



## TRAVEL

# SAN FRANCISCO -- The City By The Bay.



By Richard Levy

I'll never forget the first time I visited San Francisco. Just like thousands of other romantic fools, including of course, Tony Bennett, "I left my heart in San Francisco," the magical city by the Bay. The first day of any vacation is always exciting and full of expectations, so I suggest you start with the quintessential San Francisco experience: take a ride on a cable car; but not just any cable car: jump on The Powell-Hyde Cable Car which takes you on a breathtaking ride down San Francisco's rolling hills to Fisherman's Wharf, on the Bay. And when the conductor shouts, "Nob Hill," get ready for the heart-stopping vistas of the spectacular San Francisco Harbor and glimmering Golden Gate Bridge, below. Trust me, it will blow you away. Catch the cable car at the starting point, Powell & Hyde Streets. The line will be long, but worth the wait. When you reach Fisherman's Wharf, catch your breath at the famous Buena Vista Coffee Shop.

Fisherman's Wharf, though "touristy," is still great fun, with lots of souvenir shops, artsy boutiques, seafood restaurants and cafés, and my favorite shop, The Left Hand Store, dedicated 100% to "Lefty's." For lunch, stop at any seafood stand on the Wharf and order a San Francisco steamed Dungeness crab. They'll crack the huge crab for you and serve it with a cup of melted butter. It will be the most delicious crab you have ever eaten. Nearby, watch hundreds of Sea Lions snoozing, snoring and sun-bathing on Pier 36. Then take one of San Francisco's best walks, from Fisherman's



*Considered one of America's most recognized landmarks, the Golden Gate Bridge as seen from Baker Beach in the Presidio of San Francisco links San Francisco to Marin County. San Francisco Travel Association/Can Balcioglu*

Wharf along the waterfront to North Beach. Feeling lazy too lazy to walk? Then try a relaxing and scenic two-hour cruise of the harbor, right from the Wharf at Pier 43. The fresh briny air and delicious sea breezes will intoxicate you. Taxi back to your hotel and rest up before dinner.

I always enjoy Central Kitchen, one of the hottest restaurants in the city, offering inventive, gourmet cooking. Central Kitchen's 7 Course Tasting Menu is expensive, but amazing. (Make reservations before you leave NY.) Arrive early for a drink at their trendy "Trick Dog Bar" and don't stare at the celebs. If you can't get reservations at Central Kitchen, three other special restaurants are: La Follie, a stunning restaurant with California-French cooking; Boulevard, with its high end

Belle Epoque atmosphere; and Kokkari, the popular Greek restaurant serving home-style cooking.

One thing you unequivocally must do in San Francisco is walk over the Golden Gate Bridge; it takes about an hour. You'll be enthralled by the shimmering blue bay below, the misty fog that drifts over the harbor, bright Pacific sun peeping through the clouds, screeching seagulls, salt air and non-stop sea breezes: an exhilarating walk! Then taxi back to your hotel to recharge your batteries. The next day, head over to Union Square, the heart of San Francisco, to explore the downtown district, filled with fashionable boutiques, cafes, restaurants and impressive architecture. Be sure to see the pyramid-shaped Transamerica building and the world-class Museum of Modern Art.



*San Francisco Travel Association/Can Balcioglu*

Have lunch at Chez Claude restaurant and order whatever the special is that day.

If this is your first time in San Francisco and you don't know much about the city's very colorful history, here is my 60-second history lesson:

1848: The Gold Rush starts and the population explodes from 800 to 25,000, turning San Francisco, into a wild, woolly and lawless boomtown.

1850: The California Military District joins the United States of America, becoming our 31st state.

1869: The Transcontinental railroad reaches San Francisco, making it the fastest growing and most colorful U.S. city, sometimes called "The Paris of the West".

1906: A devastating 8.2 magnitude earthquake suddenly hits the city, and levels much of it. Residents quickly rebuild, and soon, San Francisco better than ever; bustling once again.

1937: The Golden Gate Bridge is built, changing the skyline of San Francisco forever. The Golden Gate is the largest, most breathtaking bridge of

it's kind ever built.

1965: The careers of Janis Joplin, The Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Big Brother and The Holding Company are all launched in San Francisco.

1967: "The Summer of Love", "Flower Power" explodes and Haight Ashbury becomes the center of the Hippie Movement. The Grateful Dead lived at 710 Ashbury St. that summer; Janis Joplin lived nearby at 635 Ashbury St.

2014: The amazing and colorful SF Giants win the "World Series".

For a fabulous dining experience, have dinner on "Forbes Island", a floating 700-ton houseboat restaurant. Eat downstairs under water and while enjoying your seafood dinner, peer out of the portholes to watch the fish outside watching you. Start with their fabulous chowder and anything else on the menu.

After your delicious seafood lunch, you can see more fish at the San Francisco Aquarium; one of the best in the U.S. and San Francisco is also home to one of the best Zoos in the country.

Take one day to treat yourself to the "Kabuki Springs Spa", with their hot and cold tubs and great massages, (you must wear bathing suits); it's co-ed on Wednesdays. Don't miss the Coit Tower, which local folks say looks like a fire hose nozzle. After you see the murals downstairs, climb to the top for spectacular vistas. Nearby you'll be amused by the "Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill," a park swarming with thousands of squawking and diving wild parrots. Be sure to wear a hat for protection! The "Castro District" is the largest gay area of any major city.

For a fabulous "grazing lunch" go to the Ferry Market where you can



*Landmark Scott Chernis*



*Alamo Square Evening*

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nosh your way through food stands and small restaurants offering fish tacos, local cheeses, fresh sushi, home made chocolates, local craft beers and more. For a piece of San Francisco history and great food, have lunch at the Civil War era Cliff House Bistro restaurant, in the Suto historic district. Perched on a cliff, you can enjoy Pacific views as you dine and watch the waves breaking on the rocks below. Order their clam chowder and Macadamia nut crusted Halibut.

Among the many wonderful restaurants throughout the city, my favorites are Swan Oyster Depot and Hog Island Oyster Company, offering super-fresh Pacific Coast oysters served every which way. I also enjoy dining at Le Colonial, replete with palm trees and old-fashioned Saigon ceiling fans, serving very inventive Vietnamese food. Order their Coconut encrusted crab cakes and Vietnamese spring rolls. Wednesdays after 10PM there's live Jazz and swing dancing, upstairs with a two drink minimum.

Escape the city for a few hours and take a Muir Woods Tour to see the monumental Redwoods Forest. Discriminating shopaholics will enjoy a stroll down "Union Street," San Francisco's best collection of unique boutiques.

Where should you stay? My first choice is the Mandarin Oriental Hotel; reserve a room with spectacular view of the Golden Gate Bridge. Near Fisherman's Wharf, stay at the Sunset Hotel; a lovely, mid-priced hotel with great harbor views. In the Embarcadero district, stay at the boutique Griffin Hotel, also featuring great harbor views.

Or, if money is no object consider the classic Fairmont Hotel in Nob Hill, where the rich and famous stay.

One side trip you'll never forget is taking a "Night Cruise Tour of "Alcatraz". As your boat approaches "The Rock," the fog drifting over the huge floodlights scanning the island will make you feel like you're in an old gangster movie. You'll see where famous guests like Al Capone and Machine Gun Kelly resided. Buy a couple of tin cups in the gift shop, (the ones prisoners would "bang against the bars" when agitated). No trip to San Francisco is complete without taking a day trip to Sonoma for wine tasting; your hotel can make reservations.

San Francisco has a huge Asian population. Chinatown is fabulous and you enter through a huge ornate gate adorned with two gigantic stone Lions. Eat at Hunan Home's, the best restaurant, and order the "platter of prawns with honeyed walnuts; very spicy but spectacular. On another night, taxi over to Japan Town, for the most authentic Japanese food this side of Tokyo. Also try the Dosa on Fillmore restaurant, featuring South Indian Cuisine: order their specialty of small pieces of fish and meats on mounds of seasoned rice that are simply steamed. (Yum.) To round out your San Franciscan Asian experience, visit The Asian Museum with one of the world's largest collection of Asian Art.

Rock music fans must see a concert at Fillmore West Theater where every major rock star has performed. One day visit Haight Ashbury, the neighborhood that launched the Hippie Generation and changed America forever. Take a



*San Francisco Skyline at Dusk. San Francisco Travel Association/Can Balcioglu*



*In a tradition stretching back decades fireworks are launched from just south of the Ferry Building on New Year's Eve. This photo captures the Transamerica Pyramid in foreground and illuminated towers of the Embarcadero Center. San Francisco Travel Association/Can Balcioglu*

break for drinks at Vesuvios, the famous bar where Kerouac and Ginsberg hung out and sometimes wrote; "dedicated", their website proudly proclaims, to "remaining an historical monument to jazz, poetry, art and to good life of the Beat Generation."



*Chinatown San Francisco Travel Association/Scott Chernis*

Art buffs, make time for the super-modern, "De Young Museum" with an amazing 360-degree view from the top. Spend time on in "Golden Gate Park" the largest park in the world, with great hiking trails and grand vistas. Don't miss The Hall of Science with its huge ocean coral reef and natural habitat for hundreds of penguins.

What is the best way to get to San Francisco? JetBlue usually has the best fares and in-flight service. Check out their Get-A-Way packages. On the day this story was researched, two people could stay at the luxurious InterContinental Mark Hopkins Hotel for six days, five nights, with a double room, including RT non-stop airfare JFK to SF taxes included for \$2,586.\* A less luxurious hotel knocks \$500 off the price. (Go to JetBlue.com/Get-A-Ways for dates you're considering.) Take the BART rail system from the airport to wherever you're going in San Francisco: it's fast and cheap. There's also a Shuttle Service that drops you off right at your hotel. What is the best time to go to San Francisco? Any time's the

right time. Even summer: it never gets too hot or humid and you can catch a "San Francisco Giants" game in their new AT&T ballpark located on the Bay. (Call "Stub Hub" for tickets as soon as flights are booked.) In winter, be sure to make reservations for a "SF 49ers" football game before you leave NY.

Great souvenirs: Model Cable Cars for the kids, tie-dye Flower Power tee shirts from a head-shop in Haight Ashbury and San Francisco's delicious Sourdough Bread, the "only sour thing" you will bring back from your memorable vacation. And in the event you "lose your heart in San Francisco", don't worry you'll be back to find it one day.

Fore Information: [www.SanFranciscoTravel.com](http://www.SanFranciscoTravel.com) or call them: (415) 391-2000. Many thanks to the San Francisco Travel Association, who supplied the photos for this story. \* Prices vary according to season and availability. The prices quoted reflect the rates available on the date the story was researched and are subject to change without notice.



*Opened in 1966 as part of the de Young museum in Golden Gate Park, the Asian Art Museum moved to the former Main Library building in 2003 San Francisco Travel Association/Scott Chernis*



*The first San Francisco cable car ride was in 1873; by 1906 cable cars were a very popular means of transportation, with 600 cars plying more 110 miles of routes. San Francisco Travel Association/Scott Chernis*



*Located in the Mission District, Creativity Explored is a non-profit visual arts center where artists with developmental disabilities create, exhibit and sell art. San Francisco Travel Association/Scott Chernis*