

Travel

San Diego: Sunny side up

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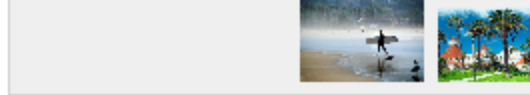
San Diego makes it easy for the visitor to like it. Really easy. The short 10-minute journey from the airport rewards those just off a long flight with glimpses of the glittering boat-filled natural bay, the USS Midway floating museum set in a former naval aircraft carrier (a reminder of San Diego's long association with the [US Navy](#)), swaying palm trees and that year-round sun.



Sunset silhouette: La Jolla Shores, a mile-long beach which is popular with surfers

San Diego also rewards the visitor (and residents, I imagine) with its distinct districts. On our way through customs a notably friendly Italian

official had recommended my partner and I try out Buon Appetito in Little Italy, as he dined there once a week with his wife.



As we looked for it an arched neon sign welcomed us into the "hood" lined with scenic shops and restaurants.

We feasted on linguine boscomare and tartufo, sat in the sun, toasting the unlikely official.

Neighbouring Little Italy is the Gaslamp Quarter, once a red-light district and home to the lawman Wyatt Earp, while the 16 once-squalid square blocks of Victoriana have been spruced up and are home to buzzing restaurants, shops and galleries. It's a poster-district for San Diego's regeneration, which as a border city - [Tijuana](#) is half an hour away - has been rough at times.

The newest hotel to open here is Andaz, taking up part of a block on F Street, just around the corner from a [Salvation Army](#) soup kitchen (there are homeless people on corners, bundles of belongings in supermarket trolleys by their side). By stark contrast, we were staying in this glamorous hotel. Formerly the Ivy, Andaz opened last year with a rooftop resort and pool, cabañas complete with plasma televisions and a firepit that by day, unlit, strangely resembled a giant bowl of cereal, with views across the city to the hazy mountains beyond.

The Andaz has slick service: one memorable breakfast of spinach omelette with fried potatoes, peppers and onions we didn't even realise was late was deemed too tardy by staff who removed it from the bill. Impressive. Other meals in the area were no less impressive. Run by blue-eyed celebrity chef Brian Malarkey, Searsucker opened less than a year ago to critical acclaim. The restaurant is decked out with salvaged chairs and art with a seasonal menu dividing dishes into sections such as "smalls", "ocean" and "farm". A selection arrived at our table brought by a friendly hit of home in the form of Liverpudlian waitress Lisette, who knew everything about each dish.

Smoky shrimp and bacon grits were a hit as was the short rib with Iron Fist Ale, the braised meat falling gently off the bone. Fried Brussels sprouts with walnuts was a novel idea if a tad too rich. And the place was lively, even on a Monday night.

In San Diego I did things I don't normally do, such as take an organised tour. The Old Town Trolley tour allows you to see a lot of the city in a short time - you can get on and off as often as you like (they fill up quickly so at times we waited for two or three before we could get on). And John, our driver/guide, was interesting and witty.

We set off from the Gaslamp Quarter and over the soaring Coronado Bay Bridge (you can take the ferry) to the island of Coronado, the first seaside resort in the [US](#).

Once a coyote-infested desert until 1886 when pipelines were built to pump water across the bay, Coronado is now a city in its own right.

Coronado is a little like being in *The Truman Show*: a clean, litter-free microcosm with wide, residential streets with every low-rise house (the only architectural law was no more than two storeys) seemingly bearing a Star Spangled Banner. Huge dunes in the sand even spell out "Coronado" on the beach - "In case you forget where you are," quipped John. L Frank Baum wrote the Wizard of Oz not far from the Hotel Del Coronado, a red turreted all-wooden hotel so whimsical that many speculate the author based the Emerald City on this destination (according to the hotel, he didn't).

We hopped off at Balboa Park, where 15 museums, the zoo and the Old Globe Theatre are harnessed together in 1,200 lush acres of culture.

Voluptuous Spanish colonial revival-style terracotta buildings and cooling gardens, including the ornate Alcazar Garden based on those of the Alcazar in [Seville](#), provide scenic shade while museums include the Museum of Man and the Air & Space Museum.

After culture it was time for some more traditional Californian-style fun at La Jolla Shores, a wide sandy sweep on the Pacific for a stand-up paddleboarding lesson. A land lesson on safety and technique from instructor Izzie was followed by a splash out to sea kneeling towards the back of the board, paddling from side to side. I steeled myself to stand up quickly, spurred on by hearing that most don't make it up on the first lesson. That was it. My legs felt weak but my arms gripped the paddle and I ploughed on out to sea. "Awesome," enthused Izzie - and for once I didn't mind that all-American word.

On the way back to the hotel I felt exhilarated. Three hours later I awoke to a dark room having missed dinner.

Instead, the [Marriott's](#) 22nd-floor Altitude Sky Lounge, a couple of blocks away overlooking Petco Park - home to the San Diego Padres baseball team - was recommended as the place to sip a cocktail and people-watch.

Locals seem cheerfully resigned to the fact that the Padres rarely win - they lost 0-1 to the Dodgers that night. One fan smiled as he told us that he rarely leaves the city. I can understand why.

Details: San Diego

* [British Airways](#) flies direct from [Heathrow](#) to San Diego, returns from £585, [ba.com](#)

* Original Travel has three nights at Andaz from £825pp room only with return flights on BA and transfers, [originaltravel.co.uk](#)

* [Searsucker](#), [searsucker.com](#)

* Surf Diva, US\$90 one-hour lesson, [surfdiva.com](#)

* Altitude Sky Lounge, [altitudeskylounge.com](#)

* Old Town Trolley Tours, US\$34 adults (pre-book online for US\$30.60), [trolleytours.com](#)

* [Balboapark.org](#)

* San Diego CVB, [sandiego.org](#)

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