

LEISURE & TRAVEL

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SATURDAY, JUNE 15, 2013

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The many sides of

San Diego

CATHY DONALDSON/TMES & TRANSCRIPT

Surfing is a way of life for many San Diegans. Here, a group takes to the morning waves.

■ **Southern California city offers plenty to explore, entertain, day and night**

BY CATHY DONALDSON
TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

After a long winter, there's nothing like a spring fling or summer junket to recharge your batteries.

And there's no better place to do it than stunning San Diego.

This southern California city — the state's second largest — has so much going for it that by day 2 of a recent visit, my husband and I were ready to send a new mailing address to our teens back home.

From its incredible natural beauty to its friendly, laid-back vibe — not to mention its year-round mild temps and generally sunny weather — San Diego is a tempting alternative for a couple of Atlantic Canadians after a long winter of snow and cold.

We began our stay in the Gaslamp Quarter, the heart of the city's downtown. In this 16-square-block area, you'll find a funky array of restaurants, nightclubs, art galleries, museums and boutiques.

For a couple on a kid-free getaway, this is a great destination, especially during the evening hours, when the dining and nightclub scene comes to life. Two of our favourite restaurants were the colourful Spanish eatery Sevilla and the Gaslamp Strip Club, the latter of which is subtitled "A Steak Place," in case you were worried.

Of course, you don't have to

just eat in San Diego, though your tummy would be quite content. There's tons of fun for couples travelling with or without kids, including landmarks like the San Diego Zoo or Balboa Park.

In the mood for a water view? Grab lunch at Seaport Village before you board the USS Midway Aircraft Carrier Museum. Or hop on a harbour cruise or sailing excursion.

Our favourite marine adventures were centred in La Jolla (pronounced La Hoya). This Pacific Coast community, whose name appropriately means "The Jewel" in Spanish, is an amazing spot for swimming, surfing, diving, kayaking and snorkelling. Opportunities for shopping, dining, as well as artistic and cultural pursuits are in fine supply as well.

Getting to La Jolla from downtown San Diego is half the fun for winter-weary tourists. The drive takes you past palm-lined neighbourhoods of stucco homes with terra cotta roofs, all surrounded by interesting, drought-resistant plants and fascinating florals, including hot pink bougainvillea and a multitude of other blooming species that made me wish I'd brought a plant guide.

A good starting point for a visit to the La Jolla coastline is La Jolla Cove, the north-facing point on the seaward end of the cliffs that form a small deepwater bay in the area. The Cove has a nice beach where visitors and locals flock in the summer for terrific swimming and snorkelling.

During our stop, the majority



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The La Jolla coastline is a popular destination for tourists and locals alike, with its rugged cliffs, secluded coves and sandy beaches.

of those exploring the Cove were gawking at dozens of sea lions sunning themselves on the cliff rocks. Others gazed at the myriad of birds that make their homes along the cliffs.

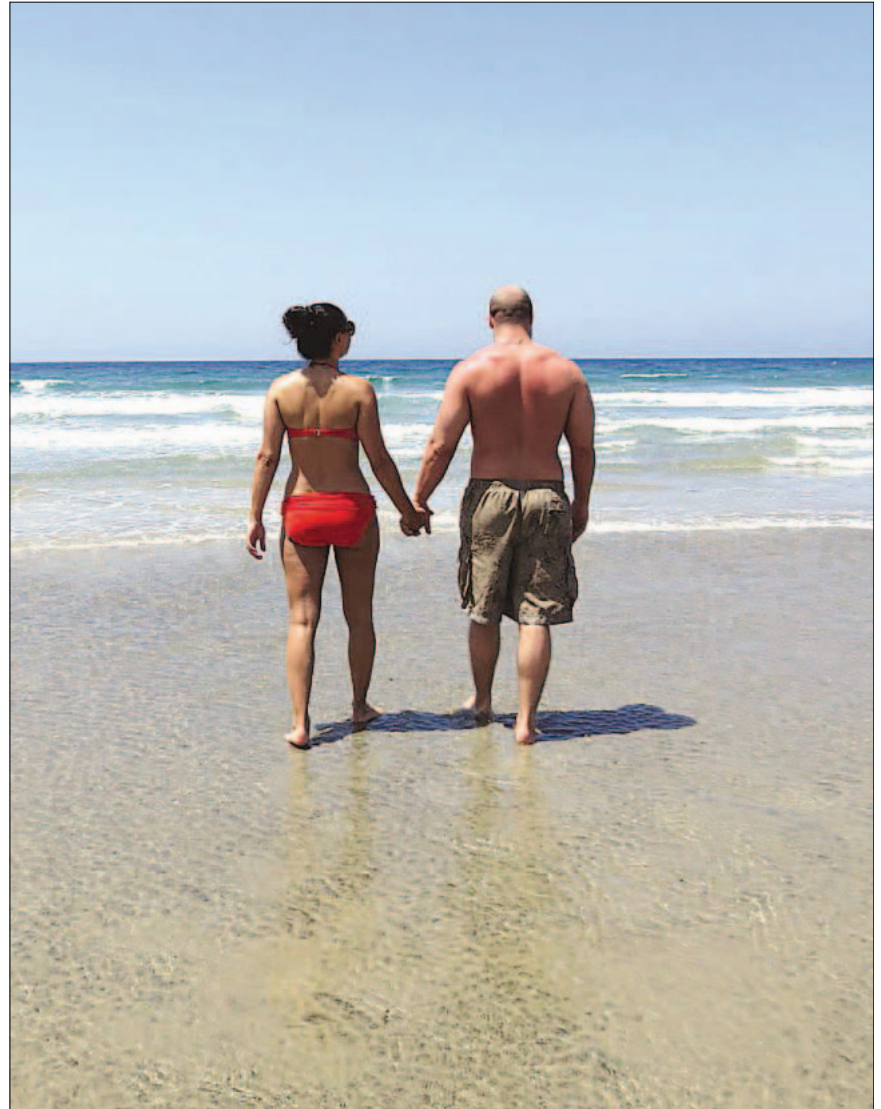
As we stood — surrounded by rocky reefs, golden sand coves, towering palms and exhilarating ocean breezes — it was hard not to sum up

► See CORONADO, H2



CATHY DONALDSON/TMES & TRANSCRIPT

Even an overcast day provides stellar views in San Diego. Here, the city's downtown is viewed from Centennial Park on Coronado Island.



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A couple enjoys a leisurely stroll toward the Pacific surf at La Jolla Shores beach.

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No obligation attached to 'save the date' cards

BY LESLEY CARLIN
TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Q: My cousin is having her wedding in Napa Valley next September. She recently sent save-the-date cards. I thought, great, I'll try not to book anything that conflicts with her wedding. But I live on the East Coast and am not certain I'll be able to afford to travel out there. My mother happened to mention this to my aunt (my cousin's mother), who was highly offended. Apparently she thinks save-the-date cards mean, "You'd better be there."

My mom offered to pay my way, but I'm a little ticked off. I'd like to be there — I love my cousin — but I'm just not sure I can. And I'm a grown adult, so I don't want to have my mother pay for my airfare and hotel just to keep her sister happy. What should I do?

A: Sending a save-the-date card is not like planting a flag in unexplored territory and claiming it for Spain (or England, or France, etc.). Save-the-date cards are intended as a way of letting people know about your wedding; they in no way obligate the recipient to attend. Your aunt is totally out of line. I would thank your mom for her offer (which is generous of her), but tell her that if you go, you'd want to pay your own way. Assure everyone that you are keeping the date open and will try to be there, but you will not be able to make a decision until closer to the wedding date.

■ **Lesley Carlin has been writing about travel and etiquette for more than 10 years. As one of the Etiquette Grrls, she is the co-author of Things You Need to Be Told and More Things You Need to Be Told (Berkley).**

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Coronado features stunning beaches and loads to keep you busy

► Continued From H1

La Jolla as just plain dreamy. The idyllic landscape continues when you reach La Jolla Shores, a two-kilometre-long crescent of sand beach popular among all types of beachgoers. We discovered this was "the beach" to hit after we stopped at the local store Surf Divas.

In fact, we got many tips about the area from sisters Isabelle "Izzy" and Caroline "Coco" Tihanyi, owners of the store, which has introduced many women to surfing since they set up shop in 1996.

Tempted as I was to try riding some waves with the bubbly divas, rent a dual kayak with hubby or check out marine critters at the nearby Birch Aquarium at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, my mate and I opted to catch some rays beachside.

As we "chilled" in the magnificent California sun, I glanced around at the young and old alike, frolicking in the surf, playing in the sand or taking a walk along the promenade. It doesn't get much better, I decided, and texted, "Everyone should live in La Jolla."

I soon realized there are endless pieces of heaven in San Diego.

Take Coronado, just across the bridge from the downtown core. The island-like community features more stunning beaches, loads to do (bike rentals are a must), shops galore to peruse and great restaurants to try (don't miss the craft beer, homemade guacamole and fresh salsa at the Coronado Brewing Company).

While on Coronado, we stayed at the Loews Coronado Bay Resort, situated on a private peninsula opposite Silver Strand State Beach. Loews is a peaceful resort for a romantic excursion, but with plenty of activities for couples and families.

Guests can opt for a "dive-in movie" (watched on a big screen while floating in one of the resort's pools), make s'mores on the beach, tour the resort's on-site herb garden or escape for rejuvenating treatments in the spa. There's even a gondola ride where you can gently cruise in a private Venetian-style boat through the enchanting canals of the Coronado Cays.

We chose to revitalize by swimming (and napping...) in the luxurious pool area and by taking long walks around the breathtaking property. Bliss!

When hunger struck, our options included dinner at Mistral, the resort's signature restaurant with views of the San Diego-Coronado Bridge, and the more casual Market Café, overlooking the resort's private marina. Both offer amazing fare. (The crab-filled trout knocked my socks off.)

Another gem we discovered in



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An artist works on a watercolour along the scenic coast.

San Diego's crown: the Paradise Point Resort and Spa, a 44-acre tropical island in Mission Bay.

After a few nights, we were ready to take up permanent residence in one of the property's gorgeous bungalow-style rooms, a well-appointed bayside unit tucked amid lush foliage. We almost felt bad leaving our sanctuary but somehow managed to investigate the beach, five swimming pools, freshwater lake and tranquil lagoon.

Among the resort's other amenities are an island-themed spa (splurge on a decadent couples' massage), two waterfront dining venues (the bay views from the Baleen restaurant are particularly romantic), a private marina and 14 bonfire rings on the sand.

Paradise Point is a central point from which to visit some of San Diego's top attractions, like SeaWorld, or its great shopping centres, including those in Mission Valley.

Another area of San Diego

worth exploring is Point Loma, considered the landing place of the first European expedition to come ashore in present-day California.

Our tour through the seaside community culminated in a spectacular meal at Bali Hai, an iconic area restaurant known for its striking views and Polynesian-style menu.

Opened in 1955 by San Diego restaurateur Tom Ham, the business continues today under the leadership of Tom's daughter, Susie Baumann, her husband Larry, and their sons.

In friendly San Diego style, Larry popped by our table to chat before we devoured tantalizing main courses of seared scallops with pineapple chutney and mojito purée as well as delectable swordfish. It's hard to know what we enjoyed most — the food, the decor (which included more than 100 Polynesian artifacts), or the awesome views of the city's downtown at night through the restaurant's

colossal windows.

For something completely different, we ventured the next day to San Diego's South Bay, the city's southernmost community, adjacent to the Mexican border.

As a couple who finds shopping a relaxing activity, my hubby and I ventured to Las Americas Premium Outlet centre, only 20 minutes from downtown San Diego. Suffice it to say the trunk of our rental car was packed after a visit to the ultra-clean, open-air mall, which boasts 125 outlet stores.

There are other areas of San Diego we missed, such as Old Town, the site of the first Spanish settlement on the west coast.

But I'm starting to think we should make our "recharging" trip an annual event. And I can't imagine a better way to boost our batteries next time than by returning to San Diego and all it has to offer.

■ **Cathy Donaldson is a travel writer and communications consultant living in Moncton.**



CATHY DONALDSON/TIMES & TRANSCRIPT

Isabelle (Izzy) Tihanyi, right, and her sister Caroline (Coco) Tihanyi own Surf Divas, a gem of a store in La Jolla Cove that has introduced many women to surfing since 1996.



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