

On the waterfront

North America's coastal cities have much more to offer than just sun, sea and surf. San Diego, Sarasota and Seattle all offer mouth-watering foodie experiences that will give you a holiday of a lifetime



Clockwise, from left: brunch at Breakfast Republic; 'beautiful' Mexican restaurant El Jardín; mid-century architecture and swaying palms at La Jolla

Very HOT dogs in cool San Diego...

BY AMY BONIFAS

Touching down in San Diego just as the sun sets I don't have to venture far for my first meal. Our home for the trip is the brand new InterContinental wrapped in glass, in prime position on the city's beautiful waterfront. The panoramic restaurant, Vistal, is buzzing with a late-night crowd sipping on spicy Martinis and local craft beers. Despite the looming sleepiness, I find myself guzzling sparkling fresh oysters and tucking into creamy burrata and roasted beets like it's a decadent midnight feast. The next morning's breakfast comes around quickly and I enjoy a Breakfast Hot Dog – slathered with cheese alongside fried onions and sautéed potatoes – at Breakfast Republic (breakfastrepublic.com) in North Park – a trendy district heaving with vintage boutiques and coffee shops. I can't resist ordering the Bacon Bloody Mary adorned with a giant gherkin and maple-glazed bacon garnish and dig into my companion's flight of pancakes, with irresistible toppings like strawberry cheesecake, cinnamon swirl and Oreo cream. Suitably fuelled we decide to explore San Diego Old Town (oldtownsandiego.org) in the glorious West Coast sunshine. Celebrating its 250th birthday this year, this quirky area is where California's statehood first began. We hang out in the square, fringed with historic museums and alfresco Mexican restaurants, then head to the famous Balboa Park where the vibe is jubilant with ice cream trucks and street performers. To cool off I wander around the stunning Botanical Building, filled with tropical plants, before heading



off to meet Stephen Kurpinsky, head of the San Diego chapter of the US Bartender's Guild (a big deal in the mixology world) at his new restaurant Hundred Proof (hundredproofsd.com). Under his guidance I order the Trust #2 made with jalapeno tequila, grapefruit and sweet agave. The flavours are bold, brash and fiery! San Diego's cuisine is hugely influenced by its neighbour Tijuana – and street food-style tacos, spicy Baja-style seafood and chilli-laced cocktails are must-try eats. The city's newest speakeasy – The Realm of 52 Remedies – is tucked away in the Convoy neighbourhood. Inside its an opulent drinking den with golden canopied tables. The experimental drinks list includes the exotic Farewell My Concubine (vodka, Asian pear, oolong tea). Thankfully, La Jolla Shores beach is the perfect tonic for a hangover. All laidback surf shops and coastal condos, the scene is even more relaxed than downtown and the next day we meander down for a surf lesson. Our teachers from Surf Diva (surfdiva.com), a friendly surf school founded by

twin sisters Izzy and Coco Tihanyi, have unending patience as we progress from paddling to standing up on our boards. Even after faceplanting the waves (several times) I peel off my wetsuit feeling very accomplished and decide I deserve a classic So-Cal lunch, at George's At The Cove (georgesatthecove.com). On the restaurant's third level is a sun-drenched terrace with just a screen of glass between you and the turquoise Pacific. We sit blissfully listening to the waves, tucking into blue corn tacos filled with lime-spiked shrimp and bitter cabbage, with ice-cold Pilsner beers, brewed just a few hundred metres away.

On our last night, we drive to Liberty Station, the city's old navy barracks. The grand mess hall is now a busy public food market (libertystation.com) where hungry visitors can stock up on everything from fresh fish to five-tiered cakes. I buy a batch of sugar-dusted Snickerdoodle cookies before heading across the road to El Jardín (eljardinrestaurantbar.com).

Decorated with coloured cow skulls and a floor-to-ceiling living wall, this beautiful Mexican restaurant is our culinary finale. At the time of our trip, the head chef – Tijuana-raised Claudette Zepeda-Wilkins – is in the running for a James Beard Award (the culinary equivalent of the Oscars). From the open kitchen she sends out a banquet: guacamole topped with a halo of piquant pickled veg; stripped fresh sea bass and dark chocolate mole; and *taco de birria* – mouth-watering roasted goat meat tacos.

Back at the hotel, we toast our trip on the fire-lit terrace with local wine and my Snickerdoodle cookies. From fine dining to licking cookie crumbs from our fingers, San Diego really does have it all. ►

HOW TO BOOK
 British Airways flies from London to San Diego from £733 return visit ba.com/sandiego. Rooms at the InterContinental start from £175 (intercontinentalsandiego.com). For more information visit sandiego.org.

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