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Look for Historic Sites throughout the guide
on the Old Town San Diego Trail
Food, Fun & History

Across the street from the San Diego Transit Center is the historic village of Old Town San Diego where you will find plenty of things to see and do.

Old Town San Diego is the Birthplace of California, the site of the first European settlement, and offers visitors a glimpse at the history of early San Diego. Some of San Diego's finest restaurants are located within this quaint area along with many unique shops, live theatre, and artisans and galleries, all within easy walking distance.

Old Town encompasses three Parks. The Old Town State Historic Park with its many historic buildings is an elegant reminder of California's colorful past. Heritage Park is a romantic setting of important Victorian homes which were moved to there to preserve them. The Presidio Park, perched high above Old Town, memorializes the original site of the first Mission and Presidio in California.

Come hungry for whatever suits your taste buds, from the finest in Mexican, Italian, Asian, South American and of course American cuisine awaits. Taste fresh handmade tortillas hot off the grill and enjoy some of the largest and best Margaritas you'll find anywhere in the country.
Take home some memories!

There are many quality hotels to choose from in Old Town to make your stay enjoyable.

Enjoy our restaurants, history, museums and guided tours which reveal the story of living history through interpreters that give faces and voices to the people that shaped Old Town.

Old Town San Diego is across from the Transit Center with Amtrak, Coaster, MTS Trolley and bus all within walking distance.

www.oldtownsandiego.org
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Scarcely more than one mile in length and one-half mile in width, Old Town encompasses within its boundaries most of the important aspects of San Diego’s early history. Its appeal to the tourist lies chiefly in the glimpses afforded into the yesteryear, in the sleepy little village nestling into the foothills. Its first civilian resident was Captain Francisco M. Ruiz, in the first years of the nineteenth century. In 1846, its population numbered 250, and in 1850 it was incorporated as a city, its government activities centering around the Plaza Viejo.

Old Town is the location of the first American settlement in California. In keeping with this history, California State Parks owns and operates a number of original and reconstructed buildings as part of Old Town State Historic Park. San Diego County Parks owns Heritage Park, a village of Victorian structures that show many styles of San Diego’s Victorian heritage, along with the oldest synagogue in San Diego. The City of San Diego owns and operates the Presidio Park, El Campo Santo Cemetery and the Adobe Chapel.
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Old Town San Diego State Historic Park presents the opportunity to experience the history of early San Diego by providing a connection to the past.

Converging cultures have contributed to the many flavors of Old Town San Diego experienced through food, history, arts, and entertainment.

The Kumeyaay people, and their ancestors have lived in this area for more than 13,000 years. It is the influences of the Native American, Mexicans, Europeans, Asians, and many others that transformed San Diego from a Mexican pueblo to an American settlement.

San Diego is the site of the first Spanish settlement in what we now call California. In 1825 this region, was the capital of both California and Baja California.

The heart of Old Town San Diego has been a California State Historic Park since 1968. As you wander through its historic homes and buildings, you can feel yourself moving back in time to early California. Be sure to see the windmill behind the Seeley Stable. This mill is a recently restored working model of the one that stood here in the 19th century. It is a remarkable piece of engineering and the only one of its kind in the entire world!

Wander into the many shops and restaurants. Stop at the Robinson-Rose Visitor Center and find out what activities are happening in the park. Take a free tour.

Old Town San Diego is a place of many surprises. You never know what you may discover!
James Robinson came to San Diego from Texas in the Spring of 1850 and developed a successful law practice. He built this two-story structure in 1853 to serve not only as his family residence but also as the home of the San Diego Herald, the San Diego and Gila Railroad office, as well as other private offices. Robinson died in 1857 and his widow Sarah Robinson sold the building to Louis Rose, who probably purchased it as a family residence. Fire destroyed the roof in 1874 and the building fell into ruins by the turn of the century.

The reconstructed building now serves as Old Town State Historic Park's visitor center and has on display a model of Old Town as it looked in 1872, created by Joseph Toigo.
BAZAAR DEL MUNDO
SHOP & DINE in OLD TOWN

SHOPS

BAZAAR DEL MUNDO SHOPS
4133 Taylor St.
619.296.3161
BazaarDelMundo.com
Diane Powers’ has combined her color-drenched shopping arcade with her beautiful Casa Guadalajara Mexican Restaurant to welcome visitors and locals alike. Fronted with the lush greenery and tiled fountains that San Diegans have come to identify with Old Town, Diane creates a sunny and welcoming entry into the Old Town community.

Formerly across the street in Old Town San Diego State Park, the Bazaar del Mundo Shops present a visual feast rich in authentic Mexican hand-painted tile, wrought iron, richly decorated walls, tiled staircases and vendor carts overflowing with handcrafted Mexican flowers.

Strolling through the Shops, visitors are greeted with long-time favorites: a deluge of unique artisans’ specialty and internationally-inspired treasures for the home, fashion, arts and crafts and collectibles. Next door to the Shops, on the first floor of The Art Collector building is Design Center Inc specializing in an array of Southwest furniture, décor and unusual gifts and collectibles.

Many of the boutique shops and vendor carts are recognizable by Bazaar devotees: the Gallery; Laurel Burch Gallerita; Ariana; Artes de Mexico; Guatemala Shop; Libros; the popular Kitchen and Dining shop and more.

An intimate patio courtyard provides a charming place for relaxation and small gatherings, amid the vibrant ambience, splashing fountains and colorful merchandise spilling into the lush terrace. Even the Shops’ tiled restrooms, lovingly adorned in specialty Mexican tiling, will inspire home decorators.

Next door to the Shops, Casa Guadalajara completes the enclave, and continues serving San Diegans’ beloved delectable and award-winning Mexican cuisine. The restaurant has incorporated into its menu many of the most popular dishes from Casa de Pico, which recently re-located to Grossmont Center in La Mesa, and Casa de Bandini, in Carlsbad's Forum Shopping Center.

Diane Powers’ Bazaar del Mundo remains one of San Diego’s favorite destinations for food, folklore and fun. For more information, please visit www.bazaardelmundo.com or call 619.296.3131.

By Nathan Mueller
Located within walking distance of the Fiesta de Reyes courtyard, The Cosmopolitan Restaurant & Hotel features a restaurant with indoor and outdoor seating, two saloons, 10 hotel rooms, and private dining rooms for special occasions. The Cosmopolitan is recognized as one of the most historically significant buildings in California.

With a history spanning over 175 years, the building was originally constructed as the home of San Diego pioneer Juan Bandini between 1827 and 1829. The building is a rarity because of its long history as well as its place as one of the few historic buildings remaining in the state that combined Mexican adobe and American wood-framing techniques.

During its 1870’s heyday, The Cosmo, as it was affectionately called, was the place to be in San Diego. Imagine bellying up to The Cosmo bar, sipping the choicest wines and bourbons and smoking fine Havana cigars. Or, if that’s not your cup of whiskey, imagine sipping tea in the parlor and dining on all the delicacies of the season.

The Cosmopolitan was the fine dining room and lodge for San Diego's elite. All the best parties in town were held at The Cosmo: galas, dances, raffles, family reunions, weddings, and all types of community events.

The Cosmopolitan is one of the most important buildings in all of California, originally the home of Juan Bandini. The lower level is a Mexican adobe structure, dating from 1827, and the upper level an American wood-framed structure dating from 1869 to 1888. It closed in 1888, and over the years, the L-shaped, two-story building served as an olive-canning factory, offices and a hotel. People of many different cultures built it, lived there, worked there, visited there, partied there, and died there. The building is nothing short of a cultural mosaic. Since
undergoing a $6.5 million, three-year historic restoration, completed in 2010, The Cosmopolitan Restaurant & Hotel is once again a vibrant part of Old Town San Diego. Brimming with luxurious vintage ambience, it is the scene of family gatherings, holiday parties, corporate dinners, fundraisers, anniversaries and weddings. The only hotel in Old Town San Diego State Historic Park, The Cosmo houses a full-service restaurant with indoor and outdoor seating, saloon and patio bar, and 10 beautiful guest rooms—each unique in its appointments with 1860’s antique furniture. While this popular restaurant and saloon takes you back in time, the versatile master chef creates a 21st-century menu, featuring American grill, seafood and favorite Mexican dishes, served al fresco on the beautiful orchard patio, indoors in the sala, or in the intimate Bandini room. At the saloon bar, which is the oldest in San Diego, the bartender gladly mixes one of his favorite old drinks served there in the 1870s, as well as a full selection of beers, wines and modern cocktails. Happy hour is offered from 3 p.m. until 6 p.m. daily with delicious appetizers. Don’t forget kids under 10 eat free every day, all day with a paying adult.

Whether you are here for cocktails, a meal or the entertainment, you’ll rave about our orchard patio with its fire bar and surrounding terraces of fruit trees, herbs, tomatoes, grape vines and flowers, many used by our chef and the bartenders in the food and drinks. Step in to the Cosmo Restaurant for a great dining experience, as well as a step back in time!

2660 Calhoun Street, San Diego, CA 92110, 619.297.1874.

http://www.oldtowncosmopolitan.com
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One block from the Old Town Trolley stop at Old Town San Diego State Historic Park
The Flavors Come Alive at Fiesta de Reyes

Fiesta de Reyes located at the north entrance to Old Town San Diego State Historic Park, celebrates the festive spirit of early San Diego and is immersed with the color and flavor of Mexico. Originally constructed in 1939 as the Casa de Pico Motor Hotel, Fiesta de Reyes, which means “celebration of kings,” also pays tribute to an early San Diego family. Maria de los Reyes Ybañez de Dominguez was the matriarch of one of the most important families in San Diego history. Her eldest daughter married Jose Estudillo, one of the first mayors of the pueblo of San Diego.

Today, Fiesta de Reyes is comprised of three restaurants, Barra Barra Saloon, Casa de Reyes and The Cosmopolitan Restaurant, along with 19 one-of-a-kind gift shops and a boutique hotel. The quaint, locally owned stores feature everything from sweet delectables and specialty foods to handmade gifts, artwork, imported home décor, children’s toys and even ghost tours with ‘Old Town’s Most Haunted’. The shops and restaurants, live musicians and boutique hotel make Fiesta de Reyes a lively experience that visitors and locals can enjoy year round.

When you enter the Fiesta de Reyes courtyard you step into a lush courtyard known for its amazing gardens and vibrant colors. The courtyard with its flowering plants, succulents and tropicals are a work of art that has become a haven for amateur and professional photographers. Hand-painted art is tucked away in and around the gardens, creating an Old World charm that is the very essence of Fiesta de Reyes.

There is always something happening at Fiesta de Reyes. From lively folklorico dancers to daily visits from Los Rios, Old Town’s favorite mariachi band, you are entertained and delighted while enjoying authentic period cuisine. Before or after your meal you can stroll through the courtyard shops where you are sure to find a keepsake unique to Old Town. Your visit to Fiesta de Reyes will engage your senses and keep you entertained as you experience the history of San Diego.
OLD TOWN TOURS

Boosters of Old Town
This non-profit organization leads tours through Old Town State Park only. Dedicated volunteers in period costume guide you on a walking tour of prominent Old Town landmarks that old and young alike will enjoy. For reservations (619) 469-3174.

Heritage Tours of San Diego
The Tales & Trails of Historic Old Town San Diego, costumed guides tour the whole of Old Town from El Campo Santo Cemetery to the State Park. This is a great tour for families. For reservations 619-491-0110.

Old Town Trolley Tours
Various tours will take you by trolley bus throughout San Diego. Perfect for the visitor who wants to take a load off their feet and enjoy the sites of San Diego by trolley. Conductors combine colorful anecdotes, humorous stories and historical information into a fast moving two-hour narrative that is both entertaining and educational. For reservations 619-298-8687

Old Town State Park Tours
Park aides lead these informative and friendly tours. No reservations necessary; just show up at the Old Town visitor’s center at the Robinson Rose building on the plaza. Tours are free. This is a service provided by the State of California. For reservations 619-220-5422

The Past and Presence Ghost Tours
Your guide to San Diego's most haunted historic sites. Come visit the past and you might just feel a presence as you explore some of Old Town San Diego's most haunted locations. Truth is Stranger than Fiction! Learn the fascinating true stories of each of these historic sites and of the real people who inhabited them, and hear the legendary ghost stories that surround them. This unforgettable and entertaining excursion includes an exclusive after-hours tour inside the Adobe Chapel, El Campo Santo Cemetery and, of course, "the most haunted house in America" the Whaley House. Tour begins in Whaley House side yard in Historic Old Town San Diego. Call (619) 297-7511
Mining in San Diego

San Diego has a history of Gem mining, going back to the first Spanish explorers. Starting in the 1800’s and continuing to the present, the area would evolve into one of the premier locations in the United States, where a large variety of gemstones are mined, due to the rare and rich Pegmatite dikes that are present in the area.

When the Indian mission was established in North San Diego they brought some of their highly prized crystals to the mission priest. These crystals were sent back to Spain for evaluation. As Spanish and American settlers moved into the area, occasionally an Indian grave would be uncovered, containing tourmaline crystals.

In the late 1800s and into the early 1900s, there were times of intense mining. It is reported that the Empress of Chine had some 1500 Chinese diggers working in North County, every scrap of pink Tourmaline found was shipped back to China. Love of the vivid Pala pink, drove her to spend fortunes on its extraction.

It is said that Tiffany on hearing of the Empress and seeing some tourmaline samples, sent some representatives to see the mining operation. Because of the rise in interest and mining activity, four new gemstones would be added to the list of material found in the San Diego area in following years.

Celebrity Gems, is a small specialized store, located on Congress St. in Old Town. It strives to carry the very best examples of rough and cut stones from the San Diego area, as well as rare and unusual stones from around the world. Everything in the store is natural, no synthetics or man-made stones.
Old Town sidewalks overflow with people who come to revisit history, to shop and to savor some of the best and greatest variety of food that San Diego has to offer.

While regional and Mexican specialties present many cooking styles and are not to be missed, visitors to Old Town have a wide choice of cuisines. The area has a history rich in diversity so you can also find early California fare along with Italian, Japanese, Creole, Peruvian, and some really great seafood. There is something for every appetite and budget and every doorway leads to a delectable discovery.

Just a tidbit or two about the food traditions of an area can give an added dimension to the dining experience so here are a few basic historic food facts about California’s cuisine.

California’s history is inextricably intertwined with Mexico and Spain. The Conquest of Mexico in 1521 gave rise to one of the richest culinary revolutions in history. When the Spanish explorer Cortez and his followers came to the new world in search of fortune, they found a wealth of culinary specialties such as chocolate, peanuts, vanilla, beans, squash, avocados, coconuts, corn and tomatoes. In turn the Spanish brought to the Americas products such as pork, beef, lamb, citrus fruits, garlic, cheese, milk, wheat, vinegar and wine, add these to the native American and early pioneers traditional foods and you have some of the richest food combinations in the country.
During Mexico’s colonial period 1521 to 1821 is when much of today’s Mexican fare was invented, such favorites as chile’s rellenos and guacamole and it was actually nuns who pioneered such now-traditional Mexican fare as buñuelos!

In the mid Victorian period Mexico was ruled by the former Austrian archduke Ferdinand Maximilian from 1864 to 1867 and though his reign was brief and tragic, French cooking left a permanent mark on many Mexican-restaurant dishes.

What to wash it all down with? Wine or Tequila of course!

From its beginnings in the blue agave fields of Jalisco, to its consumption in small cantinas and trendy restaurants, tequila is the quintessentially Mexican drink.

**Mexican Food Tradition**

There are plenty of great Mexican restaurants to choose from including Barra Barra a full-service Mexican restaurant and saloon which has been completely restored with new indoor and outdoor seating. Casa de Reyes, in the center of Fiesta de Reyes, has an outdoor area where tortillas are made by hand, and a wonderful courtyard stage and seating area. Casa de Reyes features traditional Mexican food, like homemade tamales, chile rellenos and sizzling fajitas. Also located at the northern entrance to Old Town on Juan Street is Diane Powers’s Casa Guadalajara, an Old Town tradition for over 30 years. Casa Guadalajara is a feast for your eyes as well as the palate. For those that are sophisticated and discriminating when it comes to Mexican cuisine this is the place.
Worth the Walk

Old Town is known for its Mexican Food, however there are several restaurants off Congress Street that offers variety and brings Baja to Diego. One block off San Diego Avenue and a most convenient walk from the trolley is Rockin’ Baja they serve the largest variety of authentic Mexican style seafood, that is unbeatable. The Restaurant has a fun Baja style atmosphere, the food is second to none and it’s has plenty of parking. The Alamo has a full bar, 10 flats screens and an 8’ projection screen. Great food and a sports bar atmosphere. The Congress Cafe is great for that quick breakfast or lunch fix. They serve the ‘Best Coffee in Town’ and you will swear their breakfast burritos are home made, and they deliver. Pizza Bella boasts they were ‘Voted the best Pizza in America’ well, they do have my vote. Great restaurant and courtyard serving everything Italian. So while you are here, enjoy the richness of our history, art and culture but also be sure not to miss the Flavors that are Old Town San Diego.

La Pinata Mexican Restaurant is the oldest restaurant in Old Town and a favorite of the locals. The Building was originally built as a residence and still stands today in a charming setting. Plenty of parking and a host of the most flavorful traditional Mexican cuisine. For a traditional feast, delicious Mexican food is served at Café Coyote, it is in the center of town and has won the award for best Mexican for several years in a row. Old Town Mexican Cafe also in the center of town is the original home to the handmade tortilla maker. They are one of Old Town’s best restaurants, serving traditional Mexican cuisine. Fred’s Mexican Cafe is a more southwestern style, health mex, and Miguel’s unique style of food is worth waiting for.

A little further south the D’O Thai Cottage is the prefect place for authentic Thai cuisine. Jack & Giulio’s Italian Restaurant is the place for homemade pastas, veal, poultry, beef, and seafood.
La Casa de Aguirre was built circa 1853 as the family home of wealthy San Diego merchant Don Jose Antonio Aguirre. In 1869, Aguirre’s family donated the home and the land to the Catholic Church. Father Antonio Ubach used the building as his rectory until 1885 when he founded “St. Anthony’s Industrial School for Indians” on the site. The original adobe structure fell into disrepair and was demolished in 1914. Today you can visit the historically reconstructed Casa de Aguirre and learn more about this fascinating site in the free museum.

The Old Town Convent

Constructed in 1908, the convent building originally stood in downtown San Diego. In 1940, the Catholic Church moved the structure to its present site in Old Town. During its storied history, the building has served at various times as a seminary, convent, USO, military housing and a nursery. Restored to its 1940’s appearance in 2002, the building now is a State historical site and features shopping, antiques, and historical displays commemorating the history of the Old Town Convent building.
Old Town San Diego is known as the Birthplace of California, the site of the first Spanish settlement by Father Junípero Serra in 1769. Old Town’s rich history and culture permeates this small but important area that was once part of Mexico. It is steeped in tradition to this day and still reflects much of the heritage of the roots from its past.

Some say Old Town was reminiscent of the small town of Amatitán in the center of the tequila region of México. It was there that tequila (the distilled spirit) was born, and then perfected. Although the Aztec people had previously made a fermented beverage from the agave plant, long before the Spanish had arrived in 1521… When the Spanish conquistadors ran out of their own brandy, they too, began to distill agave to produce one of North America’s first indigenous distilled spirits. Built atop an ancient village known for its delicious agave beverage, Amatitán was officially established in 1530.

The Old Days
Padre José Feliciano de la Trinidad Escobado Romo was ordained in 1802, and purchased a beautiful ranch in Amatitán. It became known as Hacienda del Padre, with all the elements needed to be considered a hacienda: “a great house,” a chapel, housing for the workers, livestock, crops, and a business as he produced a fine vino mezcal…beginning the renown history of Herradura, currently the best-selling tequila in Mexico.

Craft
The tequila bottled today is the result of over 135 years of dedication to craft, and the steps in the tequila-making process remain the same as in the old days. Today, Tequila Herradura is made from start to finish in a modern facility, but the legacy of hand-crafted excellence remains.

Harvest
The skilled worker with the knowledge to harvest the agave is called el jimador. When the jimadores determine that the agave plants are ready for harvesting, 7 to 10 years, they slice off the green outer leaves with a special sharp cutting tool called a “coa,” leaving the large agave “piñas.”

Cooking
The piñas are brought in from the fields, cut in half and they are carefully stacked by hand in the ovens made of bricks and stone. The ovens, each holding about 45 tons of agave, are sealed with iron windows and steamed the old way for up to 26 hours. The white agave piñas turn a
practiced these days is heating the mosto at slightly lower temperatures. The liquid is distilled to a lower proof to best preserve the complex flavor elements. After each distillation, the fusel alcohols and the methanol is cut to preserve only the best alcohol. Organoleptic compounds are selectively recovered during the distillation; these natural compounds, known as congeners, will add flowery and spicy nuances.

In the early days of the Hacienda, an experienced taster with a drinking horn sampled the tequila, and alcohol by volume. Today this function is performed by a sensorial evaluation panel formed of experts intimately familiar with the subtleties

Fermentation
The mosto is poured into giant open tanks, over two-stories high. Natural wild air-borne yeasts growing on citrus trees living at the distillery are used in the fermentation process, providing the tequila an unmatched flavor. The juice will remain between four and seven days in the tanks. At the beginning of the fermentation cycle, the juice churns and swirls around in great waves. When there is no more movement in the tanks, the mosto is ready to be distilled.

Distillation
Another traditional process, not often

The Tequila Factory Restaurant & Cantina chose Tequila Herradura to distill, barrel and bottle their house brand selection because of Herraduras long history and dedication to the craft. Herradura’s blue Weber agave plant is propagated by offshoots of the mother plant. In this way, the tequila produced on the Hacienda today comes from descendants of the original agave growing in 1870.

The Old Town Tequila Factory Restaurant & Cantina sits high atop the Best Western PLUS Hacienda Hotel offering sweeping views from the Mission Bay to downtown. Their menu consists of traditional Mexican Cuisine that is complimented by a full bar featuring over 100 of the Finest Tequilas of Mexico…and of course some of the best margaritas in San Diego. Attention to detail in preparing their authentic Mexican dishes, attentive service, combined with colorful ambiance amplifies the charm and flavor synonymous with Old Town.

**“Ultimate Old Town Experience”**
Relax in the spacious comfort of a beautifully appointed guest room at the Best Western PLUS Hacienda Hotel, surrounded by colorful courtyards, patios, and lush landscaping. You will love the charming atmosphere, convenient location, sparkling pool, fountains and panoramic view of the ocean, bay and city lights of our picturesque hillside retreat. On Harney St. between Juan & San Diego Ave.
Today in Old Town

This uniquely Californian town offers visitors a chance to step back in time to the nineteenth century. Old Town is a cultural and historic area and a virtual mecca for shopping and fine dining; museum, gallery, or theater going; or even hunting for ghosts at “America’s Most Haunted” house. Old Town has something for the entire family within its one by one-and-a-half mile boundaries.

Within Old Town there are three Park Agencies: State, City and County, all of which have historic sites operated as museums. Located at the northern end of Old Town, Old Town San Diego State Historic Park is the most visited park in the state system and all of its museums are free to the public. The state park spans the decades from Californio rule to the Mexican Period and finally to the American Period. Experience the days of the dons at the 1825 Casa de Estudillo, one of the finest adobe haciendas in the state; view a rare original stagecoach at the Wells Fargo Museum; see a scale model of nineteenth century Old Town at the reconstructed Robinson-Rose House, one-time Lodge of the Freemasons and home of San Diego’s first newspaper The San Diego Herald; the Black Hawk Livery & Blacksmith; the San Diego Union newspaper building; and the first public schoolhouse in San Diego, the Mason Street School are still here.

There are over 15 historic sites in all, some of which, are now home to interesting retail shops. In the park you will find merchandise unique to San Diego and Old Town like Cousin’s Candy where you can watch them pull taffy. At the north end of town there are three art galleries, the Studio Gallery features the unique and inspiring art of RBarros. The gallery has a nice selection of sculpture, jewelry and artful gifts. You will want to visit Fiesta de Reyes they have 19 shops including Beacon Artworks gallery where you will find wonderful artwork of special places and times in San Diego and Old Town. At Fiesta de Reyes you can enjoy traditional Mexican cuisine prepared by expert chefs. Enjoy the beautiful gardens and hand painted furniture as you listen to live music on the courtyard stage.

There are many more historic sites and museums at the center of Old Town: the Whaley House Museum Complex is a county-owned park consisting of five historic buildings, the most famous of which is the Whaley House, believed by many to be the most haunted house in America in addition to housing the former county courthouse and San Diego’s first commercial theater; the Old Adobe Chapel, San Diego’s former parochial church and setting for the famous wedding of “Ramona,” is now a city-owned museum; the Church of the Immaculate Conception was formally dedicated in 1919; El Campo Santo Cemetery is the final resting place of nearly 500 nineteenth century residents including the Indian leader Antonio Garra and the notorious boat thief Yankee Jim Robinson; and you won’t want to miss the Sheriff’s Museum. New in Old Town is the Old Town Model Railroad Depot. It will be open in late 2014. If you like trains and who doesn’t, you will want to be sure to visit. Attention to detail goes beyond expectation. This exhibit is fun, it will excite enthusiasts and give everyone a new appreciation.

Just up the street from San Diego Avenue is the Serra Museum and Presidio Site, the Mormon Battalion Visitors Center, with state of the art Video tours and Heritage Park, a 7.8 acre county park where seven Victorian homes have been relocated to save them from demolition. They have all been recently renovated meticulously on the exterior to their original colors and splendor.

If you are looking for unique gifts or souvenirs, a wide variety of shops are ready to tempt you. One of the best is the Whaley Museum Shop and Information Center housed in an 1870s mansion that is one of the last such buildings in San Diego. You can’t miss this colorful Victorian with its red and white striped shingle roof. The Museum Shop offers historic reproductions, gifts, souvenirs, and books from early California to the mid twentieth century. The Old Town Surf Shop is in another rare building type, the false store front, one of only four of these remaining in San Diego, and the shop is just the place for the latest surfing clothes and gear; the Covered Wagon is a great place for Indian jewelry and art; the Old Town Market Place has many wonderful shops, a courtyard with entertainment and is where you can catch the Old Town Trolley Tours.
The Bazaar del Mundo Shops present a visual feast rich in authentic Mexican hand-painted tile, wrought iron, richly decorated walls, tiled staircases and vendor carts overflowing with handcrafted Mexican flowers. Discover authentic and Southwestern folk art, fashion, and home décor in vibrant colors and natural textures at Bazaar Del Mundo Shops. Once you’ve enjoyed the flavors of Old Town you can venture out to indulge in a unique shopping experience and pick up some of the regional food products to take home with you and prepare the very meals you enjoyed while on vacation. Spend your vacation in the heart of San Diego at one of the many quality hotels in Old Town. Take time to explore the history that can only be found in Old Town.

Historic Sites & Museums

THE COURTYARD by Marriott sits on the historic site of the first Hotel in Old Town. The hotel’s location stood on a lot near the residence of George Pendleton, offering a commanding view of the Bay and surrounding country. “…a massive frame building erected by Don Juan Bandini in 1850, in flush times. The prospect for customers soon vanished. It cost Bandini an inordinate amount of money to build – according to Judge Benjamin Hayes, $25,000.

DERBY-PENDLETON HOUSE was shipped around the Horn as a prefab house to William Heath Davis’s New Town in 1850, and moved to Old Town around 1851, after the collapse of New Town. It was purchased by Don Juan Bandini for his daughter Dolores, wife of Captain Charles Johnson. It was acquired in 1855 by Captain George A. Pendleton, first county clerk and recorder, for his office. From 1853 to 1854 Lieutenant George H. Derby, one of America’s foremost humorists, boarded here, writing many of the sketches appearing in the San Diego Herald.

CASA DE PEDRORENA was the residence of Don Miguel de Pedrorena, who made his home in San Diego in the 1850’s. A member of an old Madrid family, he was educated both in that city and at Oxford. Allied in sympathy with the Americans during the Mexican War, he became captain in our Army. It was he who saved the famous old Spanish gun “El Jupiter” (now standing on Fort Stockton, Presidio Park) by burying it in the yard of his house.
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park pays tribute to the cultural influences that make California special. Restored and reconstructed buildings in Old Town San Diego are now museums, shops and restaurants that capture the energy of Old Town between 1821 and 1872.

The central plaza is lined with buildings—some dating back to the 1820s—that offer a glimpse of the lifestyles of both ordinary residents and the most wealthy and influential.

Make your visit memorable by entering into the spirit of Old Town San Diego. Enjoy its history, museums, period demonstrations, entertainment, programs and activities.

Guided walks reveal Old Town’s story, and living history interpreters give faces and voices to the people who shaped it. Visit some of the oldest buildings and historic sites in California. Today’s plaza remains the heart of Old Town. Discover the lives of those who came before to better understand how California came to be.

Native Americans

The Kumeyaay lived near the San Diego River for thousands of years before the mission and presidio were built. Today a sandy native landscape marks the former borders of the river that supplied the native people with many of life’s necessities. At first the Kumeyaay were friendly with the settlers, but this changed when their traditions and beliefs came into conflict. Diseases introduced by the settlers decimated entire villages, and the native culture nearly disappeared.
The Mexican Period

Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, but it was 1822 before a new military command arrived in San Diego.

At this time the small settlement consisted of the nearby presidio housing a military garrison, the mission six miles inland with its labor force of Kumeyaay Indians, and the port, where ships stopped to trade supplies.

Spanish soldiers began building residences below Presidio Hill in the early 1820s. Sun-dried adobe brick
Americans and other foreigners often enjoyed the customs and festivities of San Diego. The open plaza hosted fiestas, bullfights, games of chance, and amusements that offered the opportunity for wagering.

was the traditional building material, since wood was scarce. Soon five houses belonging to the Carrillo (and later Fitch), Ruiz, Ybañes, Serrano and Marron families became the nucleus of the community. By 1825 the adobes formed a rough but orderly street pattern around an open plaza. Two of the finest structures, begun in 1827 and still standing, belonged to José Antonio Estudillo and his brother-in-law, Juan Bandini.

A new Constitution written in 1849 and statehood in 1850.

The American Period

San Diego’s Mexican era ended abruptly in 1846, when the United States declared war on Mexico. Initially there was little resistance to American occupation, but the situation eventually turned San Diego families against one another. Some remained loyal to Mexico, while others supported the United States. The town was occupied and regained several times. In 1846 U.S. Navy Commodore Robert F. Stockton permanently captured San Diego. The war between Mexico and the United States ended in 1848 with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, establishing a new boundary between the two countries. James Marshall’s gold discovery at Coloma in January 1848 lured adventurers from around the world. San Diego became an important stopover for miners en route to the gold fields, and immigrants crowded into available housing. Adobes were remodeled, and new structures were built. In 1851 prefabricated wood-frame buildings, brought by ship around the Horn, were assembled in San Diego. Following the Mexican War, California experienced a major political transformation—a new Constitution written in 1849 and statehood in 1850.

San Diego was incorporated as a city, and new American law was codified. By 1856, with the decline of the military presence and the Gold Rush land boom, the town turned into a small, insular community. In the U.S. census of 1860, only seven individuals identified themselves as merchants. Fire was a constant threat, and in the 1860s one misfortune after another struck. The storms of 1861-62 brought high tides and flooding. In May 1862 a severe earthquake was followed by a smallpox epidemic. Several years of drought
San Diego was incorporated as a city, and new American law was codified.

devastated the ranchos and the cattle industry in Southern California. In 1867 San Franciscan Alonzo Horton arrived in San Diego to begin building nearby New Town. In 1868 the San Diego Union began publication in what is now Old Town.

The 1869 discovery of gold in Julian created a need for supplies, services and housing—a boon to San Diego’s economy. From 1868 to 1874, Albert Seeley operated a stagecoach line between San Diego and Los Angeles. However, it was only a matter of time before New Town began to eclipse the old settlement. Government offices moved to the new community, taking along much of Old Town’s economic base. Hope for Old Town’s revitalization died in the spring of 1872, when fire destroyed seven buildings, including the old courthouse.

In 1907 sugar magnate John D. Spreckels purchased the remains of Casa de Estudillo and began the first efforts to revive Old Town. Public fascination with Helen Hunt Jackson’s romantic novel, Ramona, led to restoration of the building advertised as “Ramona’s Marriage Place.” In 1908 more restoration began. These buildings helped renew interest in San Diego’s Spanish and Mexican roots. Auto touring brought more visitors, and in the 1930s several buildings were built to enhance its appearance as a “Spanish Village.” In 1968 Old Town San Diego became a State Historic Park, and the process of rediscovering and preserving the historic town began.
McCONAUGHY HOUSE is an Italianate house constructed in 1887, was originally owned by John McConaughy, who founded the first scheduled passenger and freight service in San Diego County. His four-horse passenger stages and six-horse wagons operated between San Diego and Julian.

ALTAMIRANO HOUSE belonged to Jose A. Altamirano, son-in-law of Don Miguel de Pedrorena. Here the San Diego Union issued its first number issue, October 10, 1868, and remained there until June 30, 1870, when the office was moved to the new subdivision, Downtown San Diego. The Altamirano House now houses the San Diego Union Museum.
Never before in U.S. history, had there been a military unit like the Mormon Battalion. Their incredible march across the U.S. was historic. What they accomplished during and after their grueling 2000-mile trek to San Diego was unprecedented and unrivaled. The eventual impact of their service changed the history of California and the U.S.

At Council Bluffs, Iowa in June of 1846, U.S. Army Captain James Allen, representing President James Polk, recruited into military service, 500 men and 38 women as laundresses.

The Battalion left Fort Leavenworth Kansas in July of 1846. Traveling on foot, they fulfilled their assignment to build a wagon road from Santa Fe to San Diego. They fought no battles but instead became peace-keepers in Southern California. They became instant friends with the local citizens because they gave hundreds of hours of service to them white-washing almost every building in town. They built a brick kiln, then showed the local citizens how to make and fired 40,000 bricks. They used the bricks to line wells that they had dug and built the first fired-brick building which was used as a school and the first U.S. courthouse in California. A replica of this building is found in the Old Town State Park.

The citizens loved this particular battalion so much that when it was time for them to be re-assigned, the citizens did not want the Battalion to leave. They were so attached to them that they signed a petition to the governor...to use his influence to keep them the service...(it) was signed by every citizen in town.

This however did not fit the plans of the Army. They were then sent to Los Angeles to finish building Fort Moore. After their enlistment finished some went north; 112 were hired by John Sutter, six of whom built the sawmill at Coloma for James Marshall where gold was discovered. After participating in that gold discovery, they made the second and largest gold find of the gold Rush on an island in the American River. In spite of their lucrative find, they left it for something more precious to them...they left to rejoin their families; many still camped on the plains road, known as the Mormon Emigrant of Iowa. Heading east they carved the first Trail, through the Sierra Nevada Mountains which became the “Forty-niner’s Highway.” This opened Northern California to the gold Rush. Over 50,000 wagons and 200,000 people used this trail during that time. A few years later, returning Battalion veterans developed an all-weather freighting road through the Cajon pass in the San Bernardino Mountains to Los Angeles.

Their legacy was road building and service, sacrifice and faith. They helped to open the West for travel and commerce. The maps they created during their march became the basis for the U.S. Gadsden Purchase.

Thomas Whaley came to California during the Gold Rush. He left New York City, the place of his birth, on January 1, 1849, on the ship Sutton and arrived 204 days later in San Francisco. He set up a store with business partner George Wardle where he sold hardware and woodwork from his family’s New York business, Whaley & Pye. They offered mining equipment and utensils on consignment. This young entrepreneur, born on October 5, 1823, came from a Scots-Irish family, which immigrated to Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1722. His grandfather, Alexander Whaley, a gunsmith, participated in the Boston Tea Party and the Revolutionary War where he provided flintlock muskets to soldiers and the use of his house on Long Island to General George Washington. Thomas’ father, Thomas A. Whaley, carried on the family gunsmith business, and served in the New York Militia during the War of 1812.

Whaley’s business acumen, acquired in part from his education at the Washington Institute, proved beneficial in San Francisco. He was so successful that he was able to establish his own store on Montgomery Street, erect a two-story residence near the bay, and rent out Wardle’s edifice. After an arson-set fire destroyed his buildings in May 1851, he relocated to Old Town San Diego upon the advice of Lewis Franklin, a fellow merchant. Whaley set up various businesses and amassed enough money to return to New York to marry his sweetheart, Anna Eloise DeLaunay, the daughter of French-born parents, on May 14, 1853.

Upon the couple’s return to San Diego, Whaley entered various general store business partnerships, most of which lasted less than a year. He purchased a lot at the corner of San Diego Avenue and Harney Street in September 1855, and in May of the following year, built a single-story granary with bricks manufactured in his own brickyard nearby. In September 1856, Whaley commenced construction of an adjacent two-story Greek Revival style brick building which he had designed. Upon completion in 1857, the building was acclaimed as the “finest new brick block in Southern California” by the San Diego Herald, and cost $10,000, an impressive sum in the 1850’s.

By 1858, Thomas and Anna Whaley had produced three children: Francis Hinton, Thomas Jr. (who died at 18 months), and Anna Amelia. In August 1858, once again arson-set fire destroyed Whaley’s business. Rebuilding in a time of economic downturn was problematic, so Whaley moved his family to San Francisco, where he worked as a U.S. Army Commissary Storekeeper for a short while. Three more children, George Hays Ringgold (named for a business partner), Violet Eloise, and Corinne Lillian, were born. In 1867, Thomas Whaley took charge of three government transports with stores at Sitka, Alaska Territory, before the American takeover on October 18.

After a major earthquake in May 1868, the Whaley Family returned to their home in San Diego. There Whaley partnered with Philip Crosthwaite to open the Whaley and Crosthwaite General Store. San Diego pioneer Crosthwaite was the Deputy County Clerk and later San Diego’s Chief of Police. In 1868, Thomas rented the upstairs southwestern portion of the house to a Mr. Thomas Tanner, who transformed the living quarters into San Diego’s first commercial theater. Just three months after the Tanner Troupe’s October 1868 opening, Mr. Tanner died suddenly and the troupe disbanded. Later in 1869, the County of San Diego rented the theater space and the former granary for use as meeting rooms for the Board of Supervisors and one of San Diego’s earliest courthouses, respectively. After the establishment of New Town San Diego by Alonzo Horton in 1868, the seat of government moved there. Residents of Old Town resisted the change, even refusing to hand over
the records. On the evening of March 31, 1871, County Clerk Chalmers the court records. Scott gathered a group of New Towners, rode out to the Whaley House in express wagons, and forcibly removed the records. Although Whaley wrote a series of letters to the Board of Supervisors noting that their lease had not expired and demanding rent and repairs to the building, his demands were ultimately ignored.

On January 5, 1882, sisters Violet and Anna Amelia had a double wedding, Anna Amelia marrying her first cousin, John T. Whaley, and Violet wedding George T. Bertolacci. Violet’s marriage ended sadly, and she divorced Bertolacci in 1883. Succumbing to depression, she took her own life on August 18, 1885. Later that year, the family moved to New Town, where Thomas built a lovely single-story frame home for them at 933 State Street. Hoping to capitalize on the San Diego boom, he opened a real estate office at 5th and G in the First National Bank Building with various partners including Ephraim Morse. He retired in 1888 after a long career of entrepreneurial endeavors, and passed away at the State Street home on December 14, 1890 at the age of 67.

The Whaley Home in Old Town was rented out for many years and eventually fell into disrepair until late 1909 when Whaley’s oldest son Francis returned to the old brick house and undertook the restoration of the building. Rehabilitated at the same time as the establishment of the Los Angeles & San Diego Beach Railway down San Diego Avenue, which coincided with the great turn of the century tourist movement, Francis utilized the family home as a residence and a tourist attraction where he posted signs outside promoting its historicity and entertained visitors with his guitar.

On February 24, 1913, Anna died in the house, followed by Francis on November 19, 1914. Lillian continued residency in her family home, writing her memoirs, and passed away in 1953. In 1956, the house was up for sale and plans to demolish it to make way for a gas station were curtailed by June and Jim Reading who, with a concerned group of citizens, convinced the County of San Diego to buy and restore the house. The Whaley House opened its doors to the public as a historic house museum in May of 1960 and since November of 2000 has been operated for the county by Save Our Heritage Organization (SOHO). SOHO is in the process of returning the house to its nineteenth century appearance.
CASA DE ESTUDILLO was constructed about 1825, and was the home of Don Jose Antonio de Estudillo, Spanish aristocrat. It became a sanctuary for women and children during armed conflicts incident to the American occupation in 1846. Incorrectly identified as “Ramona’s Marriage Place” for many years, the adobe structure is considered one of Old Town’s outstanding showplaces.

EL CAMPO SANTO CEMETERY was used between 1850 and 1880. Here lie many of the most famous early San Diegan’s. Now smaller than its original size, some graves lie beneath San Diego Avenue and Linwood Street.

THE OLD ADOBE CHAPEL was reconstructed in the 1930’s after the original structure was razed. The original, started in 1850 and dedicated on November 21, 1858, was to remain in use more than fifty years. Father Antonio D. Ubach, said to have been the “Father Gaspara” of Helen Hunt Jackson’s famous novel Ramona, officiated here after 1868. The Adobe Chapel was the setting for the fictional wedding of Ramona and Allesandro in Jackson’s novel. Here, in the small sacristy, may be seen the tomb of Don Jose Antonio Aguirre.

HISTORIC OLD TOWN SAN DIEGO TRAIL

SAN DIEGO UNION NEWSPAPER is a restoration of a building believed to be constructed in 1850 on land owned by Miguel Pedrorena, one of the authors of the Constitution of California.

RACINE & LARAMIE is operating a store in a reconstructed 1868 building.

U. S. HOUSE is a reconstruction of an original 1850 frame house, which was, over the years, a store, boarding house, and restaurant.

SAN DIEGO HOUSE was home to Freeman and Light, the first African/Americans to settle in Old Town. The reconstructed building was originally built in 1838.

BURTON HOUSE is a Colonial Revival house that was built in 1893 by Henry Guild Burton, a retired Army physician.

CASA DE LOPEZ was originally built about 1835. Known as the Francisco Lopez place, Casa de Lopez has been reconstructed in front of its original location.

COBBLESTONE JAIL was built in 1850. It is now in ruins, behind the Jail House Motel.

CASA DE CARRILLO is the oldest house in the City of San Diego. It was built by Don Francisco M. Ruiz and occupied about 1820 by the family of Don Joaquin Carrillo. Ruiz planted the famous pear orchard, the first private planting of fruit trees in Southern California. Now restored, this house is the clubhouse of the Presidio Hill 18-hole golf course.
Heritage Park, a Victorian Village

This 7.8-acre park, located at the east end of Old Town on Juan and Harney, is dedicated to the preservation of San Diego’s Victorian architecture.

Expansion downtown after WWII threatened these structures with demolition on their original sites. Public and private funds paid for the acquisition, relocation and restoration of the historic buildings.

Heritage Park is owned and managed by the County of San Diego. Plans for Heritage Park include restoration of current buildings and construction of additional Victorian Homes to be used as Historic Inn's and Bed and Breakfasts.

Renovation of many of the buildings began in early 2010 with the Temple Beth Israel’s renovation, currently all of the homes have been completed on the outside and the County is waiting to start renovating the inside.

Current Buildings include: Senlis Cottage (1896), Sherman-Gilbert House (1887), Christian House (1889), Busyhead House (1887), McConaughy House (1887), Burton House (1893), and the Temple Beth Israel (1889).
Events

Latin American Festival & Santa Fe Market

For over 25 years the Latin American Festival in late August and the Santa Fe Market in September have been a favorite in Old Town. These two events organized by Diane Powers of Bazaar de Mundo, are more reminiscent of the interiors of Mexico and Guatemala. Traditional markets were originally held in the center of town on "market day," where they would sell food, clothing and other utilitarian items. As time went on and people started traveling more, sections of the market evolved with art and by the 1930-40s the markets began to flourish with Hispanic arts and crafts. Native artists from Latin America travel to the U.S. each year to bring their artwork to the festival. These events allow us to see and appreciate such wonderful work as those that appear on the cover. Some of the work can take up to 9 months to create a single piece.

Old Town Saturday Market

Every Saturday in the center of town, Old Town has it's own traditional "market day" on Harney Street. The market is more an artisan market with art, photography, handmade jewelry and much more.

Fiesta Cinco de Mayo

Now in its 32nd year, this event is the largest celebration of it's kind in Southern California. Two days of entertainment usually held on the weekend prior to the actual date of May 5th.

Old Town Art Festival

This year will be the 9th annual art festival. Over 50 artist booths fill the streets of Old Town. The event highlights the artworks of many local and national artist. Held annually in October.

The Taste of Old Town

This event is about food and fun. You stroll through Old Town to 15 restaurants sampling the best Mexican food specialties at each restaurant along with different brands of tequila. This event is an annual fund raaiser for the Old Town Chamber of Commerce. Held annually in September.

San Diego's Dia de los Muertos

One of the premier events in Old Town is San Diego’s Dia de Los Muertos sponsored by Cafe Coyote. In its fourth year, this authentic celebration is one of the best events of its kind in California. San Diego's Dia de los Muertos, is designed to celebrate the history, culture, and heritage of the region. A celebration of life and death.

It is observed each year on actual holiday of November 1st and 2nd. Many Old Town businesses and shops create traditional altars offering a unique free tour throughout the area. Entertainment and complimentary traditional treats can be found at various locations. Activities for all ages from sugar skull decoration to face painting, music dancing and more can be found throughout Old Town! The celebration culminates with the procession to the historic El Campo Santo cemetery. This event is produced by the Save Our Heritage Organization.

Stagecoach Days

For four Saturdays in July and August, the Park celebrates San Diego in the 1860s. The afternoon is filled with activities that reflect life in early San Diego and celebrates the West on the move. Old Town San Diego State Historic Park, with the support of the Boosters of Old Town, is proud to offer these FREE activities.

To see more events or get additional information go to: OTSDGuide.com
Start the smiles, plan your next vacation on line.

Planning your next vacation or weekend getaway has never been more simple. Now you can search for airfare, hotel room rates, car rentals and book everything online through us.

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