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ENGL 3130 – Advanced Composition

## **How to Spend the Weekend in San Diego, CA**

*21+ Guide to a Three-Night San Diego Experience*

San Diego, known as “America’s Finest City,” is located on the Pacific Coast of California. Known for its beaches, nightlife, and warm climate year-round, it is a bucket-list vacation destination. Such a big city (population of approximately 1.3 million) can be intimidating for some; it was for me when I moved there at 19 years old. Fortunately, I lived out my dreams for four years and experienced more in that time than some do in a lifetime. I will use my favorite experiences to build a full picture in just one weekend. After this trip, you will be dreaming of going back. It is not just the sunshine you will miss. These memories will have you smiling ear to ear imagining sights you still see clearly when you close your eyes and drooling over meals you can still taste years later. This guide will follow an itinerary to maximize your time in three of San Diego’s hottest areas: Little Italy, Mission Beach, and Downtown.

**\*\***This guide is tailored to the 21+ community, with the understanding that consumption of alcohol is up to the individual’s discretion and is not necessary to complete or enjoy the following activities.

### **Friday**

First, I recommend flying during the day so you can sightsee from the air as you fly over the city. Nine different airlines, including American, Delta, and United, fly into San Diego International Airport, leaving the choice up to the traveler’s accessibility and budget. Upon landing, retrieve your luggage and arrange yourself a car to take you to your booked Air BnB.

If you are not able to rent your own vehicle for this trip, the city has public transportation, walkable paths (within certain limits), and multiple car services. Taxis are available at the airport pick-up platform, but I recommend Uber or Lyft instead, for both price and convenience. Always verify the driver’s license plate and car description with the app before entering any vehicle.

Leaving the San Diego airport can get hectic for new to-the-area drivers, but local ride-share operators have it down to a science. On your way out, you’ll have views of the city on your left and the ocean on your right. Anchored in the water is a large gray naval aircraft carrier with the number 41 painted on the side in white. This is the USS Midway, a famous 20<sup>th</sup> century



vessel, now operating as a museum for civilians. They offer a historical tour of the carrier itself and a detailed view of how Sailors and Marines live when deployed. San Diego houses multiple military bases for the United States Navy and Marine Corps. If history is something you're passionate about, this is just one of many museums located in S.D.

(<https://www.midway.org>)

(Check-In 3:00 PM)

Just a ten-minute drive from the airport until this weekend's home away from home; located in the *heart* of San Diego. "You've arrived at your destination 2054 Second Ave". Street parking is easily available with no meter fees. Once ready, enter the white picket fence and take in your Air BnB for the first time: *The Orange Tree Cottages* (prices start at \$200 a night). This property has six individual tiny homes with a shared front yard. Valencia orange trees and lemon trees bloom along the property line and are available for picking. These one-bedroom cottages also have a comfortable sofa sleeper, accommodating up to four people—perfect for a solo traveler, a couple, or a small group of close friends. Inside, you'll find a living room area with a TV and Roku system for movies or music. The full kitchen is stocked with necessities for guests who wish to cook during their stay. Pets are welcomed, the fenced-in yard, provided pet bowls, and a travel bed make stays easier for your furry friends.

(4:00-6:00 PM)

#### Alternative Lodging:

- DoubleTree by Hilton- \$130-\$230/night
- City24 Condo - \$200-\$500/night
- Hotel Indigo - \$220-\$400/night
- Golden Grace - \$105-\$200/night

A short five-block walk (or drive) east brings you to San Diego's famous Balboa Park. This park is a relaxing escape from the busy city, much like Central Park is to NYC. Balboa Park is full of nature trails for walking, running, or biking. The grass fields are perfect for a picnic lunch or fetch with your dog. Take some time and embrace the outdoors. It's not all palm trees and ocean breezes—there is a depth of nature here that makes out-of-state visitors feel at home. Balboa Park host over 20 attractions, including the San Diego Air & Space Museum and San Diego Zoo. Museum and park admissions can be pricey, so be sure to check online ticket sales for the best deals. Discounts are offered year-round to military personnel and students. With many local military bases and San Diego State University just ten miles away, these deals are commonly used. Seasonal attractions and vendor events are constantly rotate through the park, from farmers' markets in the spring to haunted houses in the fall. Balboa Park stays busy to keep visitors entertained.

(7:00 PM “Little Italy”)

For dinner, enjoy an artisanal Italian experience at Bencotto, known for their “100% made fresh daily, in-house” pasta. Their *Pasta Your Way* menu allows you to customize your dream dish while experiencing the real taste of Italy.

Step 1: Choose your preferred pasta shape— *Spaghetti, Penne, Gnocchi, Ravioli*, among others. Gluten-free / vegan available options for those who may require it. Step 2: pick your sauce from seven choices ranging from tomato-based, cream-based, and pesto-based possibilities. Step 3: Add-on meat and vegetables available at the customer’s request.

If pasta isn’t your Italian craving, the regular dinner menu and the chef’s specials offer various meat and seafood entrées priced from \$25-\$45. Traditional Italian desserts, including tiramisu and cannolis, are highly recommended.



After dinner, it is time for wine. Just a three-minute drive (5-minute walk) down the road you will find Pali Wine Company. This tasting room prides itself on its two distinct California wine brands: Pali Wine Co. and Neighborhood. Since 2005, they have crafted exceptional wines that honor the land, the grapes, and the artistry of wine making. Three flight options, each featuring five different wines, allows you to sample more of California’s local wines without overspending. Prefer just a single glass? Choose from over 20 assorted flavors that never had to cross state lines to reach your cup.

Although it is called “Little Italy,” this district offers more than just Italian cuisine. If your appetite craves something different, you can still find a memorable experience here.

Try:

- Underbelly: Authentic Japanese ramen, bento boxes, and appetizers.
- The Crack Shack: Locally raised, free-living chicken dishes.
  - \*They can give any famous chicken establishment a run for their money.
- Blue Water Seafood Market & Grill: From shrimp tacos to swordfish, seafood fresh from the Pacific.
  - \*Even a seafood hater, like me, can find something they enjoy.

End your night with a stop at one of many ice cream, frozen yogurt, or gelato shops open year-round thanks to Southern California’s perfect weather.

## Saturday

(9:00 AM Breakfast)

Your first morning in the Sunshine State is the perfect excuse to throw on a bathing suit, pack your bag, and head towards the coast. Take the I-5 N, one of San Diego's eight-lane interstates, to Exit 20 towards Linda Vista for a breakfast stop. At 5201 Linda Vista Rd, San Diego CA 92110 you'll find Rose Donuts, a small corner coffee shop.

Their menu offers a wide selection of breakfast options, starting with 18 different flavors of house-made donuts. If sweets aren't your preference, I highly recommend any breakfast sandwich served on their extra-large croissants. The buttered croissants melt in your mouth with every bite, pairing perfectly with cheese, eggs, or bacon. For the ultimate experience, order the combo meal: a hot breakfast sandwich, one donut, and a small Vietnamese latte (hot or iced) — all for under \$10. Enjoy your meal outside on their patio or on the way to the next destination.

(10 AM- 1 PM Beach Day)

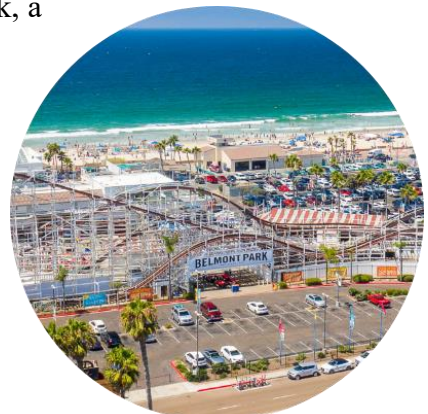
On the way to our destination, Mission Beach, you'll pass multiple coves and islands formed off the coastline. Fiesta Island, for example, is a popular local spot for after-dark beach bonfires and Jeep races in the sand. When you see signs for SeaWorld, you will know you're getting close.

Mission Beach offers a modern spin on the classic beach town vibe. The oceanside boardwalk stretches nearly two miles and is lined with shops, restaurants, and attractions. If you're ready for the sand, set up your blankets, chairs, or canopies wherever you find a good spot. Pickup volleyball games often happen near the lifeguard towers, and someone always has a frisbee ready to pass.

If you want to explore first, find *Mission Beach Rentals* for a fair price on bicycles or electric scooters to sightsee more efficiently. Scooters, bikes, and even rollerblades are a fun way for both locals and tourists to cruise along any California boardwalk. Boardwalk shops sell everything from traveler souvenirs and trendy bathing suits to surfboards for local beach bums.

At the center of Mission Beach's boardwalk is Belmont Park, a small amusement park offering interactive activities including:

- Giant Dipper: A wooden roller coaster originally built in 1925, restored since. Maxing out at 48 miles per hour, giving views unlike any other.
- Beach Blaster: A swinging coaster 67 feet in the air, complete with 120 degree turns.
- Tiki Town Mini Golf: An 18-hole course featuring tiki huts and volcanoes. (\$12/round)



- Sky Ropes: A tree to tree rope course with 26 obstacles to challenges yourself.

(2 PM Lunch)

For Lunch check out any of the beach bars and grills. The Beach House Tequila + Taqueria offers live music, great food, and one-of-a-kind mixed cocktails. Reasonable prices at an average of 17\$ per entrée. Miss B's Coconut Club is another boardwalk possibility. This establishment brings the ultimate beach club experience. With options like Caribbean Steak, Jerk Chicken, and signature club burgers, you are sure to satisfy your hunger.

As we wrap up our beach day, you could skip lunch on the boardwalk and make your way down the road to the neighboring beach, Pacific Beach instead. Home to the best hole-in-the-wall wing bar, Dirty Birds. Now with five locations in San Diego, three more than when I lived there. Growing for good reason, their wing deals change every day, giving customers a reason to keep coming back. Home to their famous “Dirty Ranch” sauce, these crispy wings will have your mouth watering, traditional and boneless alike. Enjoy local, domestic, and international beer flowing on tap as they stream live sporting events and comedy shows.

(6 PM Downtown San Diego)

During the day, it's bustling with corporate workers and heavy traffic. But at night, the music flows from each block, and partygoers from all over dress to their best for a night out. Moonshine Flats brings the country vibe to this beach city. The first level has a full bar, corn hole, darts, and pool tables for those who wish to relax with a strong drink and a good game. On the second level, a full bar and dance floor stays busy with live music and traditional line dancing. Tourist visiting from the southern states, true country-hearted folk, always show off their authentic dance moves and outshine the locals. Locals, who only know *Fake ID* from the Footloose remake. Bottle service is available for those who want a guaranteed table and endless drinks.

Other popular bars include:

- The Topsy Crow: Known for cheap drinks and no cover charge.
- Prohibition Lounge: Jump back to the 1930's in this vintage speakeasy.
- Onyx: A three-room night club with music to please everyone.
- Gaslamp Tavern: A casual sports bar with great beer and big-screen game viewings.

## Sunday

(9AM Final Excursion)

For your final event, explore one of San Diego's best malls. Unlike the typical mall you may think, here in California, the mall experience takes place outside with designer shops, imported food, and sunshine with every step. In San Diego, I found it rare to see a typical “inside” mall, the closest one being 35 minutes away.

### Top Picks:

- UTC La Jolla (Westfield UTC): Offers high-end designer stores, boutique shops, and global cuisine.
- Fashion Valley Mall: Offers similar store options. With an AMC theater for locals to catch new releases. Famous restaurant Yard House has more than 100 made from scratch American dishes.
- Mission Valley Mall: Features familiar shops like Nike and Forever 21, and shops unseen in other parts of the country, such as popular brands—Tesla and Apple.



<https://www.simon.com/mall/fashion-valley>

At UTC La Jolla, pet owners commonly bring their furry friends along for window shopping adventures. San Diego is very pet-friendly compared to other cities.

While you are there, try Superberry Açaí, a shop promoting healthy lifestyles with colorful and delicious açai bowls. Traditional bowls come in three sizes and can be topped with fresh fruit, granola, or nuts. Smoothies are also available, with optional "super boost" add-ons.

After fueling your morning with açai, browse from shop to shop, fulfilling any final shopping desires before heading back to your Airbnb to pack up your new treasures.

### About the Author:

Ivy is a senior at East Tennessee State University, studying at the College of Business and Technology. She plans to graduate in December 2025 with a Bachelor's degree in Business Administration, concentrating in legal studies. A United States Marine Corps veteran, Ivy moved to Johnson City, Tennessee after living in San Diego, California. In her free time, she enjoys spending time with her husband and their German Shepherd.

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