San Diego safe?

Safe, with standard city awareness. Balboa Park, La Jolla, Coronado, and Little Italy are busy and well lit. The main risks are petty theft from parked cars, strong sun, and ocean hazards. Use rideshare late at night, and stay on busy blocks in the Gaslamp.

NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY AT A GLANCE

Balboa Park (daytime)	●●●●●
La Jolla	●●●●●
Coronado	●●●●●
Little Italy	●●●●○
Gaslamp (evening)	●●●●○
Gaslamp late at night	●●●○○
Outside the central core at night	●●●○○

COMMON SCAMS

Street performers and petitioners may ask for money or a signature. Decline politely and keep walking. Never leave belongings visible in a parked car.

HEALTH & MEDICAL

Scripps Mercy Hospital in Hillcrest is a major hospital near downtown. Wear sunscreen and drink water. Carry travel insurance.

SOLO TRAVELERS

Share your plan with someone back home, keep your phone charged, and swim only where lifeguards are on duty. Use rideshare late at night.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Police, fire, medical	911
Poison Control	1-800-222-1222
Nearest ER (Hillcrest)	Scripps Mercy Hospital · 4077 Fifth Ave.

10 PLANNING CALENDAR

San Diego, month by month

Exact dates shift each year, so confirm before booking.

DEC–MAR WHALE SEASON

- Gray whales migrate along the coast, visible from Point Loma and by boat.

MAR–APR SPRING

- Wildflowers and cool mornings along the coast.

JUL COMIC-CON

- Hundreds of thousands of fans take over downtown for a long weekend.

JUL SAN DIEGO PRIDE

- A large parade and festival in Hillcrest.

OCT LITTLE ITALY FESTA

- Food, music, and a street festival in Little Italy.

DEC DECEMBER NIGHTS

- Balboa Park hosts a free holiday festival in early December.

SAN

Every Stop, Mapped

Scan the code to open the free interactive San Diego map — every stop in this guide, filterable by day, food, and transport.

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