

3 Fun-Filled Days in San Diego: A Fun-Filled Itinerary.



[Photo by Danny Vanhuang from Pexels](#)

San Diego is one of the most popular travel destinations for good reason. With its pristine beaches, multiple attractions, and near-perfect weather year-round, it's not difficult to create a fun-filled three-day excursion that gives you a taste of everything this area has to offer.

Having lived in Ocean Beach and worked downtown for a couple of years, I've had the opportunity to explore the different areas of San Diego, each with its own unique culture and lifestyle. From the beaches to the parks and everything in between, this three-day itinerary should give you a chance to explore and experience one of our nation's top travel destinations.

Day 1

The mission for day 1 is exactly that, a visit to the Mission Bay area of San Diego. Mission Bay is the perfect way to jumpstart your three-day adventure; you can't go wrong with a marine-themed day at one of the most coveted places in the world.

Meet and greet marine life at SeaWorld San Diego.

One of San Diego's most popular attractions is [SeaWorld](#), it doesn't need much of an introduction. There is so much to see and do here. It's a good idea to go online to see what's there and make a plan ahead of time. Going first thing in the morning can ease the parking and entrance traffic if you go early.

The Reef Touchpools and Bat Ray Shallows are great for kids because you get to put your hands in the water and touch the sea life. This amazing sea park also hosts Beluga Whales, sea turtles, penguins, sharks, and flamingos to name a few.

Sea World also offers a variety of tours and "encounters" like the [Killer Whales Up-Close Tour](#) and the [Sloth Encounter Tour](#). I really like [The Sea Lion Encounter](#) because being a resident of Southern California, I was able to learn a lot about one of our most commonly seen sea mammals.

SeaWorld San Diego also has an impressive selection of [rides and roller coasters](#) if you're looking to add a little more excitement to your visit. These ocean-themed roller coasters can really add a thrill to your SeaWorld experience.

If you're visiting with younger kids, it may be worth your while popping into the [Sesame Street Bay of Play](#). Some of the highlights include a storytime, dance party, and a meet and greet with the characters.

Have lunch at Covewood Restaurant.

Covewood Restaurant is located inside the San Diego Mission Bay Resort and is open to the public. This is a worthwhile stop if you're looking for a great meal with a beautiful view.

Located in the heart of Mission Bay, [Covewood Restaurant](#) allows its patrons to indulge in some of the best California coastal cuisines the area has to offer.

The nice thing about Covewood Restaurant is that it has an array of outdoor patios for dining al fresco as well as plenty of space inside too. I like to come here for lunch and sit and watch the ocean.

There is so much good food here too, California Cuisine as it's called. Even though it's listed as a starter, their Caesar Salad is pretty big and packs a lot of flavors. The Parmesan and truffle fries are also a favorite of mine.

Kayak Mission Bay.

After replenishing your fuel at Covewood Restaurant, it's time to get up close and personal with the ocean and marine life you've studied at SeaWorld San Diego.

Renting a kayak is a great way to experience the Southern California ocean, and kayaking at Mission Bay has its advantages. If you're going to kayak, or paddleboard for that matter, this is the place to do it.

Mission Bay is a great place to kayak because you are not out on the open seas, you can paddle in the safety of the bay and marina. Additionally, most of the rental companies offer [lessons](#) for those who are kayaking for the first time.

The nice part about kayaking around Mission Bay is that there is so much to see along your paddle. You could kayak close to some of the beautiful beaches, stop by a restaurant or bar for a refreshment, or go birdwatching at the nature preserve. I like to paddle around the harbor area and look at all the fancy yachts and party boats.

End your day at Mission Beach Boardwalk.

The Mission Beach boardwalk is the perfect place to end your day. Depending on how much energy you have after traipsing around SeaWorld and kayaking the marina, there is something for every energy level at the Mission Bay Boardwalk.

If you're in the mood for something low key after your day of kayaking, consider bringing a blanket and taking to the beach to catch the sunset. If you've built up an appetite after your afternoon paddle, you can relax and watch the sunset from one of the many oceanfront restaurants that line the boardwalk.

[Belmont Park](#) is the main attraction at the Mission Beach boardwalk. This park has roller coaster rides, bumper cars, and a carousel along with other rides. If you have the energy and are feeling adventurous you can try some laser tag or zip line. I really love going to the arcade here; it's so much fun playing all the old time and newer arcade games. When I go there it seems like 20 minutes have passed when it's already been two hours.

Aside from the arcade, one of the most enjoyable things for me to do at Mission Beach Boardwalk is just stroll around and check out the scene. Do some people watching, try on some funky sunglasses from a vendor or peek at restaurant menus in the windows to see what they are serving. As you're walking along you'll get a great view of the Pacific Ocean and its lovely white sandy beaches; and if you time it right, an unforgettable sunset.

Day 2

Day 2 keeps us inland from the sea and park side for morning hours. Later in the day it's time to explore the finer side of San Diego at the Historic Gaslamp District. There are a multitude of activities to do in this area so I've picked out some of my favorites.

The San Diego Air and Space Museum.

Best known for its zoo and botanical gardens, this gem of a park has way more to offer. The [San Diego Air and Space Museum](#) is one of the most underrated attractions at Balboa Park. It's definitely worth checking out.

This museum is loaded with space and aviation history with a multitude of collections and exhibits. Starting as far back as The Wright Brothers with reproductions of some pretty impressive gliders to an actual Grumman F4F-4 Wildcat, the aviation history is beyond expectations. It's great for both kids and adults because you can get up close and personal with the planes.

The reason I like this museum so much is because you don't just walk around looking at things. Once when I visited this museum, there just happened to be a tour guide by the WW2 planes that gave a lot of interesting information about the planes. The flight simulator, the 4D movies and space exhibit are also great interactive activities for kids and adults.

Museum of Us.

The [Museum of Us](#) is a wonderful side trip if you're in the area of Balboa Park; especially if you are looking to avoid long lines and crowds. The Museum of Us is located at 1350 El Prado in Balboa Park just a short walk or drive from the Air and Space Museum.

The Museum of Us is great for both kids and adults. I like going here because many of the exhibits are really obscure and interesting; stuff you're not likely to find in many other museums. Though small in comparison to other museums, this one is jam packed with fun activities.

They have exhibits on everything from Ancient Egypt and Mayan history to exhibits on cannibals and monsters as well as a section on Beerology. There are also many different archeological and anthropological sections to explore.

If you have kids, you should definitely check out the [Adventure Kids in Egypt](#) exhibit. They offer the little ones an opportunity to do some excavating in the dig box and other things like interactive games and building models. After the kids section on Egypt you can transition to the [Ancient Egypt](#) exhibit for more art, cultural and religious artifacts.

Enjoy a meal at Panama 66.

By now you may have built up an appetite, luckily there are more than a few options in the Park. [PANAMA 66](#) is located in the sculpture garden area of the San Diego Museum of Art just at the other end of the Museum of Us at the entrance to the Sculpture Garden.

I love eating here for so many reasons, the food, the setting and the seating options. First of all, Panama 66 offers a variety of American and other style cuisine made with fresh ingredients; everything I've tried there was delicious. They have a scrumptious Brussels and burr at a salad and also sandwiches, burgers and entrees. They also have grab and go boxes of fresh food that you can grab and eat elsewhere.

I usually get a cheese board and a glass of wine and go for a picnic on the lawn across from the Botanical Building where alcohol is allowed. There are other seating choices too. The outside seating is a beautiful patio with views of the surrounding Sculpture Courtyard; they offer comfortable indoor seating too. But if you're like me, some good food and a nice beverage makes for a good picnic on one of the many lawns in the vicinity. Perfect place to enjoy a lunch or snack.

Take a walk on one of 4 beautiful trails.

There is a central hub so to speak where four different walking and hiking trails begin at the south end of Balboa Park. The kiosk is on Park Blvd at the intersection with Presidents Way; not so far from Panama 66. Miles I have walked each of these paths and there's something available for every level of walker or hiker. Also some of the paths are paved or use portions of a road so wheelchairs and strollers are accessible.

There is a kiosk with a [big map](#) and explanation of each trail. Most definitely check out the map before you embark on your adventure. Not only does the map show color coded trails to keep you on the right track, it also shows highlights along the way so you can choose your own adventure so to speak.

There are short, easy trails ranging from 0.3-1.2 miles that offer some historic and well known sites along the way. Other trails are a little longer and designed for those who want to explore

the native flora and fauna of Southern California. Some of these trails may be difficult but will take you to some of the lesser known areas of Balboa Park.

Visit the Historic Gaslamp Quarter.

At this point you've likely had your fill of the park, so it's time to head downtown. Just a hop, skip and a jump from Balboa park is the [Historic Gaslamp Quarter](#) of San Diego. This charming enclave in the middle of downtown will certainly give you a feel of what San Diego has to offer.

Many times you'll arrive on a day when there will be some kind of [event](#) going on like an open market or silent disco. If shopping is your thing, there is no lack of boutique stores here, there are also a slew of national retailers with all kinds of treasures from clothing and jewelry to books and bikes.

One of my favorite things to do when I visit the Gaslamp Quarter is just walk around looking at the shops and people. You're bound to find something interesting. Poking around the bookstore for something new to read on your trip is both stimulating and relaxing at the same time.

The Gaslamp Quarter in San Diego is well known for its historic buildings and lavish dining options so it's quite a memorable area to visit. The streets are lined with restaurants offering al Fresco dining serving everything from French to American Fare. This is the perfect place to enjoy an upscale dinner or cafe style tapas. I love dining outdoors here with the beautiful gas lamps in the foreground and backdrop of historic buildings.

If you're really looking to enjoy all that San Diego's Gaslamp Quarter has to offer, visit the [Altitude Sky Lounge](#). This rooftop bar has a stunning panoramic view of the San Diego area as well as a fire pit for chilly evenings. I love to go around sunset time and sit up there with a cocktail.

Day 3

Day three takes you to a true laid back San Diego beach experience followed by a visit to Old Town. Ocean Beach is one of the coolest beach cultures that emerged out of Southern California. This is the perfect place to explore and embrace what San Diego is all about.

Fishing at Ocean Beach Pier.

Fishing off the pier in Ocean Beach is a perfect way to start your morning. Go early and find a good place to park for the entire day. It's easy to get around Ocean Beach on foot for the most part.

The [Ocean Beach Pier](#) is one of the longest concrete piers on the West Coast, second to one in Santa Cruz. You will see some tackle shops in the area that have supplies ranging from kids toys to deep sea fishing gear; pick up an inexpensive rod and reel if you don't have one. There is a bait shop right by the start of the pier.

Since the pier is so long and the water so deep, there are an array of different fish swimming around like different varieties of perch, halibut, mackerel and bass to name just a few. When I go fishing here, I always make a point to stop at the tide pools to check out the starfish, if you've never seen a live starfish, this is the perfect opportunity.

Explore Sunset Cliffs.

[Sunset Cliffs Natural Park](#) is a lovely area of Ocean beach with spectacular views of the cliffs and Pacific Ocean. Even just a drive along Sunset Cliffs Boulevard affords some amazing views. I have a friend who lives in the neighborhood and she said she couldn't believe how many marriage proposals take place on those beautiful cliffs.

Aside from exploring all the shops, restaurants and attractions on Sunset Cliffs Boulevard, a walk in the sand or beach-side exploration trip should be on your agenda here. You can explore the rocks and tide pools, take a stroll on the beach, set up for a beach day, or take a rest and sit and watch the surfers.

Along the rocky cliffs is a sea cave that can be explored during low tide, and a white sandy area for laying out your towel, as well as a path that takes you on a short walk. This area of Ocean Beach should not be missed.

The Ocean Beach Farmers Market.

Ocean Beach is famous for its farmers market. This activity will require a little pre-planning since it's only open on Wednesdays 4-8 but it's well worth going to. You can find [The San Diego Farmers Market](#) on the 4900 block of Newport Avenue between Bacon and Cable Streets.

Here you'll find everything from fresh meat, seafood and produce to local fare and artisan crafts. Sample some of the county's best local offerings all at one place. I would love to come here for

their fresh count flowers which were always a lower price and better quality than the local supermarkets.

There are plenty of food vendors here too if you get hungry. From street tacos and ceviche to middle eastern and vegan choices, the food served here is restaurant quality. I always enjoyed getting a loaf from the baker or bread stands and a couple soft cheeses and go and eat it on the beach.

There's plenty more to do besides eat and shop for groceries. I've seen everything from belly dancers and street performers to live bands and performances at this farmers market. I have also seen a petting zoo a couple times along with pony and llama rides.

From Ocean town to Old Town.

[Old Town San Diego](#) is by far one of the most charming historic districts in the area, and there is free parking too. Old Town also has a State Park that includes a lot of historic sites and buildings draped in colorful Mexican Heritage.

The State Park area of Old town houses 19th-Century Colonial homes and businesses including a schoolhouse and courthouse. The Whaley House Museum that is said to be haunted is also in the park as well as the firehouse and theatre from back in the day.

There are plenty of eating opportunities in Old Town so long as you don't mind delicious, authentically cooked Mexican food from grandma's recipes. With all the fresh ingredients available in San Diego, you're sure to get some of the finest food the area has to offer.

Food and history is not all Old Town has to offer; there's more. Mariachi performers and live music fill the streets along with Folklorico Dancers and other traditional Mexican dance. I was there once on Cinco De Mayo and was lucky enough to witness a live Mariachi Band and Lucia liber wrestling.

The last time I was in Old Town I found this bar and restaurant near the Campo Santo Cemetery. The [Tahon Bar](#) has great food as well as private Mezcal tasting. Also, this place has an old time speakeasy where you're given the opportunity to confess a sin before entering this quaint hidden watering hole.

A City with it all.

San Diego is one of those unforgettable vacation destinations with memories built in the ocean waves, historic culture, and friendly people. Where else can you get this close to marine life, experience the surfer beach life, and while absorb the history and lifestyle of this wonderful city.

San Diego fills me with nostalgia. Warm days, colorful markets, pristine beaches and heaps of history and culture. This three day itinerary was designed to incorporate each of the different niches and cultures of San Diego and the surrounding area. San Diego really is the city with it all.