

Sailing the Sky and Sea

By Rob Dunton

A weekend aloft and afloat in San Diego

IT IS FRIDAY MORNING, 8:30, when I meet my friend Peggy at the office of Aqua Adventures, an outfitter specializing in kayaking tours. We are checking in for the first leg of a weekend of adventure, one in which we expect to experience more thrills, more adrenaline, than either of us can imagine, taking advantage of San Diego's waterfront location and sterling weather.

Paddles, life vests and helmets in hand, we stroll two blocks to the sands of La Jolla Shores. The beach is abuzz as surfers, scuba divers, snorkelers and beachcombers intermingle on the shore. Our group is one of many with candy-colored kayaks getting ready to explore the caves and sea life in La Jolla's protected marine park. The sun and water are warm; the waves small. After a safety and training session, we paddle through the surf zone to the calm beyond. Below us dark shadows move along the bottom: seasonal guitarfish and leopard sharks, some more than 4 feet in length, swim along the sand as a gaggle of snorkelers follows above them.

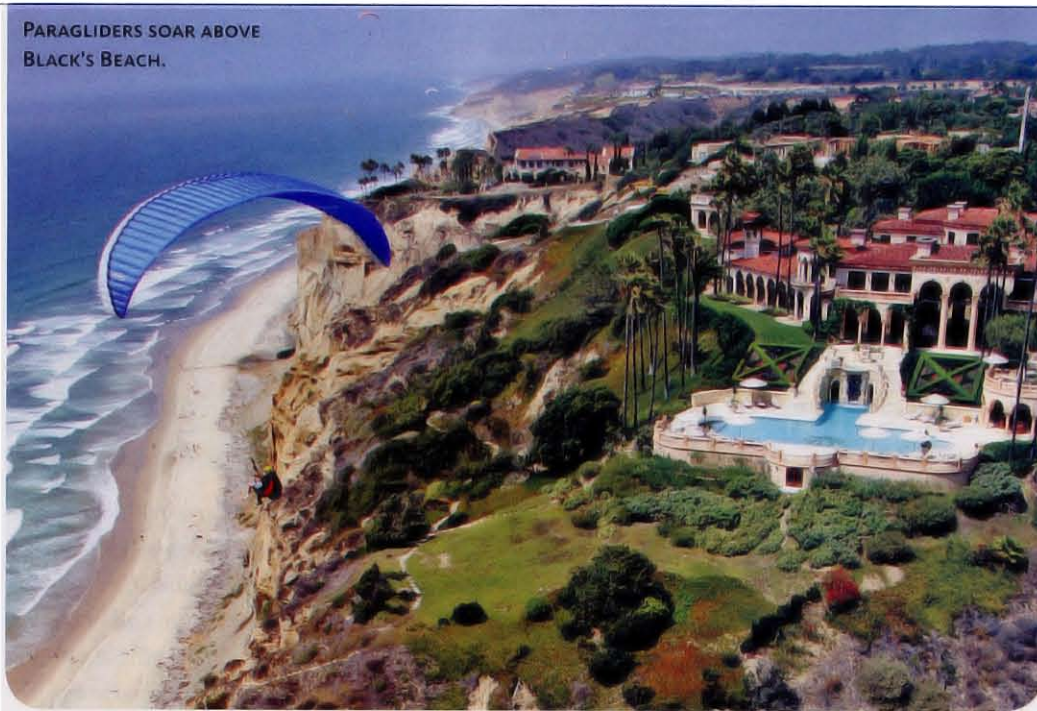
Paddling toward the dramatic cliffs that frame La Jolla Cove about half a mile away, we pass athletic swimmers churning their way toward designated buoys set a quarter- or half-mile out. Approaching the first large cave, we spot black cormorants and seagulls perched on the bluff; in the clear water below, orange garibaldi (California's state fish) swim placidly among the kelp and eelgrass. Each member of our group takes a turn paddling in and out of the high-arching caves, sensitive to the swells that come from the sea. After exiting the largest of the caves, we come upon a sea lion sunning itself on the rocks as it watches the parade of kayaks float by.

On our way back, our guides lead us into the waves to kayak-surf. Peggy and I enjoy a few successful rides, zipping along the face of small waves until each of us gets unceremoniously dumped into the refreshing sea. We paddle back to shore, hand our kayaks to the next group and move on to our next adventure *in the skies*.

After a five-minute drive, we pull into the Torrey Pines Gliderport for a tandem paragliding flight above the Pacific Ocean. "Torrey Pines is a unique spot in the world," David Jebb, owner of



KAYAKERS NEAR THE DRAMATIC CLIFFS
THAT FRAME LA JOLLA COVE.



PARAGLIDERS SOAR ABOVE
BLACK'S BEACH.

ROB DUNTON

the center, explains. "It's a five-mile-long bluff where the flying is not only good, it is consistent with 300 to 320 good sailing days a year. It was founded back in 1928, and Charles Lindbergh set some gliding records from here back in the day." David introduces my tandem guide, Tad Hurst, a Ph.D. chemist who has been flying for nine years and is dual-rated in both hang gliders and paragliders. We select a paraglider, harness and helmet, and head toward the launch-and-landing zone.

Following some core instruction, I am strapped to Tad by way of a contraption that is part canvas bucket seat and part cocoon. I take four, maybe five strides toward the edge of the bluff, and just as I am about to leap, my foot misses the ground altogether and pedals into thin air as the paraglider lifts us away. Though just a few yards beyond the precipice, my feet now dangle 340 feet above Black's Beach and the sea.

I am flying ... gliding actually ... soaring effortlessly like a seagull on the wind. When I dreamt of flying as a kid—arms out, glorious and free—this is what it felt like.

"See if you can pull yourself into the seat," coaches Tad from behind me as he steers the red-and-white paraglider

overhead. "Snug yourself in; sit back and enjoy the ride!"

There is little sound besides the rustling of wind blowing past my helmet as we soar at 25-28 mph, riding the laminar winds that flow off the Pacific and up the cliffs. As we cruise over the renowned Torrey Pines golf course, Tad tells me of gliding over Tiger Woods while a ring of photographers gestured for him to fly behind the heralded pro to enrich their shot. We circle back along the amber cliffs, over the wide ribbon of sand, sea foam and emerald-and-navy water that stretches out to the horizon.

As we pass the launch area, we spot Peggy and her guide soaring beneath a bright-blue glider. We approach them, circle around and perform a makeshift dance in the air, then fly over the megamansions that line the cliffs, and a volleyball game on the beach below. If it were up to me, I'd spend the rest of the afternoon riding the winds, but the clock is ticking, and more adventure awaits.

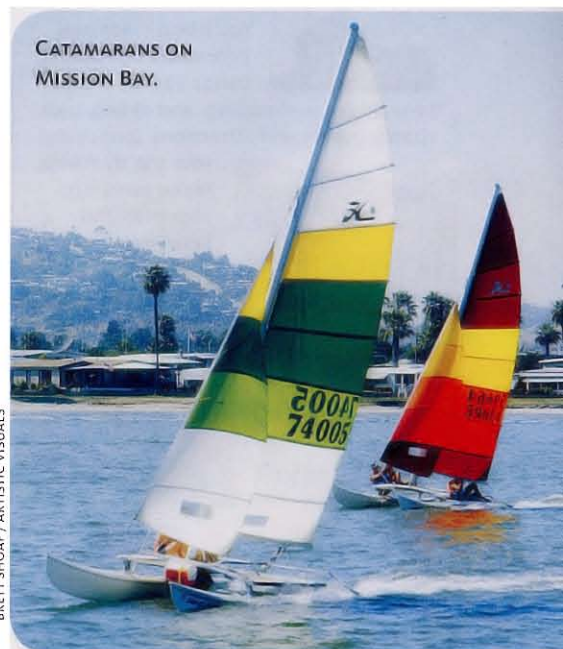
Our next stop is Mission Bay Sportcenter, on the shores of Santa Clara Point in Mission Beach. This singular location will be home for our next three activities—though its list of aquatic options could keep

us busy for a week.

A 5- to 7-knot wind is blowing as Thomas Durkin, our sailing instructor, readies our Hobie catamaran. After we push off, Thomas explains the rudiments of sailing: the difference between jibbing and tacking, rights of way, and how to steer and trim a sail for maximum speed. Peggy and I take turns at the tiller and adjusting the sails, crisscrossing Sail Bay and ducking beneath the boom as it shifts with the wind. Relaxing on the airy trampoline stretched between the catamaran's sleek hulls is a quiet prelude to the intensity of our next thrill:

riding a veritable water rocket at 40-plus miles an hour across the bay.

At 5 o'clock, the 5-mph speed limit for motorized watercraft on Sail Bay is lifted. Cloaked in life vests, Peggy and I mount two Yamaha personal watercraft, hit the green start buttons, idle out of the safety zone, then punch it. Zippity-vroooooom!!! As this hurling juggernaut reaches maximum velocity, I envision some featherweight flapping from the handlebars and am suddenly very glad to weigh 185 pounds.



CATAMARANS ON
MISSION BAY.

BRETT SHOAF / ARTISTIC VISUALS

We race around the bay as if competing in some seafaring NASCAR race, howling with zany, joyful glee. After our arms are wearied by our extreme riding, we slow down and explore more of this scenic water park: Sea World, the Mission Bay Yacht Club, the Giant Dipper roller coaster and Paradise Point. As it nears 6:30 P.M., we return to the open speed zone near the Sportcenter and race a few more laps, cranking g-force turns, jumping wakes and getting soaked. The day is done and we are spent. Time to recharge for tomorrow.

Sunday morning we return to the Mission Bay Sportcenter at 7 for a two-hour waterskiing and wakeboarding session. Early mornings provide the glassy conditions that make learning easier and performing advanced maneuvers possible. When Matt Chastain, our 23-year-old instructor and local wakeboard expert, pulls up with the boat, we are off.

A regular water-skier, I am happy to hop in first. I strap on a vest, gloves and single ski, and plop into the bay's 75-degree

water. "Hit it!" I shout, and the Mastercraft's powerful 310-horsepower engine pulls me up effortlessly. I lean into each turn, cutting the smooth water like a blade, and the resulting rooster tail proclaims a moderate level of proficiency. My legs and arms give out before my enthusiasm does, and after a short wakeboarding stint and a few mild crashes, I'm done.

Peggy's next, and Matt walks through the fundamentals of wakeboarding.

"Board on the surface, point your toes a bit to angle the board, bend your knees and keep the board near your backside," he explains. One try, two tries, then Peggy's up, and her smile starts working overtime. She turns cautiously in the safety of the wake, then pushes out, only to tumble into the bay. After a few more attempts, she trades in her board for a pair of waterskis and makes an energetic run around the bay. We end the morning with Matt performing awe-inspiring aerial acrobatics, and with each crash, I wince in empathetic pain. As sore as I am, I can only imagine

DETAILS

AQUA ADVENTURES: 2-hour sea caves tour, \$45 per person; 800-269-7792.

TORREY PINES GLIDER PORT: Approx. 20 to 30-minute ride, \$150; 877-FLY-TEAM.

MISSION BAY SPORTCENTER: Boat, driver and instructor, \$140/hr; 16-foot Hobie catamaran, \$35/hr; personal watercraft, \$90/hr; 858-488-1004.

CALIFORNIAN: 3-hour sail plus admission to all Maritime Museum boats, \$32; 619-234-9153.


COAST SANCTUARY: 90-minute East-West massage, \$105; 858-245-8246.

how Matt must feel after a half-dozen high-speed, high-altitude wipeouts, but from his broad grin, you'd never know it.



Awaiting us on San Diego's other bay is the 145-foot *Californian*, the official tall ship of the state of California. Docked at the Maritime Museum on San Diego Bay, this replica of an 1847 cutter has nine heavy canvas sails to hoist, allowing those

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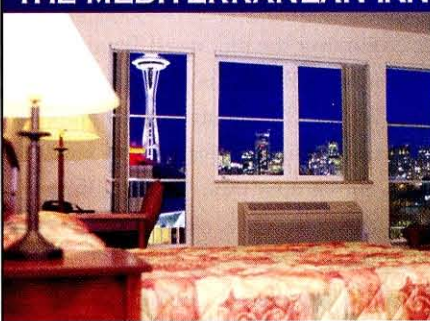
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interested an opportunity to get some hands-on sailing experience during the three-hour jaunt. The crew is made mostly of volunteer sailing aficionados who invest their time in exchange for learning the complexities and lexicon of tall ships. The captain, Chuck McGohey, is an experienced seaman with a wry sense of humor, an eye on every aspect of the ship and a twirling toothpick between his lips. As he calls out commands to the crew, the rudimentary sailing instruction Peggy and I received yesterday is lost in the deluge of advanced nautical terminology. I volunteer to help raise the sails but ask for gross simplification in any instructions: "Just tell me what rope to pull and when to stop." Soon my arms are so fatigued they barely function. I understand for the first time why Popeye the Sailor was drawn with massive forearms. Or maybe it was the waterskiing, jetskiing or kayaking? As we return to shore, two of the ship's 6-pound guns (aka "cannons") are discharged with a charismatic boom and a large puff of smoke.

To offset the woes from such a physical weekend, Peggy and I head for a 90-minute East-West massage at Coast Sanctuary. Located in Hillcrest, this petite studio is bright, airy and tastefully decorated. After cleansing showers, we melt into 45 minutes of stretching, Thai-style massage and 45 minutes of deep-tissue muscle work.

Like our own amazing race through San Diego, we experienced more adventure in this weekend than most do in a year. Now, with the help of soothing music and the nurturing hands of a professional massage therapist, I succumb to the fatigue of excess play and drift into dream space, imagining where my next adventuresome weekend might take me. ... ▲

Rob Dunton photographs and writes about culture and adventure around the globe.

GETTING THERE



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OCTOBER 2006

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Dreamin'**

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the Golden State