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Fun in the Sun in San Diego

 JULY 18, 2011 BY LYNN BURSHEIN  COMMENTS (0)

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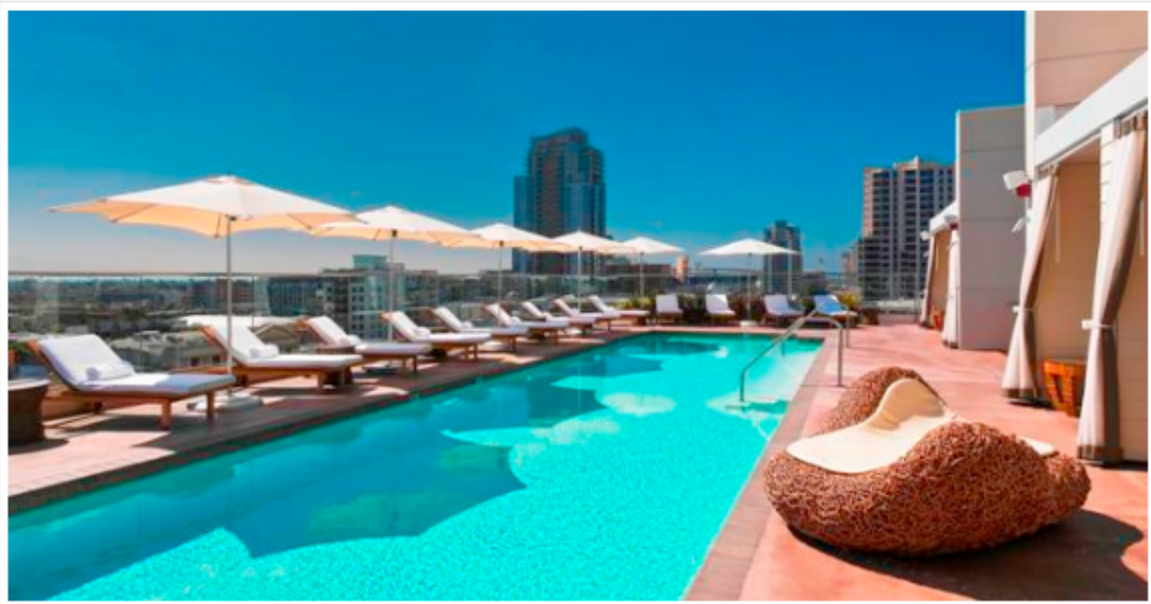
San Diego, the second largest city in the State of California, has a myriad of tourist attractions, from trips to Sea World or Balboa Park, a stroll on Coronado Beach or a visit to the annual comic book convention, Comic-Con. A visit to nearby La Jolla and the city's Gaslamp district also provides two very different but worthwhile experiences.



Grand Colonial Hotel

Located fifteen minutes from downtown San Diego, La Jolla (which means “the Jewel” in Spanish) is an affluent beach community though still very accessible to visitors. Set against the California coastline, La Jolla is nevertheless reminiscent of a southern European resort town. Case-in-point: the historic Grande Colonial Hotel, one of the area’s most popular hotels, provides elegant but low-key accommodations built in classic European style. The hotel is comprised of a five-story main building, as well as three separate garden suite walk-ups including spacious rooms - some with fully-equipped kitchens and fireplaces. Aside from a generous-sized flat screen TV mounted on the wall, the rooms are simple in design; certain features, like the open windows that allow for a cross-breeze, make the place feel more like a home than a hotel. From the back entrance, the property is just a stone’s throw away from the Casa Beach Seal Colony (where you can watch these marine mammals lumber about on the sand in their natural wetsuits). From the main entrance of the hotel, you are centrally located on the city’s historic Prospect Street, across the road from high-end clothing boutiques, cafes as well as a number of fine art galleries.

There is no shortage of good restaurants in La Jolla village, but at least one of your main meals should be eaten at the Grande Colonial’s Nine-Ten restaurant, which has received numerous accolades from travel and dining surveys. Nine-Ten has a three-course dinner menu that is a terrific value at \$45 (\$60 includes wine pairings). The Peach & Nectarine Salad combines the mellow fruit and piquant leafy greens for a nice balance. Memorable entrees include the Wild King Salmon, served with roasted vegetables, toasted couscous, and blood oranges. The dessert menu includes a “Half Baked Chocolate cake” crafted by a dessert chef who has been crowned “San Diego’s Best Chocolatier”. Enough said.



After spending time in the relatively quiet La Jolla village, visitors may be looking for some nightlife adventures, in which case the city's Gaslamp Quarter is the place to be. Dubbed "downtown's playground", this historical neighbourhood was once home to San Diego's red-light district but is now where the city's hippest nightclubs, restaurants and boutique hotels are located. One such hotel is the Andaz San Diego, with its high-ceilings, and slick and cool interior, though with friendly and attentive staff. The Andaz San Diego is also home to the "Ivy Entertainment experience", comprised of the Ivy Nightclub, Ivy Wine Bar and Ivy Rooftop - a trendy rooftop bar and lounge offering skyline views, a pool and private cabanas.

The Andaz San Diego is the place to stay when you want to be in the heart of the downtown area, not if you are looking for a mellow experience. The hotel's reservation service is careful to advise me that the nightclub sound can carry over to some of the hotel rooms, so I bring earplugs. And perhaps like some of its patrons the morning after a particularly late night, the Gaslamp Quarter looks a little rough by the light of day. Not a problem: there are plenty of other places to visit in San Diego until night falls and the revelry can begin again.

Photos provided and travel subsidized by the Grande Colonial and Andaz San Diego.