



# San Diego

*The perfect family escape*

STORY BY HEIDI CHACKEL

PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED BY SAN DIEGO TOURISM AUTHORITY

San Diego has it all—pristine beaches, five-star hotels, amazing restaurants and much more. It is the perfect vacation, especially for families, and only a five to six hour drive from Las Vegas. Recently my family of five spent four nights as tourists, and we can't wait to go back.

Our extended weekend was split, with two nights in La Jolla and two nights in Mission Bay. The weather in the middle of February

was fantastic, as I hear it is year-round. We spent our time at tourist attractions, enjoying the beach, playing Frisbee at the park and enjoying some fabulous meals.

Our first two nights were enjoyed at the Grand Colonial Hotel in La Jolla, in the heart of the downtown district. Everything was within walking distance—beaches, sea lions, parks, restaurants, and shopping. The Grand Colonial is one of La Jolla's oldest original hotels, opening in 1913 as The Colonial Apartments and Hotel.

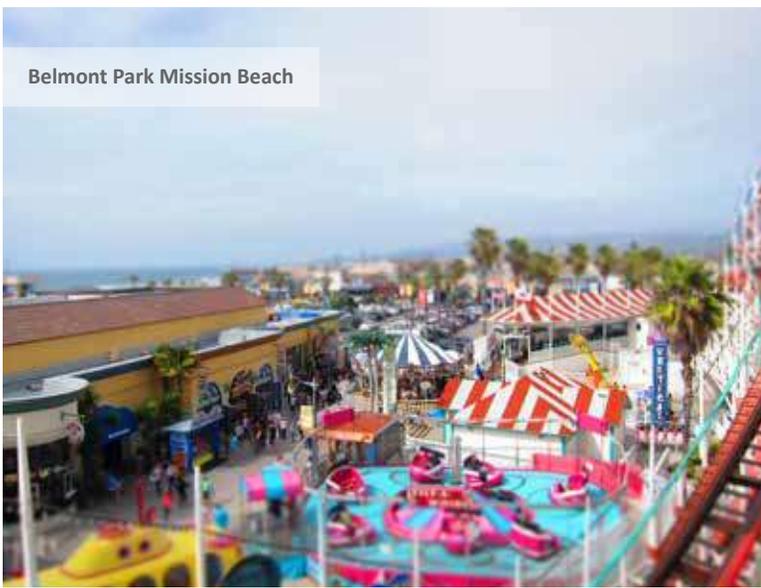


SeaWorld's Turtle Reef

COURTESY OF SEAWORLD



Grand Colonial Hotel



Belmont Park Mission Beach

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Having undergone many renovations over the years, most recently in 2007 investing \$8 million, the hotel now features 75 guest rooms as well as two adjacent historic landmarks—The Little Hotel by the Sea (from 1924) and the Garden Terraces (from 1926)—adding 18 additional suites to the inventory.

Our Garden Terrace suite boasted magnificent views of the Pacific Ocean and California coastline. NINE-TEN, the hotel's restaurant, offers a sophisticated and casual menu created by award-winning Chef Jason Knibb and Pastry Chef Rachel King. With three seating options, you can enjoy the stunning outdoor terrace with peeks of the ocean, sidewalk café tables along downtown La Jolla's historic Prospect Street or an intimate dining room. All along Prospect Street are dining choices, bars, shopping and even a few options to dance the night away.

Our first full day was filled with family friendly activities. First stop—Birch Aquarium—was a quick five-minute drive up the coast from the hotel's front door. We enjoyed the aquarium in the morning, which seemed to work out well as the crowds were thin. Located on a picturesque bluff, the aquarium features more than 60 tanks of colorful marine life. Our four-year old daughter loved everything about the aquarium and I now have over 100 pictures on my phone of coral reefs, fish, seahorses, jellyfish, a sea turtle and sharks. The whole family enjoyed the aquarium as well, not even one complaint

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Birch Aquarium



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La Jolla park and coastline

from our teenage boys about being bored—a major plus in my book.

After a quick bite to eat, we headed back to the Grand Colonial where we traded our walking shoes for flip flops, Frisbee, beach towels and sand castle building supplies. A few hundred yards from the hotel is a small, easily accessible beach. While it wasn't big enough for the Frisbee, it was great for wave running, sand castle building and soaking up the sun. Later in the afternoon we walked up the beach for just a few minutes where we ended up at

an expansive park perfect for the Frisbee. Our evening included a family dinner at a local pizza joint and a few cocktails for my husband and me on the hotel's outdoor terrace after the kids had called it a night.

From La Jolla and the Grand Colonial Hotel, we ventured south to Mission Bay and our new hotel, the Catamaran Resort. Mission Bay is characterized by sparkling beaches, miles of boardwalks and bicycle paths and a plethora of recreational activities. After checking in, we ventured down the road

about five minutes by taxi (to avoid parking) to Belmont Park amusement park. Here at San Diego's only beachfront amusement park, we enjoyed rides and a round of miniature golf. One of our sons actually succeeded at those impossible pay-to-play games and won a large SpongeBob Square Pants for his thrilled sister. The park is a good size for the area, but not overwhelming. A couple of hours was perfect to thoroughly enjoy it.

The Catamaran Resort is nestled on the tranquil waters of Mission Bay and just

JOANNE DIBONA



Oceana Restaurant at the Catamaran Resort

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Shipwreck Rapids ride at SeaWorld



Mission Bay

COURTESY BRETT SHOAF

across the street from Pacific Beach. While walking the grounds, you feel as if you have entered a tropical paradise with palm trees, lush vegetation, bamboo, tiki torches, koi ponds, waterfalls and exotic birds. Our Bay-front Suite had its own private balcony with breathtaking views of Mission Bay. A variety of activities are available, including kayaking, paddle boarding and pedal boats. Again, we spent our evening enjoying the beach and grassy areas. I was also fortunate to visit the Catamaran Spa during our stay, enjoying a

50-minute Swedish massage. The facility is first-class, offering a variety of services.

Our final activity of the vacation was a trip to SeaWorld. It was busy as ever, and I would most definitely suggest leaving the park a bit before closing to avoid parking lot traffic. Sea World is always a blast, and we thoroughly enjoyed the new Explorers Reef, a sea lion show, the penguins, Turtle Reef, *Sesame Street* Bay of Play (for our youngest) and the unforgettable Shipwreck Rapids where we were thoroughly soaked.

For our final evening, we enjoyed an amazing dinner at Oceana Restaurant at the Catamaran Resort. Our table was on the extensive patio overlooking the bay and the food was delicious and the service amazing. After dinner we enjoyed one last stroll along the beach, counting the stars wondering how soon we could return.&

**For more information**

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