

RANCH & COAST

San Diego's Luxury Lifestyle Magazine

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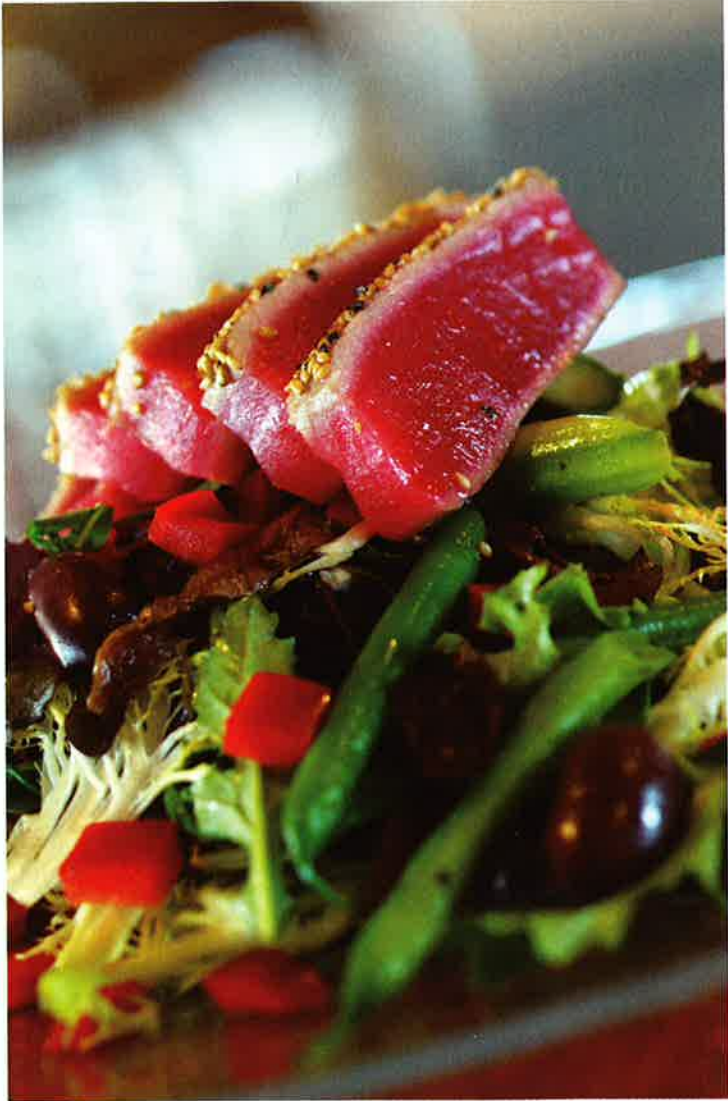
Readers' Choice Best of 2008

Plus Editors' Picks & Celebrity Guest Favorites

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Best Of Readers' Poll

We left it to you to bring out the best in San Diego. Results begin on page:

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On The Cover

A readers' choice winner in two categories, The Grand Del Mar offers a truly world-class resort experience

Photo by Vincent Knakal





**Best Sommelier:
Jesse Rodriguez At
The Grand Del Mar**

(Runner-Up: Jared Seitzer at Ivy Hotel)

An accredited sommelier with a master's degree in history, Rodriguez serves up a heady blend of historic background, regional details, and enthusiasm for his selections. Most nights you'll find him on the floor of Addison, the resort's signature restaurant, chatting with guests, making suggestions, and listening to theirs. "First and foremost," he says, "let's listen to not what I want to bring in, but what does San Diego want to enjoy?" He made waves last year by tapping into the half-bottle wine menu — encouraging diners to get a little adventurous with their selections. This year we can look forward to some Napa Valley gems that Addison commissioned from private producers. His ultimate goal is as ambitious as his wine list is tasty: to put San Diego on the map. "There's no reason at all why we can't have a food and wine culture that rivals San Francisco, or New York. It's a very exciting time to be in this industry." (858/314-1900, www.addisondelmar.com) — Paul Stuart

**Best Philanthropist:
John and Sally Thornton**

(Runner-Up: Ernest Rady)

If Kate Sessions is considered the "Mother of Balboa Park," Sally Thornton has got to be the "Mother of San Diego." Since founding the John M. and Sally B. Thornton Foundation in 1982, she's made a life out of giving back to her hometown.

Printing the list of organizations that she's headed over the years would require Bible-thin paper: life trustee of the San Diego Museum of Art; chairman of the board and president for the Arthritis Foundation; president of the San Diego Planetarium Authority; chairman of the San Diego Crippled Children Society; chairman of the Epilepsy Society's Gingerbread City, and on and on, for pages. Seriously.

Most of us get overwhelmed managing something as simple as dinner and a soccer practice, so it begs the obvious question: how does she do it?

"One of my friends asked me, 'How do you keep it all straight?' and I said, 'Basically, it's like air-traffic control: I keep them circling until it's time to bring them down.' Whatever I'm working on at the time is my favorite."

— Paul Stuart



**Best Golf Pro:
James Swift At
The Santaluz Club**

(Runner-Up: Scott Johnson at Rancho Santa Fe Golf Club)

When Swift came to Santaluz as director of golf six years ago, he started with an eight-hole course and a golf club of one. Since then the eight holes have grown into 18 and the roster has ballooned to over 250. Sure, it's quite a crowd, but that hasn't compromised Swift's knack for personalized attention.

"My job is to reaffirm why everybody joined," he says. "It's about making people happy and making people feel like they have an escape from the world."

His polished people skills translate well to the other hat he wears: golf instructor. He's happy to teach everyone from newbies to pros, from six years old to 70. And his philosophy is elegantly simple: "We want you to get better." (858/759-3131, www.santaluz.com) — Paul Stuart

Readers' Choice
Best of 2008

**Best Local Hotel:
The Grand Del Mar**

(Runner-Up: The Grande Colonial La Jolla)

Papa Doug Manchester has done it again. The Grand Del Mar combines the rich decorative arts of Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Morocco with world-class recreation facilities. The 249-room luxury hotel located east of I-5 near Del Mar offers four swimming pools, tennis courts, a Renaissance-inspired spa, and San Diego's only Tom Fazio-designed golf course. Dining options include the renowned Addison, as well as five other restaurants and cafes. However, it's the beautiful 200-seat chapel that really sets the Grand Del Mar apart from other San Diego area hotels. Looking up at the stained-glass windows, one bride-to-be remarked, "I can't think of a more wonderful place to get married."

(858/314-2000, www.thegrandedelmar.com) — Elizabeth Hansen



**Best Destination Hotel:
Four Seasons Resort Hualalai**

(Runner-Up: Montage Resort & Spa)

The Four Seasons Resort Hualalai on the North Kona Coast gets rave reviews from *Ranch & Coast* readers because "it's not a regular cement hotel." Instead, a series of 36 low-rise bungalows with up to eight rooms create a somewhat rustic, homey ambience. Natural elements — including earth tones, bamboo, and lava rock — are used in guest rooms, public spaces, and walls that curve throughout the property and enclose outdoor showers. More than 800 coconut trees tower over layers of plants, trees, and flowers that are native to the environment. King's Pond, the snorkeling pool, is carved from lava and stocked with 3,500 tropical fish. The other four pools cater to families, adults only, quiet time, and lap swimmers. Poolside services include sunglass cleaning, Evian spritzes, fruit kabobs, cold *oshiboris*, flavored iced water, cucumber slices, pre-loaded iPods, and a lending library. Mahalo Four Seasons Hualalai.

(808/325-8000, www.fourseasons.com/hualalai) — Elizabeth Hansen



**Best Recreation Experience:
Walking On The Beach**

(Runner-Up: La Jolla Kayak)

For many busy multi-taskers, walking is now the most popular way to spend time with friends. "It's replaced doing lunch," says one mom-on-the-go. "It's a great way to combine fitness, fun, and friendship." In some parts of the country, winter walks are limited to indoor malls, but here in San Diego we are blessed with walkable beaches year round. La Jolla Shores is one of the best because even at high tide there's plenty of hard pack. Torrey Pines State Beach is another good one. Canine companions are welcome on San Diego beaches only after 4pm in winter and 6pm in summer, but they can join their two-legged friends anytime on Del Mar's Dog Beach, Ocean Beach's Dog Beach, or around Fiesta Island.

Beach walkers can pick up a tide chart at most surf shops. — Elizabeth Hansen



Readers Choice
Best of 2008



**Best Gala Venue:
The Grand Del Mar**

(Runner-Up: Four Seasons Resort Aviara)

The Grand Del Mar took two years of construction and meticulous planning before it opened its elaborate doors, but it was worth the wait. Located on 24 lush acres, it has the look and feel of an old world Mediterranean estate. Besides the 18-hole golf course, the 249-room hotel has 20,000 square feet of space to host a gala, including a 10,000-square-foot grand ballroom. "It's not just the grandeur of the physical space with the built-in stage, the high vaulted ceilings, and the lovely padded fabric walls," says Charles Stuart, director of catering. "It's the way we do food and beverages that makes a gala special. We have synchronized delivery of meals straight from the kitchen for each table rather than bringing a whole tray full of entrees. This ensures guests, even if there are 600, feel pampered." (858/314-2000, www.thgranddelmar.com) — Michelle Zive