

Endless summer

► Uncluttered Pacific Beach is home to vibrant sunsets.

By John Gregory
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While the memory of summer starts to fade, the real fun is just beginning in the San Diego community of Pacific Beach.

Residents grin as they sit along the water's edge enjoying another vibrant sunset on what is now an uncluttered beach. This is the best time to visit the classic seaside village that lives up to its story book name.

Indeed, the day after Labor Day brought a noticeable change. The streets are much more quiet and parking is no longer an impossible dilemma. Just days ago the place was packed and a spot in the sand was at a premium.

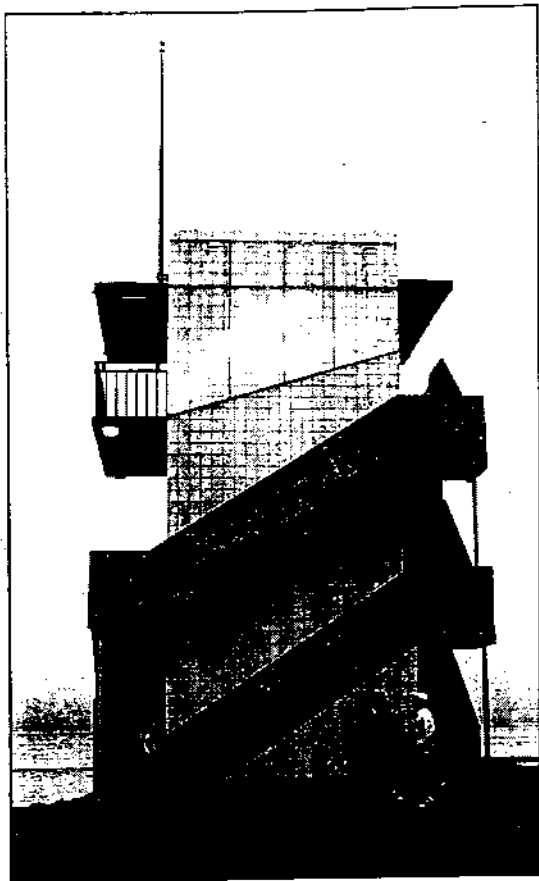
"It's like another world. It's just paradise," said Anne McDaniel, a longtime Pacific Beach resident. "You've heard of Paradise Lost? This is Paradise Found."

Mission Bay, once a giant swamp, is now a man-made aquatic park, the world's largest. The place was made for fun. SeaWorld is the biggest attraction, but Mission Bay also plays host to water-skiing, jet skiing, sailing and kayaking all year long. Lessons and rentals for these activities are available nearby.

For a special thrill, try paragliding above the water. This is a unique experience in which the participant is strapped to a parachute and towed behind a boat as they glide higher and higher. The sight is common along the Pacific Beach shoreline.

Landlubbers may enjoy a stroll in Kate Sessions Park, one of the loveliest spots in the city. It features a peaceful, green setting with spectacular views of the ocean, the bay and San Diego's skyline. Those with shopping fever can indulge themselves in the trendy boutiques and stores along Garnet Avenue, known as the Melrose of San Diego. Don't forget to stop for a rest while enjoying a favorite blend at one of the many coffee houses. Two of the most famous, Zanzibar and Cafe Crema, are on the intersection of Cass Street and Garnet Avenue, while nearby Cafe 976 is housed in one of Pacific Beach's first homes.

Although Pacific Beach, known locally as PB, is less crowded during the off-season, the town still rocks. Students and visitors mix with locals as they bicycle, skate or stroll along the boardwalk. A lively



Paul H. Hansen

Artist Robin Braidsford turned the lifeguard tower at Grand Avenue in Pacific Beach into a landmark by surrounding the structure with neon sculpture called "Terrific Pacific" and by using the external staircase to create mosaics of swimmers.

conversation is always available from the onlookers who sit atop the boardwalk's seawall every day.

An abundance of nightclubs and restaurants dot the landscape, providing something for every preference. Mingle with the friendly, yet colorful natives at watering holes such as the Open Bar, Cass Street Bar & Grill or perhaps the most classic of all California beach bars, Lahaina's. This legendary establishment features a wooden deck where sun worshipers can enjoy a drink. Patrons get rowdy at times, but they always pause to applaud each beautiful sunset.

Some of the popular restaurants include World Famous, T.D. Hayes, Hennessey's Tavern, PB Bar & Grill, Nick's at the Beach, Firehouse Beach Cafe, Lamont Street Grill and Armando's Green Flash. The latter was named for the optical phenomenon occasionally visible just as the sun drops below the ho-

zizon. The effect can be seen from the deck of Green Flash or anywhere in Pacific Beach on a clear day, and this time of year is prime green flash season.

Reservations at this seaside paradise are a little easier to get this time of year, and most inns have off season rates. Resort hotels on Mission Bay include the Hyatt Islandia, the Catamaran, the Bahia and Princess Pointe Resort. For a real treat on the beach side, stay over the water in one of the Crystal Pier Cottages on the community wooden pier. Or, open your window to the ocean at Pacific Terrace Inn.

Even when the weather becomes nippy in other areas of the state, the climate remains nice and visitors may taste a little more summer in Pacific Beach.

For guidance to the area call Discover Pacific Beach. (858) 273-3303.