

# The Timely Traveler

## Balboa Park: The Center of San Diego's Universe

San Diego's gift to the world is **Balboa Park**. The nation's largest urban cultural park is just a few minutes from its downtown's main streets. And there...the visitor finds 12 hundred lushly planted and groomed acres of discovery!



At the Veterans Memorial Museum in Balboa Park...jacket patches worn by the 'Flying Tigers'...US volunteer pilots and crews who flew the tiger-toothed P-40 fighters in China and Burma in the earliest days before WW2 broke out.



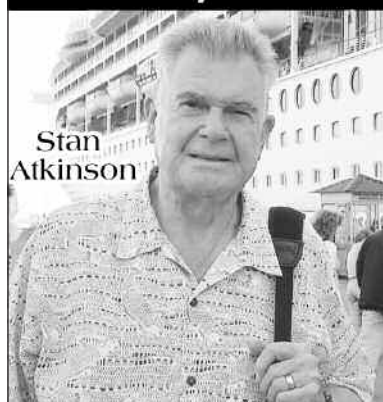
A mural in the Veterans Museum...depicting the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor. It has been signed by hundreds of survivors of that terrible day...Dec 7 1941.

Ranked as one of the world's best parks...the **Balboa** is home to 15 world class museums. There are 6 theaters. One is the **Tony-winning Globe** (<http://www.theoldglobe.org/>). Another is the **Starlight Theater** (<http://www.starlighttheatre.org/>)...an



80 works of the iconic American artist...Georgia O'Keefe... draw huge crowds at the Museum of Art at Balboa Park...thru September 28.

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Balboa Park was created in 1915..for the Panama-California Exhibition. The Spanish-Renaissance styled buildings are home to a wonderful diversity of the elements of our life...history and culture.



The country's largest permanent display of model trains..is at the Model Railroad Museum. Manned by 200 loving volunteers...they have created 4 huge exhibits...finite in their detail.



The park is a magnet for local families..and the events that enrich their lives.

outdoor amphitheatre that makes the most of an unusual setting. It's directly under the landing path for jetliners landing at the airport. As the roar of a plane beings to drown out the dialog...the musical conductor signals 'stop'. Everyone on stage freezes...in the middle of a solo...or a pirouette. The jet noise goes away...the performance continues. It's musical theatre with extra giggles for the audience.

There are 9 horticultural attractions and gardens. Throw in the world-famous **San Diego Zoo** (<http://www.sandiegozoo.org/>)...and plan to put aside at least 3 days to take in **Balboa Park!!**

It is truly the heart and soul of **San Diego**. Not all of the museums might appeal...but once inside any that intrigue you...they do not go quickly. They are all that good! Compelling and thorough on any subject matter they deal with. Some advance planning by way of the website (<http://www.balboapark.org/>) will help sharpen your focus.



34 miles of beautiful waterfront...laced with restaurants...parks...marinas and...of course...shops.



The dramatic center of the Natural History Museum...soaring over many engaging exhibits...and currently featuring 'Water H2O=Life'. The life we enjoy on Earth originated in it and cannot exist without it. A timely exhibit for a looming crisis is the essential substance.

For a place to stay the **Sofia Hotel** <http://www.thesofiahotel.com/> is hard to beat!

A downtown location in the middle of everything. Its rates are very competitive with nothing sacrificed in accommodations and service.

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## San Diego, (con't)



A young lad experiments with gravity at the Ruben Fleet Science Center...which offers all ages a hands-on relationship with science.

There are old downtown hotels throughout the US that have been re-done...but not many so completely re-done! Check out the little things in a Sofia room...comfy mattresses... towels-large and thick...great shower heads...plasma TV screens and toilets with the latest turbo-flush efficiency.

It has been chosen an 'Historic Hotel of America'. It was built in the 1920's as the Pickwick Hotel. Don't be put off by the original exterior...the terra-cotta brick dates it.



A grand old classic of the skies...the Ford 5-AT-B Trimotor...the largest civil aircraft when it started hauling passengers and mail in 1926. No surprise...they called it 'The Tin Goose'. Just one of 70 terrific exhibits at the amazing Air and Space Museum.



Some of the 'stews' (the abbreviation for 'stewardesses'..as they were called in those days) of PSA..Pacific Southwest Airways. Non-PC now..but that's what these ladies we flew up and down California with were called..before they became 'flight attendants'. Not only attractive...they were excellent at the job.



The San Diego Automotive Museum...is as outstanding a collection as the Air and Space Museum. World class...in fact. Don't kick the tires...but enjoy this tribute to what these 4-wheel wonders have done to mold our society.



The uniforms worn over the years by the PSA attendants. They became well-known (and admired) for the mini skirts. The airline took off in 1949 and had a great run until deregulation forced it into a sale to US Air in 1988.

However...enter and enjoy the delights of the major upgrades that were finished just a year ago. Rates run from \$159. to \$215.

There are a number of cruises available on the Bay that surrounds much of San Diego. A different experience is a ride/cruise in a 'Seal'. It's a boat and tour bus modeled after a WW2 amphibious 'Duck'. 'The Seal' (<http://www.trolleytours.com/San-Diego/seal-tours.asp>)



The Sofia Hotel...in the middle of everything downtown. It was originally built in 1926...the 2nd in the Pickwick Hotel chain. They built hotels to support their Pickwick Bus Lines...which eventually became Greyhound. That's how it received the 'Historic Hotels of America' designation. Nothing old about it now. They closed the hotel down for a year...to completely re-do it and its 211 rooms. It reopened last year.

cruises the City's street to Shelter Island and then pops into the Bay and sails to the right...out toward Point Loma. It's a lot of fun...with first-class guides-narrators.

The final port for the USS Midway ([www.midway.org](http://www.midway.org)) is a live exhibit not to be



Looking ungainly and ugly...a tour in the 'Seal' is a great way to see San Diego's land and sea. Although taken from the WW2 amphibious 'Ducks' these are all new tourist delights.

missed. The Naval Carrier that served the country for 47 years...longer than any other...is a fascinating self-directed tour. Put aside at least a half-day to do it...there is so much to drink in of the history that has helped keep us free.


San Diego's downtown is easily walkable...the highlight...the popular Gaslamp District ([www.gaslamp.org](http://www.gaslamp.org)) and also within downtown...PETCO Park...home of baseball's Padres. Altho much more vertical...with some beautifully designed high-rises...still...at street



The 'Seal' sails out to visit the (real) seals of Pt Loma. They bark at the passengers...and carry on with a show that delights all aboard.

level the downtown reminds me of Sacramento's (save for our embarrassing K street). A small city...getting bigger.

What isn't like Sacramento...is San Diego's excellent freeway system. Although as crowded and frustrating as any other during commute times...the San Diego freeways have been thought out with easy access and convenience in mind. What a concept!!

They surround the central area and suburbs in circular arcs making approaches to them efficient. San Diego ([www.sandiego.gov](http://www.sandiego.gov))...they maintain its 'America's Finest City'. Maybe not so overblown a claim after all! 

Stan Atkinson spent 46 years as a TV news anchor, reporter and documentary producer—most of it at KCRA and KOVR. He covered much of the world's troubles in 29 countries between the 60's and 90's. Some tormented places more than once. His assignments have ranged from Afghanistan to El Salvador and Vietnam to Iraq. He has also enjoyed the benefits of safe and sane travel including two dozen cruises, often as a group host. Stan can be reached at: [stan\\_seniormag@sbcglobal.net](mailto:stan_seniormag@sbcglobal.net).