

STUNNING SAN DIEGO

This Southern California port city welcomes cruisers with easy dockage, world-class marinas, and that incredible zoo!

By Doug Thompson



Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina; giraffes at the San Diego Zoo; Gaslamp Quarter



HILTON SAN DIEGO: MELANIE STOCKER; LISA FIELD/SANDIEGO.ORG

San Diego may play second fiddle to Los Angeles and San Francisco in entertainment and commerce, but it is tops for recreational cruisers. This port city is a launching point for voyages to Hawaii and Mexico as well as an important stop for cruisers heading to and from Alaska and South America.

When you enter the San Diego Bay, you're struck by not only its size, but also its ships—it is 12 miles long, as wide as 3 miles, and home to the U.S. Navy Pacific Fleet and Naval Air Station North Island. Aircraft carriers, submarines, and other warships are commonplace. Approaching from the north on a clear day, boats running near the coast will spy the tony shores and cliffside homes of La Jolla and Point Loma. Mild weather and warmer ocean waters offer a contrast to the colder climes of San Francisco and Los Angeles—the average temperature in San Diego is 72 degrees year-round.

While the Pacific Ocean temperatures hover in the high 60s, the breezes, and often strong winds, make for predictable sailing conditions. The America's Cup was hosted by the San Diego Yacht Club and contested out of the Port of San Diego three times (1988, 1992, and 1995).

"When we cruise down from Santa Barbara to Mexico, we like all the options you have around the Port of San Diego," says Jim Johns of Montecito, who cruises the coast of California south to Los Cabos, Mexico, in his Marlow Explorer 61E. "There are visiting slips you can rent out for a day or longer as well as anchorages. We often spend more time in San Diego than planned."

And why not? Vessels can remain at the Guest Dock facility on the southern end Shelter Island for a few hours or up to 15 days. The facility is maintained by the San Diego Unified Port District and has 26 slips for boats up to 65 feet in length.

Once docked, you can begin to explore both the land and sea. Visit the legendary San Diego Zoo, the lively Gaslamp Quarter downtown, the trails of Sunset Cliffs Natural Park, the historic Old Point Loma Lighthouse, and the parks around Mission Bay.

Anchorage, Dockage for Cruisers

Cruisers looking for dockage other than the Guest Dock facility have many options on Harbor Island, Shelter Island, and downtown at the Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina.

Harbor Island West Marina is situated for easy access to the bay or ocean. Its 620 slips accommodate vessels from 21 to 100 feet, and the marina has a full-service fuel dock, chandlery, laundry, pool, and more. Harbor Island is less than a mile from the San Diego International Airport. (Harbor Island Drive connects to the airline terminals.)

Shelter Island Marina offers the closest proximity to the ocean and is also near marine service yards and suppliers. Its slips accommodate boats from 20 to 200 feet. Water, electricity, cable TV hookups, and Wi-Fi are included as are amenities at the adjacent Island Palms Hotel, like the restaurant, fitness center, and pool.



Sunset over Harbor Island Marina

Within walking distance of downtown, the Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina has 450 slips for boats 25 to 125 feet. All the benefits of a full-service Marriott are included, such as the pool, spa, and fitness center. Amenities like water, electricity, cable TV, and Wi-Fi are available, and there is secure card-controlled access to the docks.

If you would rather anchor on your own, La Playa Cove in the Shelter Island Basin, Glorietta Bay south of the Coronado Golf Course, and the Cruiser Anchorage near the eastern tip of Harbor Island are popular spots.

Go Ashore for Adventure

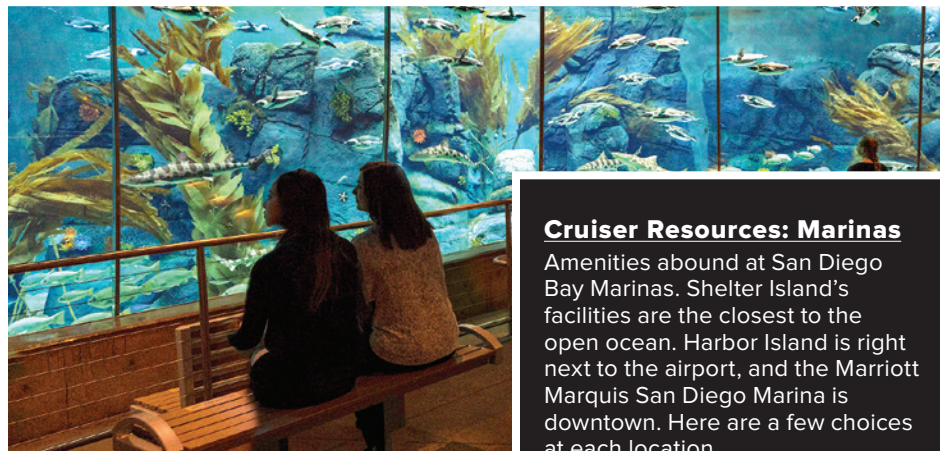
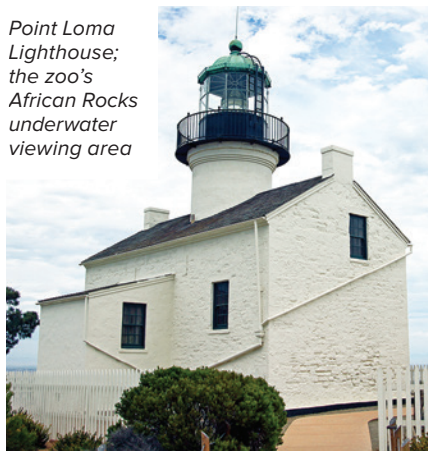
Day trips to the San Diego Zoo, Safari Park, and SeaWorld San Diego are the staple of every travel story, but trust me, it's not hype. Each venue features wondrous sights and scenes surpassed only by the ease of the experience. The zoo is in Balboa Park near downtown, and its 100 acres are home to 3,700 animals and more than 660 species and subspecies. There are also more than 700,000 plants that will make it feel like a jungle with walking tours through various bioclimate zones. Whether on foot or on a bus tour, you can see more animals in four hours than you can count. It is well worth it for visitors of any age.

The San Diego Zoo Safari Park is about 35 miles from the main zoo and is much larger at 1,800 acres. More than 3,000 animals, including the big ones like giraffes and rhinos, represent over 300 species that live in open fields among the hills of Escondido and with a little imagination, it feels like you're on an African safari.

You can visit both the Zoo and Safari Park in a single day, but it's a long day, especially with the drive. If you're up for the challenge, I suggest going to the Safari Park first and finishing at the Zoo.

Animals aside, water is still what makes San Diego unique, and that includes a trip to Mission Bay. The aquatic park there has everything from personal watercraft to kayaking to kitesurfing. There are also picnic areas, beaches, and bike paths. Ski Beach is popular for parties day and night, and Santa Clara Point is the spot for rentals. For trailer boaters

Point Loma Lighthouse; the zoo's African Rocks underwater viewing area



or anyone without a boat, Dana Landing offers a marina, launch ramp, and a sportfishing center.

SeaWorld took a bit of a hit in 2013 after the movie *Blackfish* about captive killer whales debuted. The park still has a show called "Orca Encounter;" however, SeaWorld boasts many other attractions, including shows with dolphins and sea lions, as well as aquariums and thrill rides.

Once you tire of the parks, the Gaslamp Quarter is alive in downtown. While it covers only 16-and-a-half blocks, the district is jammed with restaurants, nightclubs, and Petco Park, home to the San Diego Padres. Gaslamp's origin stretches back to 1850, when the first effort to build a town on the waterfront began. Accessible via the I-5 freeway and rail and bus lines, Gaslamp Quarter received its official charter in 1982.

A car ride (or through a ride-sharing company) will land you across the bay from downtown on Coronado Island. Coronado offers peaceful beaches, gentle surf, and

Cruiser Resources: Marinas

Amenities abound at San Diego Bay Marinas. Shelter Island's facilities are the closest to the open ocean. Harbor Island is right next to the airport, and the Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina is downtown. Here are a few choices at each location.

SHELTER ISLAND

Bay Club Marina
(619) 224-8888
bayclubhotel.com/marina

Kona Kai Marina
(619) 224-7547
konakaimarina.com

Shelter Island Marina at the Island Palms Hotel
(619) 223-0301
islandpalms.com/shelter-island-marina



Mission Bay

distinctive architecture. Celebrations are low-key—the Coronado Flower Show has been held there every spring since 1922. Hotel del Coronado (built in 1888) is a top destination. The San Diego-Coronado Bridge that stretches across the skyline will get you there or Flagship Cruises runs an inexpensive ferry across the bay to Seaport Village near downtown.

There is so much more to do around San Diego—take the boat and explore sea caves near La Jolla by kayak or make the 80-mile journey one-way up to the town of Avalon on Catalina Island. However, most of San Diego's laid-back charm comes from having great options close by. As long as you're near the Port of San Diego, there's a feeling that adventure and good times are never far away. 🌊

Cruiser Resources: Marinas (cont.)

HARBOR ISLAND
Cabrillo Isle Marina
(619) 297-6222
cabrilloisle.com

Harbor Island West Marina
(619) 291-6440
harborislandwest.com

Sunroad Resort Marina
(619) 574-0736
sdmarina.com

DOWNTOWN/ CORONADO ISLAND

Marriott Marquis San Diego Marina
(619) 230-8995
marriott.com

Loews Crown Isle Marina at Coronado Bay Resort
(619) 424-4455
loewshotels.com/hotels/sandiego

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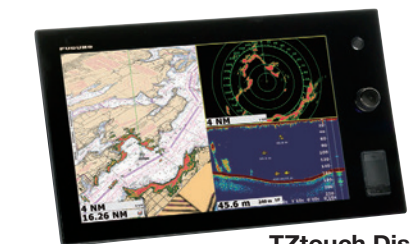
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