

Top-Flight San Diego

by **MARIA LENHART**

Meetings West, February 2009

The fact that San Diego is, at its core, a Navy and Marine Corps town only adds to its sparkle as a meeting destination. The presence of such places as the Marine Corps Air Station Miramar and the USS Midway/San Diego Aircraft Carrier Museum gives local DMCs the ability to stage events with a level of excitement and drama hard to equal anywhere else.



"Both the Midway and Miramar are really popular with groups," says Jennifer Miller, general manager of San Diego-based ACCESS Destination Services (www.accessdmc.com). "Miramar is an active military base, so it's something that most people don't have access to. The

groups are hosted by top officers; fighter pilots who have served on one or more tours. They take them out to the hangar where they can walk into the cockpits and talk to pilots about flying the planes."

Equipped for large-scale events, the base offers over 70,000 square feet of banquet space that includes the Miramar Officers Club, where scenes from the movie *Top Gun* were filmed, and the Flying Leathernecks Aviation Museum, which features vintage aircraft and exhibits on Marine history.

"The hangar is like a blank canvas, where we can do parties with a *Top Gun* theme or even cutting-edge events where we turn it into a nightclub," Miller says.

Events at Miramar also have a Corporate Social Responsibility aspect, with proceeds going to assist military families with childcare and other needs.

A massive aircraft carrier docked in San Diego harbor, the *Midway* provides the largest outdoor event space in the city, according to Miller.

"It's a wonderful venue where docents who have served on the *Midway* take people into the belly of the ship, so they can see what it was like to live on it," she says. "And you can do some really spectacular events on the flight deck. We've launched fireworks there, staged concerts and even had military personnel arrive by parachute."

Of course, San Diego is also known for surf and sand, both of which can be enjoyed at classic California beach parties held behind the Hotel Del Coronado.

"It's one of the few beaches in California where you can have amplified sound and serve alcohol," says Chris Lee, CEO of ACCESS San Diego. "We've done parties with fire pits and live entertainment—we've even had the Beach Boys perform. It's the ultimate California experience."

A bit more unusual are the polo parties that the DMC stages in northern San Diego County.

"There are active polo clubs who compete there, and groups can watch a private match and meet the players," Miller says. "We transport the group out there in classic cars, which adds to the atmosphere."

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