

Red-Roofed Turrets by Day, Sea Lions at the Cove by Dusk

A 3-Day San Diego & La Jolla Road Trip

San Diego's coastline packs a 19th-century beach resort, a working Navy harbor, a wild sea lion colony, and a cliffside state park into a drive short enough for a long weekend — no rental-car upgrade required, just a bridge, a coast highway, and good parking karma.

DURATION

3 Days

BEST TIME TO GO

Mar–Nov (Best: Sept & Oct)

San Diego's 'June gloom' marine layer can keep mornings overcast from late May through July. September and October bring the warmest ocean water and the clearest skies, while winter stays mild but suits whale-watching more than beach days.

FROM

\$780 USD / person

for 2 people, incl. 1 night at Hotel del Coronado, 1 night at La Valencia Hotel, and admission to the USS Midway Museum and Birch Aquarium

Day 1

Downtown Waterfront & Coronado

Start on San Diego's downtown waterfront with a retired aircraft carrier, then cross the bay to Coronado Island's Victorian-era beach resort for the first night.

USS Midway Museum

9am–5pm daily, last entry 4pm · \$32 USD/adult

A retired aircraft carrier turned floating museum on San Diego's downtown waterfront, with more than 60 exhibits and vintage aircraft lining the flight deck — a self-guided audio tour covers the hangar bay, bridge, and captain's quarters.

USS Midway Museum · 910 N Harbor Dr, San Diego · midway.org

Drive — Coronado Bridge

~5 min crossing · no toll (removed in 2002)

A sweeping, curved span that climbs roughly 200 feet over San Diego Bay before dropping onto Coronado Island — one of the most photographed bridges on the West Coast and the fastest way across from downtown.

Check-In — Hotel del Coronado

Check-in 4pm · from \$550 USD/night

A red-turreted Victorian beach resort open since 1888, sprawling across 28 oceanfront acres with its own stretch of sand — still Coronado's defining landmark and the reason most visitors cross the bridge in the first place.

Hotel del Coronado · 1500 Orange Ave, Coronado · hoteldel.com

Dinner — Coronado Brewing Company

Dinner · mains \$16–32 USD

A local brewpub a few blocks from the beach, pouring its own IPAs alongside fish tacos and burgers — an easy, unfussy first dinner before a full day in La Jolla.

Coronado Brewing Company · 170 Orange Ave, Coronado · coronadobrewing.com

Day 2 La Jolla Cove & the Village

A short drive up the coast trades Coronado's Victorian grandeur for La Jolla's cliffside coves and sea lion colonies — plan on spending most of the day outdoors.

Birch Aquarium at Scripps

9am–5pm daily · \$29.95 USD/adult

A hillside aquarium run by Scripps Institution of Oceanography, with a kelp forest tank, a tidepool touch plaza, and wraparound Pacific views from the terrace — a good first stop before the coastline gets crowded.

Birch Aquarium at Scripps · 2300 Expedition Way, La Jolla · aquarium.ucsd.edu

La Jolla Cove & Children's Pool

Self-guided · free

A small, protected cove ringed by sandstone cliffs where wild sea lions and harbor seals haul out year-round, best seen from the railed overlook path above Children's Pool Beach a few blocks south.

Check-In — La Valencia Hotel

from \$420 USD/night

A pink, Mediterranean-style landmark overlooking La Jolla Cove since 1926, known locally as 'the Pink Lady' — walkable to the cove, the aquarium, and most of the village's restaurants.

La Valencia Hotel · 1132 Prospect St, La Jolla · lavalencia.com

Dinner — George's at the Cove

Dinner · mains \$38–62 USD

A multi-level restaurant built into the cliff above La Jolla Cove, with a rooftop ocean terrace for sunset cocktails and a California seafood menu downstairs — reserve ahead for a window table.

George's at the Cove · 1250 Prospect St, La Jolla · georgesatthecove.com

Day 3 Torrey Pines, Balboa Park & Sunset Cliffs

A last full day covers a cliffside hike and San Diego's landmark city park before a sunset over Point Loma's sea cliffs and the drive to the airport.

Hike — Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve

7:15am–sunset (parking fills early) · \$12–25 USD/vehicle

Sandstone bluffs and badlands trails above the Pacific, home to one of the rarest pine species in the country — the Guy Fleming Loop and Razor Point Trail are the two shortest routes to the reserve's best ocean views.

Torrey Pines State Natural Reserve · torreypine.org

Balboa Park

Grounds open dawn–dusk · free to walk, museum admission varies

A 1,200-acre park built for the 1915 Panama-California Exposition, with Spanish Colonial Revival architecture, the free Botanical Building and lily pond, and more than a dozen museums along El Prado — easily a half-day on its own.

Balboa Park · balboapark.org

Sunset — Sunset Cliffs Natural Park

Self-guided · free

A string of eroded sandstone bluffs along Point Loma's western edge, with sea caves, natural arches, and some of the most reliable sunset views in the city — arrive 30–45 minutes early for a spot along the cliff-edge trail.

Departure — San Diego International Airport

~20 min drive from Point Loma · allow 2 hrs before a flight

A short drive back to Lindbergh Field closes out the loop — one of the few major U.S. airports with a runway approach low enough over downtown to be a sightseeing bonus on the way out.

Prices and hours are current as of 2026 and subject to change. i-journey.com