

The sunny side of the San Diego Convention Center

by Aleta Walther

Having attended more than 100 tradeshow, I have seen the good, the bad, and the ugly when it comes to convention centers. More bad and ugly than good, however, I love the San Diego Convention Center, its sunny skies, ocean breeze and location, location, location.

Located on San Diego Bay in the heart of a vibrant downtown, the San Diego Convention Center ranks among the best exposition facilities in the country, but it's the surrounding dining and entertainment options that I appreciate the most. No need to hail a taxi or cram clients in your car for a lunch or dinner excursion. Just exit the convention center's front or harbor-side entrances and you are no more than a couple minutes walk from a cornucopia of restaurants, bars, snack shacks and two of San Diego's most popular entertainment attractions, Seaport Village and The Gaslamp Quarter Historic District.

You don't have to settle for over-priced, bland convention food, not when you can find fabulous and feisty fare just an easy, breezy, hop, skip and jump from the convention center. Walk out the convention center's Harbor Boulevard entrance and you will find over 100 restaurants, bars and nightclubs throughout the Gaslamp. There are also gift shops and clothing boutiques, theaters and art galleries within this Victorian-era community. The Gaslamp is an elite urban destination, a playground for hip, eclectic San Diegans and visitors alike.

My favorite Gaslamp restaurants are Nobu and Maryjane's Coffee Shop, both located in the Hard Rock Hotel, directly across from the convention center.

Specializing in Japanese cuisine, Nobu is



Photo by John Stewart

more upscale and pricier than Maryjane's, but each has its time and place. I often take colleagues to Nobu where we dine on tempura (\$7 vegetable to \$29 seafood) and sushi and sashimi (\$5 tamago to \$13 jumbo clam). Nobu: (619) 814-4124, or www.noburestaurants.com.

Maryjane's is where I head after a particularly rough day trekking the trade show floor. Specializing in American comfort foods, it's easy to calm my stress with Maryjane's meatloaf, mashed potatoes, and Wavy Gravy (\$12) or Chicken Pot Pie (\$14). Maryjane's is handy for breakfast. Maryjane's: (619) 764-6950 or www.hardrockhotelsd.com.

Step out the convention center's harbor-side entrance and you'll descend into the north end of San Diego's Embarcadero with Joe's Crab Shack to your left and Seaport Village on your right. A one-minute walk along the bay, Joe's Crab Shack is ultra casual, more t-shirt and flip flops than ties and wing tips. My favorite appetizer? The crab nachos (\$10). My favorite entrée? Joe's Old Bay Steampot (\$22.99), two clusters of snow crab, a pound of clams, sausage, corn and potatoes. My favorite drink? the Rockin Poppin Pomegranate Margarita, a traditional margarita turned unconventional with the addition of a tangy pomegranate syrup and Pop Rocks (candy). Joe's Crab Shack is located at 525 E. Harbor Dr.: (619) 233-7391, www.joescrabshack.com.

Seaport Village is also a very short walk from the convention center. Most any craving can be satisfied here. Dine at any of four restaurants or nibble at more than a dozen smaller eateries.

My favorite Seaport Village restaurant is Buster's Beach House & Longboard Bar with its byside dinning and surfing motif. Whether an



ethnic dish or burgers and pizza, Buster's infuses its food with the tastes of the tropics. The Short Board, an appetizer platter of Jamaican voodoo chicken, fried calamari, onion rings and tempura coconut shrimp (\$24.50, feeds 2-4). Buster's is located at 807 West Harbor Drive: (619) 223-4300 or www.bustersbeachhouse.com.

When you're done dining, check out Seaport Village. The weather will be amazing and you'll discover lots to do with its 50 shops; clothing, souvenirs, art and toys, street-side artist colony, outdoor entertainment, horse drawn surreys and historic Merry-Go-Round.

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