

## Travel



(R-4C, B-6C, F-7C, 6D\*, R.W.G-5D, B, Wb3C)

## City with worldly flair

## San Diego has everything from tea time to siestas

By Doris Scharfberg  
special writer

The bodies crowding into the U.S. Grant Hotel elevator said plenty, even though I understood none of the languages spoken. Lean, eager athletes dressed for a track meet; male and female, some wearing earrings, tattoos and even decorative facial scars.

This grandoled version of the U.N. turned out to part of the competition in an important race held that day on the downtown streets. It's the kind of global fete San Diego takes in stride.

Born in Spanish colonialism, raised western-American, with a large population that has joined the Navy and has seen the world, San Diego breathes an intercontinental air. Mission architecture stands near Victorian Italianate, new world modern. Tea time is common; so is the siesta.

The second largest city in California is wonderfully attractive. Hills rise like bleachers around a long, curving harbor that is protected from the ocean by manmade and natural islands linked into one long peninsula.

Fiers of office buildings, hotels and homes form a gallery of box seats to watch Pacific sunsets, fleets of sailboats, the grey silhouettes of battle ships, or jets swooping into Lindbergh Field.

Exploring should start in the heart of town, a heart that has had major surgery, with a few operations still to go. Suffering the same urban malaise as every large city in the nation, San Diego has had dowdy days in recent years. Drastic measures were needed to update her Navy-base image, restore sagging vitality.

**THE 76-YEAR-OLD Grant Hotel** is a case in point. What started out to be a \$20 million facelift rose to \$80 mil as generations of paint were scraped from fine old woodwork,



photos by Doris Scharfberg

In cosmopolitan San Diego, you can see a theater with a church-like spire, listen to a street musician, meet an Asian hotel doorman, see guests in kilts at the House of Moor Restaurant and feed a whale at Sea World.

new floors and plumbing installed. The staff had four months of rigorous training in traditional civilities. They couldn't replace the turtle soup in the Grill Room (no two people could agree on how it used to taste), but lovers of the old Grant say the new one keeps its promise.

Across the street, the Westgate also threw cost-accounting to the winds. Modern on the outside, the Westgate echoes Versailles with European antiques, tapestries, Baccarat crystal and things that speak fluent rich. No two rooms are alike, which befits the royal and presidential people who occasionally drop in. If the Westgate is France, Venice

is in the next block. Horton Plaza, one of the juiciest malls ever to hit an unsuspecting midtown, has the flashy colors and Roman arches of sunny Italy plus a doge's palace outlined in black and white tile. Pink, green, yellow balconies, walls, open stables, theaters, restaurants, shops. Slightly narrow and winding, Horton Plaza could easily be a garish mess, but the colors and forms are an architectural feast instead.

The Plaza will probably become as standard an attraction as Balboa Park and Point Loma. Don't have for either one, however, before sauntering around the Gaslight Quarter, 16 blocks of Victorian architecture, edged by the Plaza.

Bustling back to 1890, storefronts and offices are being tenderly restored to the days when every window had its own gingerbread topping, every lamp post its curlicue braces. A few adult-type establishments are still in the mix, but its a good neighborhood to browse for antiques and ethnic eating.

**CLOSE** to downtown, Balboa Park is a non-stop world's fair. Only in Washington, D.C., has anything like the concentration of museums, exhibit halls and points of interest as this thousand-plus acres of lush layout.

I stood between a kilted Scotsman and a East Indian, watching Japanese drummers do a temple dance during their ethnic festival. One hundred yards away, Ansel Adams was being featured at the San Diego Museum of Art; up the street in the Fleet Space Theater visitors in a wrap-around movie were being taken through the air locks and out into space, along with the astronauts.

One hundred fifty years ago this was a dreary canyon area beyond town, as a local dump. Two fairs, one in 1915, and the California International Exposition of 1935-36 changed all that. Trees were planted, ornate plaster structures (in constant repair) of Spanish grandeur built for the fair now house the Museum of Man, Museum of San Diego History, Space Museum, Botanical Pavilion, etc.

Visitors can unwind listening to the Spreckels outdoor organ, bells from the California Tower, or watch street magicians and assorted free souls do tricks for a passed hat.

The Cafe del Rey Moro (House of the Moorish King) provides a green garden respite and excellent Cal-Mex cuisine. San Diegans consider the Cafe "their place" for weddings or family reunions.

Balboa Park teems with athletic facilities, picnic areas, learning centers. The San Diego Zoo, address B.P., is all three.

You'd need the stamina of a Grand Canyon mule to do the entire circuit of paths and downhill byways in this champion zoo where the world's largest collection of animals attracts one of the largest continuing streams of humans. It takes several visits to see every koala (not a bear) and cockatoo in the place.

A zoo of a different stripe is Wild Animal Park, a separate branch of the Zoo Society, operating in the sunbaked hills north of town. Eerily like Africa, you are taken on a moonrall around a large preserve where animals of the wild live not as they would at home, might even eat careless intruders for lunch.

Trained bird and beast perform, and there's a photo caravan for close-up animal pics from an open-air truck.

**SEA WORLD** numero uno sits on Mission Bay, letting you gaze at ocean life or gasp at killer whales leaping out of water like water-gelated space ships. The story lines of the aquatic shows get a little silly, but Sea World is a clear must, especially for kids.

In winter, grey whales migrate near Point Loma, a wondrously scenic peninsula from which to view the bay area. The drive winds past a sobering Navy graveyard to a monument of Cabrillo, first European to visit southern California, then to a Visitor's Center, old Point Loma lighthouse, and a glass-walled whale

viewing perch.

The Navy may provide a show by sending some ships to sea while you watch. Or go to the parade grounds on base to see the close-order drilling. Your taxes have already paid your admission.

Old Town San Diego State Historic Park and Presidio Park give lessons in the area's Spanish beginnings. There's a touch of the English crown at the legendary Hotel Coronado, grande dame of west coast resorts, and a bit of the colonists at Seaport Village, shops and eateries made to look like New Bedford.

The red streetcars zinging through town travel 16 miles to the Mexican border, close to Tijuana's new Cultural Center, Rio Plaza shopping.

The city on the seashore is less than an hour to desert or mountains. Never really gets cold. Expressways

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don't seem to suffer Los Angeles's dead-stagnant congestion. Streets are clean. More than 350 hotels, motels, bed and breakfasts, condo rental agencies, RV parks, campgrounds, et al, are listed in area directories.

For more information: San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau, 1200 Third Ave., Suite 824, San Diego, CA 92101-4190. Phone: (619)232-3101.

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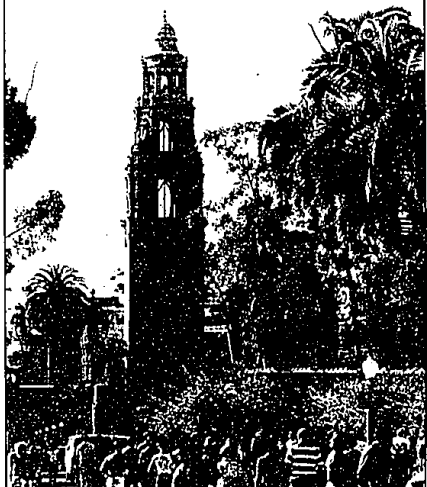
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