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San Diego's most notable beaches

A sampler of notable area beaches offers a variety of recreational options

By **BETH WOOD** Special to the U-T
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Ask any group of San Diegans to rank the area's top beaches and you might start a heated argument. To keep things peaceful, we offer a list of eight particularly notable beaches. How's that for gingerly stepping around the fire ring?

Amusement unlimited: Mission Beach

If you surf, swim or party at the fire pits, you're sure to enjoy Mission Beach. If you skate, walk, jog, bike or people watch, you'll love the boardwalk (an eight-mile-an-hour rule keeps the pace safe). Condos and vacation rentals outnumber shops and eateries, but near the corner of Ocean Front Walk and Ventura Place is a beach-side mall.

Highlight: Belmont Park's roller coaster, carousel and other rides.

Family fun (North): Moonlight State Beach

Not only does it have a children's playground, lifeguards, fire rings, sand volleyball courts and picnic facilities, this beach (run by the city of Encinitas) features an overlook area with panoramic views.

Highlight: A short walk from the Coaster station.

Family fun (South): Imperial Beach

This low-key, family-friendly beach features swimming and surfing, lifeguards, playground, fishing pier and playful public art. Near the pier and Seacoast Drive are mostly casual shops and eateries.

Highlight: Cow-a-Bunga, an outstanding ice cream parlor, right by the pier.

Great getaway: Harbor Beach

The largest of Oceanside's eight beaches, Harbor Beach has three lifeguard towers, picnic tables, barbecue grills,

Information

San Diego Convention and Visitors Bureau's beach guide:

sandiego.org/article_set/Visitors/5

San Diego city beaches:

sandiego.gov/lifeguards/beaches

Information on beaches in North and South County: individual city websites

Coastal water closures or advisories in San Diego County: (619) 338-2073



The sun sets behind the Imperial Beach Pier. K.C. Alfred • U-T



fire rings, gazebos and showers. For those seeking a quieter setting, to the south is the less populated Breakwater Way beach.

With the skyline of San Diego in the background, Suzanne Parker of Orange County relaxes with the dogs at Fiesta Island. Howard Lipin • U-T

Highlight: Nearby Oceanside Harbor's marina with shopping and culinary options.

Multitasker: La Jolla Shores

Body-boarding, surfing, kayaking, swimming, diving and snorkeling all are possible at this wide, mile-long beach just south of Scripps Pier. It has a boat launch, fire pits, showers and volleyball. The area gets crowded fast in good weather, so morning arrivals are wise.

Highlight: The adjacent Kellogg Park offers grass and a big playground.

Pooches unleashed: Fiesta Island

Yes, canines love Ocean Beach's Dog Beach and Coronado's North Beach Dog Run. But they can roam leash-free on almost 100 acres here. All three places are open 24 hours; Fiesta Island has no public restrooms (not that Fido will care).

Highlight: Calm waters.

Rugged icon: Windansea Beach

Famous for its hard-breaking surf, this beach is not for beginners. Swimmers are warned to watch out for rocks when leaving the water, and only skilled surfers are encouraged. Tom Wolfe chronicled Windansea surfers in his 1968 book "The Pump House Gang."

Highlight: A still-standing, wall-less, Polynesian-style shack built in the 1940s.

Versatility: Coronado Beach

This wide and sandy beach with usually gentle waves makes for an ideal family outing. But adults can splurge on drinks at sunset at the Hotel del Coronado. Nearby Orange Avenue offers restaurants from fancy to funky. During the week, loud aircraft often fly overhead.

Highlight: Flat-out gorgeous.

Find this article at:

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