

Family First

EXPLORE MISSION BAY WITH THE WHOLE CREW FOR DAYS FILLED WITH FOOD, SUN AND FUN.

BY ASHLEY RYAN

Mission Bay is a paradise for all ages, offering scenic views, unique entertainment, mouth-watering cuisine and an abundance of outdoor activities from sunrise to sunset. While San Diego has long been a kid-friendly travel destination, this particular area makes it especially easy to put family first.

Bahia Resort Hotel and Catamaran Resort Hotel and Spa, both owned by hospitality group Evans Hotels, have made it their mission to provide unbeatable experiences for parents and children alike, ensuring that guests can play all day around, in or on the bay.

“We are always trying to create value for guests of all ages,” says Heather Lawler, Hotel Manager at Bahia. “We always have the entire family in mind when brainstorming new ideas and activities for the hotel.”

The same is true for Catamaran. Jono Tapp, the property’s Director of Outlets, says that providing an all-encompassing resort experience is pivotal to ensure guests have an amazing time. “If somebody is staying here for five days, ideally they can stay on-property and have a new experience each day,” he explains.

Some of these experiences include watching movies on the beach, roasting s’mores over a bonfire or making Hawaiian-inspired arts and crafts. Guests can also indulge in water sports and bicycle rides nearby, or head off-property to enjoy local theme parks.

No matter where you wander in the area, your family is sure to make the most of time spent together at Mission Bay.



COURTESY OF SEAWORLD SAN DIEGO



Left and above: SeaWorld San Diego features numerous shows and programs that are entertaining and educational for all ages.

THEMED THRILLS

Just down the road from the Evans Hotels properties lies SeaWorld San Diego, an aquatic-themed park filled with marine mammals and ocean-inspired thrill rides. Visitors have unique opportunities to come face-to-face with a variety of sea animals through special underwater viewing areas. On top of the famed orcas, SeaWorld is home to dolphins, walruses, penguins, sharks, turtles, otters and more. Family-friendly shows and educational programs help visitors young and old learn about many of the creatures, all while having fun in the sun.

SeaWorld believes the best way to learn is to have fun. Through behind-the-scenes tours and in-water experiences, families have the chance to explore the underwater world in ways they wouldn’t be able to in the wild. But those who aren’t keen on diving in can still enjoy the animals as well. Immediately upon entrance to the park, children and adults are able to interact with animals at our Explorer’s Reef touch pools. This attraction’s four state-of-the-art freshwater and saltwater touch pools give kids their first chance to experience the wonder of marine animals through up-close interactions with shark pups, rays, horseshoe crabs and cleaner fish. The Manta roller coaster is another spot where families can get their hands wet while touching and feeding bat rays.

Elsewhere along Mission Bay, visitors

Action Sport Rentals offers a variety of boats so that families can enjoy time together on the water.



Paddleboarding offshore at Bahia Resort Hotel.

can enjoy boardwalk-themed thrills at Belmont Park. The historic amusement park first opened in the 1920s and has since been expanded to offer even more excitement. One of the main attractions is the Giant Dipper, a wooden roller coaster that has been in place since the park's early days. Reaching heights of 75 feet, children will love the twists, turns and drops, while parents can delight in sprawling coastal views. Other thrill rides, like Beach Blaster and Control Freak, will keep teens entertained, and younger children can enjoy a Tilt-A-Whirl, Liberty Carousel and Belmont Express mini train.

Aside from rides, this breezy beachfront spot is home to upscale and casual eateries, souvenir shops and attractions like

laser tag, a rock climbing wall, miniature golf, a zip line and a 7D Theater.

THE GREAT OUTDOORS

When staying along the water at Mission Bay, it's a must to get outdoors and explore. One of the best ways to stay active and soak up the sun at the same time is through Action Sport Rentals, a conveniently located rental company that has plenty to offer those staying at Catamaran and Bahia.

Bicycles are a great way to discover the area, as Mission Bay is home to miles of scenic bike paths. Action Sport Rentals' bikes for kids come with helmets, while the electric bikes are perfect for those who prefer not to pedal as much. Another

option is the surrey rentals, which can accommodate families of up to six.

Or, explore by water on a variety of different vessels, as Action Sport Rentals offers pontoons, speedboats and sailboats for use on the bay. Propel yourself and get a workout at the same time with stand-up paddleboard and kayak rentals, or jump all the way in with surfboards and body boards. No matter which option you choose, you're sure to enjoy time spent on the water in sunny San Diego.

In the spring and summer months, both resorts offer special seasonal activities to keep children entertained. "During spring, you can enjoy scavenger hunts, shuffleboard and corn hole on the beach," Lawler says of Bahia's programming. "In the summer, you can enjoy movies at Palm Terrace." According to Tapp, the Catamaran has similar offerings, with Hawaiian-themed poolside arts and crafts that include everything from learning the hula dance to making a lei. In addition, he says an arcade is located just off to the side, giving kids a chance to play video games year-round. And, in the evenings, both the Bahia and the Catamaran host Bayside Bonfires, complete with the chance to make s'mores.

The hotel properties themselves have family-friendly appeal as well. In 2019, Bahia opened a new playground, providing a place for children to slip down slides, climb rope ladders, cross a bridge and more. Located near the tennis courts and surrounded by tropical plants, it's a wonderful hideaway where kids can play while their parents indulge in some court time.

Bahia isn't the only place offering lush, tropical scenery. At Catamaran, the island-inspired property encourages exploration. "Our grounds are really very safe, relaxing and they're fun," Tapp says, noting the many grassy areas for kids to play. Throughout, you'll also find koi ponds with enormous, colorful fish as well as a large waterfall. A variety of ducks call the property home, but Catamaran also has some birds of its own, hosting an outdoor bird show throughout the year. And, along the water, guests can take advantage of a walking path for some exercise paired

with sightseeing. "We're a little quieter on the bay side so we have this wonderful bay walk that basically is right next to our property and traverses the whole Mission Bay," Tapp explains. "The exploring kids can do on our property keeps them entertained and that's great. We try to focus on making sure the kids are happy because then the parents are going to be happy."

FOODIE FANCIES

Food is at the forefront of every good vacation, and it's no different on Mission Bay. The resort chefs make sure that their menus consider children as well, so the whole family can find something delicious to savor. Dockside 1953, a nautical-themed eatery that serves as the signature restaurant at Bahia, offers fresh fare and a spacious terrace. "I would recommend sitting on the patio for stunning marina and bay views," Lawler notes, adding that the new restaurant also boasts fire pits and a beautiful covered trellis. With a dedication to high-quality ingredients, menu highlights include chilaquiles for breakfast; fish tacos, an Impossible burger and a selection of flatbreads for lunch; plus seared scallops, charbroiled rib-eye, seafood cioppino or a house-blended meatloaf plate for dinner.

Tapp says that fun, flavorful food that is easy to eat is the goal for the kids' menu at Catamaran. While he cites chicken tenders, the cheeseburger with French fries, the peanut butter and jelly sandwich, and the Little Shells pasta as some of the most ordered items for children, he adds that children can also share flatbreads or sushi with their parents. Seasonal poolside dining is available as well.

According to Tapp, families can also enjoy the luxury of convenient in-room dining. And, on warm, sunny days, Lawler says the area is ideal for an outdoor picnic. "The Bahia has a secluded beach for our guests so that would be a perfect place for a picnic," she says. "The surrounding Mission Bay Park does have some picnic tables scattered through the area and also bonfire pits, if anyone would like to have a barbecue off property."



The beachfront Belmont Park is home to rides, restaurants and shopping opportunities.

ENDLESS ENTERTAINMENT

At the Bahia, pop culture runs rampant in the summertime, when the resort's family-friendly film showings are the talk of the town. During these warmer months, head to the tropical Palm Terrace for complimentary movie nights—complete with popcorn and a soda. Past movie titles have included animated features like "Frozen," "The Incredibles" and "Despicable Me."

Those staying at Catamaran will have a chance to see similar films during the property's event, Movies on the Bay. "We have an oversize inflatable movie screen that we set up on the bay at dusk and we show different kids movies—Pixar movies, animated movies, Disney flicks. They're all family-oriented," Tapp says, adding that they also serve popcorn and hot dogs so guests can enjoy a beachside picnic during the films.

For a unique historical experience, these two properties also provide sightseeing cruises around Mission Bay aboard the Bahia Belle, a sternwheeler that resembles a turn-of-the-century riverboat. At night, the boat comes alive with dance floors and drink specials, but, by day, it's one of the most family-oriented activities around. For a few hours in the evening, sailors can enjoy a sightseeing tour. Take advantage of golden hour by heading up to the top deck (there are three in total) to enjoy sweeping views of the bay at sunset. ■



Family-friendly Movies on the Bay (bottom) and poolside dining (top) are available at the Catamaran.

TOP: COURTESY OF BELMONT PARK/SAN DIEGO.ORG; BOTTOM RIGHT: ZAK BENSON