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**SAN DIEGO STORY IDEAS**

**ARTS & CULTURE**

With a scene that spans from internationally renowned museums and theater companies to experimental pop-up galleries in abandoned warehouses, San Diego’s artistic landscape is one of the nation’s most diverse.

Home of the La Jolla Playhouse and The Old Globe theatre, San Diego is a leading theater producing town. Broadway shows that originated in San Diego include *Into the Wood, Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Bonnie and Clyde* along with past Tony-Award ® winners like *Memphis* and *Jersey Boys*. San Diego also boasts the 1,200-acre Balboa Park, the largest urban cultural park in the United States. Often referred to as the “Smithsonian of the West” and is home to 17 museums, numerous art galleries, five theaters including The Old Globe, and 16 beautiful gardens.

Major cultural icons like the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego and the Rady Shell at Jacobs Park continually push boundaries with groundbreaking shows that challenge artistic genres, while local neighborhoods offer a kaleidoscope of theater, dance, music, street festivals and visual art events held throughout the year. Young artists are creating vibrant underground and emerging arts districts in once blighted neighborhoods, such as North Park and Barrio Logan, adding to San Diego’s growing reputation as an undiscovered arts destination.

**CALI-BAJA CUISINE**

With some of the country’s most sought-after produce, easy accessibility to fresh fish and crustaceans from the Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Cortez, and an unquestionable gastronomic influence from its proximity to Mexico, it is no wonder why San Diego has developed a culinary identity all its own. Known as “Cali-Baja,” the region’s unique cuisine reflects the heart and soul of San Diego, an innovative culinary destination.

Embracing the fruits of the land and Baja Mexico’s culinary essence, top chef talent and restaurateurs focus on local culture over trends. While the best known Cali-Baja staple is the fish taco, the region’s 6,700+ eateries encompass everything from sophisticated temples of haute cuisine to casual, surfside shacks, all sharing a commitment to fresh ingredients and cross-border flavors that offer a multifaceted and multicultural culinary experience.

From sampling heirloom produce at a farmer’s roadside stand to attending one of the region’s major culinary events, serious foodies and novice gourmands alike delight in discovering this under-the-radar cuisine through the range of tours and tastings, epicurean shopping and special food and wine events around town. San Diego Restaurant Weeks occur twice annually in September and January and the popular San Diego Bay Wine & Food Festival occurs annually in November.

**CAPITAL OF CRAFT BEER**

While many cities in the U.S. have craft breweries, few cities can match San Diego’s reputation as a craft beer leader. Industry trailblazers like Karl Strauss and Stone Brewing Company began in San Diego, and the region boasts more than 150 craft breweries with several located within a mile of San Diego’s 70-mile stretch of coastline.

Cited as “a sunny heaven for suds lovers” by *The New York Times*, San Diego is home to innovative breweries that have brought home major awards at international competitions, including the World Beer Cup, where San Diego garnered more awards than traditional brewing destinations like Germany and Belgium. The region is known for popularizing the hops-forward “West Coast IPA” beer style. White Labs, one of the world’s leading suppliers of brewer’s yeast and a major innovator in the field, also calls San Diego home.

With a casual, relaxed atmosphere and locals who take good beer seriously without taking themselves too seriously, San Diego is the perfect place to escape for a libation vacation. Every November, San Diego hosts San Diego Beer Week, an annual 10-day-long craft beer celebration throughout the county. Smaller beer celebrations and tasting events are also held in San Diego neighborhoods throughout the year.

**DOWNTOWN SAN DIEGO AND THE HISTORIC GASLAMP QUARTER**

Downtown San Diego is a dynamic urban center with trendy new restaurants, nightclubs and retail shops opening throughout the year. Downtown is composed of eight distinct neighborhoods, including the historic Gaslamp Quarter, colorful Little Italy and East Village, each with a distinct personality and allure.

In the historic Gaslamp Quarter, the 16½-blocks listed on the National Register of Historic Places, grand Victorian-era buildings are home to over 200 restaurants, bars, nightclubs, lounges, boutiques, and shops to peruse. When the sun sets, the area's nightlife sizzles, attracting thousands of diners, theatergoers and nightclub patrons.

Once home to generations of Italian families who made their living in the local tuna fishing industry, charming Little Italy is a quaint and lively neighborhood filled with outdoor patio cafes, restaurants, pubs, art galleries, boutique shops, the Piazza della Famiglia and the beautiful Amici Park. The revitalization of East Village, a former warehouse district, was ignited in 2004 with the opening of Petro Park, the San Diego Padres’ baseball stadium. Today, visitors can enjoy trendy hotels, fashionable restaurants and cafes, rooftop bars, boutique shops and live music venues scattered throughout the area.

**EARLY CALIFORNIA HISTORY**

San Diego is not only California’s birthplace—it is also the state’s historic soul. Visitors can forego the history books and instead travel to San Diego for a fascinating lesson on California’s beginnings. Whether it is visiting Cabrillo National Monument on Point Loma where Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, the first European to explore present-day California, landed in 1542 or exploring a gold mine from Southern California’s Gold Rush days of 1870 in the historic mountain town of Julian, San Diego is steeped in historical journeys from the scenic coast to rustic inland.

Notable historic sites include the Maritime Museum of San Diego’s *San Salvador*, a new historically accurate, working replica of Cabrillo’s 16th century Spanish galleon ship, Mission San Diego de Alcala and Mission San Luis Rey, the first and largest of California’s missions, respectively. The Land of the First People park in Old Town San Diego State Historic Park pays homage to the Kumeyaay, San Diego’s original native habitats. Old Town also features San Diego’s rich Mexican heritage with historical sites, colorful shops and delicious food. Downtown’s historic Gaslamp Quarter has secretes of its own, it was an infamous “red light” district during the Wild West days of the late 1800s. Popular historic tours occur year-round and are complemented by annual historical events like the Festival of the Bells every July at the Mission San Diego and the Cabrillo Festival every September at Cabrillo National Monument.

**FAMILY DESTINATION**

San Diego is consistently recognized as one of the leading family destinations worldwide for families with children of all ages. In addition to 70 miles of pristine beaches, nearly perfect climate and popular year-round special events, San Diego is known for world-class family attractions including the San Diego Zoo, San Diego Zoo Safari Park, LEGOLAND California, SeaWorld San Diego and Balboa Park. San Diego also offers the Birch Aquarium at Scripps, Sesame Place San Diego theme park, Belmont Park with its historic Giant Dipper rollercoaster, and so much more.

During the entire month of October, families with children can enjoy special deals at San Diego hotels, restaurants, attractions, museums and transportation companies during “Kids Free San Diego” Month. Providing families an opportunity to save during budget-conscious times, “Kids Free San Diego” Month offers a variety of “kids free” incentives ranging from complimentary meals and attraction admission to welcome amenities at area hotels.

**GOLF**

San Diego offers 72 golf courses in every conceivable setting, from the ocean to the mountains to the desert. The courses feature designs from a “Who’s Who” of golf course architects like Tom Fazio, Rees Jones, Arnold Palmer, Gary Player, Ted Robinson and more. The county is also home to approximately 20 golf manufacturers including the nationally recognized names Callaway, TaylorMade and Titleist Golf.

**HARBOR AND BAYFRONT**

Two treasured island getaways on sparkling San Diego Bay, Shelter Island and Harbor Island are located just minutes outside of downtown San Diego but feel worlds away. Shelter Island and Harbor Island, conveniently located across the street from San Diego International Airport, both offer a relaxing escape paired with a convenient location. Showcasing their beautiful bayfront setting, these laid-back, manmade isles feature fantastic waterfront dining with unparalleled panoramas of the city, Point Loma and the bustling harbor. Charming nautical- and tropical-themed hotels and resorts, including one with its own private sandy beach, and expansive bayside parks perfect for bicycling and sunset strolls set the tone for relaxation. Dramatic public art installations adorn both islands, including the giant seashell-inspired “Pacific Portal” gazebo and “Pearl of the Pacific” fountain by James Hubbell, “San Diego’s Gaudi,” and the Yokohama Friendship Bell housed in a Japanese pagoda, a gift from San Diego’s sister city Yokohama. Visitors can make the most of these islands’ prime bayfront settings while touring Shelter Island’s prominent Polynesian and tiki-inspired art and architecture, grabbing a pint at San Diego's only over water craft beer bar or trying their luck pier fishing with local anglers.

**HISTORIC HIGHWAY 101 AND THE NORTH COUNTY COASTLINE**

With majestic sandstone cliffs covered in towering pine trees and expansive sandy beaches along the sparkling Pacific, San Diego’s North County coastline offers some of the most beautiful scenery in the nation. Visitors can drive along Historic Highway 101 from luxurious Del Mar to laid-back Oceanside and enjoy numerous sites en route, along with diverse and vibrant communities that capture the true essence of a Southern California vacation.

Highlights include the Del Mar Racetrack where the “turf meets the surf” at one of the country’s most scenic racetracks. The Cedros Design District in Solana Beach is a seaside niche of artist studios, galleries and boutique shops specializing in everything from clothing and wearable art to imported hand-crafted items. The iconic Swami’s break in Encinitas is rated one the best surf spots in the nation and was made famous by the Beach Boys’ hit song “Surfin’ U.S.A.” Oceanside is home to the longest wooden pier on the West Coast and the California Surf Museum.

**LA JOLLA**

The Mediterranean-style village of La Jolla, hugging the Pacific coastline, is considered the “jewel” of San Diego. One of the most sought-after vacation destinations in Southern California, La Jolla offers luxurious hotels and resorts, fine dining with breathtaking ocean views, retail shopping that rivals northern neighbors Rodeo Drive and South Coast Plaza, and sophisticated, world-class arts and culture like the Tony Award-winning La Jolla Playhouse, Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego and Murals of La Jolla, featuring the works of internationally renowned artists. La Jolla’s strikingly beautiful setting is complemented by endless outdoor recreational activities including snorkeling, scuba diving, kayaking, surfing, hang gliding/paragliding at America’s most popular coastal soaring site and golf at the world-renowned Torrey Pines Golf Course. Notable special events include the Farmers Insurance Open in January, the La Jolla Concours D’Elegance Motor Car Classic in April and the La Jolla Festival of the Arts in June.

**LUXURY RESORTS**

From coastal to inland properties, San Diego is home to a variety of luxurious resorts and hotels that offer a multitude of amenities to pamper their guests. Top-rated properties include the AAA Five Diamond, grand Craftsman-style Lodge at Torrey Pines, set above the sparkling Pacific in La Jolla, and the Fairmont Grand Del Mar, nestled amidst the serene Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve. Other notable premium properties include the elegant La Valencia Hotel, the “Pink Lady” of La Jolla; Estancia La Jolla Hotel & Spa, offering a sophisticated, California rancho-style ambiance; La Jolla Beach & Tennis Club, featuring one of Southern California’s few private beaches; Paradise Point Resort, a tropical oasis on Mission Bay; Rancho Bernardo Inn, situated in San Diego’s bucolic foothills; and The Pendry San Diego, offering an upscale urban experience in a laid-back beach-inspired setting.

**MILITARY**

San Diego's Navy and Marine Corps bases form the largest military complex in the world. San Diego and the U.S. military have a long and proud heritage that began in 1846 during the U.S.-Mexican War. Guests can get up-close views of U.S. Navy ships anchored in San Diego Bay during Fleet Week, one of San Diego's most notable annual events featuring the only Navy Open House on the West Coast and the popular Miramar Air Show, starring the Blue Angels, which occurs every fall.

The USS Midway Museum on San Diego Bay is one of San Diego’s most popular attractions and the most visited ship museum in the world. The decommissioned aircraft carrier museum features numerous aircraft displays and interactive exhibits honoring the hundreds of thousands of men who served on the ship for nearly 50 years. Visitors can also share in San Diego's rich military and maritime history at the Maritime Museum of San Diego, Flying Leatherneck Aviation Museum, San Diego Air & Space Museum, Veterans Museum & Memorial Center and the Mt. Soledad Veterans Memorial.

**MISSION BAY**

Sparkling tranquil waters, soft sand beaches and an abundance of recreational activities attract visitors year-round to Mission Bay, San Diego’s water wonderland. Located just 10 minutes from downtown San Diego, the 4,600-acre Mission Bay Park is the largest manmade aquatic park in the world, renowned for its 27 miles of meandering shoreline, bike paths, expansive green space, picnic and playground areas, tropical beachfront hotels and resorts like the Bahia, Catamaran and Paradise Point, waterfront dining, and SeaWorld San Diego, one of the region’s top attractions where guests can explore the wonders and adventures of the sea. Nearby Belmont Park features the historic Giant Dipper, one of only two remaining ocean-side roller coasters on the West Coast, and Cannonball, the largest oceanfront rooftop bar and restaurant in San Diego.

**MULTICULTURAL**

San Diego is rich in multicultural offerings from the historic National Landmark murals in Chicano Park to the pan-Asia cultural and business district of Convoy and the Latine-owned businesses in Barrio Logan, the Malcolm X Library in southeastern San Diego, the Chinese Historic District in downtown San Diego, and the Little Saigon district in City Heights. The region's annual festivals and celebrations, neighborhoods, theatres, museums and dining opportunities reflect diverse cultures and lifestyles, including African-American, Asian-American, Italian, Jewish, Latine, LGBT, Native American and more.

Notable multicultural festivals and celebrations include the Annual Little Italy FESTA, San Diego LGBT Pride, the Pacific Islander Festival, Old Town San Diego’s Dia de los Muertos, Annual Sycuan Pow Wow and many others.

**OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES**

San Diego's great outdoors beckon sports enthusiasts to exercise and unwind year-round. The scope of activities is as varied as the topography, ranging from running along the beach, snorkeling La Jolla Underwater Park and kayaking along sea caves, to rock climbing in the rustic backcountry and camping in the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. For adventure seekers, the region offers scuba diving in Wreck Alley, hang gliding/paragliding above the Pacific Ocean from the bluffs of Torrey Pines, zip lining across mountainous terrain, water jetpack flights, sky sailing, hot air ballooning, desert jeep tours, and more.

San Diego also offers 70 miles of scenic coastline and more than 30 unique beaches, from the white sandy shores of Coronado Beach, rated the #1 beach in the U.S. in 2012, and the famous Swami’s Beach surf break, to the clothing-optional Black’s Beach, set against dramatic sandstone cliffs just north of La Jolla. San Diego is also home to San Diego Bay and Mission Bay Park. Water enthusiasts can sail, swim, surf, snorkel, scuba dive, water-ski, jet-ski, wind surf, paddle board, kite surf and more along San Diego’s expansive seashore.

**NEIGHBORHOODS**

The true character and color of San Diego can be found in its neighborhoods, and the variety and diversity of the city's 100+ neighborhoods paint a striking portrait of California's second largest city. From the popular outdoor cafes and chic boutiques of Little Italy to the hip and trendy offerings of East Village and North Park, to the laidback 60’s beach hippie vibe of Ocean Beach, San Diego is a multi-faceted metropolis.

Visitors can mingle with the locals at many colorful and unique neighborhood events held annually throughout the year. Popular neighborhood events include the Ocean Beach Street Fair and Chili Cook Off, the Adams Avenue Street Fair featuring crafts and live music, the La Jolla Art & Wine Festival every fall and the quarterly South Park Walkabout where merchants stay open late offering shoppers and diners music, drinks and special activities.

**NIGHTLIFE**

Part urban metropolis, part laid-back beach town, California's beach city offers a totally unique nightlife scene. The vibrant after-hours experience combines the destination's famous beachy vibe with a club scene that attracts DJs and celebrities from around the world. Downtown San Diego’s famous Gaslamp Quarter serves as the hub for live music, restaurants, bars, nightclubs and other entertainment. Sixteen bustling city blocks offer a selection of 50-plus bars, 20 nightclubs and 130 restaurants. Posh rooftop bars are a downtown staple, while the city’s 100+ neighborhoods each have unique afterhours vibes, offering visitors a diverse nightlife scene. Live music ranges from neighborhood dive bars with local bands and touring up-and-comers to internationally known DJs and EDM acts at downtown’s biggest venues.

**NURTURE YOUR SENSES**

With San Diego's perfect climate and natural beauty, it is not surprising that health, fitness and relaxation enthusiasts are drawn to the region. San Diego is home to a large selection of award-winning day spas, destination spas and resort spas including the award-winning Spa at Rancho Bernardo Inn and The Spa at the Fairmont Grand Del Mar. From intimate to expansive, San Diego offers a variety of unique facilities like the Golden Door, Cal-A-Vie and Rock Spa at the Hard Rock Hotel San Diego. Consistently rated one of the best destination spas in the world, the renowned Rancho La Puerta is just a short drive from San Diego as well.

In San Diego, Mother Nature's playground is also a sanctuary for the soul providing a perfect backdrop to find inner peace. Nurturing activities like tai chi and meditation are enjoyed on the wide green lawns of Balboa Park and the lush gardens of the Self-Realization Fellowship Temple and Ashram Center in Encinitas, while yoga flourishes in nearly all San Diego settings, from downtown rooftops to atop paddleboards in Mission Bay.

**SHOPPING**

With more than 100 neighborhoods in San Diego, shopping enthusiasts can spend hours exploring the region’s unique retail districts. Guests seeking hip urban boutiques and the latest in hot new fashions can find plenty of options in downtown’s Gaslamp Quarter, East Village and Little Italy, as well as the adjacent Headquarters at Seaport Village. Those seeking unique finds with a local touch can wander into the vibrant neighborhoods of Hillcrest, North Park, South Park and Barrio Logan.

Between the laid-back Ocean Beach Antique District and Solana Beach’s modern Cedros Design District, there is no shortage of home décor offerings in San Diego. For the dreamer in everyone, luxury locales like La Jolla and Del Mar stock sophisticated designer labels, exquisite fine jewelry and original artwork. San Diego’s major outdoor malls like Fashion Valley and Westfield Mission Valley and the unrivaled outlet bargain shopping at Las Americas Premium Outlets, Plaza Palmera and Carlsbad Premium Outlets are sure to delight the most serious shoppers.

**SPECIAL EVENTS**

Throughout the year, San Diego plays host to a variety of annual special events, ranging from the U.S. Sand Sculpting Challenge every summer to Balboa Park December Nights every winter. With a year-round mild climate, San Diego can host popular outdoor and indoor special events that appeal to every taste and interest during any season.

Some of San Diego's most notable and unique special events include the annual migration of the California gray whale, Comic-Con International, San Diego Beer Week, the CRSSD music festival, Mardi Gras in the Gaslamp Quarter, the Julian Fall Apple Harvest, Fallbrook Avocado Festival, North Park Music Fest, The San Diego International Film Festival, Fleet Week, San Diego Fashion Week, the San Diego Bay Food & Wine Festival, and many more.

**SPORTSTOWN U.S.A.**

Spectator sports are a major feature of the San Diego lifestyle. San Diego is home to the San Diego Padres (baseball), San Diego Gulls (ice hockey), San Diego Legion (rugby), San Diego Wave (women’s soccer) and Sockers (men’s soccer) as well as the San Diego Polo Club and racing at the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club. Annual sporting events include the Farmers Insurance Open, La Jolla Rough Water Swim, San Diego Crew Classic, Rock 'n' Roll Marathon, San Diego Bayfair, the Holiday Bowl, and many more.

The region is also home to an official U.S. Olympic Training Center. Located in Chula Vista in San Diego’s South Bay, the facility was the first center to be master planned from the ground up and is dedicated to the development and performance of America’s future Olympic and Paralympic athletes.

**TWO-NATION VACATION**

Visitors to San Diego will find a unique opportunity to explore two nations in one vacation destination. With Tijuana, Mexico conveniently just 17 miles from downtown San Diego, the region makes a perfect getaway for guests looking to journey into an international adventure while expanding their passport stamp collection.

Recognized as one of the world’s most visited cities, with more than 40 million border crossings each year, Tijuana bustles with activity day and night and offers duty-free shopping, authentic Mexican cuisine, dog racing, exciting sporting events, a vibrant arts and culture scene, a glittering nightlife and much more. The lure of Mexico also extends farther south from Tijuana with an easy and scenic drive to the charming resort towns of Rosarito and Puerto Nuevo, known as “Lobster Village”; Valle de Guadalupe, a wine and food paradise offering more than 100 boutique wineries and a unique selection of gourmet restaurants, and Ensenada, known as one of the leading resort and commercial centers on the Baja peninsula, home to visiting cruises, a large sportfishing fleet and *La Bufadora* (blow hole), a natural rock formation where the sea explodes into a natural geyser.

Traveling to Mexico is easy via the [San Diego Trolley](http://www.sdmts.com/trolley/trolley.asp), a light-rail trolley system that runs from downtown San Diego to the Mexican border or on one of several shuttles and tour buses that travel to the major popular attractions throughout Tijuana and Baja, Mexico. Visitors have the option to fly-in into the International Tijuana Airport (TIJ) and utilize the [Cross Border Xpress](http://crossborderxpress.com/), an enclosed pedestrian skybridge connecting the Tijuana airport with San Diego.

**VALUE VACATION**

Value-minded vacationers can rejoice in San Diego’s Mission Valley, the birthplace of California, and Mission Bay, a 4,600-acre aquatic playground north of downtown San Diego. For convenience, value and comfort, the family-friendly Hotel Circle is home to more than a dozen modestly-priced hotels. Free year-round activities include Mission Bay Park’s 27 miles of shoreline, beckoning visitors to swim, sunbathe, picnic, bicycle and more, and Mission Trails Regional Park, featuring the Old Mission Dam, 60 miles of hiking trails and a state-of-the-art Visitor and Interpretive Center. Fun and affordable, Mission San Diego de Alcala, California’s first mission, and Junipero Serra Museum, are offered under $8.

For the ultimate money-saving vacation, families can visit in October, when the region celebrates “Kids Free San Diego.” The annual destination-wide promotion includes special discounts at more than 100 San Diego hotels, restaurants, attractions, museums and transportation companies throughout the entire month. “Kids Free San Diego” incentives range from complimentary attraction admission and meals to welcome amenities at area hotels and much more.

For more information on San Diego’s offerings, including exciting vacation packages and valuable coupons for attractions, restaurants and more, visit the San Diego Tourism Authority’s website at www.sandiego.org.

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