

The San Diego of popular imagination is a lotus land of sun and surfers, a ruggedly beautiful region where Mexican barrios coexist with mountain villages and deserts sprawl as far as the eye can see. Functionally, if not officially, its reaches extend all the way to Tijuana, Mexico, giving it an unusual international distinction, as well as a heterogeneous population of nearly five million people. Covering more than 4,200 square miles, San Diego County encompasses a variety of ecologies, including the beach and coastal strip, lowlands and mesas, foothills, mountains, and desert terrain. In Metropolitan San Diego, acclaimed geographer Larry Ford looks at the city at both the metropolitan level and that of particular neighborhoods—from the shore to the mountains, from the border towns to Camp Pendleton to its old-fashioned central city—revealing a region as varied culturally and socioeconomically as it is geographically. Focusing on fifteen epitome places from Tijuana to La Jolla, Ford pays particular attention to the creation of distinctive lifestyle zones within San Diego's large and diverse metropolitan context. From the display of Native American culture ushered in by the advent of Indian casinos, to the colorful temple architecture that abounds in East and Southeast Asian commercial districts, to the funky surfer designs of beach communities, the interplay of ethnic icons, landscape, architecture, and political networks has helped numerous communities to develop their unique characters. San Diego's movement toward neotraditional urbanism coupled with an increasing reliance on mass transit mirrors a trend that is on the rise in cities everywhere, and Ford shows how this movement has the potential to revitalize transit nodes based on small-town place identity, while diminishing the once universal trend toward homogeneous strip malls. Through its focus on the culture and creation of the places that have long captured the imagination of visitors, Metropolitan San Diego offers a wide-ranging and thoughtful look at the major actors and events that have shaped each community—the armed forces and the federal spending for equipping them on one hand; tourism and the city's attraction of retirees on the other. Linking culture, environment, and civic notions, and connecting them to life as it is lived in the county's diverse neighborhoods, Ford offers an intimate look at the small communities people live in and the large identities they share. Touring the city's mythic past—from the role of romanticism in the evolution of San Diego in the days of Ramon's Marriage Place and the Spanish ranchos to the rise of surfer culture, aerospace innovations, and the dominance of the navy—he offers a nuanced sense of the region's intriguing history and points to how this history continues to inform current realities such as employment, education levels, immigration, and environmental sustainability. A thorough and intelligent portrait of one of America's most multifaceted cities, Metropolitan San Diego brings to vibrant life the many niches, both ecological and social, that continue to make this region a destination for visitors and a beloved home to residents.

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