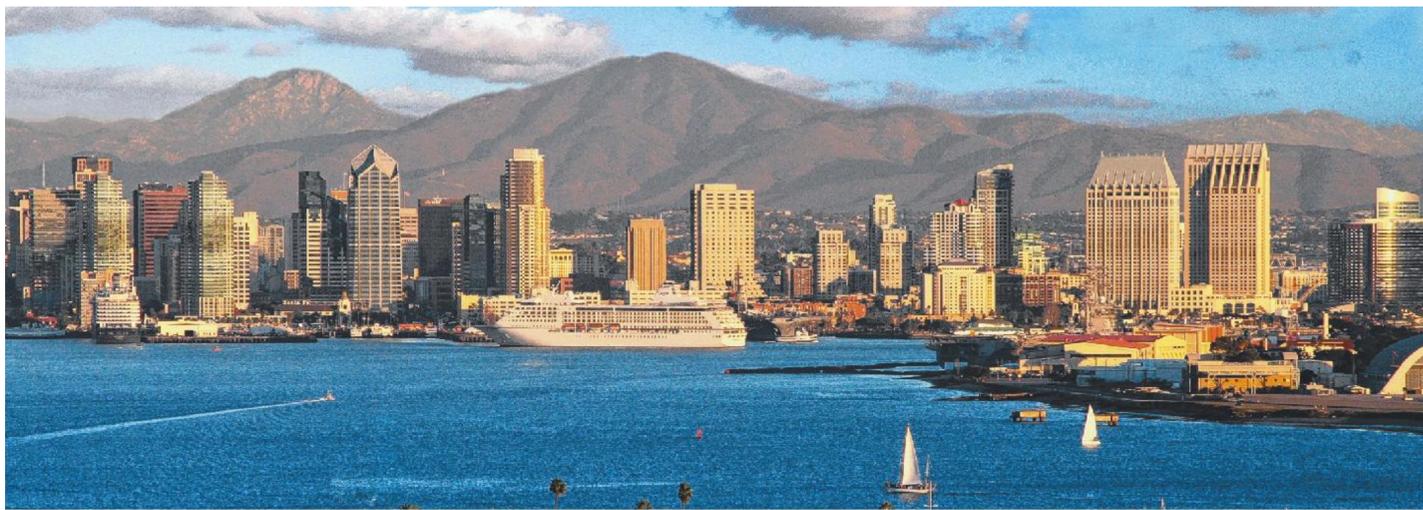


{ ONE PERFECT DAY }



San Diego, a bustling metropolis with more than 110km of Pacific Ocean coastline and rarely interrupted sunshine, also offers visitors a taste of old-style Southern California

PICTURES: SAN DIEGO CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

Just so very California

San Diego is every bit as fashionable as its big sister cities to the north

ANDREW CONWAY

IT may not have the chutzpah of Hollywood or the iconic span of the Golden Gate Bridge but don't be fooled into thinking that San Diego lives in the shadow of its more famous and showy big sisters to the north.

A world away from the cable car-clanging streets of San Francisco and star-spangled boulevards of Los Angeles, the official birthplace of California and eighth largest city in the US rightly basks in its own reflected glory.

When Portuguese explorer Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo berthed his trusty galleon in what is now San Diego Bay in 1542, it didn't take him long to realise this brave new world was worth keeping and he claimed the area for Spain.

Today's travellers see a modern metropolis with more than 100 vibrant neighbourhoods and a swag of world-class attractions and restaurants, all framed by more than 110km of Pacific Ocean coastline and drenched in almost year-round sunshine.

A beguiling blend of authentic Spanish, Mexican and US culture and architecture, San Diego offers a slice of old-style Southern California — or SoCal, as the locals call it — with a forward-thinking attitude that helps the city constantly reinvent itself.

Best arrival: Most Australians fly to Los Angeles and onwards with a domestic airline for the 40-minute hop south to San Diego International Airport.

A fun alternative is to pick up a hire car in LA and drive the scenic 2½-hour coastal route (via Interstate 5), which winds along some of SoCal's most famous beach communities.

Best tip: Pick up a copy of *Urbanist San Diego*, a free pocket-sized listing of the hottest restaurants, wine and beer bars, night life, boutiques, galleries and other in-vogue venues.

Best transport: You don't need a

car if you're keeping to the downtown area but it certainly helps if you want to explore farther afield.

San Diego's 59-Mile Scenic Drive is a terrific way to spend a day exploring some of the city's top attractions. Route maps are available at the visitor centre at 1140 North Harbor Drive, then follow the blue and yellow signs marked with a white seagull. More: sandiego.org.

Best orientation: It might be touristy but the easiest way to get a handle on the city is on the hop-on, hop-off Old Town Trolleys, which offer two-hour city circuits every 30 minutes, stopping at the Gaslamp Quarter, Coronado, Balboa Park, Little Italy, Old Town, Seaport Village and other prominent sights. Just be prepared for a goofy commentary. More: trolleytours.com.

Best beaches: With 15 main beaches and an average 266 days of sunshine annually, San Diego has sand between its toes pretty much year round.

Two popular hangouts are Pacific and Mission beaches, connected by a long boardwalk that bustles with inline skaters, skateboarders, joggers and cyclists. Historic Belmont Park (next to Mission Beach), with its vintage Giant Dipper and other classic amusements, is a weekend favourite for families. More: belmontpark.com.

Best neighbourhood: La Jolla (pronounced la hoy-a) translates from Spanish as "the jewel", a fitting description for this strikingly beautiful oceanside and Mediterranean-style village an easy 20-minute drive from the city. Leave the car at the conveniently located parking station in Prospect Place, then stroll the length of Coast Boulevard for spectacular ocean views.

Dine at George's at the Cove in the first-rate dining room, the more casual bistro or on the rooftop Ocean Terrace overlooking La Jolla Cove, then shop in the



La Jolla offers high-end shopping, fine dining and great views

high-end boutiques, art galleries and antiques stores on Prospect Street and Girard Avenue.

The scent in La Jolla Cove is more Eau de Guano than Givency, courtesy of the lolling sea lions, seals and pelicans, but the village is a super place to enjoy a sunny Sunday brunch or leisurely weekday lunch. More: lajollabythesea.com.

Best walk: The historic Gaslamp Quarter in the heart of the city was the red-light district in the late 1800s (and still has a slightly seedy edge to it during the day) but has been reinvented as a dynamic restaurant, entertainment and shopping area. Every Saturday at Ilam, the Gaslamp Quarter Historical Foundation offers a guided walking tour detailing the neighbourhood's colourful history, from Wyatt Earp's haunts to raucous gambling halls. More: gaslampquarter.org.

{ BEST BEDS }

THE new kid on the block is Hotel Palomar San Diego, a contemporary boutique hotel next to the historic Gaslamp Quarter in the heart of downtown. A reincarnation of the former Se Hotel, the Palomar has a funky urban twist with an intriguing Art in Motion theme, showcasing a continuously changing gallery. The cool, minimalist lobby is the social hub, the venue for complimentary morning coffee



and evening wine hours. The signature restaurant, Saltbox, is a gastro-lounge catering to a



The centrepiece of Balboa Park, the zoo is home to more than 4000 rare animals, many of which can be seen up close with a special backstage pass. A new Outback exhibit is being built this year to house the largest colony of koalas outside Australia. More: sandiegozoo.org.

Best museum: The word "park" really doesn't do Balboa Park justice because it's so much more than a green public space. Of the 17 world-class museums nestled within this extraordinary nature and culture precinct, the Museum of Man is a standout, taking visitors on a mesmerising journey through the anthropology of the Americas and other parts of the world. The ornate Spanish colonial architecture and landmark California Tower create a beautiful backdrop to the core and visiting exhibitions. More: museumofman.org.

Best dining: The restaurant scene here is sizzling, with a brigade of talented young chefs redefining SoCal cuisine. Two of the best are the always-busy Searsucker in the Gaslamp Quarter (where *Top Chef* finalist Brian Malarkey and his team create masterful "new American cuisine") and Bankers Hill (on 4th Avenue), which delivers stellar food, craft beers and high-octane cocktails in an edge space. More: searsucker.com; bankershill.com.

Best rooftop pool: When evening turns to late night, San Diego moves seamlessly from restaurant to rooftop, invariably at one of the sexy pool bars perched atop the city's best hotels. With its splashy pool, swing chairs, fire pits, private cabanas and panoramic skyline views, Ivy Rooftop at Andaz San Diego in the Gaslamp Quarter turns SoCal into SoCool, attracting a fashion-forward crowd that knows the difference between a caipirinha and a caipiroska. More: sandiego.andaz.hyatt.com; visitcalifornia.com.au

Best craft beer: San Diego has become the craft beer capital of America in recent years and boasts several award-winning breweries and brew-pubs. Hamiltons Tavern in South Park is the oldest beer establishment in the city, serving an outstanding selection of real ales and craft beers for more than 75 years. More: hamiltonstavern.com.

Best sports action: Be sure to take in a baseball game at Petco Park, home to the beloved Padres, who carry the weight of the city's pride (and expectations) each season. If you're not in town during the Major League Baseball season, which typically runs from April to October, a behind-the-scenes tour of Petco Park offers a fascinating insight into the game. More: sandiego.padres.mlb.com.

Best cocktails: Its location next to the San Diego Convention Centre may not be all that salubrious but the Hilton San Diego Bayfront makes keynote cocktails at sundown. Take a seat on the outdoor waterfront terrace of Odysea bar, pair the rock shrimp ceviche with arguably the best cosmopolitan cocktail on the US west coast, and settle in for a sunset to remember. More: hilton.com.

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Lie down and face the facts

THE SPA TOURIST

Membership of a health club can give you a lift

SUSAN KUROSAWA

IT used to be that if there were an hour to spare during a working day, women in particular would check out a shopping sale or go for a worthy walk.

Every shop seems to be on sale in Sydney, where I live, so there's little pressure to react to announcements of discounts and special offers. Such retail therapy, as it is routinely known, can wait until the wide-open weekend. Improving walks? One foot after the other, surely, is just to get from point A to B, or maybe C, with B being a congenial cafe.

I belong to the school that believes long walks can be very good indeed, but only when taken, one-way, by someone you don't care for.

In 2012, if you are in Sydney and you have hours up your sleeve and are serious about your complexion and the vagaries of ageing on all parts of the body, you go to a day spa. Better still, you go beyond pampering treats to a maintenance schedule and you join one, just as we signed up to gyms in the 1980s and reading groups in the 90s.

The day spa I want to join is also a health club, but not just of the torture-device kind (for which, read such revelations as chest presses and, yelp, leg extension devices).

The Observatory Health Club (which includes a two-level day spa) at the elegant hotel of the same name on the southwest side of the harbour, offers platinum and gold packages with various benefits. For starters, the six-month gold membership costs \$1250 (instalments accepted) and includes unlimited use of the 20m heated indoor pool (with domed star-wood ceiling, stately columns and deckchairs), spa, steam room scented with essential oils, sauna and gym.

Each month there's a choice of a complimentary spa treatment up to \$105 Mondays to Thursdays, one-hour personal training session, six guest passes and discounts on further day-spa therapies and meals at the hotel's fine Galileo restaurant.

Not included in the sign-up is a Carita Perfect Gold Facial, because that is another glittering dimension altogether and if everyone knew about these, there would be a queue to, well, at least Mars.



The 20m heated pool at the Observatory Hotel in Sydney

It's an astonishing 90-minute procedure involving a Carita product called Perfect Gold serum, which contains 24ct gold leaf. The business end of things is a Pro-Lift machine, which the therapist uses to massage your face and transmit a current to intensify the action of the skincare serum and stimulate muscles. It makes my skin buzz and tingle but the slight discomfort is soon forgotten when therapist Rebecca shows me the "before and after" effects.

The lifted side of my face is smoother and somehow tighter; the untreated side is its usual weary self. I insist she brings my specs so I can properly inspect the results.

Even a stubborn age spot on my right cheek looks much lighter; my forehead is less wrinkled. This is the best result imaginable without what the trade calls injectables (and they don't mean yellow fever jabs).

You'd need to cough up \$300 pretty regularly for ongoing sessions to achieve long-lasting results, but as most facials are a bit wishy-washy and more about prettying-up than proven results, this one is out of the (golden) box.

Other special therapies at the Observatory Hotel Day Spa include diamond microdermabrasion facials and applications of crushed pearl powder on tired skin, or massages with "self-heating tiger clam shells" or volcanic stones.

There's an assortment of packages, too, including afternoon teas in the hotel's Globe Bar partnered with spa appointments, twilight swims or accommodation. Or you could just get your eyebrows organised or lashes lengthened and curled so you look like a giraffe, which is very "this decade".

When I tell my godmother about the magical, gold-infused facial and my membership application and how I plan to swim under make-believe stars each day and maybe even pop a pedicured toe into the gym, she sighs in disbelief.

When she was a working girl in the 1950s, she tells me, the weekday highlight was a sandwich in Sydney's Hyde Park, the crusts crumbled and fed to the pigeons.

We agree that in spa-obsessed 2012, that would be strictly for the birds.

Checklist

The Observatory Hotel Day Spa recently partnered with Parisian brand Carita for two signature treatments with 24-carat gold leaf — Perfect Gold Facial (90 minutes, \$300) and Perfect Gold Body Massage (60 minutes, \$175; 90 minutes, \$200). More: (02) 8248 5250; observatoryhotel.com.au.

{ MAKING A DIFFERENCE }

Australian therapists take a hands-on journey to Bhutan

SUZANNE CARAGIANIS
WITH VANESSA HOLOHAN

THE expression "to lend a hand" is familiar to most people but we had a chance recently to provide help in a specific hands-on way in Bhutan.

Tourism is limited in this beautiful Himalayan kingdom to ensure the fragile environment remains unspoiled. Our visit was not as tourists — one of us is a

physiotherapist, the other an occupational therapist — but as volunteers providing professional care for hands, which are every person's most essential tools.

In Bhutan, as in too many other developing countries, the medical treatment and rehabilitation of hand injuries and disorders are often overlooked because of a lack of expertise. Typical injuries include fractures, amputations, tendon damage, deformities and, particularly, burns as the rural

Bhutanese generally cook their food over wood fires.

On this most recent trip (Suzanne's third), we gave our time and skills as upper-limb therapists to prepare and deliver an education and training program for local medical staff and to treat patients at hospitals in Thimphu, the capital, and Punakha in central Bhutan.

We conducted two-day courses on the conservative management of upper-limb injuries and also

taught therapists how to use two electric sewing machines (for the fabrication of neoprene splints) that had generously been donated to us ahead of our visit.

Our courses were an overwhelming success, with 69 attendees, including the country's four orthopedic surgeons; all the participants passed.

Before our visit we had forwarded 18 boxes of donated hand-therapy equipment, such as splinting materials, prefabricated

splints, exercise aids and reference books, and these materials are now being put to good use in district hospitals throughout Bhutan.

The success of this latest visit was capped by an invitation to meet senior health officials from the Bhutanese government to establish a memorandum of understanding. We expect to formalise the agreement this year, which will provide a supportive framework for the further development of the project. We are very

much looking forward to our visits in 2013 and 2014.

Checklist

Suzanne Caragianis and Vanessa Holohan are based in Adelaide, where a fundraising evening to support future visits to Bhutan will be held on August 18. More: suzannecaragianis.com.au; bhutanmedicalmission.com.au; kingdomofbhutan.com

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{ A LITTLE FLIGHT READING }

The Book of Idle Pleasures
Edited by Dan Kieran and Tom Hodgkinson (Ebury Press/Random House \$29.95)
THIS charming book reflects on myriad time-wasting treats, from cloud watching and skimming stones to lying in hammocks and learning the names of trees. It's an English book (hence the suggestions we gather food from hedgerows and recline on the top deck of a bus) but its appeal is universal in this time-strapped era.
Even reading the short essays, each with a lovely drawing by Ged Wells, seems appropriately idle.
SUSAN KUROSAWA

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