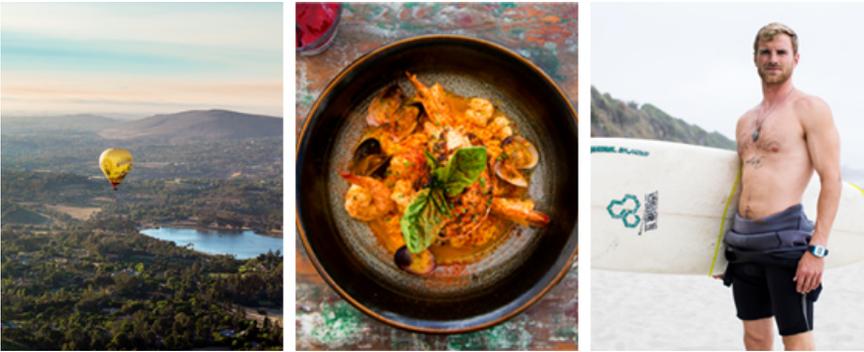


USA: West San Diego, CA

# Destination: San Diego's North County

*The seaside towns just north of this California city have it all figured out*

BY MARIBETH MELLIN



North County, as seen on a tour with California Dreamin'; paella at the Pacific Coast Grill; a surfer at Swami's Beach.

Highway 101 skirts the 20-mile stretch of Pacific coast from Del Mar to Oceanside, north of San Diego. In the classic beach communities along the way, you'll find some of the area's finest golf courses, spas and restaurants. The scenery changes every few minutes as beautiful beaches give way to charming towns. Read on for our insider's guide to San Diego's North County.

## HOLLYWOOD RETREAT

Bing Crosby put Del Mar on the tourism map when he recorded "Where the Surf Meets the Turf," the theme song of the Del Mar racetrack, in 1941. The crooner was a major investor in the original 1937 track, still used by the Del Mar Thoroughbred Club. In those days a glitzy Hollywood crowd vacationed in Del Mar, betting on the races before catching shows by Dean Martin, Jerry Lewis and Liberace at the Hotel Del Mar, now the chic L'Auberge Del Mar.

Today Del Mar retains that early sense of glamour and exclusivity while embracing outsiders seeking a taste of the good life. Visitors sample some of SoCal's freshest ingredients at chef Carl Schroeder's Market Restaurant + Bar, number three on Zagat's list of top San Diego County restaurants. Addison, at the Grand Del Mar, is another of San Diego's top tables, thanks to the talents of chef William Bradley. The lavish resort's spa and Tom Fazio golf course are also open to the public (reservations required). And the Spa L'Auberge pleases locals and visitors alike with its "Seaside Sojourn" treatments, employing techniques and ingredients from Hawaii and Asia.

Tudor- and Spanish-style buildings lend a sedate air to Camino Del Mar, which bisects Del Mar's downtown village. Sophisticated shoppers browse in chic boutiques and galleries, then sit down under the bougainvillea at **Café Secret** (1140 Camino Del Mar; 858-792-0821; lunch for two, \$50\*) to lunch on Peruvian seviche and empanadas.

At the village's northernmost point, **Del Mar Plaza** (1555 Camino Del Mar; [delmarplaza.com](http://delmarplaza.com)) evokes Tuscany with sea-view terraces and boutiques nestled in rock walls. Check out the temptations at **Urban Girl Accessories** and **Ooh La La** before sampling wine and antipasto alfresco at **Il Fornaio** (858-755-8876; dinner for two, \$65).

Continue shopping a few minutes north in Solana Beach, where stylists and designers frequent some 85 fashion and home decor shops on **Cedros Avenue** ([cedrosavenue.com](http://cedrosavenue.com)). End the day on a sunset balloon ride with **California Dreamin'** (800-373-3359; [californiadreamin.com](http://californiadreamin.com); \$188 per person) for the ultimate taste of the high life.

## QUIRKY SURF TOWNS

Local pranksters regularly costume the **Cardiff Kook** (Hwy. 101 and Chesterfield Dr.; [thecardiffkook.org](http://thecardiffkook.org)), a much maligned surfer statue marking the entry to three funky beach towns—Cardiff-by-the-Sea, Encinitas and Leucadia. Beyond the Kook, Cardiff's most endearing attraction is **VG Donut & Bakery** (106 Aberdeen Dr.; 760-753-2400). Its melt-in-the-mouth doughnuts are so fabulous that fans rise before dawn to get them freshly baked. One sugar-crazed devotee created a YouTube tribute called "Ode to VG's," set to Elvis Presley's "Can't Help Falling in Love." In case you're wondering, VG stands for Very Good.

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Funky shops and cafés line Highway 101 through Encinitas and Leucadia. Surf films and old-time favorites like The Rocky Horror Picture Show play at the 1928 **La Paloma Theatre** (471 S. Hwy. 101, Encinitas; 760-436-7469; [lapalomatheatre.com](http://lapalomatheatre.com)). Thanks to the comeback of vinyl albums, the venerable **Lou's Records** (434 N. Coast Hwy. 101, Encinitas; 760-753-1382; [lousrecords.com](http://lousrecords.com)) is still a must for music lovers.

At the south entrance to Encinitas, the **Self-Realization Fellowship Temple** (215 K St.; 760-753-1811; [encinitastemple.org](http://encinitastemple.org)) is a semi-secret stop for serenity amid nature. Paramahansa Yogananda wrote his best-selling Autobiography of a Yogi here after establishing the center in 1937. Visitors wander quietly amid koi ponds and fern-shaded trails and rest on cliff-top benches overlooking Swami's Beach, a popular surf spot.

Beachgoers of all sorts congregate at Moonlight State Beach, where new facilities opened this year. In Leucadia, locals hang out on secluded Beacon's Beach, at the foot of Neptune Street. If you want to test your balance atop a board, you can rent gear from **Progression Surf** (828 N. Coast Hwy. 101, Leucadia; 760-942-2088). At **Hansen Surfboards** (1105 S. Coast Hwy. 101, Encinitas; 760-753-6596), you'll find the latest beachwear, flip-flops, sunglasses and more. To complete your education, learn the history of surfboards at Oceanside's **California Surf Museum** (312 Pier View Way; 760-721-6876; [surfmuseum.org](http://surfmuseum.org)).

## FAMILY TIME

"More, more, more!" may as well be the motto of Carlsbad's **Legoland California** (1 Legoland Dr.; 760-918-5346; [california.legoland.com](http://california.legoland.com)) and its ardent fans. New rides and exhibits open annually at the original park, which is beloved by kids and adults who have never outgrown their fondness for the colorful mini bricks. The adjacent Sea Life aquarium mesmerizes overexcited kids with moon jellyfish and sharks, and a water park (open seasonally) saps all remaining energy. The Legoland Hotel, filled with clever diversions, from giant dragons to pirate-theme rooms, opened beside the park this year—thus cementing Carlsbad's standing as North County's most family-friendly city.

It's not all about the kids, however. Grown-up escapes in Carlsbad include elite golf courses and spas at **La Costa Resort & Spa** (2100 Costa Del Mar Rd.; 760-438-9111; [lacosta.com](http://lacosta.com)) and the **Park Hyatt Aviara Resort** (7100 Aviara Resort Dr.; 760-448-1234; [parkaviara.hyatt.com](http://parkaviara.hyatt.com)), where kids can play at the Aviara Kids Academy while parents enjoy more adult pursuits. For an unusual immersion in Carlsbad's history, reserve the exotic Oriental Room at the **Carlsbad Mineral Water Spa** (2802 Carlsbad Blvd.; 760-434-1887; [carlsbadmineralspa.com](http://carlsbadmineralspa.com)) for a carbonated alkaline mineral bath using water from wells discovered by John Frazier in 1882. Frazier learned that his water was similar to that in Carlsbad, Bohemia, and laid out Carlsbad around his well. To this day locals visit kiosks in front of the Old World spa to fill bottles with the alkaline water, which is said to promote energy, weight loss, detoxification and general good health. Complete the eastern European experience with a massive deli sandwich or a schnitzel dinner at **Tip Top Meats** (6118 Paseo Del Norte; 760-438-2620; dinner for two, \$35), a European deli and restaurant opened by German expat John Haedrich in 1967.

A different kind of water lures families to Carlsbad's Agua Hedionda Lagoon, where you can try kayaking, stand-up paddleboarding and other wet fun with **California Watersports** (4215 Harrison St.; 760-434-3089; [carlsbadlagoon.com](http://carlsbadlagoon.com)). Then pay a visit to the **Buena Vista Audubon Society Nature Center** (2202 S. Coast Hwy., Oceanside; 760-439-2473; [bvaudubon.org](http://bvaudubon.org)), at the Buena Vista Lagoon, which straddles Carlsbad and neighboring Oceanside. Trails set amid native plants showcase North County's wetlands. Inside the center, an extensive taxidermy display includes pelicans and owls in flight and a bobcat curled up like a kitten.

End your North County excursion at the **Oceanside Pier** (N. Pacific St., Oceanside) at sunset. You can catch a 25-cent shuttle to traverse the 1,900-foot-long pier, one of the longest overwater wooden piers in California. Reward yourself with a chocolate malt from **Ruby's Diner** (760-433-7829) at the pier's tip. Now, that's a perfect San Diego ending.

## EAT

**Market Restaurant + Bar** Chef-owner Carl Schroeder creates daily menus that may include lamb with gingered peach chutney and pork shoulder with tamale spoonbread. Don't miss the signature blue cheese soufflé. 3702 Via de la Valle, Del Mar; 858-523-0007; dinner for two, \$88\*

**Addison** Chef William Bradley applies French techniques to local ingredients (Dover sole en brioche; coffee-roasted duck) and pairs his dishes with vintages from a 37,000-bottle wine collection. 5200 Grand Del Mar Way, San Diego; 858-314-1900; dinner for two, \$180

**Pacific Coast Grill** A longtime favorite hits the beach with glassed-in patios, balconies and dining rooms in a sleek two-story spot. Lobster tacos, coconut shrimp rolls and crisp calamari accompany sunset cocktails at the bar; for more substantial fare, try chili-rubbed filet mignon or turkey meat loaf. 2526 S. Coast Hwy. 101, Cardiff-by-the-Sea; 760-479-0721; dinner for two, \$86

**West Steak & Seafood** Five grades of beef please carnivores, while other dishes, like lobster-and-brie raviolone, highlight seafood. The vegetables and herbs come from the chef's garden. 4980 Avda. Encinas, Carlsbad; 760-930-9100; dinner for two, \$140

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### Grand Pacific Palisades Resort 5362

This resort has an Olympic-sized pool and is set on 12 landscaped acres overlooking the Carlsbad Flower Fields and the Pacific Ocean. *5805 Armada Dr., Carlsbad*

**Member Reviews:** "Legoland was within walking distance."

"The kids loved the outdoor playground. We enjoyed having BBQs on-site."

"Went for a weeklong getaway with girlfriends. We loved the views!"

### Grand Pacific Resorts at Carlsbad Inn Beach Resort 1285

A newly renovated resort set on a gorgeous stretch of coast. Guests receive complimentary use of bicycles and jogging strollers. *3075 Carlsbad Blvd., Carlsbad*

**Member Reviews:** "Great proximity to beach, special attention to guests' needs."

"The resort has a good fitness center, pool and adult hot tub (perfect!)."

"We enjoyed the Mexican restaurant on the premises and the Daily News Café."

### Grand Pacific Resorts at Carlsbad Seapointe Resort 3987

Guests may enjoy two pools, a playground, tennis and sport courts. Nearby is one of the last undeveloped beaches in the area. *6400 Surfside Lane, Carlsbad*

**Member Reviews:** "Secluded enough for a relaxing vacation but near the ocean."

"Our family had a laid-back vacation here."

### Winners Circle Resort 0422

This resort near the beach has lighted tennis courts, a fitness center and barbecue grills available for guests. There are many golf courses in the area, and San Diego is just 20 miles away. *550 Via de la Valle, Solana Beach*

**Member Reviews:** "We enjoyed La Jolla, Del Mar and Oceanside beaches."

"Lots to do, very friendly staff."

**For complete member reviews (as member reviews have been condensed) and additional resort listings, visit [RCI.com](http://RCI.com) or call 800-338-7777 (Weeks) or 877-968-7476 (Points). Club Members, please call your specific Club or RCI telephone number.**

### Non-RCI affiliated resorts:

**L'Auberge Del Mar** Sea views and beach-cottage decor enhance the 120 rooms at this gem. Gourmet dining, a chic outdoor lounge and a serene spa complete the picture. *1540 Camino Del Mar, Del Mar; 858-259-1515; [laubergedelmar.com](http://laubergedelmar.com); doubles from \$305 per night*

**West Inn & Suites** Evening cookies and milk and complimentary breakfast make families happy at this comfortable, welcoming inn. One of Carlsbad's most popular restaurants is here. *4970 Avda. Encinas, Carlsbad; 760-448-4500; [westinnandsuites.com](http://westinnandsuites.com); doubles from \$169 per night*

**Grand Del Mar** Reminiscent of a majestic Mediterranean country estate, with sublime suites, a divine spa, a golf course and much-lauded dining options. *5300 Grand Del Mar Court, San Diego; 858-314-2000; [thegranddelmar.com](http://thegranddelmar.com); doubles from \$495 per night*

*\*Estimated meal prices do not include drinks, tax or tip.*

*NOTE: Information may have changed since publication. Please confirm key details before planning your trip.*

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