

# Sunny San Diego

An idyllic climate, vast array of beaches and wealth of tourist attractions makes San Diego an enjoyable city to visit. BETHAN NORRIS finds out what else the city has to offer the language traveller.

Language students visiting San Diego for the first time are often attracted by visions of an outdoor, laid-back lifestyle combined with all the usual attractions of a major city, and they are not disappointed. 'From my experience, students like the beaches, nightlife and definitely shopping,' says Heiko Floegel from Alliant International University in San Diego. '[San Diego has] the flair of a huge city but the comfort of a village.'

San Diego is located in the bottom southwest corner of the USA, near the border with Mexico, and is a popular city with tourists. 'San Diego's year-round mild climate is probably the main attraction for our students,' says Javier Arozarena from Converse International School of Languages. 'That and the beaches, mountains and deserts within easy reach.'

The city's mild climate, along with its location on the coast, fosters a relaxed atmosphere among locals and has created a strong beach culture, which visiting students are usually only too willing to take advantage of. Surfing, whale watching, swimming and sailing are popular activities, according to Arozarena, who adds that his school offers students city tours by sea. Nancy Kaye, at Global American Language Institute (Gali), on San Diego's waterfront, adds, 'Gali students sail free on our school yachts.'

There are numerous beaches to choose from in San Diego and each offers a slightly different experience. The best surfing beaches are Imperial Beach, Point Loma, Ocean

Beach and Pacific Beach, while the environmentally protected San Diego-La Jolla underwater park in La Jolla Bay offers a 30-metre deep underwater canyon and a kelp forest for experienced divers.



San Diego's harbour view (main picture)

by public transport from San Diego and visiting Mexico is a popular trip for students, according to Richard Halstead, Director of International House San Diego. 'Mexico is only 20 miles

While water sports and beach activities feature highly on the extra-curricular activities list, the nearby mountains and desert also lend themselves to outdoor sports. 'There's something for everyone,' says

Arozarena. 'Golf, skiing, kayaking, mountain biking and even desert jeep safaris for the more adventurous. San Diego also offers easy access to Mexico, Disneyland, Hollywood, Las Vegas and the Grand Canyon - it's a tourist's dream.'

The Mexican city of Tijuana is easily accessible

away and many students travel there to shop or experience Mexican culture and nightlife,' he says. Tijuana was immortalised in the US hit film, *Traffic*.

Converse International School of Languages arranges two- and three-day trips for their students to explore some of the many areas that are within striking distance of San Diego. 'Several times a month [we] introduce [students] to Mexico's Baja California coast, Las Vegas, San Francisco and Los Angeles,' says Arozarena.

Halstead points out that the city of San Diego itself provides numerous opportunities for students to learn about American history. 'San Diego is the birthplace of California,' he says. 'The Old Town Historical



### San Diego Zoo

The city's famous zoo boasts some of the world's rarest wildlife, such as giant pandas. A new feature is the 'Ituri forest', a recreation of an African rainforest with hippos, otters, forest buffalos and monkeys



## Agent viewpoint

*'Our clients choose San Diego as a study destination because the city is located in an outstanding region with lots of attractions [for students]. It is also near the sea. Our adult clients enjoy the modern facilities at our partner school [Converse International School of Languages], and for our younger clients, a highlight is visiting different educational parks or museums, as well as taking trips further afield to places like Las Vegas. In their free time, our students usually go to the beach.'*  
**Laetitia Maory-Laridiere, Silc Idiomas, Spain**

*'The most popular reasons for choosing San Diego [among our clients] are the warm weather and the possibility to go surfing. Students also like the fact that San Diego is not a big city like Los Angeles. They like the weather and the nightlife there and find the people very friendly. We have had no problems at all sending clients to study in San Diego, it is a very safe place.'*

**Marie-Laurence Perrichon, Ispa International, France**

*'Unfortunately, our sales to San Diego are very low, as it is [close to] the border with Mexico, so the Spanish speaking community is high, and our students prefer other cities in the USA, UK or Canada.'*

**Bruno Mellone Torres, Cosmo Educacion, Mexico**



**Museum of Contemporary Art**  
 There are in fact two separate sites for the museum, one in downtown and one in La Jolla. The museums have permanent collections as well as temporary exhibitions. In downtown, admission is free

Park is home to the first settlement in California. There are many historical places to visit.' Students studying at International House are encouraged to learn as much as possible about the city as part of

improving their English language skills. 'For conversation practice, classroom assignments can sometimes include going to the Old Town Historical Park and interviewing tourists, or a learning scavenger hunt that includes talking to people to find information they need to complete an assignment,' says Halstead.

At Gali too, students are encouraged to find out more about the city and local people. 'We have mystery guests who come to class and Gali students get to practise interviewing in English,' says Kaye. 'We go to many plays for free because our head instructor's husband is a famous actor. After the performance, the students practise English with the actors.'

According to Floegel, one of the San Diego's most famous sites is the Gaslamp Quarter, which styles itself as the city's entertainment hub and is a popular area for students to spend their

evenings. The area has a variety of bars, clubs and restaurants and is home to the annual Street Scene festival, which is a three-day event incorporating Mardi Gras, the Brazil carnival and live musical performances. 'Street Scene [is held] every year downtown,' says Floegel. 'Streets are closed, bands are playing and different food is served. Several other festivals are held year round [and there are also] many events in Balboa Park.'

Balboa Park is home to the famous San Diego Zoo

as well as numerous gardens, 15 museums and various performing arts groups. A number of cultural events are held in the park throughout the year, including 'Twilight in the Park', a series of free outdoor musical events in the summer, with military bands, Latin jazz and big band swing.

The diversity of its many attractions is a key element of San Diego's charm, although Arozarena believes that some tourists may not be aware of this before they arrive. 'Some of San Diego's most famous sites are the world-famous San Diego Zoo, the African savannah-style animal park, Sea World, our historic Old Town, and Laguna and Big Bear Mountain ski resorts,' he explains. 'San Diego [is] also [home to] a wonderful cultural diversity - including rich Spanish and native American Indian cultures and [associated] special events.'

San Diego's cultural mix is also exemplified by various institutions in Balboa Park - the Japanese Friendship Garden, the World Beat Center, which celebrates cultures of African origin, and the House of Pacific Relations, where 30 groups of diverse national origin have their own cottage in the park. □



**San Diego Trolley**  
 The San Diego Trolley is one of the city's more interesting forms of transport, along with the water taxi and pedi-cab. Tourists can take the trolley to the beach, the city centre or even to Mexico