



Festive Casa De Pico Mexican Restaurant is home to mariachi singers and delicious food.

East County is the sunny side of San Diego, so there are never any overcast days or fog to contend with. Its dynamic appeal is that it's filled with back country adventures like a huge national forest with snowcapped mountains in the winter, five Las Vegas-style Indian casinos and the largest desert in the continental United States. It is also home to a romantic 1880s gold rush mining town filled with bed and breakfast inns and a whole lot more (see Julian). It's also the least populated region of the county.

LA MESA

Even the bigger towns are small compared to the other regions of San Diego County. La Mesa, for example, which has a population of 55,600, has a charming small-town village central business district. The cars still park diagonally on the main street, and parking meters cost only (50¢–75¢) an hour.

By car, it's only 15 freeway minutes east from downtown San Diego off I-8 or Hwy. 94. Take the Spring Street exit off either freeway and it will take you right to the center of La Mesa Village.

If you prefer, you can take the **Met-**

ropolitan Transit System (MTS) Orange Line (800-266-6883). This rail transit goes directly to the Village, stopping at the corner of La Mesa Boulevard and Spring Street.

La Mesa's biggest annual event is their **Oktoberfest**. This three-day event is held September 30 and the first weekend in October on the 1st and 2nd. They have live music, outdoor booths, food, fun and entertainment. For details call (619-465-7700).

On the north side of Interstate 8 is the immensely popular **Grossmont Shopping Center** (619-465-2900). This modern shopping center boasts more than 105 specialty shops, a Macy's and a Target.

Here too is **Casa de Pico Mexican Restaurant** at 5500 Grossmont Center Dr. (619-463-3267). This restaurant which was a favorite dining destination in Old Town, has been a La Mesa favorite since 2005. See Restaurants.

Another San Diego tradition dating back to 1961 is **Anthony's Fish Grotto Restaurant and Fish Market** at 9530 Murray Dr. (619-463-0368). This award-winning seafood lovers' paradise is built

on its own private lake. See Restaurants.

EL CAJON

El Cajon is the largest city in East County. It is also home to the impressive 80-acre **Westfield Parkway** (619-579-9932), which is the largest regional, all enclosed, air-conditioned shopping center in San Diego County. It has 186 stores anchored by JC Penney, Macy's, Sears, Wal-Mart and a Regal Cinemas. The shopping center is just off Interstate 8 at the Johnson Avenue exit.

Each autumn, people flock to El Cajon for the popular **Mother Goose Parade** (619-444-8712), which will be held on Nov. 20, 10 a.m.–12:30 p.m. This is the second largest parade on the West Coast.

RANCHO SAN DIEGO

Rancho San Diego is a master-planned community filled with affordable homes.

For storage space in East County, look no further than **Jamacha Point Self Storage** at 2550 Folex Way in nearby Spring Valley (619-928-5616). It is part of the **San Diego Self Storage** network of neighborhood self storage facilities [sandiegoselfstorage.com]. See Welcome.

Here too is The **Savannah Grill Steakhouse and Lounge** at 3773 Willow Glen Dr. (619-592-4745). It overlooks the Cottonwood Golf Course.

Also freeway close is **Sycuan Casino** at 469 Sycuan Rd., El Cajon (619-445-6002). It's just 30 minutes from downtown San Diego making it the closest casino from downtown San Diego via Hwy. 94 through Rancho San Diego. See map. See Casinos.

THE BACKCOUNTRY

Adventure and scenic beauty fill East County's backcountry. For example, **Old Highway 80** has now been designated by the State of California as a historic highway. This means that this 30-mile stretch of highway is an official historic site. It was commissioned a federal highway in 1926.

To get on to this historic route from the west, exit from Interstate 8 at Lake Jennings Park Road. Then head east and look for the Historic Highway 80 road signs.



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