

Travel & Outdoors

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Sunset at the beach resort of Coronado

Oceans apart

San Diego's beautiful beaches, laid back vibe and sunny climate make it the glamorous younger sister of twin city Edinburgh

MARTYN McLAUGHLIN

On a clear day, the view from Point Lima begs the question as to why Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo felt it necessary to venture further up the west coastline of a sprawling landmass that would become known as the United States. It was here, in 1542, that the Portuguese explorer, serving the Spanish crown, became the first European to make landfall in California, arriving at one of its most beautiful locales close to where San Diego now lies.

A rocky neck of land lapped by the Pacific, it offers a wonderful vantage point. Straight ahead lies the steel and

glass skyline of downtown San Diego, framed by a vast naval base. To one side is a stretch of endless blue water while the other holds the promise of beautiful, bleak desert and, beyond it, the Mexican border.

It's little wonder that Kit Carson, the frontiersman, took pause during the Battle of San Pasqual to observe: "I have been in worse places than this." More than 125 years on, locals in San Diego regard themselves as the luckiest folk in the US. Though the heart of the city seems but a speck compared to the dizzying sprawl of Los Angeles, the diversity of its geography and culture, allied to

a gloriously warm, dry climate, make it a holiday destination of choice for California's moneyed elite.

Certainly, there are few places more alluring in the region than Coronado, a luxurious beach resort which lies less than a 15-minute drive away from the city's airport. Connected to the mainland by a magnificent two-mile-long girder bridge, the island is just a mile and a half in length, but it packs a lot in.

There are activities aplenty wherever you look, with volleyball nets available for hire and fire rings for barbecues on the beach. I deigned to break my surfing duck and venture into the Pacific. Even

at 9am, the conditions were daunting for a novice, and after a few aborted attempts to haul myself over the crests, I settled for a fun hour with a bodyboard, which proves far more forgiving to those who struggle on dry land, let alone crashing waves.

All the while, I kept scanning the beach for fear of being chided by a passing Navy Seal. A sizeable swathe of the elite force is based to the northern tip

Skyfari has great views of the zoo's 3,700 animals below

of Coronado at the Naval Amphibious Base Coronado, and its members – including the team who led the mission against Osama bin Laden – can regularly be found tramping the shoreline as part of their gruelling training regime.

Tourists, fortunately, enjoy a more relaxing stay, especially at the Glorietta Bay Inn. Originally an Italian Renaissance mansion built in 1908, it is now a boutique hotel featuring 11 beautifully appointed suites in the main building, each with unique historic details, from hexagonal bathroom tiles to crystal-glass doorknobs.

An ideal location from which to explore Coronado, it offers guests a genteel, charming stay, perhaps best illustrated by the daily knock at the door around 4pm, offering an in-room basket of cookies and glass of milk. Explore the building and you will find charming quirks in abundance, from a two-person cage elevator that climbs to the third-floor penthouse suite, and wall safes whose combinations have remained a mystery for generations.

Across the main strip, meanwhile, lies the Hotel Del Coronado. Dating back to 1888, the vast building – famed for its ruby turrets, expansive verandas, tall cupolas, and gingerbread balconies – has hosted the likes of Jack Nicholson, Brad Pitt, and Oprah Winfrey, and further back in time, Charles Lindbergh, Humphrey Bogart and Charlie Chaplin. The hotel even formed the backdrop for 1959's *Some Like It Hot*, and the beach house is where Marilyn Monroe stayed during filming.

Coronado is a great place for dinner, with numerous award-winning restaurants. At 1500 Ocean expect attentive, beachfront dining, where the grilled lamb loin, served with Sicilian couscous, boquerones, marona, and garbanzo purée, proved a favourite at my table.



Surfers at Pacific Beach; Balboa Park, below

At least one day of your trip to San Diego should be set aside for Balboa Park, an experience akin to stumbling into the sprawling estate of a curious Victorian philanthropist. The 1,200 acres of green space boasts no fewer than 15 museums set amongst a cluster of Spanish colonial-style buildings.

It took shape in the aftermath of a world's fair, the California-Panama exposition of 1915/16. When the event came to an end, ordinary San Diegans and the city's fathers decided the exhibits on show should remain in situ, and hatched a plan to ensure the zoo, in particular, would remain.

Balking at the prohibitive price put on the animals by the fair's organisers, authorities simply declared them to be in quarantine, warning that they could not be transported from the site indefinitely. Sensing defeat, those behind the fair decided to donate the animals to San Diego, giving rise to arguably one of the greatest zoos in the world.

When I visited early one weekday morning, it became clear that the attraction has moved on since those days. A towering gondola lift known as the Skyfari has wonderful views of some of the zoo's 3,700-plus animals below.

Downtown San Diego, meanwhile, offers a more sedate way to spend a day, whether shopping or simply strolling around the various attractions clustered around the waterfront. From the comfort of one of the city centre's best hotels - The Sofia, housed in a beautiful building which dates back to 1926 - everything is within easy reach. Do pay a visit to the USS Midway, a huge aircraft carrier which was a mainstay of the US navy for almost 50 years until it was decommissioned in 1992. At one time the largest vessel in the world it was home to more than 4,100 men. A few minutes' walk north, you will find the Star of India, a fine three-masted ship launched from the Isle of Man in 1863 and used to bring immigrants to the US.

Come nightfall, venture a half-mile inland to the Gaslamp Quarter. Once a notorious red-light district, it has undergone a significant rebirth in recent decades, and is now the place to go for some of the city's most vibrant bars and jazz clubs.

During my stay in San Diego, I enjoyed simple fare at mealtimes - spicy fish tacos from streetside surf shacks on



Mission Beach, and irresistible savoury pancakes from city institution, Richard Walker's - but there are also many excellent restaurants.

Casa Guadalajara offers superb traditional Mexican fare in the Old Town district, while Neighbourhood on 777 G Street is great fun, with starters including chorizo corn dogs and jalapeno mac 'n' cheese. The craft beers are pretty good too.

Indeed, beer lovers should consider a Brew Hop tour of the state's many micro breweries. Let a guide chauffeur you around allowing you to learn about the process behind each beer and of course, savouring a sample. Highlights include Stone Brewing Co, an award-winning firm that has ties with Scotland's Brewdog, and cultivates a similar renegade approach, evident in the titles it gives to its beer. Arrogant Bastard Ale, for example, is bold and unashamedly bursting in character - a lot, in fact, like San Diego itself.

THE FACTS A return British Airways flight from London Heathrow to San Diego Lindbergh Field costs from £682 (www.britishairways.com). A standard room at The Sofia Hotel (www.thesoftahotel.com) starts at £85 per night, while a standard room at the Glorietta Bay Inn (www.gloriettabayinn.com) starts at £116 a night.



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Drink in Italy's Turin region with wineries at every turn

ROSE MURRAY BROWN

Barolo is one of the most manicured and prosperous-looking villages in Italy. With its medieval castle, twisting streets, wine shops, restaurants, cantinas at every corner and sensational views across the golden Langhe hills, the home of Italy's most honoured red is a wine-lover's paradise.

It is easy to get here, an hour's drive south of Turin on a beautiful winding route into the Langhe hills. Vineyards are everywhere, hugging every slope, every undulation. Eleven villages, including Barolo, can make this famous Nebbiolo-based red in this corner of Piedmont in one of the most dramatic landscapes you can imagine.

While you can explore the hilltop villages of Serralunga d'Alba and La Morra and smell fermenting grapes in the air, it is another matter gaining access to small discreet wineries. Piedmont has some of Italy's best marked wine routes, but scores of traditional cantinas

are not set up with tasting rooms and shops, so appointments are essential in some cellars - but not all.

Start your tasting route at Hotel Barolo itself. At harvest time, watch grapes arriving at the hotel's winery, Brezza, as you enjoy morning coffee on the terrace, then head downstairs to sample Nebbiolo, Barbera and Dolcetto reds with winemaker Enzo. Stroll along to the welcoming E Pira cantina run by Chiara Boschi and sample others at the famous Brezza Trattoria with its castle views.

In neighbouring Monforte d'Alba, Aldo Conterno's hilltop winery is worth visiting if you can catch the family at home, but the easiest winery for tourists to access is Fontanafredda at Serralunga d'Alba. With a huge wine shop and bistro it's a visitor's haven. There's even a wine village to explore, built for workers by King Vittorio Emanuele.

Head northeast through Alba, famous for truffles, to neighbouring Barbaresco. Amidst a gentler landscape of hazelnut and peach orchards and vineyards, Cascina delle Rose in Tre Stelle is a good place to stay.

If you have time, before you leave Piedmont head north to the nerve centre of the Slow Food movement in Bra, where wine-lovers can actually sleep in a cellar. Enterprising winemaker Matteo Ascheri built a startlingly modern hotel of wood, chrome, brick and marble above his winery, while his sister Maria Teresa runs their bustling Osteria Muirvecchi, a haven of artisanal foods. En route to Bra, you drive through the Roero valley, home to crisp Arneis whites. If your timetable allows, explore southeast to Gavi to see its famous 16th-century fortress.

Now head to Veneto to discover Italy's contrasting northeast. Base your-



48 HOURS IN Paphos

■ **Friday, 2pm** Head out of the centre of town and check into the Ayii Anargyri Spa Resort (rooms start from €100, www.aasparesort.com). Enjoy a dip in the sulphur-laced water, which ripples through the mountains above Paphos.

■ **4pm** Visit the intriguing Unesco World Heritage listed Tombs of the Kings (Tombs of the Kings Ave, tel: +357-2630 6217). No kings actually lie here, but this was the grand last resting place of local aristocrats as far back as the 4th century BC.

■ **6:30pm** Stroll along the new waterfront boulevard from the Tombs of the Kings, which brings you to the old port. Time for a sundowner at Café Hobo (4 Apostolou

