

DESTINATION: DOWNTOWN *San Diego*

Sleek design-driven hotels, buzz-worthy nightlife and unique eateries are changing the face of this SoCal city.

By Melissa Gage



Gaslamp Quarter

luxurious

Chic and luxurious aren't words generally associated with San Diego. Visitors tend to think more in terms of flip-flops and family-friendly attractions. All of that's changing as a new wave of development transforms downtown into a destination in and of itself. The area's beautiful beaches, historic Balboa Park and ample museums are a no-brainer, but to get a glimpse of the city's newly-emerging identity, look no further than downtown San Diego.

Located just minutes from the airport, convention center and Balboa Park, the downtown area is easily accessible and generally walkable. Eight distinct neighborhoods range from the emerging East Village, home of the Padres' new PETCO Park, to the Gaslamp Quarter, where historic Victorian-era architecture blends with a buzzing nightlife scene.

Signs of change are ubiquitous as new condos, hotels and restaurants seem to be springing up on every corner. From sexy new nightclubs to utterly indulgent accommodations, downtown is updating its image with a splash of L.A. luxury and Las Vegas flash – minus the attitude. After all, this is still laid-back San Diego.



Stingaree



US Grant

Destination Digs

In the past few months, four distinct hotels have opened in historic downtown buildings. Established in 1910, **The US Grant** recently reopened its distinguished doors after a two-year, \$52 million renovation. Elements like the original marble entrance were restored, while contemporary details like flat screen televisions and unique headboard artwork were implemented. Downtown's grand dame has hosted numerous U.S. presidents and is also home to longtime power dining destination, Grant Grill.

Newly opened in the Gaslamp district, **The Keating** is a 35-room boutique hotel housed in a 19th-century building. The upscale accommodations were designed by Pininfarina, the Italian firm responsible for the look of Ferrari and Maserati. From the racy red lobby and semi-private basement lounge to sleek, studio-style guestrooms with cement floors and stainless steel sink areas, contemporary Italian design reigns supreme. Extravagant bells and whistles include in-room Bang & Olufsen entertainment systems, Lavazza espresso machines and decadent beds loaded up with goose down and Frette linens.

Eye-catching style and outstanding service are taken seriously at the new **Ivy Hotel**, located a block from The Keating. The 159-room luxury property was originally built in 1914 to host dignitaries. While a popular restaurant, club, rooftop pool and boutique are on-site, guests may find it difficult to leave lavish rooms stocked with live orchids, extra-soft robes and oversized marble bathtubs that are separated from the sleeping area by only a glass wall. Can't figure out how to work the espresso machine? Not to worry, every guest has access to a private butler.

Opened in downtown's historic Pickwick building, **The Sofia Hotel** offers more down-to-earth accommodations. A good value, this stylish hotel is equipped with modern rooms, ample business amenities, a yoga studio and 24/7 personal training. Original Gothic architecture, stately brick exteriors and old photos lining the hallways recall the hotel's 1920s origins.



Distinguished



Ivy Hotel Guestroom

Ivy Hotel Lobby

US Grant Suite

The Keating

Cocktails and Culture

While downtown's nightlife scene has long been concentrated in the Gaslamp, swanky new clubs and cultural entertainment outlets are giving night owls more options after dark. The first Thursday of every month, the newly expanded outpost of San Diego's **Museum of Contemporary Art**, attached to a downtown trolley station, holds TNT (Thursday Night Thing), featuring everything from live music and poetry readings to artist talks, standup comedy and cocktails.

Across the street from the convention center, the **San Diego Wine & Culinary Center** offers weekly happy hour events and pleasant patio seating. Thursdays feature live jazz along with wine and cheese, while Fridays offer piano music with food and drink specials. Inside, you'll find a tasting bar, demonstration kitchen and small shop offering wine, olives, preserves and locally-made gourmet goodies.

Opened this June in downtown's quaint Little Italy neighborhood, **Anthology** is a supper club with smooth, contemporary style. Three levels of seating overlook a roomy stage where big name jazz, blues and R&B acts perform while diners enjoy upscale New American cuisine by consulting star chef Bradley Ogden. With chic décor, outdoor patios and intimate nooks and crannies, it's a perfect blend of urban sophistication and California cool.

Rooftop lounges with spectacular downtown views are popping up all over San Diego. Near the ballpark, Hotel Solamar's fourth-floor **Jbar** is an expansive poolside oasis with palm trees, teak furniture, fire pits and an inclusive, laid-back vibe. Nearby, the Marriott's **Altitude Sky Bar**, located on the 22nd floor, overlooks the action at PETCO Park. Other than inside the stadium, there's no better place to catch the game.

Downtown's exclusive new club scenes lure the beautiful people with glitzy Las Vegas-style entertainment. Bottle service, steep cover charges (\$20 and up) and cocktail waitresses with plunging necklines are becoming commonplace. Bypass long lines and the cover charge at **Stingaree** by making dinner reservations at the hip, dimly-lit restaurant downstairs. Housed in a historic warehouse, the tri-level club features DJs, rooftop cabanas and plenty of VIP sections.

Playing to a similar crowd, the Ivy Hotel's nightspot-of-the-moment, **Envy**, offers a sultry basement club, midlevel lounge and swanky rooftop bar. On crowded weekend nights, eye-candy entertainers may include a French maid-outfitted table dancer or mermaid model at the rooftop pool.



Anthology



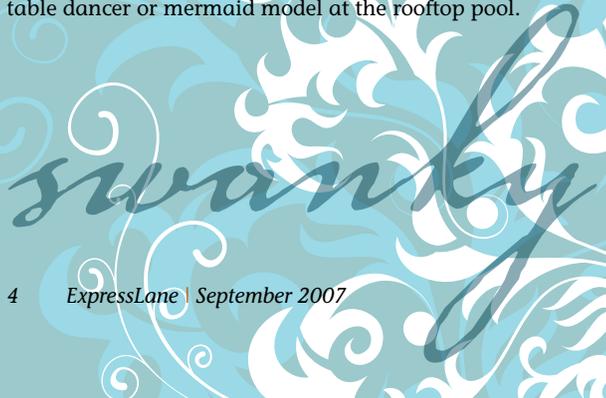
Altitude Sky Bar



Stingaree Rooftop



Stingaree Penthouse



New on the Dining Scene

With more than 100 restaurants in the Gaslamp district alone, deciding where to eat in downtown San Diego can be difficult. Steer towards one of several new restaurants that offer eclectic cuisine served in a unique setting.

Named for a popular Australian beach, the Gaslamp's new **Bondi Bar & Kitchen** is sleek, friendly and authentically Australian. The servers and chef are from Down Under, as are the sandstone tiles and iron ore walls that line the restaurant's cool, cavernous dining rooms with multiple bars and funky lighting. Cuisine is slightly upscale with hearty lamb and Australian seafood selections, shared plates and an impressive Aussie beer and wine menu.

The Ivy's trendy new **Quarter Kitchen** features a chic dining room, bustling bar and an intimate indoor-outdoor seating area neighboring the exhibition kitchen. The see-and-be-seen set pays top dollar to dine here, but judging by the crispy-skinned sea bass and 16-ounce filet, the splurge is worth it. At the bar, casual bites range from a 20-inch Kobe beef hot dog to mini lamb burgers. A playful dessert menu features a frozen PB & J and super rich s'mores.

A perfectly charming Parisian-style café in downtown's East Village neighborhood, **Café Chloe** is a new favorite lunch spot for locals. French bistro fare includes homemade pastries, cheese plates and entrées like roast chicken and mussels with pommes frites. Stop by for a cup of coffee, enjoy weekend brunch alfresco or sip a glass of wine at the curved marble bar during happy hour.

With its lantern-style lighting, contemporary Asian décor and loungy bar area, popular newcomer **Red Pearl Kitchen** is decidedly hip. Well-dressed diners sip sake over shared dim sum, satay skewers and creative Pan-Asian entrées like black pepper-caramel shrimp and mango fried rice.

For a more casual meal, opt for **Nicky Rottens Bar & Burger Joint**. This friendly, mobster-themed eatery features hardwood floors, exposed brick walls, spinning fans overhead and a long bar where patrons can catch the game. The menu offers nine burgers that can be substituted with a veggie patty or chicken, plus sandwiches and bar bites.

Downtown's development shows no sign of slowing down with the much-anticipated Hard Rock Hotel and Casino, featuring upscale accommodations, condos and NOBU restaurant set to open in a few months. The Diegan, another posh condo-hotel combo is also on the horizon.

San Diego's laid-back lifestyle isn't going anywhere, but with downtown's upscale evolution, this sunny city is quickly becoming a destination with many faces. ■



Café Chloe

charming



Nicky Rottens Bar

DESTINATION UNKNOWN

If you recognized this cityscape as downtown San Diego for last month's DESTINATION UNKNOWN, consider yourself as smooth as the swanky boutique hotel featured in the photo.

Located in the Gaslamp Quarter, The Keating is one of several new hot spots housed in historic downtown buildings.

Check out page 32 for a sneak peek at ExpressLane's featured destination for October.



eclectic



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The US Grant
326 Broadway
800.237.5029 | usgrant.net
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2

The Keating
432 F Street
619.814.5700 | thekeating.com
- 

3

Ivy Hotel, Quarter Kitchen, Envy
600 F Street
619.814.1000 | ivyhotel.com
- 

4

The Sofia Hotel
150 West Broadway
619.234.9200 | thesofiahotel.com
- 

5

Bondi Bar & Kitchen
333 Fifth Avenue
619.342.0212 | thebondi.com
- 

6

Café Chloe
721 Ninth Avenue
619.232.3242 | cafechloe.com
- 

7

Red Pearl Kitchen
440 J Street
619.231.1100 | redpearlkitchen.com
- 

8

Nicky Rottens Bar & Burger Joint
560 Fifth Avenue
619.702.8068 | nickyrottens.com
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9

Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego
1100 and 1001 Kettner Boulevard
858.454.3541 | mcsad.org
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10

San Diego Wine & Culinary Center
200 Harbor Drive
619.231.6400 | sdwineculinary.com
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11

Anthology
1337 India Street
619.595.0300 | anthologysd.com
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12

Jbar
616 J Street
619.531.8744 | jsixsandiego.com
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13

Altitude Sky Bar
660 K Street
619.446.6086 | altitudeskybar.com
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14

Stingaree
454 Sixth Avenue
619.544.9500 | stingsandiego.com

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

San Diego Convention & Visitors Bureau | sandiego.org
Downtown San Diego | sandiegodowntown.org
Citysearch | sandiego.citysearch.com