

Coronado Cheer

At Ranch & Coast we strive each issue to bring you the latest and greatest finds about San Diego. There are so many towns with long-running histories and also newly-emerging communities that we've introduced a new series in 2008. Each month we spotlight a different neighborhood and explore just what makes it a part of America's Finest City.

Few places in Southern California are as iconic as the island of Coronado, which is not actually an island at all. The 7.4-square-mile peninsula gets its name from a quartet of uninhabited islands off the coast of

Hotel Del
Coronado



Baja, which was first sighted in the early 17th century by a Spanish explorer. Though San Diego's Coronado is attached to mainland Imperial Beach by a long strip of land called the Silver Strand, it still feels like an island getaway. From its popular beaches, dining, and shopping to its unparalleled views of the downtown skyline, "the crowned one" reigns supreme.

The gracefully curving San Diego-Coronado Bridge — a sight to behold especially at night when its lights reflect in the water below — was constructed in 1969. The 2.12-mile landmark reaches a height of 200 feet (that's 20 stories!) from the water at its highest point, allowing Navy ships from nearby Naval Air Station North Island to pass below. The military has a big presence on North Island, which is considered part of Coronado — it's even training grounds for the legendary Navy SEALs.

The bridge lets visitors off just blocks from some of Coronado's most alluring attractions, including the world-famous Hotel Del Coronado, which sprawls over 26 oceanfront acres. In fact, before the Del, Coronado was a mostly desolate island overrun with rabbits. Visionary entrepreneurs Elisha S. Babcock, Jr. and Hampton L. Storey purchased the

island in 1885, figuring between the scenic location and the moderate climate, it was the perfect place to build a luxury resort.

They were right. In 1888, after just a year's construction, the monumental hotel opened its doors. The wooden Victorian masterpiece known for its signature red turrets and stately interiors still evokes that gracious era, especially around Christmastime, when costumed carolers roam the hotel. During the 120 years since it was built, the hotel's history has included everything from ghost sightings to presidential visits to Marilyn Monroe frolicking on the beach during the filming of *Some Like It Hot*.

But the Del is no dusty relic. The resort has been continually modernized, especially after a recent \$150-million renovation. Coronado's crown jewel offers a number of chic dining options, including the brand-new Eno (read all about it on page 95). There are high-end shops all along the interior corridors, and the hotel's state-of-the-art spa rejuvenates with 21 treatment rooms and a vanishing-edge pool with a view of the Pacific.

Locals in need of a weekend getaway should consider a stay in the hotel's »

Coronado
Bridge

« Beach Village, a cluster of ultra-luxury and privacy-minded cottages with flat screens, surround-sound iPod docks, and private pools and hot tubs. You'd be in good company — Kevin Bacon and Kyra Sedgwick are among recent celeb visitors. You don't have to be an A-lister to access the hotel's beautiful beaches, though.

The city that's cropped up around the Del is worth exploring, too. Orange Avenue is lined with cute boutiques and eateries, including the new-ish Chance Bistro. The casual eatery charms with a welcoming ambience and menu full of eclectic flavors. Over on First Avenue, waterfront Peohe's is right by the ferry landing. The tropical-themed restaurant is particularly prized for its spectacular views, especially at sunset. Hop on the ferry from downtown for a pleasant crossing and a good excuse to enjoy an extra glass of wine.

There's plenty to do besides shop and eat on Coronado. The ensemble-based Lamb's Players Theatre offers a year-round dash of culture. The island makes a great vantage point for the exhilarating Red Bull Air Race, which takes place this year May 3-4. A fun summer option is the Loews Dog Surfing Competition (June 28) — some of the pooches are old pros at wave riding. There's also the Coronado Classic Speed Festival in October on North Island. The motorsports event features vintage cars and salutes the military.

Coronado is a great place to get physical, whether it be a beach run along the 12-mile Silver Strand, a leisurely ride along one of the island's many smooth bike paths, or a round at the public 18-hole Coronado Golf Course. It's also a great place to get lazy — the beaches are among the cleanest, most family-friendly in the county. — AnnaMaria Stephens



Red Bull
Air Race



Loews
Dog Surfing
Competition



Lamb's Players Theatre