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Best San Diego Restaurants

**AOL
PICK
from
our
Editors**

San Diego has exploded onto the national dining scene in the past few years, after languishing in chain-food Hell. In addition to cooking at the best San Diego restaurants, several local chefs, including Bernard Guillas at the Marine Room, make regular appearances at the James Beard House, while others are suckers for chef cook-offs on TV. Chefs Isabel Cruz and Su-Mei Yu both have popular cookbooks on the market, and food and wine magazines often feature everything from San Diego's common fish tacos to the tiny gourmet veggies at Chino's Farms (where Alice Waters and raw food chefs gather their goodies). Most of the best San Diego restaurants are clustered in La Jolla and Downtown, and it's no surprise that rooms with ocean views get top billing for special events. Reservations are recommended for upscale spots.

The Prado at Balboa Park

Neighborhood: **Balboa Park**

Price: **Expensive**

Set in Balboa Park's beautiful House of Hospitality, the Prado is a San Diego icon with warm, wood-beamed dining rooms and a sunny terrace overlooking the park's gardens. The menu offers a delicious take on Latin-Italian fusion under the newly appointed chef Jonathan Hale. While Hale is busy bringing his own vision to the restaurant, he dare not remove certain dishes, including the Rosemary Roasted Jidori Chicken. Prado at Balboa Park is one of the best places to eat in San Diego for outdoor dining in a relaxed setting or a fun happy hour. The restaurant offers bar seating among a warm and whimsical environment full of glass sculptures and trinkets inspired by the surrounding museums. Don't be offended if your server asks if you're in a hurry—the spot attracts throngs of theatre patrons who have tickets for the nearby Old Globe Theatre. Reservations are strongly recommended.

[More Details on The Prado at Balboa Park »](#)

Top Of The Market

Neighborhood: **Downtown Waterfront**

Price: **Expensive**

Top of the Market's ahi might come from local waters, but this elegant dining room is best known for its impeccable seafood like Alaskan halibut and king crab legs, Grand Banks sea scallops and Dover sole from Holland. Some fish is mesquite grilled (we favor simple preparations for exquisitely fresh seafood) and served with Thai rice, couscous or veggies from local markets. Carnivores fear not—there's rack of lamb, ribeye and filet mignon on hand, as well. Top of the Market is one of the best San Diego restaurant for seafood and stunning views. Beneath the Top of the Market, the Fish Market is a more casual affair with a seafood market, oyster bar, sushi bar and casual seating. Both have spot-on views of San Diego Bay.

[More Details on Top Of The Market »](#)

Marine Room

Neighborhood: **La Jolla**

Price: **Expensive**

During high tide, waves crash right up to the windows of the Marine Room's elegant dining room, a favorite among food reviewers and gourmards. The view even on calm days can't be beat, and the food—an artful mix of Pacific Rim, French, Mediterranean and California influences—is consistently pleasing. Chef Bernard Guillas is a local star who appears at food-based charity events and teaches cooking classes at Macy's department store. The menu changes frequently and Guillas enjoys playing with unusual combinations, which is perhaps the reason the Marine Room is often considered one to the best places to eat in San Diego. Consider the Brandt Farm beef cheek and foie gras with sunchokes, honshimeji and frosted blueberries, or the elk tenderloin rubbed with wattleseed. You don't often see an artisan cheese plate on local dessert menus; this one is always intriguing. In addition to the main dining rooms, where just about every table has an ocean view, there's a cozy bar just right for sipping martinis at sunset. Reservations are a must.

[More Details on Marine Room](#)

George's at the Cove (Ocean Terrace)

Neighborhood: **La Jolla**

Price: **Moderate**

You could dress up and dine at George's California Modern fine dining room downstairs, but the view and camaraderie among diners on the rooftop terrace are classically Californian. Lunch on a bodacious Niman Ranch burger with Maytag blue cheese or the pole-caught albacore tuna salad at one the best San Diego restaurants while admiring your bronzed fellow diner and the outstanding view of La Jolla Cove. The terrace is extremely popular; make reservations or expect to wait in line while watching valets park Jaguars.

[More Details on George's at the Cove \(Ocean Terrace\)](#)

Isabel's Cantina

Neighborhood: **Pacific Beach**

Price: **Moderate**

At Isabel's Cantina you'll never guess you're eating healthy as you chow down on the Latin and Asian fusion cuisine offered at chef Isabel Cruz's popular Cantina. When not found in Cantina's kitchen, Cruz is busy building her culinary empire from San Diego to Oregon with two restaurants in each location, along with a funky La Jolla cafe, and a comprehensive cookbook. At Cantina, patrons often argue about which Isabel's menu is better—breakfast/lunch menu supporters site the coconut French toast and carne asada sandwich as the best way to start a day, while dinner patrons tout delicious offerings like the all-vegetarian Asia Grill or Brazil Bowl with marinated chicken or tofu as a vegetarian's paradise.

[More Details on Isabel's Cantina](#)

Old Town Mexican Cafe

Neighborhood: **Old Town**

Price: **Moderate**

Perhaps the most-popular Mexican restaurant in San Diego, the Old Town Mexican Cafe wins all the best restaurant surveys. It's famous for carnitas (marinated pork) served with tortillas fresh from the grill, beans and rice, and a tray of condiments including cilantro, onions and guacamole. One of the best San Diego restaurants for breakfast hangover cures (served all day) include an egg-and-chorizo taco and saucy chilaquiles (fried tortilla strips in red sauce) with fried eggs. The restaurant keeps expanding to outdoor patios and more dining rooms, but that never seems to shorten the lines of patrons waiting for tables.

[More Details on Old Town Mexican Cafe »](#)

Saffron Thai Grilled Chicken

Neighborhood: **Little Italy**

Price: **Budget**

Owner Su-Mei Yu grew up in Bangkok and missed the grilled chicken she used to buy at ramshackle huts by the Thai city's boxing arena. Now Su and a slew of cooks serve up fragrant marinated chicken with peanut sauce and jasmine rice from Saffron Thai's tidy storefront. She's added a noodle and sate shop next door and expanded the menu so even regulars can find new favorites at one of the best places to eat in San Diego. Yu has become a celebrity, with two Thai cookbooks and many TV appearances, but she still spends most of her time at her tiny cafes.

[More Details on Saffron Thai Grilled Chicken »](#)

Kono's Cafe

Neighborhood: **Pacific Beach**

Price: **Budget**

The menu is short, you have to order at the counter, and the food comes with plastic silverware. So why is there always a line at this tiny shack at the foot of Crystal Pier? It's the food, bro, plus the view and laid-back attitude. Surfers fuel up on Kono's bountiful breakfasts before and after riding the waves, while fans watch the waves from tables on the pier. Unless you're famished go for the Little Breakfast: eggs your way, wheat toast, and home fries mixed with cheese and green onions. The Big Breakfast #1 includes eggs, potatoes, English muffin and yummy vanilla-scented French toast that's so good you should consider getting a full order on its own (the fluffy pancakes rock as well). Skip the burrito, burgers, and sandwiches. Breakfast is served till closing (3PM Monday-Friday, 4PM Sat. and Sun.). Have someone in your party hover over a table while you order—seating inside and out is limited.

[More Details on Kono's Cafe »](#)

South Beach Bar and Grill

Neighborhood: **Ocean Beach**

Price: **Budget**

A star on various food shows, this consistently packed casual beach bar is said to serve the best fish tacos in the universe (or something like that). South Beach windows by the bar look out across the parking lot with a glimpse of the ocean and right onto the sidewalk, allowing patrons to visit with friends passing by without even leaving their stools. The fish comes grilled or fried, wrapped in a soft corn tortilla (you can also get carne asada or chicken). One of the best San Diego restaurants for socializing, South Beach Bar and Grill's scene gets a tad rowdy at night.

[More Details on South Beach Bar and Grill »](#)

Point Loma Seafoods

Neighborhood: **Point Loma**

Price: **Budget**

A terrific seafood experience can be had at Point Loma's take-out seafood cafe and retail fish market, which is always noisy and jammed. Take a number for your order—a squid or crab-salad sandwich on soft sourdough; ceviche still tasting of the sea; fresh albacore with mayonnaise, celery and red onions; heaping plates of fried shrimp, scallops, fish and squid with fries and slaw; fresh lemonade; chocolate-chip cookies. Take your food to the enclosed patio or the outdoor tables by the waterfront for a postcard view of the marina. The fish market is the best in town, with the pinkest, freshest selection of local catches and a lavish display of smoked fish and sushi. Offer to bring dinner, then stop here for swordfish or wild salmon (worth its weight in dollars), red snapper, yellowfin tuna or halibut. Add a loaf or two of savory sourdough, a bottle of wine and some brownies—and a lemon, of course. Don't miss this place.

More Details on [Point Loma Seafoods »](#)

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