



L'Auberge Del Mar.

## NORTHERN EXPOSURE

Sophisticated resorts, sunny beaches and wide-open spaces. Welcome to San Diego North

By Renee Brincks



Golfing in San Diego North.

When planning the Foodservice Sales & Marketing Association's annual meeting, Sharon Boyle looks for four- and five-star resorts near major metropolitan areas. She favors destinations within 30 miles of an airport, makes on-site golf a priority and selects properties close to upscale restaurants. This year, Boyle found everything she wanted in north San Diego County.

Approximately 325 people attended her February event at Rancho Bernardo Inn Golf Resort & Spa. She lists the resort's ambience, attention to detail and an "España night"—complete with cigar rollers, flamenco guitar music, paella and special-recipe sangria—as highlights. "The service was the best I've experienced in all the years I've been doing this," Boyle says.

The community of Rancho Bernardo, 27 miles from San





Poolside at the Rancho Bernardo Inn.

Diego International Airport and far removed from big city bustle, is at the center of San Diego North. This 2,000-square-mile region stretches 35 miles along the coast from La Jolla to Oceanside. It also reaches inland, past Escondido and the surrounding foothills, toward Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

"We're more the resort, spa and golf area of San Diego. We have a little more space, plus leisure activities and fabulous beaches," says Mark Erikson, vice president of sales and marketing for the **San Diego North Convention & Visi-**

**tors Bureau** ([sandiegonorth.com/conference](http://sandiegonorth.com/conference)). He lists airport proximity and pleasant year-round weather among the area's major draws. "The fall is gorgeous. In the spring—March and April especially—the Flower Fields are blooming up near Carlsbad. It just takes your breath away," he says. "Summertime is our high season, but there are still many options and there's great golf and beach weather."

Because local hotels have recently reported more short-term bookings than normal, Erikson says planners can find surprising

deals at any time. "Never assume that hotels are full or that you shouldn't consider a place, especially with the economy as it is. Always call and ask what the options are," he advises.

Meeting planners are not alone in discovering San Diego North's magic. The U.S. Open was held here in June, at Torrey Pines Golf Course. Next February, the final stage of the Amgen Tour of California begins in Rancho Bernardo and wraps up in Escondido. Lance Armstrong will participate in the professional cycling event, his first U.S. race in

## GETTING THERE

- More than 20 airlines serve the **San Diego International Airport** ([san.org](http://san.org)), 3 miles north of downtown San Diego, 38 miles south of Oceanside and 63 miles south of Temecula.
- SkyWest/United Express operates daily flights between Carlsbad's **McClellan-Palomar Airport** ([www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dpw/airports/airskeds.html](http://www.sdcounty.ca.gov/dpw/airports/airskeds.html)) and **Los Angeles International Airport** ([lawa.org/lax](http://lawa.org/lax)). Attendees can also fly into LAX and drive 90–120 miles to San Diego North.
- **Amtrak** ([amtrak.com](http://amtrak.com)) stops in Oceanside and San Diego, with local public transportation and taxi service branching out from there.



three years. Diverse attractions, beaches, parks and wineries add to this destination's overall allure.

## COMMUNITY CHARMS ▼

### BY THE BEACH

San Diego County's northernmost coastal community is **Oceanside** ([oceansidechamber.com](http://oceansidechamber.com)), a playful beach town known for surfing, sailing and sport fishing. The sunny city has a 1,900-foot wooden pier that overlooks 3.5 miles of white sand beaches. Nearby, the 7-mile San Luis Rey River Bike Trail provides a picturesque introduction to the area. You'll also find attractions such as the **Mission San Luis Rey** ([sanluisrey.org](http://sanluisrey.org)), the largest of California's missions, and the **California Surf Museum** ([surfmuseum.org](http://surfmuseum.org)). The Oceanside Transit Center makes getting around more convenient by linking Amtrak trains and local commuter routes.

Just to the south is **Carlsbad** ([visitcarlsbad.com](http://visitcarlsbad.com)), home of **Legoland** ([legoland.com](http://legoland.com)) plus several posh resorts, recreation-friendly la-

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—Mark Erikson, vice president of sales and marketing for the San Diego North CVB

goons and intriguing downtown galleries and antique shops. Some 50 acres of roses, poinsettias and Giant Tecolote Ranunculus bloom bright in March, April and May at the **Flower Fields at Carlsbad Ranch** ([theflowerfields.com](http://theflowerfields.com)). The city's McClellan-Palomar Airport provides a direct entry point to north San Diego County.

**Encinitas** ([encinitaschamber.com](http://encinitaschamber.com)) has 11 beaches begging to be explored, and the San Elijo Lagoon Ecological Reserve includes more than 300 plant species and 5 miles of hiking trails. Among unique venues at the **Quail Botanical Gardens** ([qbgardens.org](http://qbgardens.org)) is a secluded

deck that overlooks a three-story waterfall.

Though it covers just 2.1 square miles, **Del Mar** ([delmarchamber.org](http://delmarchamber.org)) is packed with shopping, recreation and ocean-view restaurants. There's also the famous **Del Mar Fairgrounds** ([sdfair.com](http://sdfair.com)) and its historic horse track, which once welcomed celebrity guests Bing Crosby and Lucille Ball and still draws race fans every summer. On Saturdays, local growers peddle produce and flowers at the popular Del Mar Farmers Market.

South of Del Mar, past **Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve** ([torreypine.org](http://torreypine.org)) and its namesake golf resort, is postcard-perfect La



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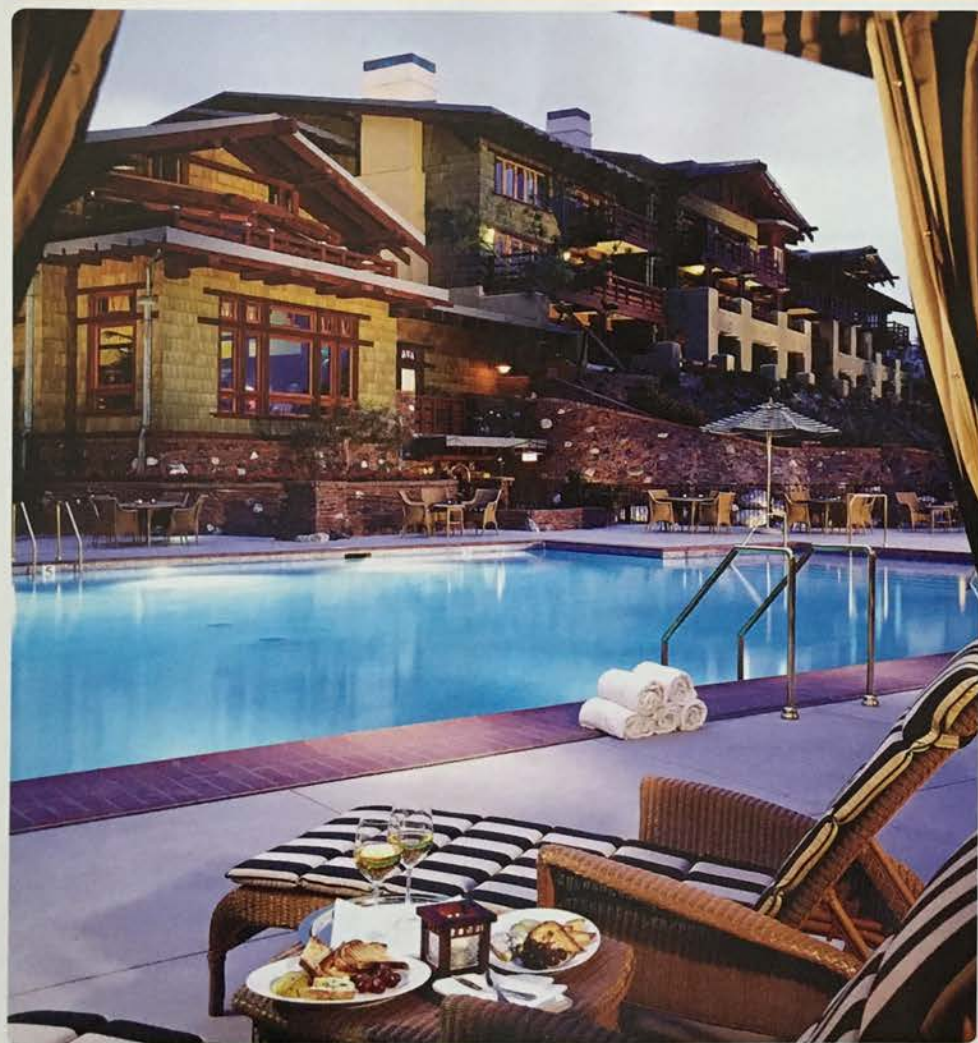
**TWENTY/20**  
GRILL & WINE BAR

**Ocean Pearl Spa**





Above, Guest room at the Grand Del Mar; below, pool at The Lodge at Torrey Pines.



**Jolla** ([lajollabythesea.com](http://lajollabythesea.com)). The community's name means "the jewel" in Spanish, and it lives up to that moniker with a sparkling bay and secluded beach coves. The University of California, San Diego and the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, along with its well-known **Birch Aquarium** ([aquarium.ucsd.edu](http://aquarium.ucsd.edu)), call La Jolla home. Artists thrive here, as well. **San Diego's Museum of Contemporary Art** ([mcsad.org](http://mcsad.org)) has a La Jolla location, and downtown avenues are lined with galleries.

## INLAND APPEAL

Northeast of La Jolla, the planned community of **Rancho Bernardo** ([rbernardo.com](http://rbernardo.com)) offers groups a taste of southern California's best. Golf courses, upscale shopping venues and major properties, including the recently renovated Rancho Bernardo Inn, are tucked within the community's boundaries. For 119 years, winemakers at the **Bernardo Winery** ([bernardowinery.com](http://bernardowinery.com)) have crafted vintages here, as well.

Just north along I-15 in **Escondido** ([escondido.org](http://escondido.org)) are cultural and recreational activities enough to please all types of meeting attendees. The 1994 opening of the **California Center for the Arts** ([artcenter.org](http://artcenter.org)) sparked a downtown renaissance, and the center remains a top draw for its visual arts museum, performance stages and on-site conference center. Today, Escondido's city center also hosts ongoing art walks, a biannual street fair and summer car cruises. Exhibits and outings such as the Kilimanjaro Safari Walk at the **San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park** ([sandiegozoo.org/](http://sandiegozoo.org/)

## DON'T MISS

- La Jolla's diverse restaurant scene, ideal for dine-around events.
- The Palomar Observatory, with its 200-inch Hale Telescope and fascinating behind-the-scenes guided tours.
- The new Land of Adventure area at Legoland, with four exhibits inspired by 1920s Egypt.
- Stargazing and spotting bighorn sheep in the Anza-Borrego Desert.
- The chance to sample locally brewed Surfrider Stout and Harbor Hefeweizen at Oceanside Ale Works.
- Asian and African elephants, viewable from the Elephant Overlook at the San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park.



wap) showcase exotic species, and naturalists lead hikes at the 3,058-acre Daley Ranch.

Each spring, the community of **Fallbrook** (fallbrookca.org) goes its own shade of green during the annual Avocado Festival. Pastoral beauty abounds here, where roads wind up orchard-lined hills and city streets retain an Old West vibe. Just east of Camp Pendleton Marine Corps Base is the **Fallbrook Art Center** (fallbrookart.org), a centerpiece of the town's creative scene.

Vineyard tours and tasting events continue to crop up around **Temecula** (cityoftemecula.org), a bustling inland city 15 miles northeast of Fallbrook. There's a budding wine industry here, marketed by the **Temecula Valley Winegrowers Association** (temeculawines.org), and the mild southern California climate makes for pleasant hot-air balloon tours, hiking, horse-drawn carriage rides and outdoor markets. Attendees traveling with their families enjoy the **Temecula Children's Museum** (pennypickles.org), while the **Pechanga Resort & Casino** (pechanga.com) caters to adult tastes with golf and spa options, live entertainment and an expansive gaming floor.

## KEY VENUES ▼

While downtown San Diego has a large-scale

### GROUP DINING

- **Arterra Restaurant**, Del Mar  
arterrarestaurant.com  
American cuisine made with seasonal ingredients
- **Baily's Fine Dining**, Temecula  
oldtowndining.com  
California and Continental cuisine
- **El Bizcocho**, Rancho Bernardo  
ranchobernardoinn.com/bizcocho  
California-influenced French fare
- **Marine Room**, La Jolla  
marineroom.com  
French classics and global cuisine
- **Stone Brewing World Bistro & Gardens**, Escondido  
stoneworldbistro.com  
Seasonal, locally sourced dishes
- **Vivace**, Carlsbad  
fourseasons.com/aviara  
Contemporary Italian

convention center, San Diego North offers an assortment of alternative venues that immerse attendees in local culture.

In Escondido, the California Center for the Arts' conference facility includes a 9,000-square-foot ballroom, breakout rooms and outdoor courtyards, plus a 1,500-seat concert hall. Up to 240 guests can partake in the "Dinner on Stage" event, a dazzling dining experience complete with theatrical lighting and special effects.

More than 180,000 sq. ft. of exhibit halls, event rooms, luxury suites and outdoor, ocean-view spaces are available at the Del Mar Fairgrounds. Construction of a new roof for the 47,250-square-foot Del Mar Arena is scheduled for March 2009 completion. Down the road in La Jolla, venues at the Birch Aquarium



## Making Meetings a *Breeze*

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croquet. With 100,000 sq. ft. of indoor and outdoor space, including an 18,000-square-foot ballroom, La Costa is among the region's largest coastal conference facilities. The resort is set on 400 acres and also has twin 18-hole golf courses, 17 tennis courts, a spa with 42 treatment rooms, and 610 guest rooms and suites.

Recent renovations at **Rancho Bernardo Inn** ([ranchobernardoinn.com](http://ranchobernardoinn.com)) have positioned the resort among San Diego North's most sought-after meeting venues. At the heart of the property's 26,000-square-foot conference center is the new 10,140-square-foot Aragon Ballroom, a stylish space with an adjacent gathering area and outdoor garden. The 287 guest rooms have been updated with new linens, couches, chairs and 42-inch flat-screen televisions, and many overlook the resort's 18 holes of golf. Other resort amenities include a full-service spa and fitness center and the highly rated El Bizcocho restaurant.

Select meeting rooms at **The Lodge at Torrey Pines** ([lodgetorrey.pines.com](http://lodgetorrey.pines.com)) also overlook neighboring greens, and most indoor venues feature adjacent deck or patio space. Guest rooms and suites measure up to 2,000 sq. ft. in

## CONVENTION CENTER EXPLORES EXPANSION

In September, the **San Diego Convention Center Corporation** ([visitsandiego.com](http://visitsandiego.com)) began a yearlong feasibility study that could lead to a large-scale expansion of the downtown facility.

The center now holds a one-year lease option on 8.5 acres of land adjacent to the current 2.6-million-square-foot waterfront facility. Together with the Port of San Diego and the City of San Diego, center administrators will explore specifications and financing options with a target development completion date of 2014.

"The success of this would mean we'd be able to keep our most lucrative clients who are bursting at the seams, and we could re-book clients who have outgrown our facility," says Steven Johnson, vice president of public affairs for the San Diego Convention Center Corporation. "It would also mean more jobs, and it would let San Diego build upon its success as a world-class meeting destination."

The San Diego Convention Center currently serves 1 million attendees annually. Tides, a new 130-seat on-site restaurant that caters to groups assembled at the facility, opened in August.

size and are styled with nature-inspired décor. The Lodge has earned the AAA Five-Diamond award for six consecutive years.

The AAA Four-Diamond **Pala Casino Spa and Resort** ([palacasino.com](http://palacasino.com)) is preparing for a \$100-million restaurant remodel and development project. A new sushi and sake bar, Mexican restaurant and Italian coffee house

are planned, and the expanded Pala Terrace Buffet will seat 600 guests upon completion. The 507-room resort, located off I-15 south of Temecula, has 30,000 sq. ft. of function space and accommodates groups of up to 2,000. In addition to a spa and a pool with 12 private cabanas, Pala Casino features live entertainment along with its gaming attractions.

## A SETTING FOR SUCCESS

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SAN DIEGO NORTH—NEAR THE COAST	ROOMS/MEETING SPACE	WHAT'S DISTINCTIVE
<b>Estancia La Jolla Hotel &amp; Spa</b> estancialajolla.com	210 rms/26,000 sq. ft.	IACC-certified. Spa, fitness classes, fountain courtyards.
<b>Four Seasons Resort Aviara</b> fourseasons.com/aviara	318 rms/76,000 sq. ft.	Newly renovated 15,000-square-foot spa; Arnold Palmer signature golf; on-site restaurant can accommodate 112.
<b>The Grand Del Mar</b> thegranddelmar.com	249 rms/20,000 sq. ft.	Opened in late 2007; 10,000-square-foot ballroom. Four pools, tennis, Tom Fazio-designed golf course.
<b>Hilton San Diego Del Mar</b> hilton.com	257 rms/17,000 sq. ft.	Conveniently located near Del Mar Fairgrounds. Largest meeting room is 6,000 sq. ft. Business center on-site.
<b>Hyatt Regency La Jolla at the Aventine</b> lajolla.hyatt.com	419 rms/32,000 sq. ft.	Includes 11,800-square-foot Aventine Ballroom and 5,850-square-foot glass-enclosed Barcino Pavilion.
<b>L'Auberge Del Mar</b> laubergedelmar.com	120 rms/15,500 sq. ft.	Brand new luxury hotel with indoor and outdoor event space; private path to beach; full-service European spa.
<b>La Costa Resort and Spa</b> lacosta.com	610 rms/100,000 sq. ft.	Conference Center and Costa del Sol ballroom offer 50,000 sq. ft. of meeting space; additional 50,000 with new Vista Terrace and Garden Pools.
<b>La Jolla Shores Hotel</b> ljshoreshotel.com	128 rms/7,500 sq. ft.	Beautiful beachfront setting; rooms just steps from the sand. Remodeled guest rooms; tennis on-site.
<b>La Valencia Hotel</b> lavalencia.com	115 rms/5,000 sq. ft.	Recently added 15 luxurious Ocean Villas; Sky Room restaurant offers dining with 180-degree views.
<b>The Lodge at Torrey Pines</b> lodgetorrey.pines.com	170 rms/13,000 sq. ft.	San Diego's only AAA Five-Diamond meeting and conference resort; borders renowned Torrey Pines Golf Course.
<b>Marriott San Diego Del Mar</b> marriott.com	284 rms/12,078 sq. ft.	Arterra Restaurant features indoor and outdoor dining; Grand Ballroom seats 896 theater-style.
<b>Marriott San Diego La Jolla</b> marriott.com	360 rms/16,040 sq. ft.	Eighteen meeting rooms; in-house A/V assistance. Indoor and outdoor pools.
<b>Sheraton Carlsbad Resort &amp; Spa</b> sheratoncarlsbadresort.com	250 rms/25,000 sq. ft.	Brand new resort with spa. Minutes from beaches and Championship Crossings at Carlsbad Golf Course.
SAN DIEGO NORTH—INLAND		
<b>Harrah's Rincon Casino &amp; Resort</b> harrahsrincon.com	662 rms/13,500 sq. ft.	Updated meeting facilities and technological options. Renovated pool area with fire pits.
<b>Pala Casino Spa and Resort</b> palacasino.com	507 rms/30,000 sq. ft.	Las Vegas-style gaming, executive boardrooms, flexible breakout space and outdoor event venues.
<b>Pechanga Resort &amp; Casino</b> pechanga.com	522 rms/40,000 sq. ft.	Four-Diamond resort; 22,000-square-foot Grand Ballroom can seat 1,800; teleconference center can host 118.
<b>Rancho Bernardo Inn</b> ranchobernardoinn.com	287 rms/45,000 sq. ft.	Recently completed a \$25-million renovation; venues include 26,000-square-foot conference center.
DOWNTOWN SAN DIEGO AND SURROUNDING AREAS		
<b>Hilton San Diego Bayfront</b> hilton.com	1,190 rms/165,000 sq. ft.	New waterfront hotel adjacent to San Diego Convention Center. More than 30 breakout rooms; 34,000-sq. ft. ballroom.
<b>Hyatt Regency Mission Bay</b> missionbay.hyatt.com	430 rms/30,000 sq. ft.	Renovated guest rooms with flat-screen TVs. The Palm Ballroom has a private courtyard and seats 190.
<b>Manchester Grand Hyatt</b> manchestergrand.hyatt.com	1,625 rms/125,000 sq. ft.	Largest ballrooms in San Diego; 41 breakout rooms; on-site A/V experts. Full-service spa.
<b>San Diego Marriott Hotel &amp; Marina</b> marriott.com	1,362 rms/110,000 sq. ft.	Waterfront setting, adjacent to the San Diego Convention Center and the Gaslamp Quarter; 54 meeting rooms.
<b>Town &amp; Country Resort &amp; Convention Center</b> towncountry.com	1,000 rms/250,000 sq. ft.	San Diego's largest privately owned convention center; new 41,000-square-foot Grand Exhibit Hall.



## ACTIVITIES AND OFF-SITE EVENTS ▼

### FOOD, DRINK AND FUN

Gaming and entertainment options abound at resort casinos such as Pala Casino and the nearby **Pechanga Resort & Casino** (pechanga.com), a 522-room property with more than 2,150 slots and games and 40,000 sq. ft. of event space. At **Harrah's Rincon Resort and Casino** (harrahs.com), blackjack dealers clad in bathing suits work the "bikini pit," a popular outdoor gaming area.

San Diego's burgeoning craft beer culture offers spirited alternatives for off-site activities. **Green Flash Brewing Company** (greenflashbrew.com), located between Oceanside and Escondido in Vista, leads group brewery tours and tastings by appointment, and also has an on-site meeting space. Escondido's **Stone Brewing Company** (stonebrew.com) books private brewery tours for large groups. Its Stone Brewing World Bistro & Gardens, an indoor-outdoor venue that seats up to 385, serves sustainable and organic fare and local beers. **Brewery Tours of San Diego** (brewery-toursofsandiego.com) operates custom outings that include tastings and behind-the-scenes access at local breweries.

Several San Diego North operators offer group wine and culinary adventures, as well. The Grape Escape by **PRA Destination Management** (pra.com) takes guests into Temecula's vineyards and orchards, where they learn about local history and sample the region's top wines. **Destination Temecula** (destem.com) coordinates tours, events and team-building activities for executive retreats and groups of up to 500. Hands-on winemaking activities, limousine tasting tours and sunset winery dinners are among group options. **Where You Want to Be Tours** (wheretours.com) arranges meals at distinctive local restaurants as part of their standard and customized excursions; the company also leads team-building outings and scavenger hunts.

### NATURAL ATTRACTIONS

Even the most dedicated meeting attendees might be tempted by San Diego North's sunny skies, warm breezes and stunning vistas. Luckily, venues here capitalize on nature and nice weather with open-air event spaces and imaginative off-site options. Some 35 acres, including a rainforest exhibit, subtropical fruit



garden and bamboo grove, provide a colorful backdrop for gatherings at Quail Botanical Gardens. Three buildings are available for private events and groups can gather in the gardens, as well.


Groups of 20 or more are invited to book private tours at **The Lavender Fields** (thelavenderfields.com) each May and June, when blooms are at their peak. A lavender labyrinth also is open seasonally. The grounds are located 17 miles north of Escondido.

South of Escondido, the San Diego Zoo's Wild Animal Park provides awe-inspiring alternatives to traditional meeting rooms. The largest venue is the Hunte Nairobi Pavilion, which has a 35-foot vaulted ceiling. The Mombasa Island Pavilion has no walls and overlooks the Mombasa Lagoon, as well as the pelicans and flamingos that frequent the waters there. Additional picnic areas and decks allow attendees to meet in view of lions and gazelles, while VIP tours introduce guests to the park's wonders.

Even Legoland gets in on the nature-themed action with the Sea Life Aquarium that opened in August. The two-story attraction incorporates 72 Lego models among displays showcasing more than 200 marine species.

Hiking, biking and equestrian trails cross

several state and regional parks in north San Diego County; the **County of San Diego** (co.san-diego.ca.us) maintains a comprehensive online list of recreational areas. In addition, several local outfitters rent gear and lead tours for visitors. Among them is **La Jolla Bike and Kayak Tours** (sandiegobikeandkayaktours.com), which operates snorkeling, biking and kayaking adventures. **Surf Diva** (surfdiva.com) offers corporate team-building clinics and catered lunches on the beach in La Jolla.

Here, the great outdoors also includes a collection of great golf courses. The challenge for players? Where to tee off first. In addition to public courses scattered throughout the region, many major resorts feature newsworthy fairways. The course at Rancho Bernardo Inn has been the site of PGA and LPGA tour events. On the heels of this year's U.S. Open, Torrey Pines is gearing up to host the annual Buick Invitational in February. Tom Fazio designed the 18-hole course at the Grand Del Mar, and professional golf instructor Roger Fredericks holds workshops on the greens at La Costa. 

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