



BIG BAY AND BEYOND

Excerpts from an article written by Carolyn Koenig for Smart Meetings, May 2010

Almost 50 years after Columbus first glimpsed the shores of the New World, explorer Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo entered into San Diego Bay, the first foray of European adventurers into the coast of what is now California. He claimed it for the King of Spain, noting succinctly in his log that the bay was “a closed and very good harbor,” and naming it San Miguel, after a saint whose feast was the next day. His ships remained for six days, gathering provisions while sheltered in the land-locked bay from a storm that swirled out at sea.

Today’s visitors are greeted by an equally spectacular sight, as their plane descends into San Diego International Airport: a sea of tall, architecturally unique buildings and lush palm trees fringing the shores along a vast, still-magnificent harbor. And while most meetings are shorter than the six days Cabrillo gave his crew before pushing onward, attendees often will extend their stays just to do their own exploring.

And there’s plenty to explore. The once-small city (whose name changed when another explorer, Sebastian Vizcaino, arrived to map the coast) has expanded its original boundaries inland and north, joining other smaller cities and rural areas to form San Diego County, a 4,269-square-mile region with a 70-mile, picturesque coastline, boasting beaches to match.

Had Cabrillo stayed longer, his armada of 250 men and three ships would have learned even more about this new territory, particularly its mild weather. San Diego enjoys a sunny climate with daytime temperatures that average around 70 degrees year-round—a factor in many planners’ booking decision.

Other factors in these decisions, of course, are San Diego’s myriad attractions for meetings and conventions, from a 2.6-million-square-foot, state-of-the-art convention center to a plethora of hotels and resorts that support it or can host self-contained conferences and events. There’s also a full range of cultural, recreational and tourism options adding to its appeal.

DOWNTOWN SAN DIEGO

Within its nearly 320 square miles, the city of San Diego encompasses a clutch of meetings destinations, including Downtown, a vibrant area with eight distinct neighborhoods. Flanking the waterfront, Downtown is where you’ll find the convention center, several major meetings hotels, the historic, but very trendy, Gaslamp Quarter (with more than 100 restaurants and 40

nightclubs), Petco Park (the San Diego Padres’ baseball stadium), Seaport Village shops and restaurants, and more.

MAJOR MEETINGS VENUES

You can’t get much more major when it comes to meeting venues than the **San Diego Convention Center**, which features more than 615,000 sq. ft. of exhibit space, including 72 meeting/banquet rooms, two ballrooms and 184,500 sq. ft. of landscaped terrace levels for receptions and breaks. Located on the Embarcadero on San Diego Bay, its distinctive sail-like architecture reflects its setting. Like all of downtown, it’s easily accessible to the airport—an easy five minutes.

Downtown houses two additional dedicated meeting and event facilities: the **San Diego Concourse**, which features 300,000 sq. ft. of meeting space; and the Civic Theatre, next door, which presents live musical and theater performances (it’s also home to the San Diego Opera).

Meetings hotels run the gamut between brand-new contemporary designs to hundred-year-old luxury properties—and everything in between. Among the larger, convention hotels are the new **Hilton San Diego Bayfront**, a sleekly modern hotel with 1,190 guest rooms and 100,000 sq. ft. of meeting space (the highest ratio of meeting space to hotel rooms in the downtown area); the **San Diego Marriott Hotel & Marina**, immediately adjacent to the center, with 1,362 guest rooms and 75,000 sq. ft. of meeting space; and the **Manchester Grand Hyatt**, with 1,625 guest rooms and 125,000 sq. ft. of function space, including the largest ballrooms in San Diego. The **Omni San Diego Hotel**, which is connected by skybridge to Petco Park, features 511 rooms and 27,000 sq. ft. of function space.

CSR—corporate social responsibility—plays a big role in many companies’ agendas, and **Access Destination Services**, a San Diego-based DMC, recently assisted in organizing a work day for Underwriters Laboratories, whose meeting participants had traveled from all over the world for their annual meeting. A group of 80 rolled up their sleeves and spent an afternoon enhancing a San Diego Neighborhood House Association’s First Step Head Start site. “As a group, we are so pleased to have had the opportunity to give back to a wonderful community of people,” says Jill Oakman, global marketing manager for Underwriters Laboratories.