



Scrawny's SD Hot Spots

BY: Scrawny Johnny



In collaboration with the upcoming Spellers Freedom Conference of 2026, taking place in San Diego, California, on October 16 & 17, I wanted to put together a few of my own favorite spots for anyone spending time in and around the county. This is not meant to be some definitive (conclusive, final) “best of San Diego” list; these are simply places I genuinely (authentically, sincerely) enjoy and would feel comfortable sending somebody visiting from out of town. Some made the list because of the food, most for the setting, and a couple happened to execute both near perfectly. San Diego is spread out, so this little tour works its way from Balboa Park to Mission Beach, north through Del Mar and Oceanside, and inland toward Escondido.

Let’s spell: SIMPLY FAVORITE COLLABORATION COUNTY

What California city is hosting the Spellers Freedom Conference 2026? SAN DIEGO

What month is the conference taking place? OCTOBER

This is not meant to be some _____ “best of San Diego” list. DEFINITIVE

These recommendations are places the author _____ enjoys. GENUINELY

Some spots made the list because of the food, some setting, and some execute both near _____.

PERFECTLY

Name one area mentioned along the tour. BALBOA PARK, MISSION BEACH, DEL MAR, OCEANSIDE, ESCONDIDO

Give me a synonym for definitive mentioned in the passage. CONCLUSIVE, FINAL

Give me a synonym for genuinely mentioned in the passage. AUTHENTICALLY, SINCERELY

What ocean borders San Diego? PACIFIC

If you travel from Mission Beach toward Oceanside, what general direction are you moving? NORTH

What makes you trust someone’s personal recommendation?

When visiting a new city, would you rather follow recommendations from a local or choose places entirely on your own? Why?

If you were making a “hot spots” list for where you live, what is one place that would have to make it?



My first stop is CANNONBALL in Mission Beach, a sushi spot sitting directly above the Mission Beach BOARDWALK near BELMONT Park, with San Diego's largest oceanfront rooftop overlooking the Pacific. This might sound like an odd recommendation coming from somebody who does not care much for fish, but I cannot resist their Red Dragon Roll: tuna, tempura shrimp, cream cheese, and spicy crab, complemented by rayu, eel sauce, and red tempura flakes. We typically begin with some EDAMAME, salted, spicy, or both, a routine (custom, habit) I am never upset to participate in. Around sunset, you get the beach, surfers, people cruising the boardwalk, and whatever chaos Belmont Park happens to be producing that day. If somebody is visiting San Diego and wants delicious food with a beautiful beach backdrop (scenery, setting), this should be one of the first places on your list.

Let's spell: OCEANFRONT ROUTINE CRUISING BACKDROP

What Mission Beach restaurant are we recommending? CANNONBALL

Cannonball sits directly above the Mission Beach _____. BOARDWALK

The suggested sushi roll is the Red _____ Roll. DRAGON

What nearby amusement park did we mention? BELMONT PARK

What appetizer usually begins the author's meal? EDAMAME

Name one way we said the edamame can be ordered. SALTED, SPICY

Give me a synonym for routine mentioned in the passage. CUSTOM, HABIT

Give me a synonym for backdrop mentioned in the passage. SCENERY, SETTING

A cannonball often refers to a specific type of jump generally into what body of water? POOL

What activity uses ocean waves and a board to move across the water? SURFING

Would you prefer a restaurant with alright food but an incredible view or incredible food with no view? Why?

How much do you think the setting can change the way a meal is experienced?

What would make a restaurant feel specifically like San Diego to you rather than somewhere that could exist in any city?



The Cottage Del Mar



Monarch Ocean Pub

Working our way up the coast, Del Mar has breakfast through dinner covered between two spots that have worked their way into my heart. The COTTAGE Del Mar sits on the ground floor of Del Mar Plaza. You can sit streetside, enjoy the coastal breeze, and expect some of the friendliest service I have experienced around town, and I have yet to find a breakfast option there that does me wrong. After you’ve worked up an evening appetite (craving, desire), I usually end right up upstairs at MONARCH Ocean Pub, where the mood shifts to ocean views, good food, and a much more social ATMOSPHERE (mood, vibe). Monarch even has a nightly sunset toast, ending with the whole pub joining in on, “Cheers to me, cheers to you, and here’s a toast to a hell of a view.” Their dry-rub wings never miss, and most people I’ve taken to Monarch end up suggesting (advocating, proposing) it themselves whenever they return to San Diego.

Let’s spell: COAST BREEZE ATMOSPHERE RETURN

The author said these two spots have worked their way into their _____. HEART

What breakfast spot are we exploring first in Del Mar? THE COTTAGE

The Cottage is located on the ground floor of what Del Mar shopping area? DEL MAR PLAZA

Where might you head for a social atmosphere in the evening in Del Mar? MONARCH OCEAN PUB

What natural event does Monarch celebrate every night with a toast? SUNSET

Give me a synonym for appetite mentioned in the passage. CRAVING, DESIRE

Give me a synonym for atmosphere mentioned in the passage. MOOD, VIBE

Give me a synonym for suggesting mentioned in the passage. ADVOCATING, PROPOSING

In what direction does the sun generally set? WEST

What meal is normally eaten at the beginning of the day? BREAKFAST

Would you rather begin your day with a quiet outdoor breakfast or finish it somewhere social overlooking the ocean? Why?

What is one restaurant or location you return to often enough that it has become part of your normal rotation?

Several visitors have returned to Monarch after being taken there once. What does that tell you about the difference between enjoying a place and actually remembering it?



Beach Break Cafe



Coffee Cake

Farther north in Oceanside is Beach Break Cafe, a breakfast spot that has been around since 1988 and still wears its Southern California surf culture proudly. It doesn't hurt that they're about a block from the beach, so the surf theme feels less performative (superficial, theatrical) and more like neighborhood MEMORABILIA (relics, mementos). The inside is covered with surfboards, surf photos, and even surfboard-inspired ceiling fans, which gives you plenty to look at while you wait for the food. I usually stick to their omelets, but the thing I tell people they need to get is the warmed coffee cake, you will not regret it. The portions are generous (large, plentiful), the place gets busy, and weekends can come with a wait, so earlier is usually better. Beach Break isn't trying to be a fancy breakfast spot; it's humble, tasty, and has been doing its thing for almost 40 years.

Let's spell: THEME MEMORABILIA GENEROUS OMELETS

What Oceanside breakfast spot are we discussing? BEACH BREAK CAFE

What Southern California culture is reflected throughout the restaurant? SURF

What warmed item does the author say people need to try? COFFEE CAKE

Weekends can come with a wait, so _____ is usually better. EARLIER

Beach Break Cafe has been around since what year? 1988

Give me a synonym for performative mentioned in the passage. SUPERFICIAL, THEATRICAL

Give me a synonym for memorabilia mentioned in the passage. RELICS, MEMENTOS

Give me a synonym for generous mentioned in the passage. LARGE, PLENTIFUL

Which meal combines elements of breakfast and lunch? BRUNCH

Surfboards are used in the ocean; what similar board is commonly ridden on pavement? SKATEBOARD

Would you rather wait longer for a breakfast place you already know you love or try somewhere new?

Why can an older neighborhood restaurant sometimes feel more memorable than a polished new one?

What simple food do you think becomes surprisingly special when one restaurant makes it extremely well?



And if everybody has eaten enough, San Diego gives you two very different ways to spend a day around animals. The San Diego Zoo sits inside BALBOA PARK and is one of those attractions locals can grow up visiting without ever feeling like they have completely exhausted it; there is always another section, animal, or route you somehow missed the last time. Giant pandas are back at the Zoo, and the SKYFARI aerial tram lets you take an airborne (aloft, flying) shortcut over the treetops while getting a completely different view of the park. Farther north near Escondido, the San Diego Zoo SAFARI PARK takes a much more spread-out approach, with expansive SAVANNA habitats and the Africa Tram carrying visitors around part of that landscape (terrain, topography). I have been to the Zoo plenty of times and can recommend it firsthand, while the Safari Park is still one of those places I keep saying I need to finally visit. If somebody attending the conference has an extra day to burn, either one gives them something memorable (notable, remarkable) to do that has absolutely nothing to do with where they are eating next.

Let's spell: ZOO AERIAL VISITORS LANDSCAPE

San Diego gives you two very different ways to spend a day around _____. ANIMALS

Where is the San Diego Zoo located? BALBOA PARK

What aerial attraction carries visitors above the Zoo? SKYFARI

Which animal attraction is located farther north near Escondido? SAFARI PARK

What type of habitats make the Safari Park feel different from a traditional city zoo? SAVANNA

Give me a synonym for airborne mentioned in the passage. ALOFT, FLYING

Give me a synonym for landscape mentioned in the passage. TERRAIN, TOPOGRAPHY

Give me a synonym for memorable mentioned in the passage. NOTABLE, REMARKABLE

A savanna is generally dominated by what type of vegetation? GRASS

What continent is strongly associated with large natural savannas and safari wildlife? AFRICA

What animal would you want to see if you visited either attraction?

Would you rather explore a compact zoo with many different exhibits or a much larger park where animals are spread across open habitats? Why?

If you had one free day during a San Diego trip, would you spend it at the Zoo, Safari Park, beach, or somewhere else entirely? Why?

Intentional Motor Activity: Supported Sit-Ups

To balance out all of the food in this lesson, let's work through a few controlled sit-ups. Begin lying on your back with your knees bent and feet planted on the floor, then slowly bring your upper body forward before returning to the starting position with control.

If initiating the forward movement is difficult, it is completely fine to add support. Feet can be tucked underneath a couch or other sturdy surface, or a parent, coach, or partner can gently hold the feet in place. A partner can also offer their hands for the athlete to hold as they begin the sit-up, providing only as much assistance as needed to complete the movement successfully.

As strength, coordination, and confidence improve, gradually fade the support by using less pressure at the feet, lighter hand assistance, or eventually no assistance at all.

For motor planning, keep the sequence simple:

SET → LIFT → SIT → RETURN

The goal is not speed or a high number of repetitions. Focus on controlled initiation, completing the forward movement, returning with control, and gradually building independence.

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