



OLD TOWN SAN DIEGO

is far more than a pretty place, although with the surrounding splendor, it is easy to forget that fact. As with the earliest inhabitants, Old Town San Diego is still embraced by those who find comfort and life within an area that reaches out to every one of the senses through the culture, history and originality.

The native Kumeyaay Indians first saw the greatness of the area and the Spanish missionaries and American settlers followed. In 1769, Father Junipero Serra established the very first mission on a hillside overlooking what is currently known as Old Town San Diego—one of a chain of 21 missions that were to be the cornerstone of California's colonization. In the 1820s, a small Mexican community of adobe buildings formed below the hill, and by 1835 the area had attained the status of El Pueblo de San Diego. In 1846, the American flag was raised in the Old Town San Diego Plaza, making it the first American settlement in California.

Now, Old Town San Diego is home to a variety of historic sites, galleries, live entertainment, unique dining and the Old Town San Diego Market. A little more than one mile in length and a half mile in width, Old Town San Diego offers more than 25 restaurants and, in addition to the food and shopping, Old Town hosts numerous events like the Latin American Festival, Bazaar del Mundo, in August; Old Town San Diego Art Festival Oct. 1 and 2 and Día de los Muertos Nov. 1 and 2. In many businesses and along the plazas, live entertainment can be enjoyed every evening.

In 1968, the State of California Department of Parks and Recreation established Old Town State Historic Park (www.oldtownsandiegoguide.com) in an effort to preserve the rich heritage that characterized San Diego during the 1821 to 1872 period. A large draw to tourists, the park includes a main plaza, exhibits, museums and historic buildings, including La Casa de Estudillo, La Casa de Bandini, La Casa de Altamirno Pedronera and the Mason Street School, San Diego's first one-room schoolhouse.

Just up the hill from Old Town San Diego Historic State Park sits Heritage Park where several of San Diego's most notable Victorian homes have been relocated and authentically restored to their original splendor, including the Whaley House, an officially designated haunted house; the Little Adobe Chapel on Conde Street, the first Church in Old Town San Diego and El Campo Santo on San Diego Avenue, an 1850 Catholic Cemetery.

Situated between historic spots are shopping opportunities for both old and new items with an emphasis on Mexican-style pottery, art, crafts and tin. The Old Town Market sits at the edge of the State Historic Park and provides a collection of restaurants, unique shops and museums reminiscent of San Diego's earliest years. The market includes a reconstructed 1853 adobe house, a restored convent built downtown in 1908 and moved to Old Town San Diego in 1940, a new theatre and a museum of archaeological artifacts.

OLD TOWN SAN DIEGO:

a historically
cultural
experience



By Charlotte Tallman
Photography by San Diego CVB
and Old Town Association



The hillside retreat provides a panoramic view of San Diego city lights in the evening and the vividly blue ocean and bays below.



Fiesta de Reyes (619.297.3100, www.fiestadereyes.com), located on the northeastern part of Old Town San Diego State Historic Park, was constructed in 1939 as the Casa de Pico Motor Hotel. Now, the plaza offers 18 locally owned shops and three restaurants specializing in dining that celebrates the modern spirit and flavor of Mexico, including Casa de Reyes, a courtyard restaurant with an outdoor tortilla factory, mariachi stage and California hacienda décor; Barra Barra, a full-service restaurant and saloon with indoor and outdoor seating and the Cosmopolitan Hotel & Restaurant, originally constructed as the home of San Diego pioneer Juan Bandini between 1827 and 1829.

Because Mexican cuisine is the specialty in Old Town, it's not hard to find authentic fare, but Café Coyote y Cantina (619.291.4695, www.cafecoyoteoldtown.com) should be on the top of the list, especially for tequila lovers. Café Coyote has been a part of the area for over 20 years and is a certified 'Tequila House' by the prestigious Academia del Tequila in Mexico City, one of only a few certified in the U.S. Master bartenders create fresh and frosty margaritas from over 100 tequilas while Mexican tortilla ladies make fresh tortillas by hand and strolling mariachis move from table to table playing festive Mexican music.

The Best Western PLUS Hacienda Hotel in Old Town San Diego (800.888.1991, www.haciendahotel-oldtown.com) is complemented by a type of historic charm not found in many other places. The hillside retreat provides a panoramic view of San Diego city lights in the evening and the vividly blue ocean and bays below. The charm of this 200-room Old Town hotel comes from handcrafted Santa Fe furnishings inspired by the simple elegance of the old Spanish missions. Each room features a private balcony or shared lushly landscaped courtyard with sparkling fountains and colorful bougainvillea among classic Spanish and Southwestern architecture.

To see many of the sites San Diego Old Town and the surrounding area has to offer, a jump on the San Diego Old Town Trolley (800.844.7601, www.trustedtours.com) is encouraged for a two-hour, fully narrated tour that stops at Old Town, San Diego Harbor and Embarcadero; Seaport Village, Horton Plaza, Historic Gas Lamp Quarter; Coronado; Balboa Park and San Diego Zoo and Little Italy.

From the glimpses of yesteryear to the modern offerings of both American and Mexican cultures, Old Town San Diego offers an idealistic experience to anyone who embraces the birthplace of California. //

OLDTOWNSANDIEGO



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