

The Port of San Diego

Bananas, wind turbines and cars, lots of cars

Story and photos by Jan Wagner - © AutoMatters & More

The Port of San Diego is absolutely vital to the sustained economic development of the local area, the state of California, the region and the nation. To provide insight into this and to commemorate Maritime Month, each May the Port of San Diego shares its vast wealth of knowledge via narrated, educational chartered boat and bus tours along San Diego Bay's waterfront—incredibly free of charge.

Experiencing this bustling, vibrant area by both sea and land provides two distinctly different and complementary opportunities to learn about the Port of San Diego. It encompasses shipbuilding, repair and maintenance; the US Navy; cruise terminals; cargo terminals, which handle thousands of automobiles, as well as tons of cargo as diverse as bananas and cement; the hotel industry; entertainment; recreation; and the commercial fishing industry.

Maritime Month has a long and colorful history, dating back to 1933 when "the joint Congressional Resolution established May 22 as National Marine Day to recognize the men and women of the US

Merchant Marine, and the many other maritime industry workers that have transported cargo and defended the United States since 1775."

Legislation created the Port of San Diego back in 1962 to manage San Diego Bay, promoting commerce, navigation, recreation and fisheries. Today, the maritime industry generates billions of dollars in annual economic impact and thousands of jobs with family-supporting salaries that are above the region's median income. The Port of San Diego's cargo terminals are one of only 17 commercial "strategic ports," designated to support cargo and vessel operations for the US military's Transportation Command and Military Sealift Command. Naval Base San Diego is the principal homeport of the Pacific Fleet, home to 213 individual commands and comprising over 1,600 land acres and 326 acres of water. The boat tour passes by and describes, in fascinating detail, many different types of US Navy ships and their functions.

Only 20 miles from the Mexican border, the Port of San Diego offers easy access to



three major interstate highways and on-dock rail access, providing straight hauls to major metropolitan markets.

The Port of San Diego is multipurpose, handling what are called breakbulk cargoes. These include anything that does not fit neatly into a container, such as very large parts like windmill components, with their long blades and towers; free-flowing cargo including cement, sand and gravel; lumber; newsprint; and heavy equipment.

Cold storage dockside warehousing and a multi-acre refrigerated container facility accommodate perishable cargoes. Container ships are loaded with Dole bananas, pineapples and other fresh fruit from Costa Rica and Ecuador. Over 185 million bananas per month are processed here.

After they are unloaded from the ships, containers are plugged into over 500 refrigerated container outlets to keep their cargo cold. Some of the containers are unloaded and broken down into pallets,

for transshipment to local grocery stores.

With its orderly rows of automobiles that stretch almost as far as the eye can see, the Port of San Diego is a major vehicle import/export facility. Some of the new vehicles have their hood raised or a flag tied to their antenna to alert workers to what the vehicles need, such as port-installed accessories and services. Mitsubishi has final assembly of utility trucks done here, which saves on tariffs.

Pasha has a thriving business between National City and four different islands in Hawaii, to handle any vehicles from Hawaii that need to be salvaged. Of the thousands of rental car fleet vehicles returned to the mainland annually, many seem to be Mustang convertibles.

Other exports that pass through the Port of San Diego include sodium sulfate, soda ash and potash, which are mined in the Death Valley area of California. These materials are loaded onto ships by a 2,000 tons per hour bulk loader/unloader.

Hotels along the waterfront are part of the Port of San Diego's real estate operations, along with 22 waterfront parks.

The Port of San Diego built the convention center in 1989 and then turned it over to the City of San Diego to run.

Lasting several hours, these boat and bus tours are interesting, informative and thought provoking, and provide numerous photo opportunities for visitors and residents alike. We wish they ran year-round, but start planning for next May. ■



QUICK PORT STATS

! The US Bureau of Transportation Statistics ranks the Port of San Diego as one of America's top 30 US container-ship ports, bringing in nearly 3,300,000 metric tons of cargo per year. Together with National City Marine Terminal, it is the primary US port of entry for Acura, Honda, Isuzu, Mitsubishi Fuso, Nissan, Volkswagen and Hino Motors. The Port holds a 20-year lease with Dole, bringing in much of the country's banana crop. ! The Port of San Diego is a self-supporting public-benefit corporation, governed by a seven-member Board of Port Commissioners, one each appointed by Chula Vista, Coronado, Imperial Beach and National City, and three by San Diego. ! Other major West Coast ports include Los Angeles, Long Beach, Oakland, Portland, Seattle and Tacoma. ■