

Exploring San Diego, California: A Disney Cruise Line Port Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

In the fourth of this [series of articles](#), looking at some of the Disney Cruise Line's home ports of call, we turn our attention this week to the west coast, and the beautiful Californian city of San Diego.

It's hard to know where to start with San Diego. Unlike most cities, where the major attractions are mostly downtown, the most famous of this city's offerings are to be found in magnificent Balboa Park, which covers a staggering 1,200 acres more than a mile from the heart of downtown.

□ The first place we headed to on our visit is, I'm sure, the first stop for many visitors to San Diego, is its world famous zoo. Like a Disney park, it's hard to describe just how big this place is, and how much there is to see here. If I say that they have a hop-on, hop-off bus service around the park, a cable car, and there are even escalators to help you get around, you may get the idea! We spent the vast majority of a day there, and there was still plenty we didn't see. And just like a Disney park, trust me, you will come away exhausted at having done so much walking, but you'll also come away feeling that you really have got your money's worth, and seeing what amazing places the animals here live in.

□ Sadly, we had only allocated a day for Balboa Park, which was a huge mistake on our part, so all we were able to do with the remainder of the day was wander around and see the stunning Spanish Colonial buildings here. They are definitely something worth seeing, although it's a shame we didn't get to go inside them, something we need to rectify on a future visit one day. Among those I'd love to see are the San Diego Natural History Museum, the Reuben H. Fleet Science Center, the Botanical Building, the Museum of Man, the Air and Space Museum, and the Automotive Museum. I know my husband would also love the Model Railroad Museum, and while we're not art lovers, if you are, there's plenty for you to see, including the San Diego Museum of Art, the Museum of Photographic Arts, and the Timken Museum. Wow, better allow a whole week just to see everything in Balboa Park!

But there's plenty more to see in San Diego outside of Balboa Park, and we were lucky enough to stay in one of those attractions on our visit. If you're a Disney Vacation Club member, then you could as well, as the Hotel del Coronado is one of the options in the Concierge Collection, which is how we managed to do it. This is your original Grand Floridian, and it's something that every Disney fan should see on a visit to San

Diego. Step into this National Historic Landmark, and it's like stepping back 100 years or so in time, complete with an old-fashioned elevator that's operated manually. It's a treat to have someone opening and shutting the doors for you, and that really did make me feel special!

It's from here that you start to get some appreciation of how important the sea is to San Diego. We were amazed at how much the U.S. Navy is a key part of life here, especially given the reductions we've seen in recent years in the British Navy. One way to get a good idea of this is to take one of the many harbor cruises offered in San Diego. We found it fascinating, and loved being able to see things such as the Cabrillo National Monument, North Island Naval Air Station, the submarine base, Point Loma, and Coronado Bridge. We took the two-hour full harbour tour, and I'd certainly recommend that, as it was excellent value, with lots to see.

More of San Diego's maritime history can be seen at the USS Midway aircraft carrier, located on the downtown waterfront. It's got almost 30 restored aircraft on board, and it gave us a good idea of what life on board must have been like. Once again, this is an attraction that takes longer to tour than you first imagine -- are you seeing a pattern here?! Sadly, because we spent so long there, we didn't get a chance to visit the Maritime Museum, which is packed with historic ships, including the world's oldest active ship, Star of India. Another one to add to the list when we return one day!

There are also some fascinating neighborhoods in San Diego. We drove through the Gaslamp Quarter, a National Historic District, which gives you an idea of what the San Diego of yesteryear must have been like. I would have liked to have seen this place at night, when it's at its most vibrant, but sadly we were too tired for that. If you want to learn about San Diego's origins, head for the Old Town San Diego State Historic Park, where you can explore the city's oldest buildings. It was the last place we visited before heading out of San Diego, but I wish we'd made it our first stop, as it put a lot of what we'd already seen in perspective.

San Diego really is packed with things to see and do. In our short stay, we didn't get as far as seeing SeaWorld, mainly because we're regular visitors to the Florida one, and we wanted to see the unique attractions that San Diego has to offer. A short drive away from the city are LEGOLAND California, and the San Diego Wild Animal Park. While we're not huge LEGO fans, I would have loved to have seen the Wild Animal Park, the sister attraction to the San Diego Zoo, but sadly with limited time, we had to pick one of the two to visit, and the world famous zoo won out.

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San Diego is an enchanting place. Like much of California, it's got a laid back feel to it, but you can't be laid back when you visit it, as it's packed with attractions. There's easily enough to keep you occupied for a week or so here, but the chances are, like us, you'll only have a couple of days, so you will have some tough choices to make to decide what to see in this beautiful city. In the next of this series of articles, we turn our attention to Disney Cruise Line's newest home port in the Caribbean, San Juan in Puerto Rico.

About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)

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