What accessory dwelling units cost here, what moves the price, and the fees budgets forget. Published by San Diego ADU Match, a free matching service for homeowners — not a contractor.

The published ranges

These are the ranges San Diego ADU builders themselves publish in their guides (2026). They are educational ranges for planning — not a quote, an estimate, or an offer for your project. Only a licensed builder who has looked at your property can price your ADU.

ADU type	Published range
Junior ADU (JADU), inside the existing home	$50,000 – $100,000
Garage conversion	$100,000 – $210,000
Detached new build	$300,000 – $450,000+ (about $375–$600 per sq ft)

Why the ranges are wide: size, site conditions, the distance from existing water, sewer, and electric lines, finish level, and your city's fees all move the total. Two ADUs of the same size on different lots can honestly differ by six figures.

What drives the cost up

- Detached new construction: a full foundation, framing, and roof from scratch
- Long utility runs — the farther the unit sits from existing water, sewer, and electric, the more trenching and pipe you buy
- Size and a second story: more structure, more stairs, more engineering
- Sloped lots, tight access, retaining walls, and drainage work
- Premium kitchens and baths — the two rooms that dominate finish budgets
- Separate utility meters and electric panel or service-capacity upgrades
- Coastal-zone or very-high-fire-hazard requirements that apply to your lot
- A fully custom design, drawn from a blank page

What holds the cost down

- Converting space that already exists — a garage, or part of the house as a JADU
- A preapproved or standard plan instead of custom design (several San Diego County cities publish them)
- A smaller footprint with a smart layout
- Standard, durable finishes instead of premium ones
- Plumbing placed close to the home's existing lines
- Impact-fee relief for smaller ADUs (see the fee notes below)
- One story, a simple roofline, and easy equipment access

Permit and utility fees — the part budgets forget

- City permit and plan-check fees are charged by your city and vary by city and project; they are separate from the builder's construction price unless your contract says otherwise.
- Impact fees: under California law, ADUs under 750 sq ft are generally exempt from development impact fees — the City of Santee's official ADU guide states this exemption, and the City of Oceanside waives all of its city-controlled development impact fees. Larger ADUs can owe proportional impact fees.
- School fees can still apply even when impact fees do not — Santee's guide notes school fees may apply to ADUs over 500 sq ft.
- Utility connection and capacity charges (water, sewer, and SDG&E; electric) are set by the provider, are property-specific, and are a common surprise line item.
- Energy code: newly built detached ADUs can trigger California Energy Code requirements — the City of San Diego's rules summary notes a solar requirement for new detached ADUs, with panels allowed on the ADU or the main house.

How a project usually runs

1. Feasibility conversation. A licensed builder looks at your lot, your city's rules, and your budget band, and tells you plainly whether the project pencils.

2. Design and permits. Custom plans or a preapproved plan set, then city plan check and a building permit. Timelines vary by city — Oceanside, for example, publishes a 60-day permit-review clock.

3. Build and inspections. Construction in stages with city inspections along the way, ending in a final sign-off. You contract and pay the builder directly.

How San Diego ADU Match works

San Diego ADU Match is a matching service, not a contractor: we do not build, design, or permit ADUs, and we never quote or estimate a price for your property. You describe your project once, and we match you with one licensed local ADU builder who works in your city — only that builder. Your details are never sold to a list or shared with other builders. Homeowners pay nothing; builders pay us a flat

marketing fee, and that is disclosed to you before you submit anything.

Start at **adu.emberandironstudio.com** — the online version of this guide includes an educational cost estimator, garage conversion and detached ADU cost guides, ADU rules guides for San Diego, La Mesa, El Cajon, Chula Vista, Santee, and Oceanside (each summarized from that city's own official page), and a 2-minute “Can I build an ADU?” check.

Fine print: this guide is general educational information. Ranges are published builder-guide ranges, not a quote or estimate for any property. Rules summaries are drawn from the cities' official publications and change over time — confirm current standards with your city. San Diego ADU Match does not give feasibility or legal opinions.