

SAN DIEGO GREAT ITINERARIES

ONE DAY IN SAN DIEGO

If you've only got 24 hours to spare, start at **Balboa Park**, the cultural heart of San Diego. Stick to El Prado, the main promenade, where you'll pass by peaceful gardens and soaring Spanish colonial revival architecture (Balboa Park's unforgettable look and feel date to the 1914 Panama-California Exposition).

Unless you're a serious museum junkie, pick whichever of the park's many offerings most piques your interest—choices range from photography to folk art. If you're with the family, don't even think of skipping the **San Diego Zoo**. You'll want to spend the better part of your day there, but make an early start of it so you can head for one of San Diego's **beaches** while there's still daylight.

Kick back under the late afternoon sun and linger for sunset. Or, wander around **Seaport Village** and the **Embarcadero** before grabbing a bite to eat in the **Gaslamp Quarter**, which pulses with nightlife until last call (around 1:40 AM).

Alternate plan: Start your day at **SeaWorld** and wrap it up with an ocean-view dinner in **La Jolla**.

FOUR DAYS IN SAN DIEGO

Day 1

The one-day itinerary above also works for the first day of an extended visit. If you're staying in North County, though, you may want to bypass the zoo and head for the **San Diego Wild Animal Park**, a vast preserve with huge open enclosures. Here, you'll see herds of African and Asian animals acting as they would in the wild. It's the closest thing in the States to an exotic safari. Not included in the general admission—but worth the extra cost if it's in the budget—are the park's "special experiences": guided photo caravans, rolling Segway tours, mule rides, and the new Flightline, which sends harnessed guests soaring down a zip-line cable high above earthbound animals.

Another North County option for families with little ones: **LEGOLAND** in Carlsbad. **Note:** the San Diego Zoo, the San Diego Wild Animal Park, and LEGOLAND are all-day, wipe-those-kids-right-out kind of adventures.

Day 2

Your first day was a big one; ease into your second with a gut-busting breakfast (**Richard Walker's Pancake House** in downtown's East Village is a crowd pleaser), followed by a 90-minute tour aboard the **SEAL Amphibious Tour**, which departs from Seaport Village daily. The bus-boat hybrid explores picturesque San Diego neighborhoods before rolling right into the water for a cruise around the bay, all with fun-facts narration.

Back on land, devote an hour or so to **Seaport Village**, a 14-acre waterfront entertainment complex with 54 shops and more than a dozen restaurants. Meant to look like a harbor in the 19th century, Seaport features 4 mi of cobblestone pathways bordered by lush landscaping and water features. From there, stroll north to the **Embarcadero**, where you'll marvel at the historic maritime vessels, including the *Star of India* (the world's oldest active ship), *Berkeley*, *Californian*, *Medea*, and *Pilot* (in summer, a few of the ships stage cannon battles).

Learn about local nautical history at the **Maritime Museum**, or explore San Diego's military might at the **San Diego Aircraft Carrier Museum** aboard the USS *Midway*, a permanently docked aircraft carrier with more than 60 exhibits and 25 restored aircraft. Spend the rest of your afternoon and evening in **Coronado**, a quick jaunt by ferry or bridge, or walk a few blocks north to the **Gaslamp Quarter**, where the shopping and dining will keep you busy for hours.

Day 3

Set out early enough, and you might snag a parking spot near **La Jolla Cove**, where you can laugh at the sea lions lounging on the beach like lazy couch potatoes at the **Children's Pool**. Then, head up one block to Prospect Street, where you'll find the vaunted **La Valencia** hotel (called the "Pink Lady" for its blush-hue exterior), and dozens of posh boutiques and galleries. Head east to the **Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego's** La Jolla location, which impresses as much with its ocean views as it does with its world-class collection of artwork. MCASD's Museum Café is a casual but elegant spot for a light lunch.

If you're with kids, skip the museum and head for **La Jolla Shores**, a good beach for swimming and making sand castles, followed by a visit to the **Birch Aquarium** and a fresh bite to eat at **El Pescador Fish Market**, an always-crowded lunchtime favorite. Once you've refueled, head for **Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve**. Your reward for hiking down the cliffs to the state beach: breathtaking views in every direction. If you're with small children, the trek might prove too challenging, but you can still take in the views from the top. For dinner, swing north to **Del Mar**—during racing season, the evening scene is happening—or, for families, head down to **Ocean Beach** for a juicy burger at the surf-theme **Hodad's**.

Day 4

Begin with a morning visit to **Cabrillo National Monument**, a national park with a number of activities. Learn about 16th-century explorer Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, take a gentle 2-mi hike on the beautiful Bayside Trail, look around the Old Point Loma Lighthouse, and peer at tide pools, which teem with sea life (remember: look but don't touch).

After Cabrillo, hop in your car and head to **Old Town**, where San Diego's early history comes to carefully reconstructed life. The Mexican food here isn't the city's best. Leading contenders for that honor are Las Cuatro Milpas in Barrio Logan and **Tacos El Gordo** in Chula Vista, both too out-of-the-way for most tourists. The Old Town

restaurants aren't even particularly authentic, but they are bustling and kid-friendly, and frosty margaritas make an added incentive for grown-ups. After that, spend a few hours exploring whatever cluster of neighborhoods appeals to you most. If you like casual coastal neighborhoods with a youthful vibe, head to **Pacific, Mission, or Ocean Beach**, or venture up to **North County** for an afternoon in Encinitas, which epitomizes the old California surf town. If edgy and artsy are more your thing, explore the **Uptown** area, where you'll find super-hip shops, bars, and eateries.

ALTERNATIVES

If you're an **adventure junkie**, ignore all of the above suggestions and skip ahead to the Sports and the Outdoors chapter. You can easily fill four days or more with every imaginable outdoor activity, from swimming, surfing, and sailing to hiking, golfing, and paragliding. San Diego is an athletic enthusiast's heaven—unless you're a skier, that is.

In **winter**, adjust the itineraries to include more indoor activities—the museums are fantastic—as well as a whale-watching boat tour.

In **summer**, check local listings for outdoor concerts, theater, and movie screenings, all a wonderful way to while away a warm evening.

One last alternative plan is **Tijuana**. Though the Mexican border town is not for the anxious traveler—it's dirty and can be quite dangerous at times—there are attractions worth experiencing, from the garish but exuberant Avenida Revolución, a junk-filled shopping bazaar, to Centro Cultural Tijuana (CECUT), with its Omnimax Theater and excellent exhibits on Baja California's history, flora, and fauna. For the extra-emboldened, traditional bullfights at the Plaza Monumental are simultaneously violent and graceful, and quite beloved by locals.