

Destination: Southern California

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DESTINATION: SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SUN & FUN VACATION SPOTS AROUND SAN DIEGO

Visitors to California come to enjoy the weather, and also look at locations they have seen in movies and television. Well, you don't have to stay in Hollywood or the Los Angeles area to enjoy some celebrated vacation spots. Just head south to the San Diego area.

One of the most visited hotels is the famous Hotel del Coronado in San Diego. The "del" as it is known, has been the location for film shoots for numerous years, and still continues to play host to production companies, only a couple of hours drive south of Los Angeles.

One of the most famous shoots was the Marilyn Monroe, Tony Curtis and Jack Lemmon classic *Some Like It Hot*. Tourists who visit the site, still recall the wonderful scenes of the stars frolicking on the beach in front of the hotel's iconic setting.

The del Coronado is a short distance from the freeway leading up to Los Angeles and just a few miles south to the Baja California peninsula. And it is convenient to the San Diego Airport, just a couple miles away.

At its opening in 1888, the "del" was the largest electrically lit building outside of New York City. And after some remodeling in 2007, the hotel now has a new fitness center, plus luxury ocean front cottages and villas.

A few seasons back, Coronado itself was named one of America's dozen distinctive destinations by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. So there's much to see and do at the hotel and the surrounding community.

Meanwhile, just a short drive away is the scenic, there's the art-filled town of La Jolla. The historic hotel there is the Grande Colonial Hotel on Prospect Street, a main thoroughfare. Just steps away from the beach, this hotel offers panoramic views of the ocean and has a distinctive classic European styling, albeit still a boutique hotel. The area itself is worth a visit, being replete with internationally known art galleries, museums and world-class shopping and dining. La Jolla is but 20 minutes northwest of San Diego, hence that international airport makes access a short, easy trip.

Not to be outdone in the historic hotel category, two blocks away is the La Valencia Hotel, with a distinctive tower that marks it from other buildings. The Mediterranean-inspired hotel overlooks the La Jolla cove and the Pacific Ocean. It is a favorite of both tourists and locals, who want a change of scenery, or a place to bring guests.

Essentially unchanged since its lavish debut years ago, the La Valencia is still called the "jewel of La Jolla," because of its distinctive gold and blue dome. The hotel interior is plush with exquisite Spanish mosaics and hand-painted murals and ceilings.

For years it has been a popular hideaway for celebrities and jet-setters, and still has that sense of nostalgia, while continuing to offer the latest in comfort and amenities. The 15 ocean villas feature butler service and ocean-facing patios and fireplaces. This is a one-of-a-kind hotel, which guests still love because of the classic European style-- but as modern as today itself.

Also in San Diego is the Sofia Hotel, a downtown area classic landmark. The location is one of the best in the city, being just blocks from the famed Horton Plaza shopping center, the Gaslamp Quarter and the San Diego Convention Center.

The Sofia started out life as the Pickwick Hotel, distinguished by its Gothic revival style, embellishments and unique roof line. After a major renovation, the property was re-opened as the Sofia, retaining its original character, but now offering a modern sensibility and serene style. The neo-Gothic hotel is new as can be, yet is one of the Historic Hotels of America.

For visitors going a little north of the San Diego County area, there is a unique hotel in the affluent community of Rancho Santa Fe, called The Inn at Rancho Santa Fe.

Exquisitely designed in the early 1920s, the hotel has the distinctive California architecture of that era, with elegance and an air of class. The original guest house and surrounding cottages blend harmoniously into the 23 acres of lush gardens and meandering pathways creating a soothing and tranquil environment.

Tourists who seek something different and relaxing, will love visiting the San Diego area, Southern California's great getaway destination.



FRANK BARRON

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FRANK BARRON is the former editor of The Hollywood Reporter, having served twice in that capacity. In between, he was West Coast news director for Billboard Publications, supervising their five magazines.

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