

THE COMICS Reporter

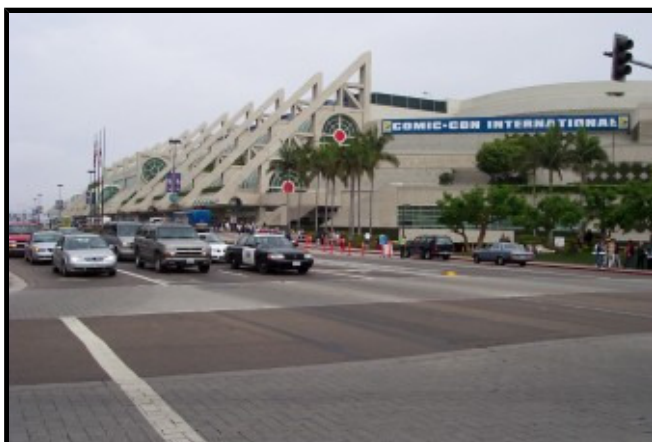

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Tom Spurgeon's Web site of comics news, reviews, interviews and commentary



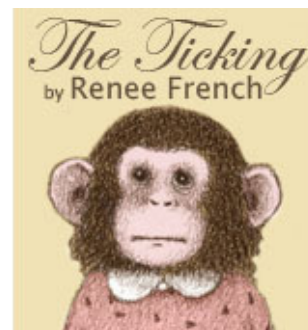
May 28, 2007

Welcome to Nerd Vegas: A Guide to Visiting and Enjoying Comic-Con International in San Diego, 2007!



CR Reviews

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[Comic-Con International](#), also known as CCI, Comic-Con and San Diego Con, is the largest gathering of comics industry professionals and fans in North America. It is a show of growing importance to hundreds of pros in related publishing, merchandising and film businesses. Comic-Con International is traditionally held over four days, Thursday through Sunday, with [a Wednesday preview night](#) added on for good measure, at some point between mid-July and mid-August.

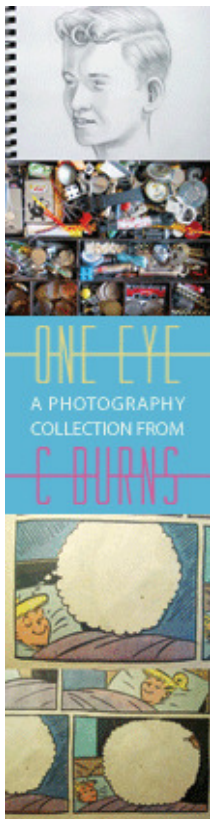
In 2007, the show is scheduled for July 26-29, with a preview night on July 25.

What follows is a long list of numbered observations that will hopefully augment your San Diego con-going experience. I hope you have a good time, and if you have any tips of your own, [please send them to me](#). I'd like to make a list of reader tips at the bottom of this document.

Although the article has been updated with many new photos and several brand new jokes of dubious value, I realize you may not want to read the whole thing again. If you're a long-time reader who doesn't have time for the whole document, try [The Update](#). If you're too busy to read something this long, try [The Short Form](#).

Otherwise, enjoy!





WHAT IS COMIC-CON INTERNATIONAL?



Four Things CCI Offers

1. A massive main floor marketplace featuring [exhibitors](#) including but not limited to publishers, individual artists, comic book back issues dealers, movie studios, toy companies and individual artists, many of which have wonderful things for sale.
2. In rooms of varying size at other places in the building, convention [programming](#) including but not limited to previews of big-company titles, small-publisher spotlights, single-artist slideshows, themed-issue discussions, film presentations (celebrities), and sneak peeks at forthcoming TV shows (more celebrities).
3. At night there are entertainment activities both formal and informal, including Friday evening's [Eisner Awards](#) ceremony and Saturday's famous costume [Masquerade](#).
4. All around San Diego at all hours of day and night [comics industry employees, writers, artists, fans](#), retailers, Hollywood types, and press people are taking morning meetings, breaking bread over long lunches and sharing late-night drinks, socializing and seeing to informal business matters on a massive scale.

Seven Reasons to Attend CCI

1. The show's size.
Between exhibitors and attendees, nearly twice as many people attend Comic-Con International as live in [my hometown](#). It's therefore a tremendous opportunity to interface with a lot of comics constituencies at their most fulsome: creators, customers, editors, you name it.
2. Its proximity to Los Angeles' film business.
Making a connection with some sort of film interest is a significant and growing concern for many professionals and fans. The marriage of film and comics at the show has led to the development of an entire wing of programming to

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- [Panier de Singe, Florent Ruppert and Jerome Mulot](#)
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- [Sergent Laterreur, Gerald Frydman and Touis](#)
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- [My Crappy Photo of King Features Comics Editor Brendan Burford](#)
- ["It's Not Nice to Fool Jay Kennedy," By Patrick Rosenkranz](#)
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Letters to CR

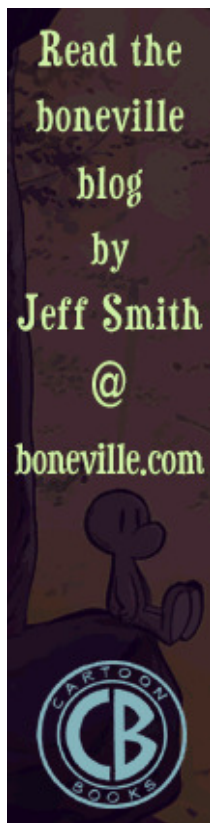
- [Stephen Frug on the Mystery of the Draftable Amish](#)
- [Stefan Halley on CAPE Raising \\$3000 for Child's Play \(PR\)](#)
- [John McCarthy on the MoCCA Museum Opening to the Public \(PR\)](#)
- [Charles Brownstein on the Strangers in Paradise Function May 31 \(PR\)](#)
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- [First Person: Gary Esposito on FCBD in New York](#)



previews and advance publicity. Other pop culture industries have followed film's lead by increasing their presence as well -- toy makers, animation studios, television shows and book publishers, just to name a few. I'm a comics guy, not a film guy; I tend to forget the movie people are even there. Still, I'd be lying if I told you that the proximity to the film industry hasn't been a major and unique driving force in the con's development or if I downplayed in any way the fact that it's hugely appealing factor for tons of people who go.

3. Left coast roll call.

There is no other sizable West Coast comics industry show during the summer season, which makes CCI an even bigger attraction for the major comics professional communities in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland and Seattle, as well as in the medium-sized ones like Las Vegas and San Diego itself. It's a national show, for sure, but the percentage of comics folk west of Denver who make it down to San Diego's convention center is extraordinary.

4. A well-run convention.

Years of experience on staff not only helps the show function, there is enough institutional memory for staffers to be sensitive to -- and invested in -- a lot of different con-going experiences.

5. Meet and greet.

Practical business really does get done there. There is a ton of looking at talent, a lot of talking about future plans, a great many people having introductory meetings, and so on. Just touching base with people *in person* can yield enormous benefits later on.

6. Special guests.

Although there are other major comics shows in places like [Angouleme, France](#) and [New York City](#), Comic-Con remains big enough it can bring in [special guests](#) from around the world of cartooning. For example, the writer [Warren Ellis](#) will make a rare convention appearance at the show this year.

7. The year doesn't feel the same without it.

CCI is one of the few recurring, reliable experiences on the calendar by which comics people can mark the passage of time as they waste their once-promising lives.

Seven Reasons To Skip CCI

1. It can make you hate comics.

Some cartoonists express particular discouragement at the excesses of the show's omnivorous, pop-culture focus. Life is tough enough as a cartoonist without *inviting* a soul-destroying, four-day migraine.

2. Money.

It costs a lot to exhibit and it can cost a lot to attend.

3. Who needs it?

You might feel, and you might be right, that you can get much of what a big convention offers elsewhere for less expense and trouble. If you're only going in order to buy comics, for example, you might be better off spending your San Diego hotel and food budget at an on-line comics store or your local shop.

4. Too big a tent.

Some might feel more comfortable at a show that better

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- [Collective Memory: Alternative Press Expo \(APE\) 2007](#)
- [Collective Memory: Emerald City ComiCon 2007](#)
- [Collective Memory: Jay Kennedy, RIP](#)
- [Collective Memory: WonderCon 2007](#)
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- [A Short Interview With Jordan Crane](#)
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Discount items related to San Diego Comic Con.
[eBay.com](#)

[Trade Show Marketing](#)

Cell phone marketing to attendees More leads - Money Back Guarantee
[www.hitchmedia.com](#)

[Meeting Location in DC](#)

Official Site: Residence Inn Dupont Circle in DC. Book Direct & Save!
[www.Marriott.com/wasri](#)

[San Diego Corporate Video](#)

SD Video Production Co. We shoot Conventions, Gen Sessions & More
[www.thestudiosofjosephg](#)

matches a specific interest, like [Wizard Entertainment's Chicago show](#) (mainstream American superheroes) or the [MoCCA Festival](#) (small press and handmade comics) or Austin's [Ikkicon](#) (anime and manga).

5. You've got things to do.

You simply can't find time in your schedule for that many days away from home. If it's a work trip, you may need an additional day or two once you get back home to decompress and for follow-up, so you have to figure that in, too. That's a full week away from the drawing table and/or writing desk.

6. What? Leave home?

Your distaste for crowds and travel far outweighs any benefit you might see from attending.

7. I can't believe it's July again already.

Even though you've liked it in the past, and you might like to go in the future, you'd just rather not go this year.

Six Questions to Ask Before You Commit to Attending

1. "Do I Really Want to Go?"

Again: If it's a chore in any way, don't go. It's not a requirement. If you're connected in any way to people that are going, you may feel a twinge of regret caused by being left out, but it goes away *really quickly*.

2. "Do I Need to Be There the Whole Weekend?"

I never go the full length of the show. Greatest benefit? *There's no better way to reduce the costs of a convention than to cut the time spent there.* If your goal is to socialize and see the big panels, think about Friday-Sunday. If you want to shop and network, think about Wednesday-Saturday. Think about going one night, even. You may miss one out of five things you wanted to do, but you'll also be much less likely to get bored or burnt out. You may even leave wanting more.

3. "Do I Need a Room or Just a Bed?"

Figure out exactly what you need and what you're willing to accept. A bed is easier to find than a room. If going means taking the whole family for multiple nights, and you haven't done any planning until a few weeks before the show, you might reconsider your attendance.

4. "Do I Want to Go for Realistic Reasons?"

Quick Links

- [Find Your Local Comic Shop](#)
- [Find an Indy/Alt-Comic Shop](#)
- [General Industry Data and Analysis](#)
- [Characters, Titles, Publishers, and Creators Database](#)
- [Buy My Book \(2003\)](#)
- [Syndicate This Site \(RSS 1.0\)](#)
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A comic book convention is not a young-woman-with-her-first-job-in-the-big-city movie. If it were, you probably wouldn't be the star. It's best not to go assuming you'll engage in long conversations with your favorite writers, powerful comic book editors will solicit your opinion on where to take their characters next, [Pantheon](#) and [First Second](#) will enter into a bidding war for your mini-comic, and you'll cap off your evenings doing shots with the cast of [Battlestar Galactica](#) at [J6Bar](#). It's a convention, people are working, and you're one of 130,000 people experiencing the moment. *Enjoy the experience you're having, not the experience you think you deserve.*

5. "Will I Have Too Much on My Plate?"

The more commitments you make = the more stress to which you're exposed. Don't agree to every single thing if you can help it. Besides, some stuff people choose to do at CCI -- [portfolio reviews](#), say, or obtaining certain [autographs](#) -- have a lot of line-time or other dead time built in that might end up squeezing the other parts of an ambitious, complicated itinerary. Free time is good. It's nice to just wander and go with the flow. When someone tells you, "You gotta go see this booth," it's great to have the time to go see that booth.

6. "Do I Need to Stay in a Hotel Really Close to the Convention Center?"

It's nice, but not necessary. I've stayed [a few miles away](#) and [a lot of miles away](#), and neither weekend stands out in memory as a horrible experience. Anyone insisting you have to stay 100 yards away from your hotel bar of choice is either being lazy or way too precious about their vacation time.

GETTING A PLACE TO STAY

Lodging Choices Ranked By Status

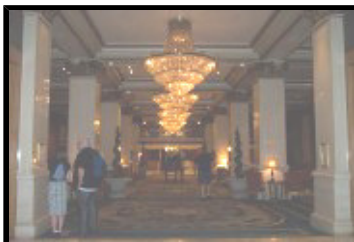
1. One of the hotels extremely close to the convention center ([Omni](#), [Hilton](#), [Marriott](#), [Hyatt](#))
2. A friend's place you get all to yourself
3. House rental
4. One of the hotels sprinkled throughout the Gaslamp ([Solamar](#))
5. One of the hotels on Broadway ([Westin Horton Plaza](#), [US Grant](#))
6. Staying at a friend's place with that friend
7. Apartment rental
8. One of the hotels north of Broadway, south of the highway (Radisson, [Best Western](#), [W](#))
9. Bed and Breakfast
10. One of the hotels across the bay where a water taxi is available for the morning jaunt but you have to take a regular cab to get home
11. Hotel Circle ([Red Lion](#), [Handlery](#))
12. Tijuana
13. [Way up the coast at a sleepy beach hotel](#)
14. Your car
15. Steps of the Convention Center
16. Staying up all night, sleeping in someone's room during the day
17. Commuting back and forth from Los Angeles
18. On the beach
19. With whomever takes you home from a Hyatt bar
20. In the convention center, underneath the [Mile High](#)

[Comics](#) table, in a series of complicated tunnels you've created from old copies of [Steelgrip Starkey](#)

21. A stranger's car
22. [State-run lodging](#).

Fourteen Random Observations About Various Hotels

1. The venerable [US Grant](#) -- home of a fine lobster [bisque](#), quiet and well-appointed rooms, decent brunches and a lovely bar no one in the comics industry visits -- has reopened for Summer 2007. I mention this here because all three people that felt its absence are regular readers of this site.



2. In eight years of staying there, four days per visit, the only comics-related person I have ever seen in the [Westin Horton Plaza](#)'s exercise room is [Kevin Eastman](#). In general, use of hotel facilities like pools, hot tubs and exercise rooms seems to be really light during the convention weekend. Taking a couple of extra hours in the morning to pamper yourself or get in a workout can be fun and a great stress reliever.

3. The security people at the [Hyatt](#) will follow you into a bar in order to yell at you for not obeying their orders, but you pretty much have to take a swing at one to get thrown out. Don't test this.

4. My favorite hotel out on the [Hotel Circle](#) is the [Red Lion Hanalei](#). I'll be staying there one night this year, in fact. The Red Lion features easy parking, a hot tub, an exercise room, a pool and a cheap breakfast buffet -- everything necessary to spend a quality, quiet morning before heading out to the convention hall.

5. If you don't want to drive but are staying out on Hotel Circle north of downtown, check your hotel's proximity to a train; some are close enough to walk to a station while others are not. There are also a few hotels across the bay to the south and to the northeast that can get you near the convention hall via [water taxi](#), which is a cool way to start your day but may be sort of impractical depending on your schedule. You can likely get to the convention center via a water taxi, but they might stop running before you want to go home.

6. Staying until Monday or Tuesday? Think about moving to a different, less expensive hotel. Two times I've stayed for an early Monday flight, I've switched to a cheaper hotel out by the airport, and, sadly, used the money I saved to buy a complete run of [Defenders](#). I'm hideous! Don't look at me!



7. The [Holiday Inn on Harborview](#) is the place I keep seeing comics people I thought could afford a fancier hotel. It's also a world unto itself, with [a beer-focused bar](#), [a seafood restaurant](#) across the street, a Denny's a block or two away for late nights, and its own feel and atmosphere. An underrated

convention headquarters.

8. The hotel I've heard people complain about the most is -- by far -- the [Westin San Diego Emerald Plaza](#). In summary: 1) isolated 2) has tiny rooms 3) and sports thin walls. It is, however close to the Y building and [one of the easier, nicer places to eat breakfast](#). The runner-up in terms of bad vibes is the Hyatt, getting specific low marks for grumpy staff.

9. A nice place to meet and chat that's close to the show and very quiet is the bar in the [Horton Grand](#). The Horton has some nice things going for it. It's *really* close, its own prices aren't much more than the CCI discount so it's a good place to get a back-up or safety room if, for instance, you think you might come out a day early as you can cancel the day before and not get penalized, and, as long as you're not facing the street, the rooms are quiet and nice enough. Its most bizarre quirk is a guestbook in every room into which about 50 percent of the guests scrawl obscenities.

10. [The Westgate](#) has very large, nice rooms, but don't try to stuff extra people in there -- of all the San Diego downtown hotels, the Westgate has the fiercest reputation for keeping the number of crashers down. To that end, they don't offer roll-away beds the way the [Westin Horton Plaza](#) does, and they're not above charging you for an extra person if they think you had a non-reported person in your room for the entirety of your stay.

11. When I win the lottery, I'm staying at the [Hotel Solamar](#) and throwing a fancy party.

12. I hear there is another group using much of the Hyatt the weekend of this year's Con, busting its status down from the convention's official hub to its unofficial hub. May God help those poor people. Also, this makes me wonder if there's a chance that this may change the hotel's lenient attitude about the various late-night functions, like all the people sprawled out on the lawn.

13. There's fun to be had at every hotel in San Diego, from the diviest dive to the swankiest suite. Enjoy your stay no matter where it might be.

Six Things To Remember About Reserving a Hotel Room Through the Con

1. It's great to get [the hotel discount offered through Comic-Con](#), but it's not the only way to get a discount and there are desirable hotels not on that list. Also, in a few cases it's worthwhile to have the ability to cancel at the last minute. Given the crush of people who want to use it, you should see the con's room brokering service as one option, not the only option.

2. You're pretty screwed if you've just now looked into the Comic-Con hotels, and at this point you have some work ahead of you, period. The most desirable hotels for the most people, meaning those close to the convention center, are snapped up within ten minutes on the first day they are offered. That's just the way it is. By the time you're reading this, that was months ago. In fact, with more companies being pushed by their attending employees to buy hotel rooms in advance, many of these hotels are booked the old-fashioned way long before their discounted rooms come up. I'm told a few boutique hotels

were almost totally booked one week after last year's show.

3. It's probably worth noting that with almost every room guaranteed to sell out, there's very little incentive for hotels to make a lot of rooms available at discount. It's really not going to get any better in the near future, and with so many on-line media sources now, more than enough people are going to be aware of the exact moment the rooms become available to make getting a room a pain in the butt. Accept the pain for what it is; you'll be happier for it.

4. Two tips for using the Comic-Con site if you weren't on it getting a room on that first day. 1) Check back often, even now; the most desirable hotels won't have rooms open up, but several of the mid- and lower-rung hotels will. I saw open rooms on there in late April, the last time I checked. 2) You may have more luck stringing reservations together on a day by day basis as they open up rather than waiting for a four-day window to become open. Friday is the toughest single evening to secure.

5. Once you secure a room, bookmark your hotel's web site to check on potential specific hassles. The convention won't tell you if there's construction in the parking lot, say, or if the pool is down, but your hotel's web site almost certainly will.

6. If you got your room from the con, or even if you didn't, you may want to confirm that reservation before you go to San Diego. Seven months is a very long period between reservation and stay, in which a lot of stuff can happen.

What Eight Things Should I Do As It Gets Closer to the Con and I Still Need A Room?

1. Again, check aggregate sites like [Sidestep.com](#), [Kayak](#) and [Travelaxe.com](#). Do it today!

2. Wait until deposits begin to come due for rooms reserved through the convention, in June or early July. This is when rooms are dropped from people deciding not to go, people moving to another hotel, and people that were hedging their bets.

3. Reach out to your friends and see if any of them can help. There may be people who are looking to drop a room, or others looking for a roommate or two. Be creative. Many hotels do a roll-away for an extra \$20 or so. You might look into that kind of thing if you can find willing roomies. All of the major comics message boards where people gather will usually accommodate people posting about needing a room or roommate. [Here's one for 2007 on The Engine](#).

4. Consider [Bed and Breakfasts](#). I did this once, and had a great time.

5. Google "San Diego Vacation Rentals." Think about renting a house or an apartment. This could be cheaper than a hotel in many cases. I suspect people will be doing this a lot more frequently over the next few years.

6. Consider local places off the beaten track like [La Pensione](#) in Little Italy, a little hotel with tiny rooms and no air conditioning that's nice for the less than \$100 price. It's totally sold out this year, of course, and anyone who took my advice in last year's heat is probably still saving up the

strength to come punch me in the jaw, but the key is to look around.

7. If you're an [AAA](#) member, some hotels may keep a few extra and nearly all the hotels give a discount for those customers.

8. Stay calm. You're really only in danger of not finding anything if you wait until just a couple of weeks before. You're probably going to have to stay slightly further away than right next door, or stay someplace you'll need to use cabs or a car, but where there's a will, there's almost always a way.

Four Uncomfortable Conversations I've had in the Elevator of My Hotel About Comic-Con International

1. 2001:

Man With Wife: Are you going to the comic book show?

Me: Yeah.

Man With Wife: We should go to that Saturday, honey; everybody who goes is a weirdo.

[Awkward Silence]

2. 2004

Woman In Her 30s: Are you here for the convention?

Me: Yes.

Woman: That's so cute.

Me: Really?

Woman: Well... how old are you?

3. 2005

Teenager With Friend: Are you here for Comic-Con?

Me: Yes.

Teenager With Friend: Are you anybody?

Me: No.

Teenager With Friend: I haven't met anybody.

4. 2006

Woman in Her 50s: Are you with the Comic-Con?

Me: Kind of. I'm attending the show.

Woman in Her 50s: Well, they should have kiosks.

Me: Kiosks?

Woman in Her 50s: They should have kiosks in hotel lobbies so people can buy something that don't want to go.

[pause]

Me: Why don't you want to go?

Woman in Her 50s: Those people are dangerous!



Seven Ways To Maximize Your Hotel Experience

1. Remember that the hotel is there to get you to the con. This is one for the pros out there, although the principle applies to a lesser degree to everyone. The best hotel room in San Diego county is no consolation if getting from the hotel to the convention center is either a) impossible, or b) such an ordeal it forces you into a tension-releasing orgy of violence a la [Robert Stack in Airplane!](#) on the first group of people that approach your table.

In other words, if your trip counts on you getting to the convention center and back carrying a bunch of supplies, you're probably not going to be able to stay way out on the Hotel Circle or up the shore. You're going to want to make that much greater a priority out of staying downtown. I can stay just about anywhere, but I'm not carrying piles of art and drawing supplies back and forth; I'm carrying my wallet, a camera and a few notes for my [Sapphire and Steel](#) pitch. I'm a great believer in making every trip work the best it can, but for pros, distance is going to be a bigger factor than it is for most people.

2. Put everyone's name on the room. Hotels won't give an unlisted person a key, even if that person swears that they're staying with someone that told them they would leave an extra key at the front desk. On the other hand, someone screwed over by their roommates in this fashion may get a comped room just so the desk staff can get to the next person in line. Trust me on this. I wouldn't count on it these days, though.

3. Register at your hotel as close as you can to when check-in times begin. Hotels can and will bump you; I've heard stories about being shoved out to the boonies without compensation. Secure your room!

4. Consider using everything your hotel offers. Check out the various options you have for hotel services, from pools to room service to spas, to add value and variety to your trip.

5. Make friends with the concierge. This is a person in the lobby of nicer hotels who is paid to answer your questions. Ask some. Make one up if you have to.

6. Start a tradition. Bagels and the morning Internet in the Westin's cafe, a nightcap standing on the lobby looking out over the Holiday Inn pool, counting hookers on the street from the lower-level rooms at the Bristol: it's fun to connect a hotel with a certain thing you enjoy doing, no matter what it is.

7. Sign up for the points program. If your hotel has them, sign up for the frequent stay program or point program or guest program -- whatever they call it. You may be able to check in and check out more quickly, you may get a bonus upgrade or similar reward for joining, if something happens that's inconvenient in a very busy weekend for the hotels you can be more easily compensated, and if you go to multiple conventions over the years you can earn free rooms even when you sign up through the con.

IN THE WEEKS LEADING UP TO THE SHOW

Three Travel Sites to Bookmark

1. [Sidestep.com](#) -- A good starting point for cheap flights. In the past I've used [Orbitz](#), [Mobissimo.com](#) and [Kayak.com](#) as well. I don't travel frequently enough nor do I pay enough attention to the travel industry to know which sites are the best, but those are ones I've used.

I travel just enough to know that you should check every result from sites like those above against the airline in question's web site, to see if the latter is a better deal.

2. [Amtrak.com](#) -- I've taken Amtrak to San Diego from LA and would recommend it for the laid-back traveler. The traffic on Interstate 5 on arrival and getaway days can be brutal (although that doesn't mean it will be; last year it was very nice). Amtrak may allow some leeway on which train to take on your travel days, so if you have a ticket on Sunday and suddenly want to sleep in or do a late lunch with a friend you didn't even know was there until 10 PM Saturday night, you can go on a train later that day -- don't take my word on that without confirmation, though.

Anything over six hours on Amtrak can be shaky in terms of comfort and is almost guaranteed to be a bust in terms of timeliness, so I would *not* recommend the trip from the Bay Area, Portland, Seattle, or any point due East. The Bay Area trip might work if you're on a super loose schedule, but even then you're likely to step off the train back home cranky, exhausted and in desperate need of a shower.

3. [San Diego Transit](#) -- If you're driving into town, this is a good place to map out the transit stations where you can leave your wheels and train the rest of the way. (I used to use the one to the east of Petco Park.) It's also the place to find out how to use public transit to get to Tijuana (as I recall, the trolley to Tijuana is \$3 or \$4 for the round trip).

Five Things to Prepare Well In Advance

1. Business cards

I never give out more than 15 or 20, but there's a certain class of folks that are pretty adamant about preparing for future contacts through a card exchange. Plus this makes me feel like my dad, although his business cards didn't have cartoon versions of himself on them. Remember to put all relevant information on your card.

2. Any art to give out

If I'm taking a mini-comic to give away or trade, I try to prepare it well in advance so it doesn't feel like yet another con expense. This is frequently impossible, I know. I would suggest getting it done in advance, because time to hit a kinko's to finish something like this us is pretty rare at a show like San Diego's.

3. Any art by which to get jobs or published

I'll put a little section with links to portfolio review advice below, but in general if you're taking a proposal to show publishers or to pitch to publishers or to give to reviewers, the one thing my friends seem to regret most is not bringing enough copies of the proposal or ashcan or whatever form it's in. Plus be prepared to re-send it when

you get home, because people lose things.

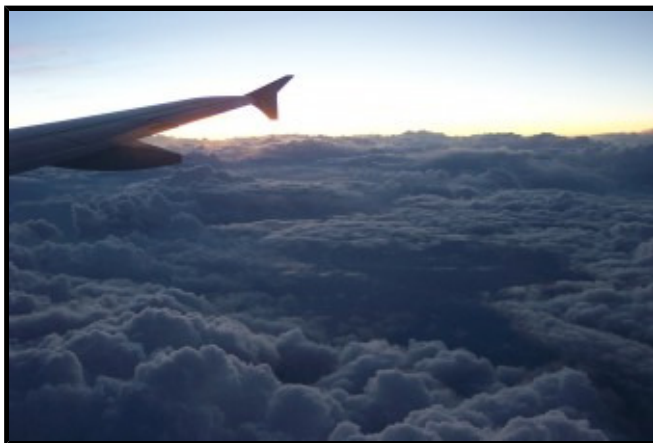
4. Cash, both on your person and in your bank
Make sure you do the basic travel thing of making sure you have enough money around or in the right accounts to cover your trip and emergencies. One year I went down to San Diego with a single debit card tied to an account that had been closed without my knowing it. That was so not a good weekend. Also, CCI costs a lot: there's travel, there's a couple of \$15 cab rides in there, most likely, there's food, there's hotel rooms that can be a lot of money at night. Make sure you budget for the show far in advance. You don't want to have the stress of stretching a dollar down there when you're busy if you can help it.

5. Things to Sell
Again, the only time I hear regrets is when people don't bring enough to sell and are out of stuff by Friday morning or whatever.

Here's a related piece of advice you might want to consider. If you're counting on a publisher to bring your books in order to facilitate your signing or selling them, you might want to double-check with them to make sure this is being done. They're busy getting ready for the show, too, and it's easy for them to forget that extra box with your book, particularly if you're not a big artist for that publisher.

Five Things To Think About Packing

1. Drugs -- Aspirin or similar pain relief can be a blessing.
2. Germ protection -- Hand lotion or wipes to keep your germ exposure down are nice to have if that's a concern for you. A few people have told me they use immunity boosters like [Airborne](#) in the days leading up to San Diego and right on through the week. This seems to me a great idea.
3. Watch/Phone -- I know this makes me sound like [Jeremiah Johnson](#), but I don't carry a phone anymore nor do I wear a watch, so I borrow them both for the convention. You'll want to know what time it is and have a way to stay in contact with your friends old and new.
4. Postage Supplies -- Don't want to carry a suitcase loaded down with books? Mail stuff back. Buy a cardboard tube; stuff it with tape, a sharpie and a couple of big envelopes; stick it in your luggage. There is a post office convenient to the Broadway-area hotels right next to the Westin Horton Plaza lobby; it's open on Saturday. There are also some mailing services at the convention itself, although I can't personally vouch for them.
5. Light Jacket -- It can get a little chilly at night in San Diego, and some of the most commonly utilized nighttime social spaces at CCI are beaches, courtyards and decks. Don't get caught being that cold person that everyone feels sorry for. A sturdy long-sleeve shirt will do the trick for most people.



Five Things to Tell People On the Airplane

1. "It's a gathering of tribes. Strange, nerdy tribes."
2. "Rumor is they've discovered some sort of comics in Japan."
3. "I'm one Burl Ives and two of the nymphs away from completing my collection of Sam Fuller action figures."
4. "Iron Man? Based on my dad."
5. "Ironically, as a kid I spent my summers playing golf and drinking martinis."

GETTING AROUND TOWN



Seven Quick Notes About San Diego's Transit Options

1. Walking is good. If your hotel is downtown, from Broadway to Harborview particularly, you'll probably be doing *a lot* of walking.
2. No one ever smiles on the trains pictured above, and most cartoonists and industry folk I know avoid them like the plague. I've never had a problem on one and found them a convenient way to go from parking garage to convention center. They don't exactly run on a tight schedule, though.
3. Like many mid-sized cities, San Diego boasts a small downtown perfect for jumping in and out of taxis, so

consider doing so at those moments when a walk seems daunting or problematic. The late nights aren't scary in downtown San Diego, but it's still a city and that means you can get in trouble stumbling around at 2 AM. I don't think I've ever spent more than \$6 on a cab ride not to the airport. To go outside of downtown, you're talking more the \$15-25 range. Think \$15-ish from the downtown hotels to the airport.

4. It's probably worth mentioning that in terms of getting home from many places until sort-of late (as opposed to *really* late) there's always the option of the convention buses. And of course, this is an option during the day, too. The convention has buses that run all day and into the night on various circuits from hotels to convention center and back again. It's kind of like the city bus I used to take to the good arcade, but with more people in costume. Most folks I know take the buses if they're tipsy at night and it's early enough they're still running, if they leave the convention center tired and sore and don't want to walk back to their hotel, or even to the convention if they're at a hotel across Broadway serviced by the bus circuit. [Check out this link to get to the bus schedule PDF, but it won't be up until closer to the show.](#) Don't stress about it if you forget; you can pick it up when you get there.

5. Like in Las Vegas -- only without the excuse of being, you know, *Las Vegas* -- there are various places around town where cabs will simply *not* come and get you. I used to go to this skeezy but fantastic Mexican place in a horrible neighborhood and learned the hard way that it would be a bus trip back into downtown proper. I've heard other, similar horror stories. Try not to depend 100 percent on cabs.

6. If you have a car and put it in a garage, most of the city garages stay open really late into the night for con-goers. Please double-check how late. I remember being locked into a parking garage once, although the security guards in the adjacent building were nice enough to help me get out, after much pleading and weeping.

7. San Diego has [pedicabs](#) -- bicycles that can hold a driver and two passengers where otherwise an ice cream freezer might go -- but the only time I took one was in 1999 when a guy gave me a free, pity ride rather than see me pummeled to death by [CBLDF](#)-hired security. Some people really like pedicabs when they're exhausted, which also helps in that you're too tired to care how potentially goofy you look. Get a price beforehand -- that's important -- and also be sure to tip if you liked the service.

Four Web Sites to Bookmark For Use In the Weeks Leading Up to the Show

1. [Comic-Con.org](#) -- A well-maintained resource for checking out when things start and end and checking out the programming before you arrive.
2. [Newsfromme.com](#) -- Mark Evanier hypes his own panels at the show, which are generally excellent, old-school panels of the intimate, talk among friends variety. Mark also provides a lot of plain-speak advice about general con issues. Mark's skinnier this year so you can trust his advice *that much more*.
3. [Virtual Guidebook to San Diego](#) -- See the sights before your visit.

4. [The Beat](#) -- Heidi MacDonald is a longtime CCI attendee and will likely post about any big news story that might have an effect on the show.



Twelve Places You Should Know Ahead of Time To Have a Basic Lay of the Land

1. [The Convention Center](#)
2. [The Marriott](#)
3. [The Hyatt](#)
4. [Seaport Village](#)
5. Rail stop for [Little Italy](#)
6. [Horton Plaza](#)
7. Ralph's Supermarket
8. [Gaslamp Quarter](#)
9. [Towards Petco Park](#)
10. Fed Ex/Kinko's (actually a block north, on C street)
11. US Post Offices
12. [Omni Hotel](#)

GOING TO THE SHOW

Five Tried and True Pieces of Con Advice That Bear Repeating

1. "Wear Comfortable Shoes"

The convention floor is huge. It's bigger than the room Steve Geppi keeps his duck comics. It's bigger than that soundstage where they filmed the emperor's arrival in *Return of the Jedi*. It's sit down and make you cry big. It's make strange excuses not to walk the whole thing more than once big. Wear nothing that will harm you, weigh you down, or make you sweat more than anyone near you would like. But most of all, do no more harm than is necessary to your feet.

2. "The Convention Center Food is Expensive and Bad"

This has been true of every convention at every convention center everywhere in the world since 1952, and remains true at CCI. No need to apologize if you like the food, but don't act surprised if you don't.

3. "Get in Shape for The Con"

Yes if it's to drop five pounds in anticipation of squeezing into your [Lucy from *Elfen Lied*](#) costume. No if you need to get in better shape simply to survive a few days of walking around tracking down back issues of *Werewolf By Night*. I know how you feel, I'm quite large myself, but if you honestly need to get in shape just to pursue some attentive loitering for four days and five nights, please consider staying at home and spending your con money on a YMCA membership and personal trainer. We want you at all the cons yet to come, not just this year's show.

4. "Please Don't Smell Bad"

Be considerate enough to work hard at being presentable, even when it's difficult to be at your freshest. Don't worry too much about not being post-shower, ready-for-cotillion fresh -- it's summer, it's a big show and there's a lot of walking. It's really only the people that don't seem to care a lick, that have visible stink lines coming from them, that make others mad.

5. "It's Not Your Basement"

Be friendly and courteous and open to new experiences and you will probably see some amazing sights, meet lots of nice people, chat with a few art heroes and even get in a good dose of informal networking. People are there to meet and be met. As is the case with summer camp and jury duty, people make convention insta-buddies all the time, and sometimes they develop into enduring friendships. On the other hand, snort loudly, muscle into conversations and fire off abrasive commentary in the faces of people you don't know, and you will probably be hired by Diamond. Ha ha, I'm just kidding. *You will have your choice of comics-related jobs.*

Six Things to Take to the Show Each Day

1. Lunch

Consider packing a lunch or large snack in case you end up wanting to do things in the Convention Center that make it hard to leave for a sit-down meal. You can get a lunch ahead of time at places like Ralph's, [Redfield's at the Hyatt](#), or [at the Westgate Hotel](#).

If you're meeting someone for dinner that's working at the show, or if you yourself are working, dinner will probably be later than you think because people at the show usually don't get out until 7 PM. If you pop out for a burger at noon your lunch won't go to waste; it can be called into duty as a 3 PM snack or a 5 PM blood-sugar boost to a friend that has that wild look in her eye. For a place to eat your packed lunch, the convention center has a lot of outdoor balcony space accessible from its second floor with nice views of the surrounding area.

2. Cash Money

Don't get caught cash-short and have to stand in The Line of Compulsive Nostalgia Indulgence in the convention center lobby. The nearby hotel ATMs can be a better bet speedwise, but unreliable, particularly on the weekends. I generally take two credit cards, approximately \$150 in cash and a couple of checks to the convention center each day, although everyone's needs are different. I also carry about \$200 in \$3 bills with Prez Rickard's face on them, but only [Chris Pitzer](#) takes those.

A convenient way to meet your cash needs is to get cash back on a purchase at the grocery store -- say bottled

water -- on the way over to the show. Or hit your own hotel's ATM as you head out the door. Credit Cards are pretty widely accepted, but don't count on every exhibitor being able to take them.

Also, please don't mug me.

3. A Backpack or Carry Bag

Over-sized giveaway bags have been popular promotional items the last two years, although you can't always count on that kind of thing being made available and may want to take your own. Bags and backpacks are also fun for knocking over other people's children "by accident." Don't leave your bag in a room while you go pee, because it may be stolen. Trust me on this.

4. Water

It's easy to refill your bottle at the con's water bottle.

5. Business Cards and/or Handouts

If you brought things to distribute, don't forget them to take them to the convention center!

6. Pen and something to write on

This is a magic spell deal where if you don't have them you will want them, but if you do have them on you you will never use them. It's your choice which is more frustrating.

Five Con Registration Tips

1. If you can get an exhibitor to register you, you won't have to wait in line and can simply obtain your badge from them rather than at the registration desks.

2. If you qualify as both a professional and a media person, the media line is shorter than the professional line. Plus there's a press room handy if you want to interview someone or simply stare at a roomful of bizarre celebrities.

3. Although things improved greatly last year, the professional line is still more bearable on off-hours and days. I've registered on late Friday mornings without any line whatsoever.

4. I don't even know what to say about that generally monstrous attendee line. Good luck with that. I'd suggest coming at an off time but that might be risky, too. It's amazing how quickly they process the crowds, but holy crap that line is long.

5. Badge Skills! If you don't want people to keep staring at your chest or mumble "Yeah, yeah" when you ask them questions because they have no idea you're their buddy Paul from the Bendis Board, don't give them the excuse of a lanyard that flips around. Display that badge and display it proudly, that's what I say. After eight hours in the visual-overload nightmare that is the CCI convention floor, I wouldn't recognize Mr. T without seeing his name to be sure. Keep those badges forward!

Eight Notes on Parking a Car at the Show

1. Parking is a bear. A big bear with sharp teeth and a bad attitude, hopped up on powdered No-Doz. [Mark Evanier](#) jokes that if you want to find a parking space, then leave right now. That's a lie: *Mark isn't joking*. Do whatever you

can to avoid it. There are stories of people who drive down from LA, can't find a space, and drive back to LA.

2. If you're going to park at a hotel, count on spending \$20-\$25 a day.
3. Make sure you have the right to take your car out and bring it back without extra charge before you do so.
4. Many people I know decide that having a car simply means sucking it up and going in earlier than they might have gone were they not with car, in order to find a parking space in close proximity to the convention center. Others park at garages near transit stations, or downtown, and then walk/train/cab over.
5. When I used to drive a car to the show, the parking garage at the 12th and Imperial station (east on Broadway to 12th, turn right) was my friend for a lot of reasons. One, it was one stop away on [the trolley line](#). Two, at the time nobody used it. Three, despite the parking garages being open really late, when this one was full it was in a neighborhood where at least on the weekend you could find parking nearby on the street. I have *absolutely no idea* if this is still true. I kind of doubt it.
6. You might go in even earlier the first day to at least scope things out.
7. Don't be shy about parking far enough away there's a short walk, convention bus trip or trolley hop involved.
8. If it makes you feel better while suffering the hassle of having wheels, your carless friends aren't able [to pop out to Hodad's](#) for a burger. If you have a car at the show, make use of it by extending your dining and social options.

NOW THAT YOU'RE AT THE SHOW

Three Things About Approaching Famous People; You Will See Famous People

1. Walk up, offer firm handshake and smile. "Hi, [honorific] [last name]. My name is [your actual name, or, if you can't remember it, "Steve Lieber"]. I'm a great fan of your work in [comic, show or movie]. Can I help you [or if the person is with someone, "you folks"] find something?"
2. If someone is approachable, nine times out of ten it's because they're lost or confused by the assault of product. And if they're not approachable, leave 'em alone, you creep.
3. Please don't follow famous people around, stopping as they do, blocking everyone else's foot traffic. Because I will hate you.

Five Things to Make Time For at the Show

1. [The Eisner Awards](#) (Friday Night) -- You know [that speech by Wallace Shawn in Heaven Help Us](#)? The Eisners is like that, but three hours long. If you work in comic

books, you should go at least once just to see it. Be warned that attendance by pros seems to have gone up in recent years, so you can't count on a table up front with the nominees just by showing up the way you could ten years ago, when the Fantagraphics table consisted of me, [Rich Johnston](#) and I think the drummer from [Foghat](#). Another reason to go is there's usually a smallish cocktail party afterwards that's useful for seeing people you might not run into otherwise.

2. [The Masquerade](#) (Saturday Night) -- Showtime at the Geekpollo. This is another amazing thing to watch, if only once, although you may get depressed when you realize the participants are probably having way more fun in those few moments than you had the entire weekend. This is packed, and there's a line, so count on investing the evening.

3. [Go to a Panel](#) -- A good rule of thumb is that if you can't find something in the programming that specifically interests you, go to anything featuring [Sergio Aragones](#).

4. [Shop the Convention Floor](#) -- What's easily available at Comic-Con seems to ebb and flow. This decade CCI has become a great place to buy original art, cheaper 1970s comics, and, as of 2004, boutique toys. Keep an eye out for convention-only mini-comics or similar, con-only offerings. I believe in shopping early and gawking late -- there are a few people that cut prices on Sunday to lighten the return load home, but not as many as you'd think, not with a Chicago show in a couple of weeks.

5. [Walk Artists' Alley](#) -- This is the part of the convention consisting of rows of tables set up with artist after artist behind them. Somewhere in the scores of people is someone you didn't know was still alive and someone whose work you've *just* started enjoying. I guarantee this.



Four Types of Comics Panels to Consider Attending

1. Panels With That Year's Featured Non-North American Cartoonist(s) -- You'll probably get to see a slide show of pretty art, and the person/people likely won't be back. I've seen artists like [Lorenzo Mattotti](#), [David B.](#), [Dupuy and Berberian](#) and [Ryoichi Ikegami](#) speak at the show and loved each and every panel. Combined attendance at those panels? Less than 100 people.

2. Panels With Funny People on Them -- If the cartoonist makes you laugh on the page, they will likely make you

laugh on the stage.

3. The National Cartoonists Society panel -- Strip cartoonists don't do lots of shows. Plus you can sneak in some booze and do a drinking game based on one sip every time someone in the crowd asks how to get their own work syndicated. This may kill you from alcohol poisoning, though.

4. One-Time-Only Guests -- I'd include older cartoonists in which you have an interest, because no one knows how the health of such guests will hold up year to year in terms of travel. There are also cartoonists who for whatever reason don't go to a lot of shows. They're usually good guests because they're not burnt out on the experience and want to be as professional as possible. [Art Spiegelman](#) was one such who attended in 1999; [Gary Panter](#) was another; he was there in 2005.

Five Costumes You Don't See As Much As You Used To



1. Spider-Man From Alternate Universe Where Danny Strong Was Cast as Movie Spider-Man
2. Spawn
3. That Guy Spawn Was Named After
4. [The Rhino-Headed Dude from Hepcats](#)
5. NextPlanetOver.com Creditor

Five Friendly Pros I Enjoy Seeking Out When They're There

1. [Batton Lash](#)
2. [Jeff Smith](#)
3. [Jim Ottaviani](#)
4. [Scott McCloud](#)
5. [Roger Langridge](#)

Five Notes About Networking

1. Pre-Network

Before the show tell all your friends and acquaintances what your goals are and ask them if they can help. Make this a common request and you'll be surprised how many times a friend knows the one person you're dying to meet, or how frequently friends will look out for you.

2. Access your peers

For instance, if you're a reporter that wants to meet cartoonists, ask the other reporters you meet if they can introduce you to the cartoonists they know.

3. Quantity

Get to know as many people as you can. In just a few short years, that person in line with you may be more important to your career than the person you're lining up to see.

4. Pace yourself

Be reasonable about what you can accomplish in a weekend. You're probably not going to receive a contract right there on the floor, but you might meet people to whom you can send stuff to when you get home. Someone once described networking to me as "Setting Up For The Follow Up" and that makes a lot of sense.

5. Cut folks some slack

Everybody is really, really busy, so err on the side of forgiving them if they don't provide you exactly with whatever it is you feel you need to be provided with. And don't pin your hopes on one show, even a big one like CCI. Comics is stuffed with publishers, all of whom want new talent. Taken as a group, comics publishers have a thorough system for finding and exploiting talent. If you have a talent that's suitable to someone, and you're not actively hiding, they will eventually find you. Hang in there.

Six Pieces of Advice Parents Have Shared With Me About Having Kids Around at the Con

1. Limit their exposure

For younger kids, one day at the show may be enough. Families that do a lot of cons and are there for a longer time tell me they try to mix up days at the con with other activities like the beach or the zoo. There is a kids' day with more programming aimed at kids; it's on Sundays.

2. Put the kids on point

Let their desires, energy and moods help dictate your schedule. Comic-Con can be really tiring, but it's less so for kids when you're seeing things the kids like and letting them decide when to leave panels or go to the next booth.

3. Make extra-sure you eat

You can't tell a kid to suck it up the way you can an adult, so it's important to take a snack or two and to maybe even get to the [Seaport Village](#) or up into the [Gaslamp District](#) for a meal at a regular hour.

4. Drawing is magic

I've had a couple of parents mention that a great thing about being at the con is being around so many artists whose basic technical skills can be mind-boggling for a kid to see. Think about maybe getting a few sketches for a kid of their favorite character; many artists in Artist's Alley are there to do modestly priced sketches. A few artists may do something for a kid for free, but don't count on it.

5. If You Have To Dump 'Em...

The Con [does offer childcare](#), but the only person who told me they've used it is one single parent who had a meeting sprung on him last-minute. I'm not even sure the Con will accept kids last-minute, although this guy can be very convincing.

6. Have fun

Enjoy the con through their eyes.

Four Random Tips On Going To The Show

1. If you need cash, and you're really well known to an exhibitor, they may let you write a check for cash at their booth. Some people may even prefer to have less cash to carry around. No harm asking, but don't count on this.

2. Don't be shy about asking people who are dressed up in costumes to pose for pictures; the attention is frequently what they're there for. Plus you may get the honor of addressing a grown man as "Lord Vader."

3. If you're friends with an exhibitor, they may let you stash your backpack or stuff you bought at their booth, probably with the caveat that they're not responsible for it -- this can still be a life saver. If this happens, do something for the exhibitor in return like bringing them a coffee or manning the booth while they take a bathroom break.

4. If you get bored, do a good deed. [Give blood](#), register to vote, or go buy something from the [CBLDF](#) or [Hero Initiative](#) booths. Heck, buy a sketch or comic from someone in [Artist's Alley](#) that looks lonely. Take [Zander Cannon](#) a sandwich. Compliment someone's costume even if you don't know who they are and their fleshy parts scare you. Be a con hero.

Four Common Con Activities With Which I'm Largely Unfamiliar

1. "Breaking Into Comics" Panels -- Be talented and professional; be prepared to start small and work your way up. There, now you don't have to go.

2. Portfolio Reviews -- I would suppose the key here is to show work as close to the work you want to be hired to do as possible, follow their rules, enjoy your time in line as best you can and take the advice given. Most people break into comics by doing them, anymore, so *my* advice is to start doing comics. The great Steve Lieber has some tips [here](#).



3. Autograph Seeking -- There are lots of people signing stuff: set up by the con, at



their publishers, at their devoted spaces in the area between the halls. It's not my thing, but I certainly have friends who seek out signatures for books, especially for gifts. The only advice they give me is to check out charity-related booths like the [CBLDF](#), or any smaller publisher that

carries the creator's work. Those places might allow you to get an autograph without having to stand in a hugely long line. If that's impossible, enjoy your line experience with like-minded fans, because it's probably unavoidable. Don't cut. [Matt Groening](#) stands in lines; you can, too. That's [Gary Panter](#) doing a sketch in the photo.

4. Gaming and Other Related Nerdly Arts -- There is a lot of general fan activity at San Diego Con, everything from gaming rooms to Klingon [Rites of Ascension](#). The con schedule should tell you everything you need to know to find what you're looking for.



Five Random Thoughts On Being On the Floor

1. Above is my favorite floor photo from a recent San Diego Con: [Dr. Doom](#) ponders his [pimp cup](#).

2. I'm one of those old-timers that sees manga as less its own



thing and simply as "more comics" from another of the world's great comics traditions, so I'm probably not the first person you go to for special tips on how to enjoy manga and anime at Comic-Con. Still, manga and anime fans are certainly out in force. The majority of the young people you see dressed up are wearing some sort of manga- or anime-related costume. The



publishers, editors and creators have a significant presence as well; if nothing else, the occasional book give-away certainly gets them the notice of the other booths.

You can experience the show from a manga-centric point of view the same way you experience any other area (superheros, art comics, movies) that interests you -- [visiting the related booths on the exhibition floor and going to the panels and previews that feature this kind of material.](#)

3. Sometimes the best way to get from one end of the show to the other is to leave the hall and walk in one of the outside hallways.

4. If you can stand it, and you have some time, wander a bit and check out the general craziness of the floor even if you're not interested in the vast majority of what's on display. I don't like toys, but I love looking at the toys. And there's always some sort of bizarre, what-the-heck-were-they-thinking exhibit setting back civilization a few decades, like the famous skimpily-dressed [woman in a clear plastic box.](#) You could practically hear her thinking of all the ways she was going to fire her agent.

5. Jeff Parker [has good advice](#) about the more intimate meet-and-greets available to you in Artist's Alley.

SHOPPING

Six Shopping Tips

1. If you really like a certain booth, get contact information or pick up a business card so you can buy from them at other times of the year, particularly if they sell out of an item before you get back to buy it. Most vendors attending the show are big enough to do mail order; many of the individual artists offer mail order, too.

2. Don't wait too long to buy something you'll really regret not having. There are 100,000 other people here.

3. Hit dealers early that seem to have an exclusive on their portion of the market. [Stuart Ng Books](#) is a dealer that frequently exhibits that I like to hit early for their older cartooning books. In contrast, I can probably find some

Master of Kung Fus with [Brynocki](#) just as easily on Sunday as I can on Wednesday night.

4. [Rory Root's Comic Relief](#), a convention mainstay, always does a great job of bringing a ton of material, including out-of-print or hard-to-find oddities. Root has a real knack for anticipating demand on some mid-list books that might become popular at the show, like something that's up for multiple Eisners.



5. Between [Comic Relief](#), the similarly loaded [Bud Plant](#) area, and, although some might not admit it, the mainstream-heavy, blanket-discounted, trade-focused [Mile High Comics](#) booth, you can find most every major comic-related book and comics trade that's in print. Use these shopping areas as the backbone of your new comics buying, and return to them often.

6. My one friend who buys a lot of comics at CCI makes a list before she goes. This includes the price at which she's willing to buy a book, so that she won't buy something she could have bought for cheaper at home or on-line. Buying something that hits your price point sounds way, way easier to me than comparison shopping between tables with 100,000 other people in the room.



Six Things I'll Always Consider Buying

1. Any special drawings that [Johnny Ryan](#) (that's his Judge Dredd, above) prepares for the show.

2. 1970s Comics from the spinner rack in front of the [Lee's Comics](#) booth.



3. Any [Jaime Hernandez](#) pen and ink drawings.

4. [Roger Langridge](#)'s original art pages. They're beautiful and affordable.

5. Anything sketchbooky [Steve Rude](#) might have at the show.

6. Something from the [Twomorrow's](#) table, where all the magazines are piled on top of each other, like a four-color pile of to-be-rolled hard

candy.

Five Ways to Have a Great Buying Experience

1. As suggested above, know what the things you generally like cost, particularly from your local guy back home, even if you need a crib sheet. It's not worth it to have traveled hundreds of miles to get something you could have obtained by driving across town.

2. Get things personalized through cartoonist signings and sketches (if they're doing them), check out original art and other one-of-a-kind items, and keep an eye out for convention-only ashcans and the like. Those are the kinds of things you can only get at Comic-Con.

3. Comic-Con does a great job of keeping vendors with illegal items out of the show, but it never hurts to be too careful.

4. Some companies and shops will be happy to bring stuff pre-packaged for you to pick up when you get there. For those of us without a full-service comics shop near our homes, this can be a godsend in terms of scoring less popular items in a way that doesn't cost a lot in shipping. Check with your favorite companies a few weeks ahead of time.

5. Sunday close-out deals aren't what they used to be, but Sunday still features several vendors that seem to want to get rid of material at a discount more than they want to take it back home. It's a good day to shop without a specific must-have object in mind. Another thing to look for on Sunday that's fun in an odd way is to watch some of the publishers sell leftover stock directly to retailers. You rarely get a chance to see someone power shop for funnybooks.

SAN DIEGO NIGHTS (AND DAYS, IF, LIKE ME, YOU PLAY HOOKY)

Six Things to Do *Outside* the Show



1. Eat Out -- Despite the barely-controlled



rage of some fans at being asked to spend more than \$7 on a meal, San Diego offers up a number of decent-to-fine restaurants of which to avail yourself in the nearby Gaslamp,

downtown, and Little Italy neighborhoods. And because comics fans are by legend ruthlessly cheap, it's easier than you'd think to find a table. Call ahead anyway if you can, particularly for Friday and Saturday.

2. [Visit the Zoo](#) -- San Diego offers one of the great North American zoos. It's a fun way to decompress on a Sunday or a Monday, or to give you and/or your friends the day away from the convention hall on a Thursday or Friday. There's no vacation that can't be made better by spending quality time with the [pygmy marmoset](#).

3. Visit [Tijuana](#) -- This is a great thing to do with a bunch of people, friends new and/or old, and easy to build around a dinner in a way an impromptu meal *doesn't* work in San Diego. Please note this and other slightly grander plans might be easier to with people *not* exhibiting at the show, who won't be able to leave until 7 pm. This is also a fun Sunday night activity if none of you are exhausted from breaking down a booth. As border regulations tighten up, at some point this is going to require a passport, not just a driver's license I don't think [that's until December of this year](#). But you should check in advance more fully and completely.

4. Go to a Party -- It seems like there were more *large* parties ten-twelve years ago. What may have happened is that the downtown's transformation has rid the neighborhoods around the convention center of cheap space to rent for big blowouts. It's taken some time, and they're not yet the multi-storied illegality farms of yesteryear, but it's true: actual parties are back in vogue, particularly with the addition of non-comics sponsors of all shapes and sizes. *Go to every party to which you're invited*, and one or two to which you're not. If they ask who you know, I'm not saying tell a lie, but everyone seems to know Jim Lee.

5. Going to a Padres game can be fun. That's a nice, friendly ballpark -- a solid double in terms of design with a nice view of downtown in the upper level seats that aren't horribly expensive. It's nice place to relax, and the vendor food is decent enough for a junk-food dinner. Plus, [it's the Padres](#), so you're liable to see two or three players you could have sworn retired in '98. Unfortunately, they're away at Colorado and Houston this year; but let me put the thought into your brain for future cons.



6. Use the Water -- [San Diego's beaches](#) are nice; all of them said to be worth visiting are worth visiting. One thing I enjoyed once was throwing in with some friends to [rent a powerboat](#). The [sailing is pretty good, too](#).

Seven Random Tips



On Stuff To Do Outside the Show

1. For some reason, every year 2000-2003 I stumbled across a men's shoe sale somewhere in the [Horton Plaza](#). Other than that, I've never come across such great shopping that made me want to stop what I'm doing and spend money that way. Your mileage may vary.

2. If you need some alone time, and you might, it may sound crazy but you can always [go to a movie](#).

The [Pacific Theaters Gaslamp](#) (pictured) and the [UA 14 Movies](#) are the nearby movie theaters. Comic-Con is one of the few places you can go where a giant special effects movie is actually relaxing to the eye in comparison to the visual excess of the exhibition hall.



3. San Diego's gentrification has limited the number of traditional Saturday night parties, as renting out a space has become prohibitively expensive. So don't count on having something to do on Saturday; if you haven't heard of anything, there may not be anything. Everyone older than 30 is exhausted, anyway.

4. Car rentals are sometimes cheaper on Saturdays, parking overnight in a downtown is usually easier on Saturday and Sunday, and having a car can open up more parts of San Diego to you. Most full-service hotels can help you rent a car if you get there and suddenly feel the impulse not having reserved one.

5. Remember, only a few rental car companies still rent to a debit card -- if you're like me, sometimes you don't travel with a credit card unless you plan it in advance. Those that do accept debit cards might require proof of travel in the form of a ticket that says you're flying out on a certain day.

6. The last few years have seen Friday night art openings in the Gaslamp district in conjunction with the show. This can be a fine Eisner Awards alternative or Eisner appetizer. You can ask around the appropriate art-comics booths. There may also be a movie premiere or two in town although these may require picking up passes and/or standing in a line.

7. The younger alt-comics cartoonists used to have parties on the beach and maybe they will again someday. What started out as a cheap way to have an afterparty turned into a really cheap way to do a Saturday night party turned into a party that everyone of a certain age began to feel really old attending.

Still, if you get a chance to go to a party like this, go. It's lovely being outside on a warm summer night after a day stuck inside a convention center. Plus, if you're lucky, you may get to see something like [Joe Chiappetta](#) failing to make his leap across the fire (1997), [Nick Bertozzi](#) being hassled by The Man (2000), Gary Groth making [Dylan Horrocks](#) cry (2001) or, my personal favorite, [Scott](#)

[McCloud](#) accidentally performing a live comedy routine with [Jason Lutes](#), [Jason Little](#) and [Jason](#).

Five Places I've Eaten in San Diego (Quite Cheaply)

1. [In-N-Out Burger](#)

The only burger chain in the area worth a pilgrimage. Okay, maybe not. The only one I know of that people drag me to.

2. [Saffron](#)

Really cheap Thai within walking distance.

3. [Sun Cafe](#)

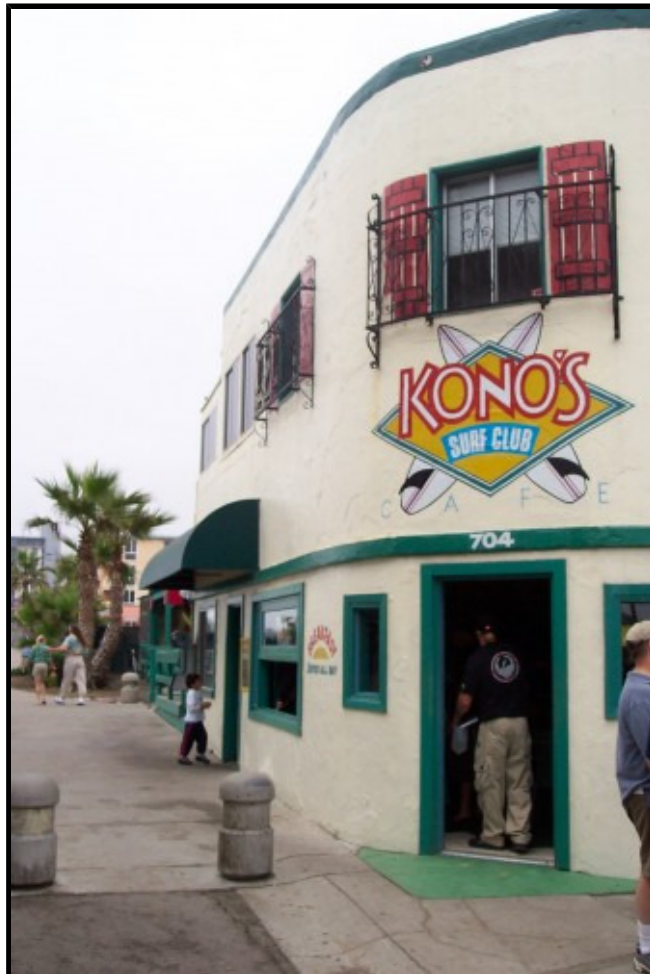
Scary and only OK diner that gets points for serving grease and starch which may be what you require to throw on top of all the booze still in your stomach from the night before. It's overcrowded on weekend for breakfasts, but usually fine crowd-wise on Thursday and Friday.

4. [Pokez Mexican Restaurant](#)

Solid. An institution.

5. [Dick's Last Resort](#)

I like it fine for a late lunch, or a liquid lunch, not so much for dinner. I would have liked it when I was in college.



Five Places I've Eaten in San Diego (Somewhat Less)

Cheaply)

1. [Mister Tiki Mai Tai Lounge](#)

I've never been impressed by my entrees, but this kind of food and liquor can be perfect for a group of friends. Slightly more expensive than you'd think.

2. [Sadaf Persian Cuisine](#)

I think [Bandar](#), which is a street over, may be a better and more reliable dining experience overall, and the portions are certainly humongous, but Sadaf's [Chicken Fesenjan](#) competes and it's less busy early in the evening. [Persian](#) is the only food that is done better in Southern California than anyplace else in the U.S., so I always try to have some.

3. [Turf Supper Club](#)

San Diego hipster mainstay. A very short cab ride. It's cook your own meat in a old-time racing bar, which is a fine way to mix meals and socializing, or send the control freak in your group away from the the table with all of your steaks. A great place to escape the show.

4. [Kono's Cafe](#)

The best breakfast I've had in San Diego. A fine bonus to give yourself as a gift if you're in a hotel far enough away to be using a car.

5. [Rei Do Gado](#)

This is a Brazilian Grill, meaning you pay something like \$40-\$50 and they bring various cuts of meat to you until you're full, pass out, or die when your stomach explodes. This place reduces even the closest friends with lots of catching up to do to grunting, monomaniacal chow-pigs. But good, particularly if you missed a meal earlier in the day. Or hate animals.

Five Places I've Eaten Breakfast In San Diego

1. [Kono's Cafe](#)

Again: good. Don't worry about the line.

2. [Cafe 222](#)

In the neighborhood. And really good.

3. [St. Tropez Bistro](#)

Very convenient to those staying along Broadway.

4. [The Westgate Gourmet Wine and Delicatessen](#)

More coffee and a food item than orange juice and a plate of meat and eggs, but that may be all you need.

5. [Hob Nob Hill](#)

Eat breakfast the way [Jack Kennedy](#) once chowed down: unhealthily. Worth the short drive if you have access to a car. If I remember right, they have a carry-out bakery, if you want to be a hero and bring people muffins or whatever.

Five Things About Eating Vegetarian/Vegan During the Con

1. Three restaurants that non-meat eaters visiting CCI have told me about are [Pokez](#), [Rancho's](#) and [Kung Food](#).

2. A wider guide with several reviews [can be found here](#).

3. In general, Thai and Indian restaurants can easily accommodate vegetarians and with some questions and directives -- like "No dairy, please" -- can usually serve vegans with little problem. It's southern California; servers should be accustomed to questions about the food.

4. Come to think of it, it being southern California I bet most restaurants can accommodate most diners, period, if only with a dish or two. I might stay away from the steakhouses, though. Check ahead.

5. It may be a bit of extra work to make sure you get to certain restaurants or pick up certain things for lunch, but going with your friends to enjoy food on a diet you share can be a real camaraderie-builder. Besides, you get all those health benefits, even at the show. I've never seen someone sweat their way through a panel because their tofu stir-fry has come back to haunt them.

Seven Additional Tips About Eating in San Diego

1. Many of the hotel bars either have food service or allow food to be ordered into the bar from the hotel's restaurant. This makes them good compromise locations at odd hours when, say, one person wants to get a drink but another person hasn't had anything to eat since 8 AM.

2. Work with your [concierge](#), if your hotel has one, particularly if your eating group has special requests. In fact, make sure you ask your concierge at least one goofy, slightly unreasonable food-related question during your stay, even if you don't care to know the answer. If you can't think of one, try "Do you know a restaurant that serves mostly round food?"

3. Starting in 2004 there has been a restaurant reservations booth at the convention center complete with menus. If you see it, use it. I found it very handy. It's good to head someplace with reservations rather than without, particularly on Friday and Saturday.

4. Never, ever go out to "just find something" to eat with a group of more than three other people. Really. Don't do it. I'm not kidding. Don't. You'll be sorry. More comics industry friendships and business relationships have ended with the words, "Screw you people! I'm going back to the room and ordering a pizza!" than have collapsed over royalties and creator credit *combined*.

5. Here's [a list of late-night diners](#) in San Diego.

6. If you're super into this, San Diego offers about a half-dozen frequently updated [Foodie Blogs](#).

7. [This brunch site](#) is one of the few places linked to here that may actually be more chatty than this guide.

Fourteen Things to Remember About Drinking at the Con

1. If you're worried about the cost of booze, you can always throw a "pre-party" in your hotel room and consume cheap, store-bought hooch with your closest -- or imaginary -- friends before moving to a bar or party. If you can still make it to the bar.

2. Mental exhaustion from exhibiting is like three beers right there.
3. Lots of people in comics and at the show don't drink; there's no stigma for or against consumption. (Except for the book publishing people, who are drunk 24 hours a day and shriek like demented banshees at people who refuse to join them. And at "monsters.") The only odd thing about comics culture and alcohol is that many people in comics drink as if they discovered the world of booze three weeks ago, so sometimes late nights at conventions can feel like tear night during [fraternity rush](#). Adjust your expectations accordingly.
4. Since it's summer, men can order drinks that have colors in them or that are fizzy and have limes at the bottom without fear of scorn and/or reprisal, except maybe from [Beau Smith](#).
5. Since you may be on your feet, moving from group to group, stick to a glass with a low, fat bottom. The [Cape Codder](#), [Mojito](#), and [Sea Breeze](#) all have the advantage of being served in glasses that do *not* look dumbassed being lugged around on a deck, lawn or porch. [Here are more](#).
6. If you don't know what to order, order a gin and tonic. No one will mess with you: nothing hints at sudden, deranged, violent reprisal like a gin and tonic in a crowded bar. It's like ordering a glass of milk in a Wild West saloon. They are also usually strong enough you can sip from your glass as the ice melts and it's almost like having another drink.
7. Remember this bit of drinking-on-a-budget doggerel: "all drinks after the second drink might as well be well drinks."
8. If you didn't know, a well drink is a drink made from whatever alcohol the bar uses as the default type of that kind of liquor, generally cheaper stuff. And really, if you didn't know that, maybe stick to soda.
9. Beer for beer, [dive bars](#) are far less expensive than hotel bars.
10. You are, however, much less likely to get your ass kicked in a hotel bar.
11. Good luck finding a dive bar in new San Diego, anyway.
12. If you walk into a party to which you weren't invited, getting drinks at the bar may bring with it one more round of scrutiny. Look confident, be prepared.
13. You can offer to buy your favorite creator or prospective editor a drink if you want to, but it's not necessary and it's not a guaranteed in. In fact, it's kind of hard to do this without looking like a dork.
14. There used to be things to consume *other* than booze for those people who enjoy breaking the law and making the Abraham Lincoln automaton at [the Hall of Presidents](#) cry. But thanks to increased airport security, the entertainment option that used to be open to all willing to stuff something into the toe of a boot is today pretty much locals-only. The moral to this story? BEFRIEND THE LOCALS.

WINDING THINGS UP

Six Small Joys to be Had Late in the Weekend

1. Seeing a professional attendee shutting down and becoming acid-tongued and bitter. Not as much fun if professional was acid-tongued and bitter to begin with.
2. Seeing people sitting outside the convention proper, lined up along the walls of the lobby like kids at a middle-school dance waiting for a ride home.
3. Watching young couples in related costumes holding hands.
4. Knowing that somewhere on the floor is a company that's lost an intern over the weekend. Just lost them somewhere.
5. Listening to the exhausted security people openly making disparaging comments about attendees by Saturday morning. Upstairs is a better show than the main hall.
6. Attending the weird, lightly populated Sunday morning panels where everyone involved is too tired to whitewash the truth. Sunday 10-12 should be re-named the [Howard Beale](#) slot. I've seen publishers come right out and crack on their own books on Sunday morning, and creators on opposite ends of the stage admit outright contempt for one another. It's kind of fun.

Four Smaller, Personal Memories From Comic-Con

1. 1996: [Ryoichi Ikegami](#) answering questions about potential movie versions of [Mai, the Psychic Girl](#) with polite, slightly bewildered variations of "I have no idea; I only drew that comic, and it was a while ago." *Eight questions in a row.*
2. 1999: Standing in the ocean with no clothes on and as a group noticing the random, quiet men who had moved away from the fire and were just, you know, coming down to the shoreline to check out the water and whatnot, making us all laugh without having to say what we were all laughing at.
3. 2003: Sitting in a nearly empty Picadilly's bar, alternative cartoonist hangout now closed, drinking with close friends, laughing our way through increasingly stupid and outlandish reasons to put off going to the art-comics beach party.
4. 2006: Sitting in a crowded Picadilly's after writing about it in last year's guide when I see a friend of mine mouthing something at me from the bar. I get it on the third try: "YOU. RUINED. PICADILLY'S."



Ten Ways to Say Goodbye to CCI

1. Watch the final few holes of [the British Open](#) from bed on Sunday; I swear it's on TV like every third year.
2. Say goodbye Saturday night and skip Sunday altogether, avoiding any potential disillusionment from encountering desiccated, grumpy cartooning idols.
3. If after the weekend's activities you're feeling guilty or unclear, the Christian Cartoonists Panel is sort of like church. They pray and everything.
4. Go back to beach on your way to the airport and try to retrieve your a) eyeglasses b) wallet c) underwear d) dignity. You won't find the dignity.
5. Put your costume on and eat the [champagne brunch at the Horton Grand](#) in character.
6. Go back and forth between two factions of costumes trying to get them to come to blows.
7. Give your badge to the angriest-looking local who asks you for one as you leave the show for the last time.
8. Stay an extra day and hang out with the other people who do the same, soaking in that "last day of summer/we are the c.i.t.'s" vibe. Sometimes there are Sunday night thank-you or "dead dog" parties to crash. Going to a nice dinner and crashing early works, too.

9. (Semi-advanced travelers only) Take your car out of the expensive hotel parking on Saturday night and try to park near your hotel on the street, which may be slightly easier to do on Saturday night and Sunday daytime than the other days. You save \$25 on parking, and the next morning you can stuff your bags to your car rather than check them in at the sure-to-be-obscenely-crowded bellhop counter.

10. (Super-advanced travelers only) Save a night's hotel by scheduling your Sunday flight at 7 AM and going straight from the bar or beach late Saturday night (or restaurant) to the airport. Or to breakfast at [Denny's](#) and then [the airport](#). Must have light luggage load, a friend willing to store stuff, a car rental, and folks willing to put up with you being frazzled and kind of loopy that first day you're home.

Seven Things To Do When You Get Home



1. Sleep.

2. Get all of your business and networking follow-ups out the door by Friday. There's no reason you should have the same discussions about the same things next year that you had this year, although you'd be surprised how often that happens.

3. Try to explain what you did all weekend to your confused and slightly worried co-workers: "Then I met [that one guy](#) with the tattoos all over his body from that show on cable a few years ago. You'd know him if you saw him. He had the tattoos...?"

4. Write about the show, whether as magnificently

as [a classic Steve Lieber/Jeff Parker effort](#), or as modestly as a message board post. It's genuinely fascinating -- well, at least to me -- to read about other people's experiences, to find out what that group you walked by at the Omni was talking about, for instance, or what happened at the panel you couldn't visit.

5. Get back to work, you bum.

6. Unpack all of your stuff. If something has gone missing, it's better to know sooner than later.

7. Make your hotel reservations for 2008. Hope you're not too late.

And that's it. Have fun. Smile. Say hi if you see me; I'd like to meet you. [And please, e-mail me with 1\) obvious errors, 2\) your favorite cartoonist to visit, and 3\) any tips of your own. Especially stuff like places that are closed; I probably missed at least one of those.](#)

Photos by [Whit Spurgeon](#), 2003; and [Gil Roth](#), 2005.
Comic-Con International and Mile High Comics are
advertisers here. I was kidding about there being hookers
near the Bristol; they're all at the show. I like Danny
Strong.



BONUS SECTION: READER RESPONSE AND OUTSIDE SOURCES

The Best Five Pieces of Advice From CR Readers Over the Years Not Yet Folded Into the Other Sections

1. Apply for a [Ralph's](#) card and get discounts on your groceries. ([Marc Mason](#))
2. Program Schedule and event information is posted [on the convention site](#) the week before the show, listed in a free Events Guide you get at the show, updated in a daily newsletter available each day at the show, and scattered throughout the web before the show even starts. Don't miss something because you're uninformed. ([Jackie Estrada](#))
3. Most hotels allow patrons to either check a laptop in for safekeeping or actually put it in a safe, so you don't have

to worry about it being stolen while you're at the convention. ([Chris Arrant](#))

4. Consider volunteering for the experience and for the free admission. (Various)

5. Don't forget the closest lunch place -- [Joe's Crab Shack](#), behind the convention center. (Various)

Other San Diego Guides and Similar Resources

1. [Evil Geniuses](#)

2. [Scott Tipton's 2003 Guide](#)

3. [About.com](#)

4. [TV Guide's 2006 Entry](#)

5. [Well-written summary report of an enjoyable time at the Con by a more casual fan.](#)

6. [Comic Foundry's 2006 restaurant guide](#)

Advice From CR Readers, 2007

1. There is a local comic shop over near the [San Diego Sports Arena](#) that carries a healthy section of current books and also graphic novels. I found most of my [Preacher](#) collection there. I totally forget the name but it is on Sports Arena Blvd so check Superpages or something related. (M Paul Douglas)

2. In-N-Out is good, but [Fatburger](#) is damn good. [Ground beef \(not patties\) burgers, fresh cut fries, and ice cream milkshakes.](#) There used to be one in downtown, but I believed it moved up to the mission valley area. [Check Fatburger's website.](#) (M Paul Douglas)

3. Try getting a tour of either the USS Midway aircraft carrier, or if one of the active aircraft carriers is in port, try and get a tour. Either the [USS John Stennis](#) or [USS Ronald Reagan](#). It's a great experience regardless of your personal politics. (M Paul Douglas)

4. Do not buy food or drink at the Convention Center. You will get ripped off like a "no war" bumper sticker in Dallas. Buy your food at Ralph's instead. Get one of their big cheap turkey subs to gnaw on during the day. ([Eric Knisley](#))

5. Keep your eyes open. One year we found a Subway that was doing a super-special on veggie subs, so we bought a couple every morning: lunch AND dinner solved for about \$6.00 apiece. ([Eric Knisley](#))

6. Do not buy bottled water anywhere. Bring your water bottle to the Con Center or your hotel and fill up for free. ([Eric Knisley](#))

7. Make a budget for the show -- the actual money you will spend on the floor -- and stick to it. ([Eric Knisley](#))

8. Here's a bit of wisdom I developed from years of pharma-conferences. It may not be so pertinent for the Con, but it does keep stuff in order: outgoing business cards in the right pocket, incoming business cards in the

left. Because there's nothing as embarrassing as meeting someone important, handing him your business card, and realizing that it's actually someone else's card. ([Gil Roth](#))

9. I noticed that Hostels were left out of the lodging list for San Diego. [As I wrote in my blog a while back](#), "I'm opposed to paying a hundred and fifty bucks for a hotel room I'll only see for 30 seconds before my face hits the pillow, so renting a bed in a hostel works just fine when I'm traveling alone." San Diego has a few, including some with private rooms (about 25% of hotel price) which can be reserved if you do it far enough ahead. In the case of San Diego, I'll be staying with friends, but a couple weeks later in Chicago, I'll be staying in a hostel. ([Leif Jones](#))

10. Do not attempt the San Diego Zoo if you've already spent a full morning walking the convention floor, even while wearing comfortable shoes. The zoo is very spread out with steep and winding trails through much of it. Tour trams are one option for getting around, though there is usually always a line for them and they only take you on a set route to the more popular exhibits. This is not so good if you've had your heart set on seeing some of the more obscure denizens, such as the tiger quoll, flying fox or fossa, each located in a different corner of the zoo and off the tram route. To really experience the San Diego Zoo, you have to walk the trails and explore. Thus you will want to go early in the morning on a day when you've got no convention stuff planned until later. Also it's cooler in the mornings, which can be a real issue in San Diego in July. And don't forget, the big carnivores are more active in the early hours, giving you a better chance to see them when they are up and about. After you get back to the hotel, give your feet a breather of about an hour or so before heading onto the convention floor. ([Paul Dini](#))

11. I always find somewhere to have a nice breakfast. I'll sit down. Have coffee (unlimited refills) brought to me and order some waffles or pancakes or french toast. I'll then spend the next 90 minutes looking over the Schedule planning my day. And then, around 10am, I hit the show. (Gabriel Neeb)

12. You will lose track of your friends. Try as you might, you will lose them. Even if you all make it to the right place at the right time, a thousand other people will have chosen the same meeting place. No matter where you are, odds are it will be too noisy to hear your phone. If not, it's because you're in a place where phones are frowned upon. Use text messaging. It's quiet, unobtrusive, and won't earn you evil glares from [a guy dressed as Alvin the Chipmunk](#). (Logan Hawkes)

13. [Dick's Last Resort](#) is usually empty at lunchtime on the weekend and their pulled pork sandwich is bloody amazing. (Logan Hawkes)

14. There are *dozens* of signings from pros not mentioned on the guest list. There is usually a comprehensive list of signings in the book you get when you register. However, an easier method of determining who's doing signings is to get the little pamphlet available by the entryways to the con each day. Last year, I met Berkley Breathed, Brian Froud, and Tony DeZunigua because I checked the signing schedule early. This is also an excellent way to find lower-profile signings for high-profile guests -- in 2006, Ray Harryhausen had a huge line at the Dark Horse booth, but barely any at the table where he was selling DVDs. (Zack Smith)

15. Most of the higher-profile names who are promoting movies and TV are almost impossible to meet through traditional autograph sessions -- the lines get capped pretty quickly. If you want to meet someone just after a panel, the trick is to manuvre yourself to the absolute front of the room and as close to the stage as possible *right before* the panel ends, then *politely* approach them and ask for an autograph after they've gotten up. *Make sure you bring your own pen.* This doesn't work every time, but I have a Mike Judge autograph to prove that sometimes it does! (Zack Smith)

16. Rules for getting con sketches (check out some of my favorite pieces at

<http://www.comicsketchgallery.com/pages/Zack>):

a) A spiral-bound sketchbook is easier for artists to work with than a bound sketchbook -- it lets the book lie flat on the table, rather than their having to hold it open with one hand. Some sketchbooks have higher-quality paper than others, so it helps to shop around.

b) Most artists are enthusiastic about drawing something other than Batman or Spider-Man, but if you have a more esoteric idea, try printing out some reference photos. Let's say you want a Veronica Mars sketch -- do a Google search, then cut-paste some photos into a file, then print the photos out on good glossy photo paper. In some cases, if you do a little research -- look at interviews with artists, read their personal web sites -- you can find out more about what they like to draw, and get some great ideas. I've had a lot of fun getting such pieces as [an Arrested Development sketchbook](#) or a Sid and Marty Krofft-themed book with entries from guys like [Jeff Parker](#). Incidentally, remembering to get a piece from [Parker](#) or [Steve Lieber](#) should be a rule in itself.

c) Try to have at least \$100 saved for a really good commission piece or two -- but remember, most higher-profile artists will do a free doodle if you ask nicely.

d) Everyone wants an [Adam Hughes](#) sketch. He works very hard at drawing them. People dash across the con floor the minute a con opens to get on his list. There's a two-year waiting list last time I checked. Don't put all your hopes on getting an Adam Hughes piece, and please don't give him crap about this. He's a good guy.

e) The more elaborate your description of what you want in a sketch or commission, the less likely that an artist will draw it. Consider a sketch like jazz -- allow some room to improvise.

f) Theme books are a lot of fun, but don't make your theme too esoteric (like, say, *Arrested Development*) unless you have a very specific idea of what artists you want in there. If you get a really good theme going, it can inspire each new artist to top the previous one.

g) Have at least two sketchbooks handy at any given time -- one for larger pieces, and one for smaller head-shots. This way, you don't have to get your sketchbook back from one artist before you can get a sketch from another.

h) *Under no circumstances* leave your book with an artist to be mailed back to you unless you're willing to wait a long, long time.

i) If you get a sketch or commission outside of a sketchbook, try bringing an accordion folder or some sort of hard plastic sheath that you can store it in order to prevent damage. An accordion folder is also a good way to store reference photos, business cards, handouts, lists, etc...

j) Finally -- and this is pretty basic -- higher-profile artists are more in demand for sketches, and usually don't have time for more than a quickie doodle. However, check out the guest list and [Artists Alley](#) in particular. Some of the best people to get sketches from are up-and-comers -- people who have great skills and plenty of time on their hands. And there are plenty of older pros who aren't as hot as they once were, but still have tons of talent. Look at [Gene Colan](#), who recently retired, but was doing amazing commissions up to the age of 80! Know your pros -- and treat them with respect. That's the key to any good sketchbook. (Zack Smith)

17. Never wear your badge outside of the Convention Center or official functions (The Hyatt Con Suite). It makes you look like a tourist and more likely to be harassed by the homeless and a victim of crime. (Tom Stidman)

18. Know where you are going. Have directions memorized before you walk to that place for lunch or that super cool comic book store. Ask for directions from your concierge desk. It makes you less likely to act like a lost tourist. (Tom Stidman)

19. If your hotel has a local area shuttle and your further away than two miles from the CC, use it. One of the advantages of my hotel (besides being only five miles away) is that it has a local area shuttle. This is useful when you want to have dinner close to your hotel, but don't want to walk. (Tom Stidman)

20. Look outside of the usual places and look at hotel websites. I found the best San Diego bargain hotel (\$110 a night) five miles from the convention center. Be willing to be as far as 50 miles away from the convention center for hotel space at this point. (Tom Stidman)

21. Have a game plan. My game plan for the show floor is to take it in thirds. One third (furthest from doors and artist alley) on Wednesday. The freebie middle on Thursday and Friday is the third closest to the start of the convention center. Saturday is the day I will avoid the show floor. You may miss one out of five cool signings, but you won't be con zombied. Sunday is the day I must fly back home.

22. Another way to do the show is wait until Noon to see the show floor and go to morning panels. I did this at New

York Comic Con to no lines and I missed very little of the event. (Tom Stidman)

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