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On the Shady Side: Escape the Heat to San Diego's Coolest Spots

by Ondine Brooks Kuraoka

During the dog days of summer, it's tempting to hunker down inside until the temperature drops. Cabin fever can hit hard, though, especially with little ones. If we don't have air conditioning we hit the mall, or stake out a booth at Denny's, or do time at one of the wild pizza arcades when we're desperate.

Of course, we can always head to the beach. But we yearn for places where energetic little legs can run amok and avoid the burning rays. Luckily, there is a slew of family-friendly, shady glens nestled between the sunny stretches of San Diego. First stop: Balboa Park (www.balboapark.org).

The Secret is Out

While you're huffing a sweaty path to your museum of choice, the smiling folks whizzing by on the jovial red **Park Tram** are getting a free ride! Park in the lot at Inspiration Point on the east side of Park Blvd., right off of Presidents Way, and wait no longer than 15 minutes at Tram Central, a shady arbor with benches. The Tram goes to the Balboa Park Visitors Center (619-239-0512), where you can get maps and souvenirs, open daily from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Continuing down to Sixth Avenue, the Tram then trundles back to the Pan American Plaza near the Hall of Champions Sports Museum. Later, hitch a ride back to your car in breezy style. A day at Balboa Park has never been easier, or cooler.

Arched Walkways

From the Visitors Center, take a shady stroll under the arched walkways of Balboa Park's Pedestrian Mall; watch for glimpses of couples in their finery preparing for wedding photos. Peek into the chapel and ballroom at the House of Hospitality.

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Balboa Park Gardens

Though the Alcazar garden itself isn't shaded, sit like royalty on a shady, trellised bench overlooking the orderly flowerbeds and listen to the chimes of the nearby California Tower. The Zoro Garden, east of the Casa de Balboa, is a lesser-known spot with more shade and rock-walled paths, planted to attract butterflies, with milkweed, sunflower and passion vines.

The Botanical Building, at the far end of the Lily Pond, is a retreat with speckled shade and soothing sounds of fountains. Learn the names of the tropical beauties blooming all around and relax on a bench. Kids will love the "Touch and Smell" herb garden, just inside the entrance. Enjoy this lush delight while it is still free of charge through the summer; a fee may be imposed come fall. 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., closed Thursday.

House of Pacific Relations International Cottages

Just north of Marie Hitchcock's Puppet Theater, sup on ethnic treats under the trees while watching the folk dancers work up a sweat. Sundays, 2 p.m. to 3 p.m.

Shady Adrenaline Rush for Tots

If you want to spice things up a bit for the little ones, try the cool combination of the Carousel and Miniature Railroad, just south of the Zoo. Treat the tots to a satisfying burst of adrenaline, with the bonus of shade! The Carousel has been in operation since 1922. 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. in summer, 619-460-9000. The train, running since 1948, travels through 4 acres of Balboa Park in 3 minutes, 11 a.m. to 6:30 p.m., 7 days a week through Labor Day. (619) 231-1515 ext. 4219. Operated by the San Diego Zoo Transportation Department.

Spanish Village Art Center

North of the Natural History Museum, kids can watch artists at work. Eat lunch under the umbrella tables; bring your own or buy lunch there. Daily, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., 619-233-9050. Children's art classes, 619-236-8997. www.spanishvillageart.com.

The Cool Side of the Zoo

Plan your outing to the San Diego Zoo around the shady exhibits. If you linger long enough in these areas, you'll avoid sunburn for another day:

- Reptile House
- Koala Exhibit
- Absolutely Apes
- Gorilla Tropics
- Tiger River
- Polar Bear Plunge
- Hippo Beach
- Ituri Forest
- Scripps Aviary
- Rainforest Aviary

Take the Skyfari to get to the other side of the Zoo.

Bonus: Get to the Zoo early and you have a better chance of watching the animals feeding. www.sandiegozoo.org.

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SeaWorld Adventure Park

SeaWorld has its share of indoor aquariums and exhibits, but there are also several outdoor areas that offer respite from the mid-day sun:

- Shamu Close Up
- Tide Pool Exhibit
- Shady play area at Shamu's Happy Harbor
- Typically shady lawn along the Bayside Walkway

At shows the only shade is at the very top, against the back wall. www.seaworld.com

Where's the Shade at Petco Park?

The best shade, according to a park representative: Field Reserve Level, approximately Rows 30-31, more on 3rd base side. Toyota Terrace Level, beginning Row 7, more on 3rd base side. www.padres.com.

Absorb History, Not Rays

Bazaar del Mundo (www.bazaardelmundo.com), on Juan Street in Old Town, has shaded courtyard walkways. Treat your family to a visual feast of cultural curios and then have lunch under one of the umbrellas at the Bazaar's casual restaurant, Casa de Pico, 619-296-3267. Next, drive a few minutes to the rolling hills of Presidio Park. If the kids are out of patience for the Serra Museum, play a game of cards under the hillside trees of the Presidio. Take the trolley from Old Town to Mission Basilica San Diego de Alcala and enjoy the shady garden. www.missionsandiego.com.

Done with the beach? Try a day at the lake

Lake Murray, Kiowa Dr., La Mesa. 619-668-3274. There are a few shady trees near the dock. Canoes, kayaks, motorboats for rent. Go boating in the morning and then have an early lunch under the trees. Be sure to park at the lot on the Kiowa Drive entrance; shade is scarce at the other entrance on Murray Park Drive.

Santee Lakes, 9040 Carlton Oaks Dr. 619-596-3141. www.SanteeLakes.com
190 acres and 7 lakes; numerous trees for picnics, fishing and bird-watching. Admission is \$2 per vehicle on weekdays and \$3 on weekends.

Kumeyaay Lake, Junipero Serra Drive, Santee. <http://www.mtrp.org/campground>.
Several shady alcoves and fishing. Also a reproduction of a Native American shelter.

Parks with tree cover or shady picnic tables

Most of San Diego's city and county parks have some tree cover, though the play structures are rarely shaded. Make the most of the cool morning hours on 100-degree days by getting out early. Give the kids a token tummy-filler when they first get up and plan a picnic breakfast instead of lunch, so the kids can run wild without getting burned. Or go later in the day and have a relaxing, alfresco dinner. Bring some books and have story time under the trees. You'll have a quiet ride home because you'll be the only one still awake!

Tip: Bring blankets instead of counting on getting a table; that way you can follow the shade around to extend your stay.

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Here are a few spots with good trees for picnics:

- Spreckels Park, 601 Orange Ave., Coronado. 619-522-7326.
- Mast Park, 9125 Carlton Hills Blvd., Santee. 619-258-4100.
- Jackson Park, Jackson Dr. and Laird St., La Mesa 619-667-1307.
- Sixth Avenue Playground, Balboa Dr., Balboa Park, west side. 619-235-1104.
- Chicano Park, Crosby St. Exit off of I-5, under the Coronado Bridge at National Ave., downtown San Diego. www.chicano-park.org.

Beach parks with shade

- Dunes Park, Seacoast Dr., Imperial Beach. 619-423-8328.
- Ellen Browning Scripps Park, Coast Blvd. near La Jolla Cove.

An easy hike under oaks

Mission Trails Regional Park: After visiting the Visitor and Interpretive Center (619-668-3275), the walk along the dirt trail towards the Old Mission Dam has quite a bit of shade. http://www.mtrp.org/visitor_center.asp.

Shady Day Trips

Quail Botanical Gardens, 230 Quail Gardens Drive, Encinitas. Seeds of Wonder Children's Garden. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., daily. 760-436-3036. www.qbgardens.com.

Self-Realization Fellowship Meditation Gardens, 215 K St., Encinitas. West of Hwy. 101. Overlooking the ocean. Koi ponds. 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tues. through Sat. 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Sun. Closed Mon. 760-753-2888.

Live Oak Park, 2746 Reche Rd., Fallbrook. I-15 North to 395 North. Creeks, oak groves, American Indian milling stones. Mon. through Fri., 9:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. and weekends, 9:30 to 8 p.m. \$2 parking fee per vehicle.

Flinn Springs County Park, 14787 Old Highway 80 at Marina Springs Lane, El Cajon. Lots of oaks. 858-565-3600. Also visit the Flinn Springs Country Store for old-fashioned candy. 619-443-1842.

The sun's rays are most damaging between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. in the summertime. Remember to protect your children with sunscreen and don't forget yourself! Sun protection websites:

www.foundation.sdsu.edu/sunwisestampede

www.aad.org/SkinCancerNews/SafeSunTips/protect_yourself.html

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