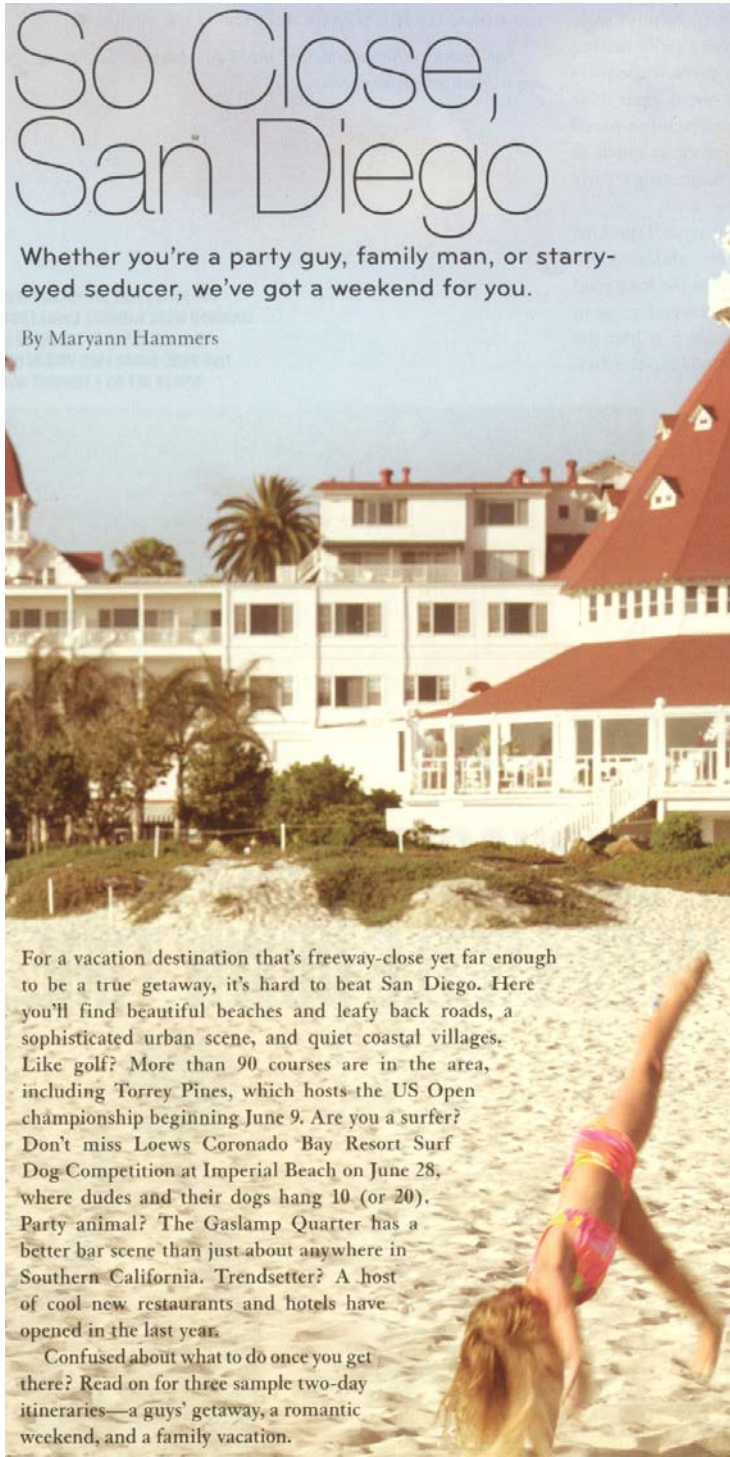


So Close, San Diego

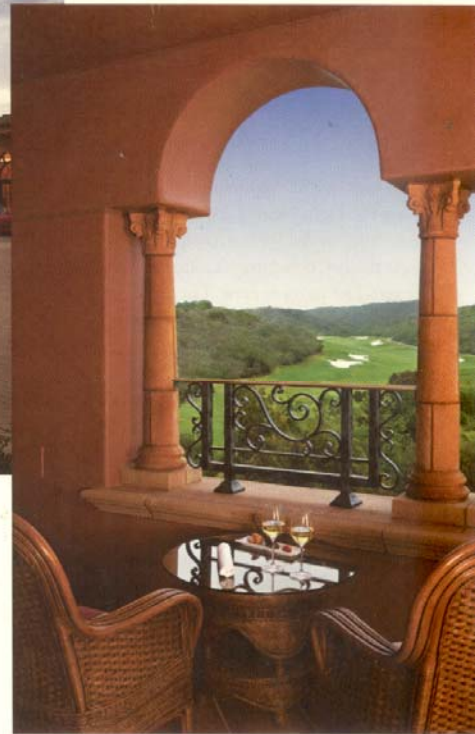
Whether you're a party guy, family man, or starry-eyed seducer, we've got a weekend for you.

By Maryann Hammers



For a vacation destination that's freeway-close yet far enough to be a true getaway, it's hard to beat San Diego. Here you'll find beautiful beaches and leafy back roads, a sophisticated urban scene, and quiet coastal villages. Like golf? More than 90 courses are in the area, including Torrey Pines, which hosts the US Open championship beginning June 9. Are you a surfer? Don't miss Loews Coronado Bay Resort Surf Dog Competition at Imperial Beach on June 28, where dudes and their dogs hang 10 (or 20). Party animal? The Gaslamp Quarter has a better bar scene than just about anywhere in Southern California. Trendsetter? A host of cool new restaurants and hotels have opened in the last year.

Confused about what to do once you get there? Read on for three sample two-day itineraries—a guys' getaway, a romantic weekend, and a family vacation.



DEL MAR: That's Amore!

If you can't pull off an Italian vacation, Del Mar may be a nice substitute. Seriously. This two-square-mile seaside town—perhaps best known for horseracing and a county fair—is the locale of a new 249-room golf-and-spa resort as impressive as a Florentine palazzo. Snuggled within the lush rolling hills of the Los Peñasquitos Canyon Preserve, The Grand evokes old-world Tuscany with sculpted fireplaces, rustic wood-beamed ceilings, and gurgling fountains.

But though the place is magnificently Mediterranean, it's also thoroughly modern sun-splashed California: with sparkling pools, an elegant spa, and fitness center. Guys, this place is irresistibly romantic. Plan accordingly.

The Grand is located at 5300 Grand Del Mar Court, Del Mar, 858-314-2000 or www.thegrandelmar.com.

{WEEKEND FOR WOOING}

Day 1

Morning: Start your day in Cent' Anni, the resort's gourmet coffeehouse, for Mexican hot chocolate or cappuccino and croissants.

Late morning: Work out. Unlike most skimpy hotel gyms with a few broken machines, this spacious fitness center is equipped with treadmills with personal viewing stations, exercise bikes, weight machines, free weights, and a movement studio for Pilates, yoga, and Spinning classes.

Afternoon: She heads to the spa. You're tempted to join her for the Couples Classic (bath, wrap, and massage); but you gotta hit some balls—so head to the Tom Fazio-designed private golf course to play a round.

Late afternoon: A light alfresco lunch at the resort's Club Grill, or relax by the peaceful adults-only pool.

Evening: Cocooning in your lavish room is a defensible option, but the coast is a short drive away, and so is Epazote, an upscale-casual steakhouse that offers perfect sunset-over-the-sea views (1555 Camino Del Mar, 858-259-9966 or www.epazotedelmar.com). Before dinner, join the locals at the restaurant's sexy Z Ocean Bar for a hand-shaken margarita.

Night: Back to your room, where you sample that super-sized, super-deep bathtub (bath salts and a mint-scented milk bath are provided). Think this is more for her? When she's happy, you're happy. Enough said.

Day 2

Morning: Breakfast at Amaya, the resort's all-day bistro. Sit outside, surrounded by rolling green hills and splashing fountains.

Late morning: Hike in Los Peñasquitos Canyon (www.penasquitos.org). The sage-scented Cobbles Trail winds past wildflower fields, a duck pond, a flowing creek, and a three-level waterfall with a swimming hole.

Afternoon: Pacifica del Mar has the same great ocean views as Epazote (1555 Camino Del Mar, 858-792-0476 or www.pacificadelmar.com), but its open-air setting is a tad more casual. The restaurant is lauded for seafood, but lunchtime sandwiches and salads are delicious. If you're watching your carbs, don't touch the basket of warm bread. Once you start, you can't stop.

Late afternoon: Stroll hand-in-hand along the sand. (Here's a preview: www.camzone.com.)

Evening: Is it possible that she's not yet impressed? Well, pack a jacket and tie, because this will wow her: Cap your stay with dinner at Addison (5200 Grand Del Mar Way, 858-314-1900 or www.addisondelmar.com). The Grand's palatial signature restaurant with soaring ceilings and tall arched windows with sweeping golf-course views. The prix-fixe French-influenced menu is based on local, seasonal ingredients and each of the four courses are artistically prepared and elegantly presented.

Night: Hustle back to your room, tiger. ■



From left: The impressive entrance of The Grand Del Mar elicits romance before you've even left the car; relax and enjoy the view from a suite balcony; four heated pools offer private cabanas, poolside dining, spa treatments, and underwater speakers for total relaxation.