

SAN DIEGO[®]

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The Best of San Diego 2009

There have never been more reasons to love San Diego. For our annual “Best of San Diego” issue, we unearthed the tops in town. Wanna know where to find the best margarita? Place to polka? Seaside spa? Our intrepid research yielded some clear standouts. And you can’t afford to miss our section showcasing the city’s best bargains. Like two-dollar tapas. Seriously.

FOOD & DRINK

TAPAS BRUNCH Sundays sparkle at the **Carlsbad Sheraton’s Twenty/20 Grill & Wine Bar**. That’s when the eatery hosts its Sparkling Sundays brunch (11 a.m.–3 p.m.), and it’s where chef Reed Anderson cooks up tapas-style plates—try the smoked salmon with potato pancakes—prepared on the outdoor grill (and priced at a reasonable \$2 to \$6 apiece). And what’s brunch without the bubbly? There’s an array of champagnes, sparkling wines and other specialty drinks. 760-827-2500; twenty20grill.com.

SPOTS

SNORKEL SPOT Who needs Hawaii? Grab a snorkel mask and head to La Jolla Cove, one of Southern California’s most photographed beaches. Whether you choose to wade close to shore or kayak to deeper waters, you’ll be swimming with a variety of sea life, including rays and sharks. And the leopard sharks, at least, are harmless.

PLACE TO DROP OFF VISITING IN-LAWS Balboa Park offers a staggering number of sights and sounds for all ages to keep your in-laws busy and out of your way. Just beware—there’s so much to see and do, they might want to return to San Diego sooner than you think. balboapark.org.

HIDDEN GEM OF BALBOA PARK Think you’ve seen all of Balboa Park’s gardens? Chances are you’ve missed Garden Court, an expansive stretch nestled between the park’s administration building and the Activity Center along Park Boulevard near Presidents Way. With arcades, fountains, domes and tile work, the hidden garden’s tranquility is disturbed only by the planes flying overhead. balboapark.org.



STARGAZING On dark, clear nights, our Cuyamaca Mountains and Anza-Borrego Desert are beyond compare. Escape the city lights and head east for a visual feast powered by telescope or naked eye. Or join the San Diego Astronomy Association near Campo at Tierra del Sol for its Star Parties, open to the public. 619-645-8940; sdaa.org.

PLACE TO BURN STUFF ON THE BEACH Some of the best things in life actually are free. Next time you’re in the mood for roasting marshmallows or burning photos of your ex over an open flame, nab a bonfire pit somewhere along Mission Bay. If you time it right, you’ll have a front-row seat to SeaWorld’s fireworks display.

FUN

REASON TO PLAY HOOKY Seventy years and still going strong, opening day at Del Mar is a San Diego tradition unlike any other. The crowd ranges from crass to classy; dress as you want—or who you want to be—for the day, but hats are a must.

PLACE TO POLKA Two left feet? No problem. Get your polka on (or your chacha, foxtrot or samba) at MacVittie’s Dance Studio in La Mesa, which is poised to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2010. The secret to the school’s success: enthusiastic, patient instructors. 619-465-3411; macvittiesdance.com.

DEEP-SEA FISHING Oceanside Harbor—a quaint, tiny pool of water surrounded by marinas, restaurants and even a fake lighthouse—is a kinder, gentler alternative to San Diego Bay. Helgren’s offers four deep-sea fishing options: half-day, three-quarterday, twilight and Saturday-night shark fishing.