



Destination Guide: San Francisco



Top Picks From AAA Travel Editors - Travel information you can trust

AAA Destination Guide: Official AAA maps, travel information and top picks

AAA Destination Guide: San Francisco includes trip-planning information covering AAA recommended attractions and restaurants, exclusive member discounts, maps and more.

Cable cars, the Golden Gate Bridge, the Transamerica Pyramid—San Francisco is a travelogue of iconic images. Even if you've never been to California, you've seen these seven hills in classic films and TV shows. For a first-time visitor, every sight is new but familiar. Who wouldn't recognize the lantern-strung alleys of Chinatown, the stately Victorian mansions of Pacific Heights or the serpentine twists of Lombard Street? Who hasn't sung the Tony Bennett song? Our photographic memories of San Francisco go back to the Great Earthquake of 1906, and more recently, Loma Prieta. Our cultural mileposts include the leather bars of Castro Street, the Latin taquerias of the Mission District and the incense shops of Haight-Ashbury (though the flower children sport more piercings and tattoos these days).



The "gay capital of the world," San Francisco has a higher percentage of gay and lesbian residents than any other U.S. city. By contrast, it also has the fewest children. Soaring home prices have forced all but the richest families out of the market. Today's gold rush is real estate—and tourists. Half a million arrive for Gay Pride Month in June alone. Others come for the Cherry Blossom Festival, the San Francisco Opera and Chinese New Year. Everyone saves room in a suitcase for designer labels from Union Square and kitschy souvenirs from Fisherman's Wharf. It's all part of the San Francisco experience—uniquely American, and a world apart.

Essentials

Cross the Golden Gate Bridge, one of the engineering marvels of the world. Dress warmly and leave your car in the north-side lot for the 1.7-mile stroll across the bay.

Rest in Golden Gate Park. This thousand-acre haven is a favorite among locals for its tranquil gardens and wind-swept beaches. Observation decks at Cliff House provide panoramic views.

Take the ferry to Alcatraz Island, the infamous prison where the likes of Al Capone and George "Machine Gun" Kelly did federal time.

Ride the cable cars (but don't call them trolleys). The Powell-Hyde line goes over Nob Hill, past the Cable Car Museum and Powerhouse Viewing Gallery to Ghirardelli Square.

Climb Telegraph Hill and enjoy the panoramic view from Coit Memorial Tower. If you're lucky, you'll see a famous flock of wild parrots.

Walk down Lombard Street, the "crookedest street in the world." (Go up the steps if you're training for Everest.) The Powell-Hyde cable line stops at the top of Russian Hill.

Buy a Grateful Dead T-shirt in Haight-Ashbury, where Timothy Leary made "Turn on, tune in, drop out" the mantra of the Sixties.

Eat dim sum in Chinatown, one of the largest Asian communities in North America. Sip cappuccino in North Beach, San Francisco's Little Italy.

Stop at Fisherman's Wharf. Yes, it's touristy, but where else can you nibble Dungeness crab in front of a herd of hungry sea lions? Don't forget to take home a fresh loaf of sourdough bread.



Essentials Map



Get maps and turn-by-turn directions using [TripTik Travel Planner on AAA.com](#)

San Francisco in 3 Days

Three days is barely enough time to get to know any major destination. But AAA travel editors suggest these activities to make the most of your time in San Francisco.

Day 1: Morning

After nibbling on crusty, Parisian-style loaves and delicate sweets at Boulangerie Bay Bread, sample a morsel of San Francisco's inimitable flavor perusing the privileged Pacific Heights area. Among its "painted ladies" is Haas-Lilienthal House, an 1886 Queen Anne Victorian highlighted by intricate wooden gables and a circular corner tower. Just a few blocks northwest, amble through the fairytale setting surrounding the Palace of Fine Arts. Fronted by a rippling azure lagoon frequented by sinuous swans, the exquisite structure contains the hands-on science and art exhibits of the Exploratorium.

Essentials Details - Get additional information on [AAA.com](#):



- GEM Attraction offers a *Great Experience for Members*

1. Golden Gate Bridge

San Francisco, CA 94129



2. Golden Gate Park

Stanyan St & Fell St
San Francisco, CA 94117
Phone: (415) 263-0991



3. Cliff House

1090 Point Lobos Ave
San Francisco, CA 94121
Phone: (415) 386-3330

4. Alcatraz Island

San Francisco, CA 94123
Phone: (415) 981-7625



5. Nob Hill

1100 California St
San Francisco, CA 94108

6. Cable Car Museum and Powerhouse Viewing Gallery

1201 Mason St
San Francisco, CA 94108
Phone: (415) 474-1887

7. Ghirardelli Square

Beach St & Larkin St
San Francisco, CA 94109
Phone: (415) 775-5500

8. Telegraph Hill

1 Telegraph Hill
San Francisco, CA 94133
Phone: (415) 362-0808

9. Lombard Street

Lombard St & Hyde St
San Francisco, CA 94109

10. Chinatown

750 Kearny St
San Francisco, CA 94108
Phone: (415) 986-1822



11. North Beach

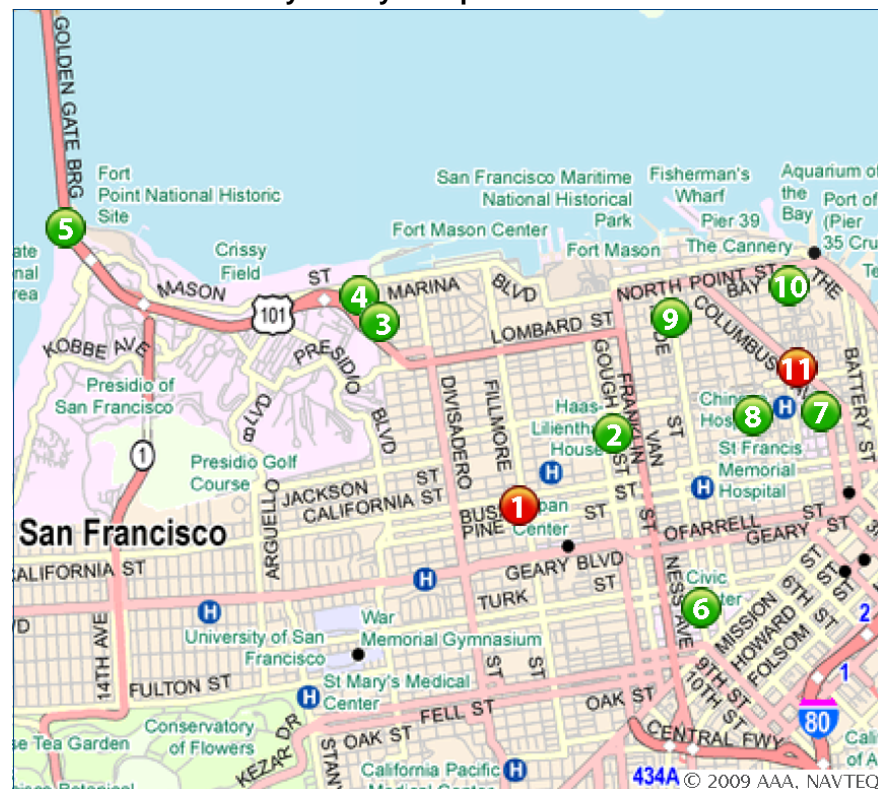
Montgomery St & Jackson St
San Francisco, CA 94133

12. Fisherman's Wharf

Embarcadero & Beach St
San Francisco, CA 94133
Phone: (415) 674-7503

Walk across the Golden Gate Bridge, the quintessential symbol of "The City by the Bay," for an inspiring peek at its 746-foot-tall towers. Completed in 1937, the Art Deco suspension bridge spans the Golden Gate Strait and typically offers unparalleled views of the San Francisco skyline. In summer a billowy mist often envelops the area, concealing sections of International Orange-painted steel while encouraging baritone bellows from foghorns.

San Francisco in 3 Days – Day 1 Map



Get maps and turn-by-turn directions using [TripTik Travel Planner on AAA.com](#)

Afternoon

Check out the expansive collection of the [Asian Art Museum of San Francisco](#) before sampling *char siu bau* (fluffy, steamed buns packed with Cantonese barbecue-flavored pork and onions) and *har gow* (tasty shrimp dumplings made with a sticky, translucent wrapper) at a dim sum luncheon.

If you have time, make reservations for an eye-opening, guided walking tour of [Chinatown](#), the largest Chinese community on the West Coast. In lively Portsmouth Square, the original plot of land out of which San Francisco rose, you'll discover elderly men engaging in fervent *xiangqi* (Chinese chess) matches. Not far away, throngs of grocery-laden

Day 1 Details - Get additional information on [AAA.com](#);

AAA Diamond Rating information available on [AAA.com/Diamonds](#)



- GEM Attraction offers a *Great Experience for Members*



- Exclusive AAA member discounts available

1. Boulangerie Bay Bread

2325 Pine St
San Francisco, CA 94115
Phone: (415) 440-0356

2. Haas-Lilienthal House

2007 Franklin St
San Francisco, CA 94109
Phone: (415) 441-3004



3. Palace of Fine Arts

3601 Lyon St
San Francisco, CA 94123
Phone: (415) 567-6642

4. Exploratorium

3601 Lyon St
San Francisco, CA 94123
Phone: (415) 561-0360



5. Golden Gate Bridge

San Francisco, CA 94129



6. Asian Art Museum of San Francisco

200 Larkin St
San Francisco, CA 94102
Phone: (415) 581-3500



7. Chinatown

750 Kearny St
San Francisco, CA 94108
Phone: (415) 986-1822



8. Cable Car Museum and Powerhouse Viewing Gallery

1201 Mason St
San Francisco, CA 94108
Phone: (415) 474-1887

9. Lombard Street

Lombard St & Hyde St
San Francisco, CA 94109

10. North Beach

Montgomery St & Jackson St
San Francisco, CA 94133

11. The Stinking Rose

325 Columbus Ave
San Francisco, CA 94133
Phone: (415) 781-7673

pedestrians pass storefront windows flaunting crispy Peking ducks and brightly packaged ancient Asian cures. While roaming tight passageways bedecked with colorful signs bearing Chinese calligraphy, enjoy a few exotic desserts. Eastern Bakery, opened in 1924 on Grant Avenue, specializes in mooncakes; the rich, dense pastries are usually filled with a sweet bean paste and one or two salty egg yolks. You'll catch a whiff of

vanilla-scented fortune cookies down Ross Alley—a factory has produced the folded wafers here since 1962—and glimpse murals depicting everyday Chinatown scenes.

Evening

Roll through San Francisco's many distinctive neighborhoods aboard the city's time-honored cable cars, past architecturally striking homes backed by sparkling waters and lush rolling hills. Ride the Powell-Mason line to the Cable Car Museum and Powerhouse Viewing Gallery, where you'll encounter the massive engines and wheels behind the world's last manually operated cable car system. Continue on the scenic Powell-Hyde line—its cars are marked with red signs—then disembark at Lombard Street for a stroll down a steep one-block section of this famously crooked, chrysanthemum-speckled thoroughfare.

Even if you have a stuffy nose while roaming North Beach (San Francisco's own Little Italy), it's hard to miss The Stinking Rose. Though it likely dissuades scores of visiting vampires, the eatery's luminescent, multicolored sign boldly broadcasts the slogan "A Garlic Restaurant" into the night. Inside, clusters of wine bottles and garlic bulbs hang from above, while every inch of wall space is covered by framed photographs and quaint murals. Accentuated by gilded mirrors and lamps, rows of tented red curtains along a narrow corridor create intimate dining spaces—the perfect setting for indulging in a tureen of pungent, garlic-steamed clams.

Order the house drink named after Beat Generation icon Jack Kerouac (rum, tequila, orange and cranberry juice served in a bucket glass with a lime) at Vesuvio on Columbus Avenue. Artists, chess players and poets have crammed this gritty North Beach saloon ever since the *On the Road* author made it a regular hangout. Between the bar and the adjacent landmark bookstore, City Lights, a repaved alley named after Kerouac showcases tablets engraved with his quotations, along with the compelling words of other renowned writers.

Day 2: Morning

Where else but Golden Gate Park can you gape at lounging bison, meditate in a Japanese Tea Garden filled with weathered Buddha sculptures and bronze lanterns, shoot arrows in an archery field, stare into the "eyes" of a 19th-century African mask and examine a plant species that existed before the dinosaurs first roared? The verdant park is home to numerous recreational facilities and such attractions as the Conservatory of Flowers, the de Young Museum and the National AIDS Memorial Grove. The western edge of this rectangular, 1,107-acre expanse—174 acres larger than New York's Central Park—abuts the Pacific coast.

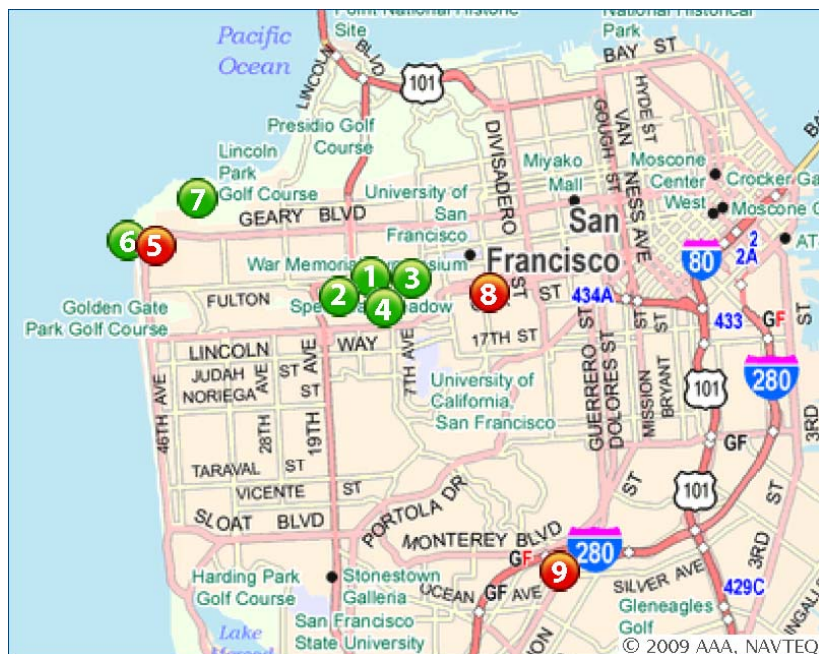
Order the Eggs San Francisco (two poached eggs with Dungeness crab meat and toasted sourdough bread) at Cliff House-The Bistro. The historic establishment overlooks the Pacific Ocean, where foaming waves smash against rocks peppered by cantankerous seals. Though fire destroyed the first two Cliff Houses, the third—a neoclassic edifice built in 1909—now houses a casual bistro. Providing a striking juxtaposition is a modern wing featuring a two-story, slate-and-glass dining room. From Cliff House, hike along the Coastal Trail's undulating headlands, where you'll find cypress and eucalyptus trees, deteriorating military batteries and mesmerizing shoreline scenery.

A less strenuous after-breakfast option is to contemplate your day beside Auguste Rodin's the "Thinker." A bronze cast of this celebrated, pensive figure graces the courtyard of the Legion of Honor. Explore the interior of the Beaux Arts building, a three-quarter-scale replica of the Paris original. The museum's collections include pastel Monets and abstract Picassos, English and French porcelain, Egyptian busts and vibrant prints by Japanese artist Katsushika Hokusai.

Afternoon

"If you're going to San Francisco, be sure to wear some flowers in your hair." Heed the Summer of Love's hippie anthem in Haight-Ashbury, once the psychedelic epicenter of 1960s counterculture. Bounded by Fulton Street in the north, 17th Street in the south, Divisadero and Castro streets

San Francisco in 3 Days – Day 2 Map



Get maps and turn-by-turn directions using [TripTik Travel Planner on AAA.com](#)

in the east and Arguello Boulevard in the west, the neighborhood is today a diverse commercial hub overflowing with vintage clothes shops, exclusive boutiques, trendy restaurants and bars, and independently owned record and book stores. Elegant, renovated Victorians also reign in this district, including a purple one on Ashbury Street once inhabited by scraggly haired Grateful Dead band members.

Taste cask-conditioned ales surrounded by rich murals at [Magnolia Pub & Brewery](#), housed in a refurbished building that, at one time or another, has functioned as a pharmacy, a bohemian gathering spot and a late-night dessert café run by a former burlesque performer. On weekends a brunch menu is dished up until 2:30 p.m., providing such scrumptious eats as braised beef brisket hash and bourbon vanilla French toast.

Evening

Slide into one of the comfy red vinyl booths at [Joe's Cable Car](#)

Day 2 Details - Get additional information on [AAA.com](#);

AAA Diamond Rating information available on [AAA.com/Diamonds](#)



- GEM Attraction offers a Great Experience for Members



- Exclusive AAA member discounts available

1. Golden Gate Park

Stanyan St & Fell St
San Francisco, CA 94117
Phone: (415) 263-0991



2. Japanese Tea Garden

8th Ave & Kennedy Dr
San Francisco, CA 94118
Phone: (415) 752-1171

3. Conservatory of Flowers

100 JFK Dr
San Francisco, CA 94117
Phone: (415) 666-7001

4. de Young Museum

50 Hagiwara Tea Garden Dr
San Francisco, CA 94118
Phone: (415) 750-3600



5. Cliff House-The Bistro

1090 Point Lobos Ave
San Francisco, CA 94121
Phone: (415) 386-3330

6. Cliff House

1090 Point Lobos Ave
San Francisco, CA 94121
Phone: (415) 386-3330

7. Legion of Honor

100 34th Ave
San Francisco, CA 94121
Phone: (415) 750-3600



8. Magnolia Pub & Brewery

1398 Haight St
San Francisco, CA 94117
Phone: (415) 864-7468

9. Joe's Cable Car Restaurant

4320 Mission St
San Francisco, CA 94112
Phone: (415) 334-6699

Restaurant for a root beer float and a fresh ground beef steak burger.

Plastered with neon beer signs and Polaroids of faithful patrons, the restaurant offers such tried-and-true standards as the patty melt and the BLT inside a replicated San Francisco cable car. Of course, it's much more fun to try out the menu's more unusual variations. Bite into a juicy 8-ounce burger smothered in homemade teriyaki sauce, or try one served on a toasted English muffin.

Pamper yourself in the Castro district, the heart of San Francisco's gay community. Concentrated around the intersection of Castro and Market streets, the locale is overflowing with a blend of exclusive, kitschy and



provocative retailers, along with fluttering rainbow gay pride flags and a diverse array of people watchers. Marvel at elaborate handcrafted chocolate sculptures while savoring an egg-shaped truffle at Joseph Schmidt Confections on 16th Street or splurge on stylish name-brand clothing at one of Rolo's three polished stores. Afterward, pay it forward at Under One Roof on Castro Street; since 1992, the proceeds from the shop's funky souvenirs have benefited AIDS and HIV organizations. While such historic sites as the opulent Castro Theatre (see our *Performing Arts article*) provide entertainment for casual sightseers, the village also is known for its pulsing nightlife—from The Midnight Sun's laid-back video bar (4067 18th St.) to the neighborhood's pioneer tavern, Twin Peaks (410 Castro St.).

Day 3 Details - Get additional information on AAA.com;

AAA Diamond Rating information available on AAA.com/Diamonds



- GEM Attraction offers a *Great Experience for Members*



- Exclusive AAA member discounts available

1. Ferry Building Marketplace

One Ferry Building
San Francisco, CA 94111
Phone: (415) 291-3276

2. Pier 39

Beach St & Embarcadero
San Francisco, CA 94119
Phone: (415) 705-5500



3. Fisherman's Wharf

Embarcadero & Beach St
San Francisco, CA 94133
Phone: (415) 674-7503

4. The Cannery

2801 Leavenworth St
San Francisco, CA 94133
Phone: (415) 771-3112

5. Ghirardelli Square

Beach St & Larkin St
San Francisco, CA 94109
Phone: (415) 775-5500

6. San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park

499 Jefferson St
San Francisco, CA 94123
Phone: (415) 447-5000

7. Alioto's

8 Fisherman's Wharf
San Francisco, CA 94133
Phone: (415) 673-0183

8. The Buena Vista Cafe

2765 Hyde St
San Francisco, CA 94109
Phone: (415) 474-5044

9. Gary Danko

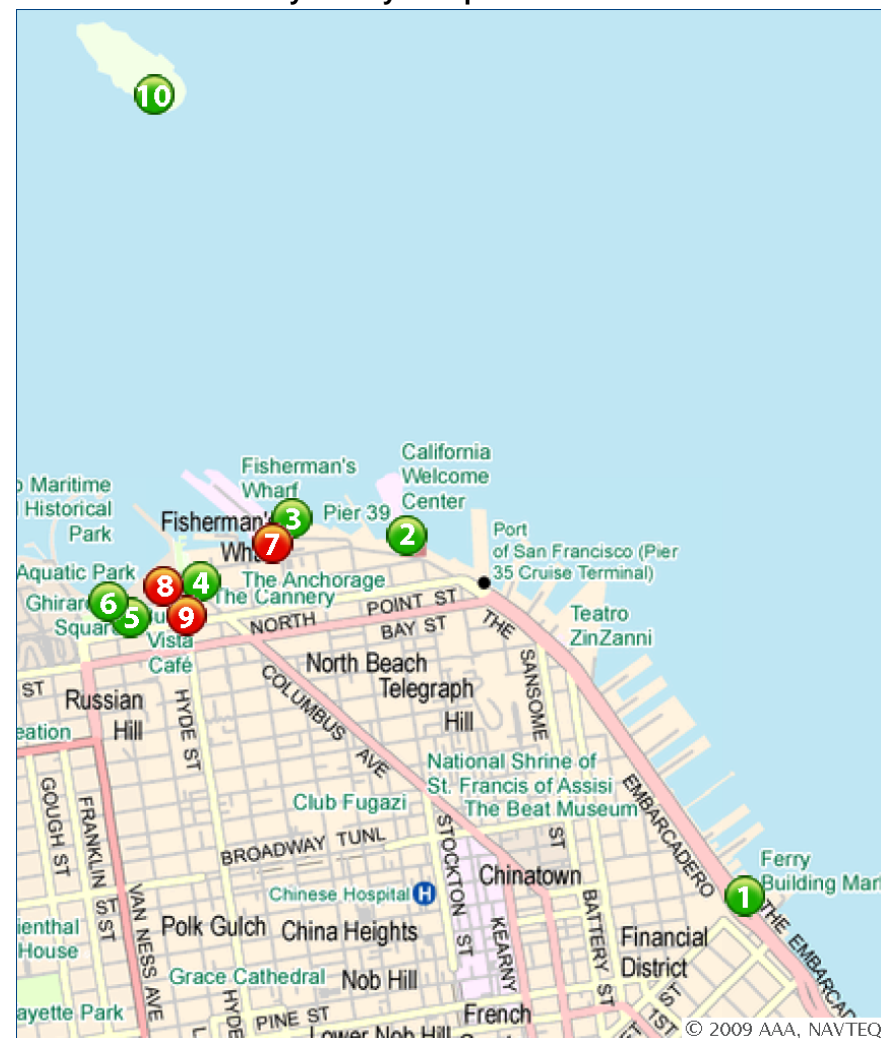
800 North Point St
San Francisco, CA 94109
Phone: (415) 749-2060

10. Alcatraz Island

San Francisco, CA 94123
Phone: (415) 981-7625



San Francisco in 3 Days – Day 3 Map



Get maps and turn-by-turn directions using [TripTik Travel Planner](http://TripTik) on AAA.com

Day 3: Morning

Bicycle, skate or walk past diligent pier workers and foraging seagulls along The Embarcadero. The street bends along the northeastern



perimeter of San Francisco, which sits on a 7 mile by 7 mile plot on the tip of a peninsula. You'll be treated to fantastic views of Bay Bridge, one of the country's busiest bridges, while such shopping meccas as Embarcadero Center and [Ferry Building Marketplace](#) present countless opportunities for self-indulgence. Hunt for a set of antique, hand-painted dishes or a chic pair of Franco Sarto loafers; sip traditional breakfast teas while testing out atypical desserts (at the Ferry Building, try Out the Door's black rice pudding or its luscious Vietnamese flan); or relish the heady aromas and tastes of a bustling farmers market, where top local chefs regularly demonstrate their innovative cooking techniques.

Afternoon

Follow The Embarcadero to [Pier 39](#) and [Fisherman's Wharf](#). Skirt the crowds encircling street-performing jugglers and magicians and head straight for the pier's most beloved entertainers—a herd of boisterous sea lions. While you could easily spend several hours eating and souvenir shopping at these two popular tourist attractions, instead investigate the vicinity's historic facets, including [The Cannery](#), [Ghirardelli Square](#) and [San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park](#).

Dine on Sicilian-style fried prawns or potato-crusted halibut fillets in a tasteful restaurant overlooking vast stretches of docked yachts. [Alioto's](#), established at the wharf in 1925 as a fresh fish stall, also offers an outdoor Dungeness crab stand, where busy cooks can be seen cracking and packing heaps of steaming reddish-orange crustaceans.

Pair a glass of piping-hot Irish coffee from [The Buena Vista Cafe](#)—where the whiskey-infused, whipped cream-capped brew first was introduced to U.S. drinkers—with a decadent slice of Grand Marnier cheesecake.

Evening

Experience a meticulous blend of sophistication and comfort at [Gary Danko](#), operated by a critically acclaimed American chef who uses classical techniques to prepare extraordinary seasonal dishes. Three-, four- and five-course meals are presented with dramatic flair, while a wine cellar stores more than 1,500 selections, including centuries-old vintages and dessert wines from around the world.

Venture to [Alcatraz Island](#) as night begins to fall. Thursday through Sunday evenings ferries depart just before dusk, transporting just a few hundred visitors to "The Rock" for a dazzling panorama of the Bay Area. Augmented by the majesty of the Golden Gate Bridge at sunset, special programs recount the isle's most triumphant (and most tragic) moments, affording an in-depth look at the former penitentiary and Civil War-era fortress.

Or, if the San Francisco 49ers are playing, head to Monster Park (*see our [Spectator Sports](#) article*) for gridiron excitement ignited by the legacies of such hall of famers as head coach Bill Walsh (1979-88), cornerbacks Jimmy Johnson (1961-76) and Ronnie Lott (1981-94), and quarterback Joe Montana (1979-94). Formed in 1946 and incorporated into the National Football League 4 years later, the team has collected five Vince Lombardi trophies since their first Super Bowl win in 1982.

Restaurants



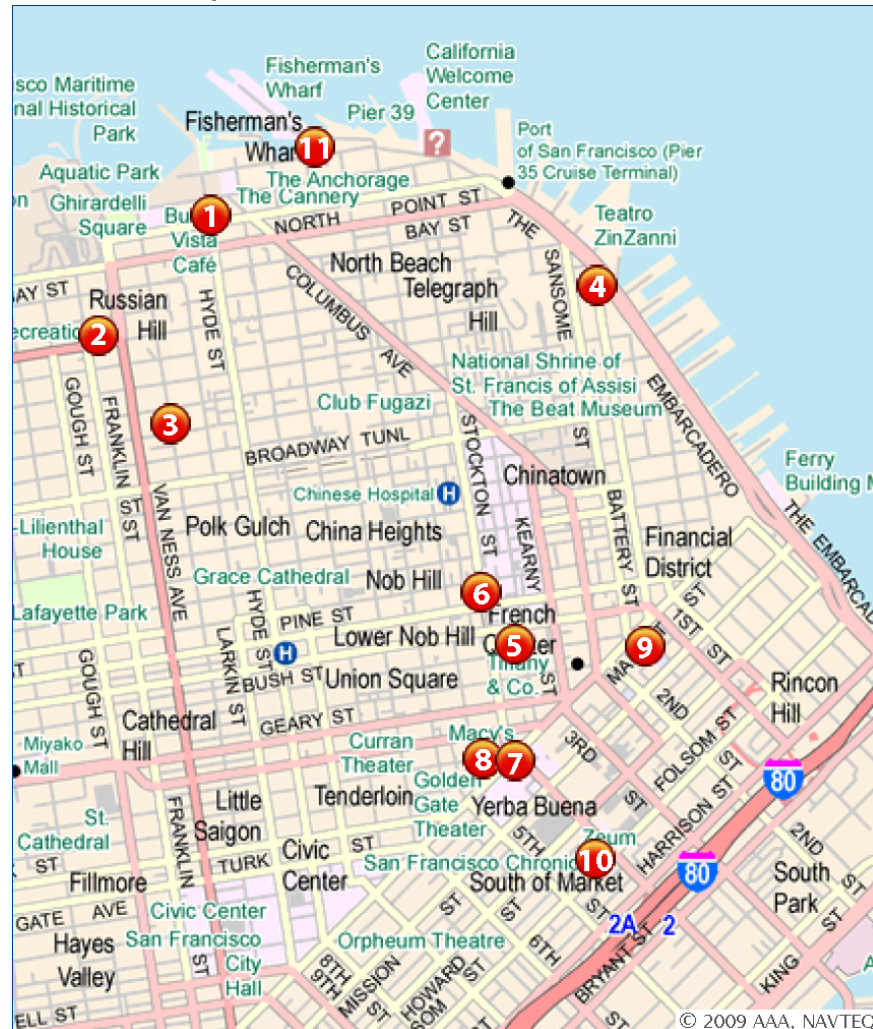
Award-winning chef [Gary Danko](#) runs this top-of-the-line restaurant in Pacific Heights with impeccable service in an unstuffy environment. Tasteful modern art and lightwood touches enhance the dining room. Danko is a classic California chef with modern French influences, and his cuisine reflects it. An impressive wine list features some 1,600 selections. For an appetizer, try lobster salad with avocado mousse or foie gras and duck confit terrine with pineapple mint chutney and vanilla brioche. Creative entrées include pancetta-wrapped frog legs and horseradish-crusted salmon medallions. You won't go wrong with any choice from the dessert tray, but your eyes may linger on the coconut pineapple Napoleon. Reservations are not easy to come by.

While in San Francisco and in need of a steak, there's no better place than [Boboquivaris](#) on Lombard Street. The secret of Bobo's steaks is dry-aging, and the meat is so tender, you can cut it with a fork. The

restaurant takes its name from the Venetian court jester of comedy and entertainment. A giant marionette of Boboquivari hangs above the door, fitting in well with the mystical décor.

A great place for a romantic evening is La Folie. Led by renowned chef Roland Passot, this kitchen prepares some of the finest French fare

Restaurants Map



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on the West Coast. The menu combines classic French cooking with California style—and a hint of whimsy, as reflected in the quail and foie gras lollipops. The dining room has a decidedly sophisticated elegance, as does the service.

The menu changes daily at McCormick & Kuleto's Seafood Restaurant to reflect fresh catches. Complementing the seafood specialties are a wide range of salads and appetizers, including fresh bay shrimp quesadillas. The three-tiered dining room in Ghiradelli Square offers panoramic views of San Francisco Bay, Angel Island and Alcatraz.

Restaurants Details - Get additional information on AAA.com;

AAA Diamond Rating information available on AAA.com/Diamonds

1. Gary Danko
800 North Point St
San Francisco, CA 94109
Phone: (415) 749-2060

2. Boboquivaris
1450 Lombard St
San Francisco, CA 94123
Phone: (415) 441-8880

3. La Folie
2316 Polk St
San Francisco, CA 94109
Phone: (415) 776-5577

4. Fog City Diner
1300 Battery St
San Francisco, CA 94111
Phone: (415) 982-2000

5. E & O Trading Company
314 Sutter St
San Francisco, CA 94108
Phone: (415) 693-0303

6. The Dining Room
600 Stockton St
San Francisco, CA 94108
Phone: (415) 773-6168

7. Fifth Floor
12 4th St
San Francisco, CA 94103
Phone: (415) 348-1555

8. John's Grill
63 Ellis St
San Francisco, CA 94102
Phone: (415) 986-0069

9. Yank Sing
49 Stevenson St
San Francisco, CA 94105
Phone: (415) 541-4949

10. Azie
826 Folsom St
San Francisco, CA 94107
Phone: (415) 538-0918

11. Boudin Bakery & Cafe
160 Jefferson St
San Francisco, CA 94133
Phone: (415) 928-1849

Fog City Diner is no ordinary diner. Chefs, not short order cooks, prepare this excellent food. Walking into the chrome-and-neon dining car on The Embarcadero, you're sure to feel a pang of nostalgia. There's something on the menu for every taste, from Mexican and Chinese dishes to All-American burgers and meat loaf. The mu shu pork burritos are three thin pancakes rolled in a cone and stuffed with stir-fried meat and vegetables. One word for the red curry mussel stew: *spicy*. Bring a friend and share one of the large desserts. The line can be long, so call ahead for reservations.

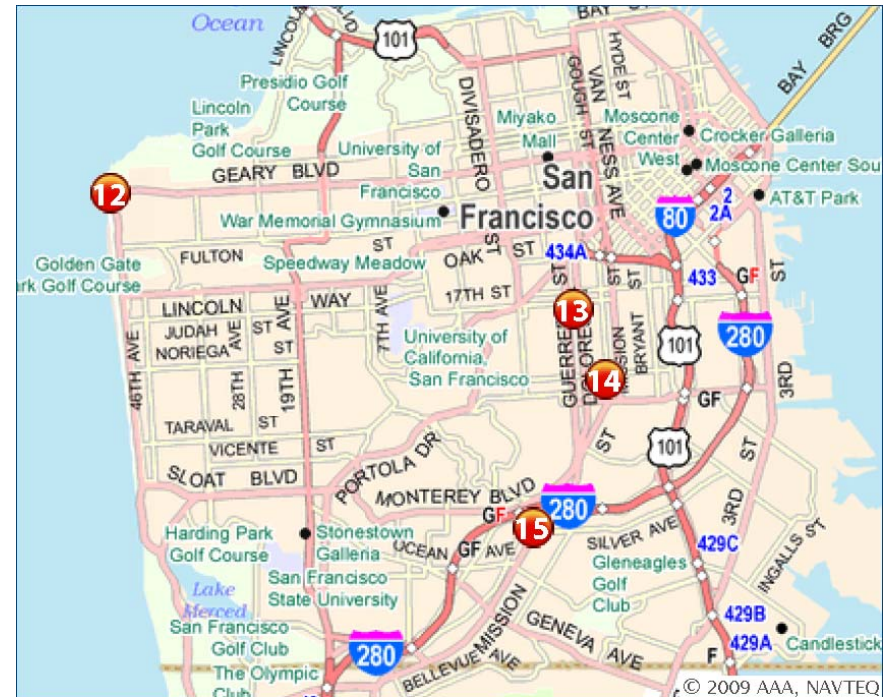
Always busy, E & O Trading Company features Southeast Asian-inspired cuisine. At this tri-level restaurant near Union Square, you'll find tastes of Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and East India—all on one menu. The décor enhances the food, complete with bamboo accents, and the centerpiece bar tends to be quite lively.

One would expect elegance from The Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco, and one would find it at The Dining Room. Though this is fine dining at its finest, there's a refreshing lack of stuffiness. The wait staff—excellently trained and engaging—is among the best in the city. Iron Chef winner Ron Siegel serves up wonderful haute French fare. The seared foie gras with huckleberry reduction is not to be missed.

Enter the elevator at the plush Hotel Palomar, press the button for five, and you'll be transported to a world of outstanding modern French cuisine. The first things you'll notice at the Fifth Floor are the zebra-print carpet and the beautiful artwork. The dining room is understatedly elegant. With so many fabulous menu selections—ranging from rabbit to skate wing to poularde—it might just be wise to go with the chef's tasting menu so you won't have to make the tough decisions. The staff enhances the experience with grace and skill.

A San Francisco landmark, John's Grill was established in 1908. Author Dashiell Hammett made this atmospheric restaurant a setting in "The Maltese Falcon." One can almost imagine Sam Spade sitting at the bar, surrounded by the dark oak walls (which now are covered with photos of

Restaurants Map



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Restaurants Details - Get additional information on [AAA.com](#);

AAA Diamond Rating information available on [AAA.com/Diamonds](#)

12. McCormick & Kuleto's Seafood Restaurant 
900 North Point St
San Francisco, CA 94109
Phone: (415) 929-1730

13. Delfina 
3621 18th St
San Francisco, CA 94110
Phone: (415) 552-4055

14. La Taqueria 
2889 Mission St
San Francisco, CA 94110
Phone: (415) 285-7117

15. Joe's Cable Car Restaurant 
4320 Mission St
San Francisco, CA 94112
Phone: (415) 334-6699

all the celebrities and detectives who've eaten here). Hearty fare includes steaks, seafood, pasta and salads. Live jazz plays every night, and it's said the drinks are pretty stiff.

If you're looking for dim sum, Yank Sing is the place. "Dim sum" is the generic name for a style of cuisine comprising hundreds of bite-sized delicacies. All a diner needs to do is point to the dishes on the cart. Be sure to try at least one shrimp dish, as the shrimp here is among the best you'll find. The atmosphere manages to remain serene, even with the many large parties and bustling carts. The staff is very efficient and knowledgeable. There are two locations, Rincon Center and Stevenson Street, both open only for lunch. No one in San Francisco does dim sum better.

Azie is a striking restaurant best described as "dramatic." The unique bi-level design creates the feeling of a bustling Asian street. Not to be outdone, the food also has a flair for the dramatic. The chefs have creatively combined the exotic flavors of Asia with traditional French cooking techniques. There's an extensive list of appetizers, and a sampling of these can make a meal—try the iron skillet spicy prawns and the crab spring rolls. If you're lucky, you may find yourself at the eight-seat chef's counter to get a closer look at the unfolding drama.

Clearly the best choice for mid-priced Italian fare in the city, Delfina is packed every night. The seasonal menu changes daily, based on the offerings of local producers. This small neighborhood trattoria reflects its home, the Mission District. Both the décor and the servers tend to be hip and arty. The buttermilk panna cotta may be the best you'll taste anywhere.

Another hot—and spicy—spot in the Mission District is La Taqueria. This well-established and very busy restaurant is always at the top of the heap when asking about the best Mexican food in town. You'll be hard pressed to find better tacos and burritos. There's no rice in the burritos, making them smaller but more flavorful. The quick-serve format is indeed very quick; the long lines here move fast.

Frequently recognized for the best burgers in town, Joe's Cable Car Restaurant was originally designed to look like—what else?—a San Francisco cable car. This institution has been in the same location since it

opened in 1965. The burgers are lean, slow-cooked, 100-percent USDA choice beef chuck, ground daily on the premises. These hearty burgers come in 4-, 6- and 8-ounce sizes. The 8-ounce version is known as the Paul Bunyan special, and it might take a lumberjack to handle it.

San Francisco is as renowned for its sourdough bread as it is for its fog, and the best bakery is still the original. Boudin Bakery & Cafe dates back to 1849. Visit this Fisherman's Wharf classic and watch the bakers make the bread—and then line up to make a purchase while it's still warm. This is San Francisco

Attractions

In a city with dozens of attractions, you may have trouble deciding where to spend your time. Here are the highlights for this destination, as chosen by AAA editors. GEMs are "Great Experiences for Members."



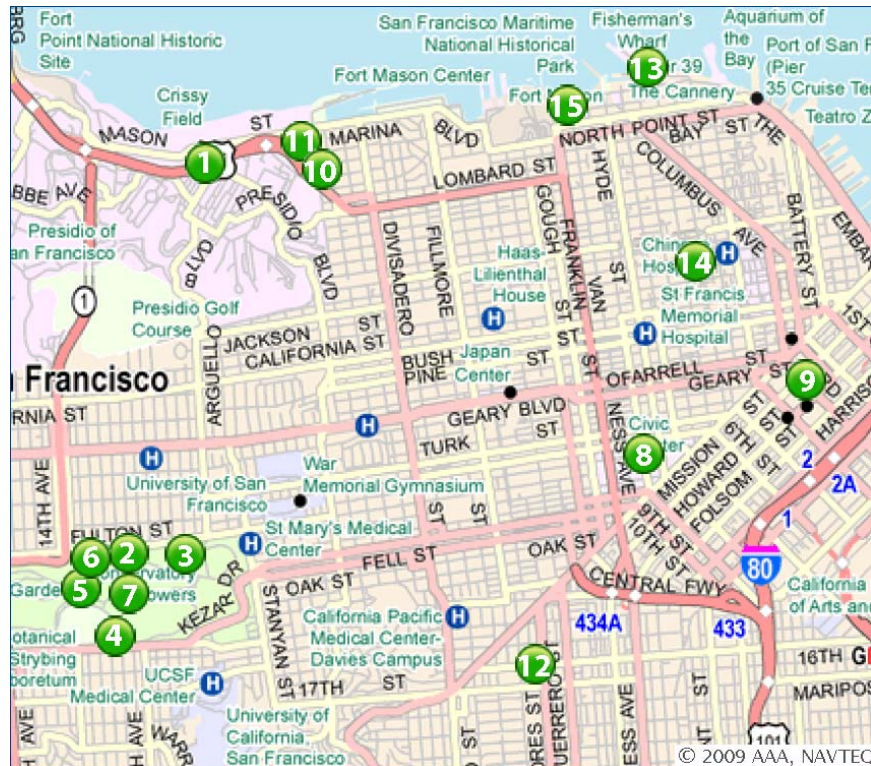
San Francisco sits on a peninsula, bounded on the west by the Pacific Ocean, on the east by San Francisco Bay. At the northern tip is the AAA GEM attraction Golden Gate Bridge, the landmark by which all travelers orient themselves to the city. Golden Gate National

Recreation Area, one of the largest urban national parks in the world, encompasses 59 miles of bay and ocean shoreline on both ends of the span. Noted for its dazzling scenery, the park preserves some 1,250 historical and cultural sites, including Alcatraz Island and Muir Woods.

On any sunny afternoon, Golden Gate Park is one of the most popular places in San Francisco. This AAA GEM attraction has it all: botanical gardens, museums, sports fields, playgrounds—even a buffalo enclosure and a fishing pond. Three miles south of its namesake bridge, the city park covers more than a thousand acres between Sanyan Street and Ocean Beach. A Dutch windmill stands at the western entrance; the white dome of the Conservatory of Flowers dominates the eastern end. This Victorian greenhouse shelters a humid jungle of giant ferns and delicate orchids. The entire park is an oasis of exotic greenery.

Fantastic, otherworldly plants from Chile, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa make the 55-acre San Francisco Botanical Garden at Strybing Arboretum an unforgettable walk. Free guided tours are given every day. The Japanese Tea Garden, developed for the 1894 World's Fair, is especially lovely during cherry blossom season in the spring.

Attractions Map



Get maps and turn-by-turn directions using [TripTik Travel Planner on AAA.com](#)

Attractions Details - Get additional information on [AAA.com](#):



- GEM Attraction offers a *Great Experience for Members*



- Exclusive AAA member discounts available

1. Golden Gate Nat'l Recreation Area

2. Golden Gate Park

Stanyan St & Fell St
San Francisco, CA 94117
Phone: (415) 263-0991



3. Conservatory of Flowers

100 JFK Dr
San Francisco, CA 94117
Phone: (415) 666-7001

4. San Francisco Botanical Garden at Strybing Arboretum

9th Ave & Lincoln Way
San Francisco, CA 94122
Phone: (415) 661-1316

5. Japanese Tea Garden

8th Ave & Kennedy Dr
San Francisco, CA 94118
Phone: (415) 752-1171

6. de Young Museum

50 Hagiwara Tea Garden Dr
San Francisco, CA 94118
Phone: (415) 750-3600



7. California Academy of Sciences

55 Music Concourse Dr
San Francisco, CA 94118
Phone: (415) 379-8000



8. Asian Art Museum of San Francisco

200 Larkin St
San Francisco, CA 94102
Phone: (415) 581-3500



9. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art

151 Third St
San Francisco, CA 94103
Phone: (415) 357-4154

10. Palace of Fine Arts

3601 Lyon St
San Francisco, CA 94123
Phone: (415) 567-6642

11. Exploratorium

3601 Lyon St
San Francisco, CA 94123
Phone: (415) 561-0360



12. Mission San Francisco de Asis

3321 16th St
San Francisco, CA 94114
Phone: (415) 621-8203



13. Fisherman's Wharf

Embarcadero & Beach St
San Francisco, CA 94133
Phone: (415) 674-7503

14. Cable Car Museum and Powerhouse Viewing Gallery

1201 Mason St
San Francisco, CA 94108
Phone: (415) 474-1887

15. San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park

499 Jefferson St
San Francisco, CA 94123
Phone: (415) 447-5000

Across the park, you can ride the carousel, have a picnic, jam with street musicians, hire a paddleboat or rent a bike or skates to cruise 7 miles of paved trails.

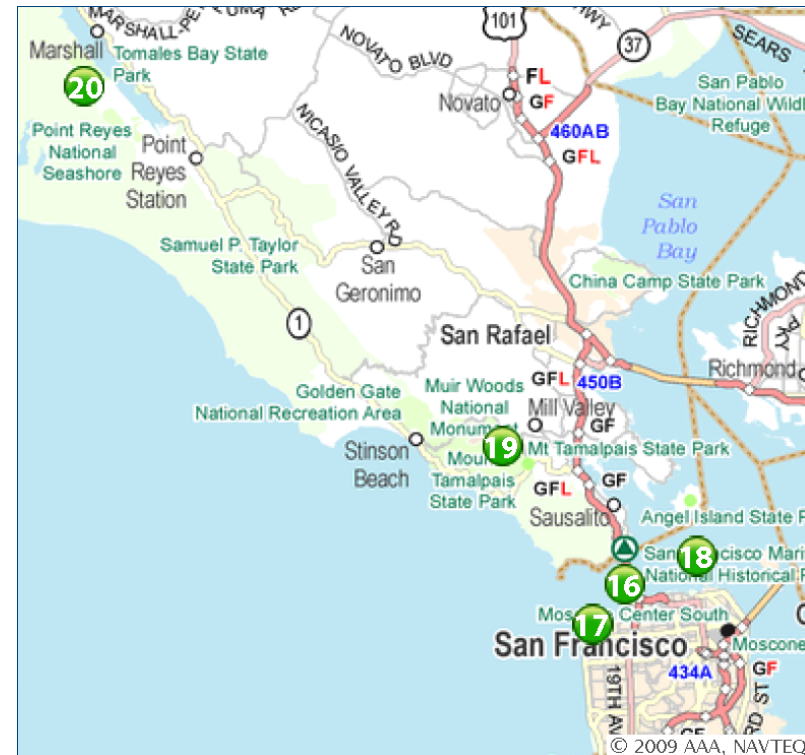
On rainy days, Golden Gate Park offers a cluster of museums around Stow Lake (one of a dozen man-made ponds designed by Scottish landscaper John McLaren). The burnished copper facade of the de Young Museum draws visitors to one of the country's finest collections of American paintings. Founded in 1895, the museum underwent a massive expansion in 2005. Another of the park's highlights, The California Academy of Sciences, was damaged in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake and later torn down to make way for a \$500 million structure designed by architect Renzo Piano. The new facility, which rose from the ashes of the old, is in the forefront of the concept of sustainable architecture with its recycled steel construction and green roof. This AAA GEM attraction retains such old favorites as the Steinhart Aquarium and the Morrison Planetarium while adding a host of new exhibits.

North of the park on a hill overlooking the Pacific and the Golden Gate, the Legion of Honor is one of the city's greatest treasures. The Beaux Arts building, modeled after the 18th-century Palais de la Légion d'Honneur, was built to honor Californians who died in France during World War I. The ocean view from here is particularly breathtaking. This AAA GEM is home to Rodin's famous statue, the "Thinker," along with some 84,000 other sculptures, paintings, prints, decorative arts and antiquities.

A spectacular collection of Asian art spanning 6,000 years is housed at the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, another AAA GEM attraction. Here are exquisite Persian ceramics, Cambodian deities, Indian temple reliefs, Thai daggers, Japanese textiles, Tibetan scrolls and one of the oldest Chinese Buddhas in the world.

The maplewood galleries of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art read like a "Who's who" of 20th-century art: Picasso, Matisse, O'Keeffe, Pollock, Magritte, de Kooning, Lichtenstein, Rothko, Warhol. The brick-and-steel building with its striated skylight is an artistic achievement in

Attractions Map



Get maps and turn-by-turn directions using [TripTik Travel Planner on AAA.com](#)

Attractions Details - Get additional information on [AAA.com](#):



- GEM Attraction offers a *Great Experience for Members*

16. Golden Gate Bridge

San Francisco, CA 94129



18. Alcatraz Island

San Francisco, CA 94123

Phone: (415) 981-7625



17. Legion of Honor

100 34th Ave

San Francisco, CA 94121

Phone: (415) 750-3600



19. Muir Woods National Monument



20. Point Reyes National Seashore

itself. In contrast to this modernistic landmark, the [Palace of Fine Arts](#) resembles a Roman ruin. The classical rotunda, built as the entrance to the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition, was meant to last only a year. San Franciscans loved it so much, they made it permanent. Lagoons surround the palatial hall, which is home to [Exploratorium](#), the museum of “science, art and human perception.” At this AAA GEM attraction, visitors of all ages will have fun touching, trying and testing their skills at 650 hands-on exhibits.

Another of the city’s most revered antiquities is the [Mission San Francisco de Asís](#), one of the oldest buildings on the peninsula. Still visible are the rawhide lashings that Spanish missionaries used in the 18th century to secure its redwood timbers. This AAA GEM attraction, also known as Mission Dolores, withstood the 1906 earthquake while latter additions fell. The adjacent church, an elaborate mixture of Moorish and Corinthian styles, is a striking counterpoint to the simple mission.

Sooner or later, all tourists make the pilgrimage to [Fisherman’s Wharf](#). The northern waterfront bustles with shoppers, sightseers, crab trappers and T-shirt vendors. To add to the noise and fun, Pier 39 is the winter home for hundreds of rowdy sea lions. Here too are museums, the historic Cannery, an aquarium and a fleet of tall ships at the [San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park](#). Be sure to sample the Ghirardelli chocolate, sourdough bread and catches of the day.

Ferries from the Alcatraz Cruises fleet depart from Pier 33 for [Alcatraz Island](#), the old federal prison that sits on a forbidding rock in the middle of the bay. Thirty-six prisoners tried to escape between 1934 and 1963, but none made it to freedom, and many died in the attempt. A group of American Indians claimed the island in 1969 and occupied it for 2 years. National park rangers lead guided tours, or you can explore “The Rock” on your own. Tours sell out quickly in the summer; call ahead for reservations.

If you’ve taken advantage of San Francisco’s public transit, the [Cable Car Museum and Powerhouse Viewing Gallery](#) is worth a stop. Displays at the Washington-Mason Powerhouse include the first cable car, built in

1873. In an underground gallery, you can see the channels and pulleys that guide the cars beneath the street. The San Francisco system is one of only two National Historic Landmarks that move; the other is New Orleans’ St. Charles streetcar line.

Any time left to explore beyond the city limits? Take a scenic drive north toward Mill Valley on SR 1. Here on the slopes of Mount Tamalpais is [Muir Woods National Monument](#) and one of the region’s last old-growth stands of coastal redwoods. These ancient sequoias can reach 250 feet high and 15 feet across, and some have stood for a millennium. A paved, 1-mile walking trail leads from the visitor center to the aptly-named Cathedral Grove. Traffic heading to this AAA GEM attraction can be heavy on weekends; plan to arrive early. If you keep going north on SR 1, you’ll reach the crashing breakers, grassy dunes and mossy forests of spectacular [Point Reyes National Seashore](#).

Events

In addition to its many cultural and historic landmarks, this destination hosts a number of outstanding festivals and events that may coincide with your visit. GEMs are “Great Experiences for Members.”

In January, crowds gather at Fisherman’s Wharf to celebrate the [Sea Lions’ Arrival at Pier 39](#). The boisterous pinnipeds—mostly young males—begin to appear in August after breeding season. Up to a thousand will winter here, feeding on herring and fighting for prime basking spots (and mugging for the camera). The first sea lions arrived at the marina after the 1989 earthquake; most go back to the Channel Islands for the summer.

In spring, Holland comes to Fisherman’s Wharf for the 9-day [Tulipmania Festival](#), with nearly 40,000 jewel-bright blooms adorning the docks. The [Pacific Orchid Exposition](#) at Fort Mason Center features thousands of exotic plants from around the world.

One of the city’s biggest events—and one of the largest celebrations of its kind outside Asia—is the [Southwest Airlines Chinese New Year](#)

Festival and Parade in February. The annual procession with its stilt walkers, acrobats, lion dancers and ornate floats draws up to 500,000 spectators. The finale of this AAA GEM Event is a 200-foot-long golden dragon and a massive explosion of firecrackers.

March is time for the “Wearin’ of the Green.” The city’s first St. Patrick’s Day Parade was held in 1852. The United Irish Societies uphold the tradition today with traditional music, crafts and food. Pink is April’s shade for the Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival, a showcase of Japanese-American culture. Highlights include a food bazaar, crafts festival, classical music performances and a grand parade through Japantown.

The city hosts its version of Mardi Gras in May with Carnaval San Francisco. Two days of Latin-American and Caribbean dancing and revelry end in a high-energy parade through the streets of the Mission District. The African-American community hosts the Juneteenth Festival, considered the biggest and largest celebration outside Texas, where the holiday originated. A parade and cultural events commemorate June 18, 1865, the day Union forces arrived in the Lone Star State to announce the end of the Civil War and slavery.

From these traditional processions, San Franciscans turn to the Annual Bay to Breakers Race, one of the wackiest sporting events in the country. Up to 100,000 costumed runners turn up in May for this 7.5-mile “race.” It’s basically a block party—with kegs of beer in shopping carts.

June is Gay Pride Month, one of the city’s biggest happenings. Half a million visitors come for the parties, dances, film and arts festivals and the 2-day culmination, the San Francisco Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender SGLGBT Pride Celebration and Parade. A San Francisco artist unveiled the rainbow flag—now a symbol of gay pride around the world—at the SFLGBT parade in 1979.

All the world’s a stage for the San Francisco Shakespeare Festival, which features free weekend performances throughout the month of September. If experimental theater is more your style, the San Francisco

Fringe Festival brings local, national and international companies together for more than 250 free-wheeling shows.

On Columbus Day, thousands of people line the streets for the Italian Heritage Parade and Celebration. The day begins at Fisherman’s Wharf with the customary blessing of the fleet, and the parade of handcrafted floats winds its way to the “fisherman’s church,” the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in North Beach. For a true celebration of Italian heritage, dine al fresco at one of the many restaurants along the parade route.

Lest you think San Francisco is all about arts and culture, pack your boots and spurs for the Grand National Rodeo, Horse and Stock Show in November. Along with the traditional bronc-busting, barrel-racing and bull-riding events, you can also attend a western art show and wine tasting.

Things to Do

Shopping

The phrase “shop ‘til you drop” could easily have been coined for San Francisco. You can find malls, farmer’s markets, ethnic areas, retail complexes, souvenir shops, boutiques, secondhand stores, designer showrooms—an amazing assortment of cosmopolitan, funky, kitschy, trendy choices guaranteed to keep any shopaholic (or tourist) blissfully happy. Some shopping areas, in fact, are so identified with San Francisco they are attractions in their own right.

Antiques

Just a block from a San Francisco icon, the Transamerica Pyramid, is historic Jackson Square, where many of the city’s oldest commercial buildings can be found. Most of the brick, three-story structures centered on Jackson Street in the shadow of the Financial District date from the gold rush era and the 1870s when this rough-and-tumble area was known as San Francisco’s Barbary Coast.

Long since gentrified, the historic district is now the heart of the city's antiques area. Restored buildings on the narrow streets have been repurposed as shops specializing in American and European furniture and accessories; fine silver; paintings, prints, posters and maps; and hand-woven rugs.

Malls

Within easy walking distance of Jackson Square is the Embarcadero Center, near the waterfront in the Financial District between Sacramento, Clay, Battery and Drumm streets, an area also part of the rowdy Barbary Coast in the 19th century. The center, a mixed-use office and retail development, is a five-block area with luxury hotels and five office towers, four of which are linked by three levels of shopping.

The center's collection of public art, including Louise Nevelson's soaring steel sculpture "Sky Tree" at Three Embarcadero Center, is interspersed among more than 70 upscale shops (think the likes of Ann Taylor, Coach, JoS. A. Bank and Williams-Sonoma), an open-air plaza and a wide assortment of restaurants and services—a treat for both office workers and tourists.

Die-hard shoppers could effortlessly spend an entire day and max out their credit cards at Westfield San Francisco Centre, which covers an entire block of prime real estate on Market Street between 4th and 5th streets. The center's classic Beaux Arts exterior, which dates to 1896, is in contrast to its contemporary glass-fronted entrance on Mission Street.

Often aptly described as a nine-story vertical mall, the center's dizzying spiral escalators and glass-domed, colonnaded rotunda distinguish it from your average, everyday mall. Bloomingdale's (the largest outside the New York City flagship store) and Nordstrom (the second largest in the chain) anchor the center and set its upscale tone. More than 180 specialty shops, services, eateries, a multiplex theater and a day spa add to the center's draw.

It's probably safe to say that San Francisco is the only city with a mall designed to resemble the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan, Italy—

well, at least the dome of that galleria. Both Crocker Galleria and its Italian counterpart have an arching glass dome as their main architectural feature; the California center is notable for a huge clock set in the center of its arch.

Crocker, between Kearny and Montgomery with entrances on both Sutter and Post streets, has two levels of boutiques specializing in apparel, jewelry and home fashions as well as chic specialty shops and services. A third level features about a dozen restaurants.

Markets

If a visit to the Ferry Building Marketplace is on your agenda, try and schedule it for Saturday, preferably in the morning. That's when the Ferry Plaza Farmer's Market is at its peak. An almost unimaginable assortment of fresh fruits and vegetables, artisanal cheeses, olive oils, flowers, herbs, breads and preserves, much of it organic, is displayed under colorful tents. You can graze your way through the stalls, which crowd the front, back and sides of the marketplace, sampling Northern California's agricultural bounty. Everything comes from farms in nearby counties and is so fresh it was picked within the past 24 hours.

You'll mingle with locals carrying reusable cloth bags, and chefs from local restaurants choosing what will appear on tonight's menu. Prepared foods are also available, and tables on the grounds provide settings for breakfast or lunch. The market, on The Embarcadero at the end of, appropriately enough, Market Street, is open Saturday 8-2 and, in a smaller version, Tuesday 10-2.

Specialty Districts

Union Square is a plaza bordered by Powell, Geary, Post and Stockton streets, named for the pro-Union rallies held there during the Civil War. That history is completely lost on contemporary shoppers, though, who venerate the area as the hub of San Francisco's shopping scene. The name no longer refers just to the square itself, but incorporates the surrounding blocks chock full of department stores as well as more mainstream shops, galleries, hotels and theaters.

Serious shoppers can spend serious time and money at such revered names as Barneys New York, Dior, Giorgio Armani, Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Macy's, Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue and Tiffany & Co. A cluster of designer boutiques can be found on fashionable Maiden Lane, including Chanel, Hermès, Marc Jacobs and Yves St. Laurent. Gump's, a San Francisco institution, is known for its fine selection of giftware, home furnishings and jewelry, much of which has an Oriental flair.

A perennial favorite with visitors (but not necessarily locals) is the area at the northern end of The Embarcadero, where souvenir shops vie for attention with waterfront seafood restaurants, ferries to Alcatraz and Sausalito, the occasional gallery and barking sea lions. You can find your "I escaped from Alcatraz" T-shirt or your choice of tchotchke stamped with the city's name at The Anchorage or Fisherman's Wharf, Pier 39, The Cannery, or Ghirardelli Square.

Although visitors tend to think of Chinatown as a place to go for dim sum and inexpensive trinkets, this area bordered by Broadway, Stockton, Bush and Kearny streets is actually a vibrant city within a city, with streets crowded with residents hurrying between shops and markets, conversing animatedly in various Chinese dialects. In addition to the requisite souvenir shops, though, you can also find items made of jade and ivory, jewelry, silks, herbs, electronics, teas, kitchenware and bookmarks with your first name elegantly scribed in Chinese calligraphy.

Much lower key is Japantown (also known as Nihonmachi), where shopping is concentrated at the Japan Center complex bounded by Post, Geary, Laguna and Fillmore streets, and the Kintetsu and Kinokuniya buildings in particular. Check out a few of the sushi restaurants while you shop for colorful kimonos, wind chimes, bonsai trees, electronics, teapots and Oriental chests.

From Japantown it's a short walk up Fillmore Street heading north toward Jackson. The area has a distinct neighborhood feel and is perfect for a leisurely stroll. Window-shop to your heart's content in charming clothing boutiques and shops featuring the latest in trendy interior décor. Pamper yourself at an emporium specializing in cosmetics and skin care products,

then refuel with a cup of fresh-ground coffee or a bite to eat at a sidewalk café.

Continue on toward the bay, which you can sometimes catch a glimpse of as you crest one of San Francisco's famous hills. When you get to Union Street, you're in Cow Hollow, a reference to the days when the area was known for dairy farming. Its agricultural days long past, Union Street heading east to Van Ness is a shopper's paradise, a favorite of residents who live in nearby restored Victorians and come to browse the hip, upscale boutiques, jewelry, gift and antique shops and relax in the bistros and clubs.

If you remember the counterculture days of the '60s when flower power was in full bloom, then a trip to Haight Street in Haight-Ashbury is a must. Although the area is not nearly as gritty as it used to be, you can still find vintage clothing stores, incense, tie-dyed T-shirts, funky jewelry and used books and records.

Nightlife

Diversity is what San Francisco is all about, and the city's nightlife scene is no different. The raucous forty-niners knew how to live it up, and that good time tradition has continued. If you want cool blues or jazz, frenetic rock, classy cocktail lounges, bars with a little history, or views with your booze (or some combination thereof), this city won't disappoint.

Bars

The perfect spot on a cool San Francisco night might just be the Buena Vista Café, near Ghirardelli Square and the cable car turnaround at 2765 Hyde St., where you can warm up with an Irish coffee. Legend has it the café is the birthplace of that whiskey-infused cup of joe, but in actuality it's the first place the drink was served in the U.S. (in 1952, to be exact). Regardless, grab a seat and warm the cockles of your heart after a busy day of sightseeing. Phone (415) 474-5044.

In addition to being known as San Francisco's "Little Italy," North Beach is also where you'll find some of the city's most popular late-night

hangouts. This is where the beat generation poets caroused in the 1950s, and two bars remain as relics from that era.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti, owner of the famed City Lights Bookstore, Allen Ginsberg and Jack Kerouac were regulars at Vesuvio, 255 Columbus Ave., across from City Lights. In an alley just across Columbus at 12 Saroyan Pl. is Spec's Twelve Adler Museum Café (Spec's for short), where irreverent memorabilia (cartoons, buttons with avant-garde sayings, an armadillo) covers the walls, and the wood tables and chairs are well worn. Both bars are frequented by a mixture of ages and income levels who come to enjoy a beer or two along with a bit of the past. Phone Vesuvio at (415) 362-3370 and Spec's at (415) 421-4112.

Another favorite North Beach nightspot is Tosca Café at 242 Columbus Ave., though this old standby is more of a local rather than literary watering hole. The place has a definite Italian feel and its jukebox leans toward operatic standards. Assorted celebrities have been known to drop by when they're in town. You can reach Tosca at (415) 391-1244.

Climb to the top of ritzy Nob Hill to The Fairmont San Francisco, then take the elevator downstairs to The Tonga Room & Hurricane Bar. The room is a Polynesian explosion, complete with thatched tiki huts, a lagoon with a ship floating in the middle (the ship doubles as a bandstand), palm trees and a thunderstorm every 20 minutes. Kitschy to say the least, though they do make a mean mai tai (and yes, there will be a paper umbrella in your drink). A reasonably priced Oriental-inspired buffet is served weekdays during happy hour, and dancing begins at 8. Phone (415) 772-5278.

Cocktail Lounges

For an elegant night out, indulge yourself with cocktails at Top of the Mark, the classy lounge at the top of the InterContinental Mark Hopkins San Francisco, a Nob Hill landmark since 1939. Though not small, the room has an intimate, cozy feel. Live music (mostly jazz) enhances the mood Tuesday through Saturday evenings. Request a seat along the wall of windows for breathtaking views of the bay and city. Come with

someone special at twilight, watch the sun set and the lights of "The City" come twinkling on for a truly magical experience. Phone (415) 616-6916.

Cool, sleek, fashionable décor defines the Redwood Room at the Clift Hotel in Union Square at 495 Geary St. This modern lounge exudes panache, from its redwood paneling to the changing display of digital artwork. Phone (415) 929-2372.

Harry Denton's Starlight Room is a throwback to when a night on the town meant dressing up for an evening at a swanky hotel's top-floor lounge, in this case the Sir Francis Drake Hotel at 450 Powell St. Cocktails and hors d'oeuvres are served in an opulent setting reminiscent of 1930s San Francisco, with red velvet booths, silk draperies and imported chandeliers. Entertainment consists of both bands and DJs playing hits from the 1960s through the '80s. The dance floor can get crowded on weekends, and Sundays brings, incongruously, a drag brunch. Phone (415) 395-8595.

Dance Clubs

If you like a little high-tech action with your dancing, then check out the DNA Lounge at 375 11th St. in SoMa, the area south of Market known for its hip clubs. Depending on the night, you might find DJs; live music; a burlesque show; or a mashup dance event. There are two levels of dance floors, with patrons gyrating to hip-hop, rock and metal. The club provides internet kiosks as well as streaming audio and video webcasts of all events. Phone (415) 626-1409 to see what's going on any given night.

111 Minna Gallery has a split personality—art gallery by day, dance club at night. The club's name doubles as its address, which is also in SoMa between Second and New Montgomery streets. The place has a loft-like warehouse feel and the DJs spin a mix of styles. Phone (415) 974-1719.

Rock and Blues Clubs

Swanky and retro describe the main room of Bimbo's 365 Club, which has been cranking out live rock and jazz at 1025 Columbus Ave. in North Beach since 1951. With elegant red-accented surroundings, table

service, a huge dance floor and the possibility of catching a name act, this place packs 'em in. Phone (415) 474-0365.

Another San Francisco mainstay is the Boom Boom Room at 1601 Fillmore St. at Geary. The club started out as a blues spot in the 1930s, though nowadays you might run into some R&B, funk and soul as well. Check out the assemblage of old photos from past gigs on the club's walls. Legendary blues artist John Lee Hooker was affiliated with the Boom Boom Room in the late 1990s. Phone (415) 673-8000.

Bottom of the Hill is, well, at the bottom of Potrero Hill at 1233 17th St. Rock bands, many local, play at this top-rated club to enthusiastic crowds seven nights a week, with sounds ranging from alternative to punk to pop. The patio out back is a great place to take a break and chill out with friends. A note of caution, though: It's best to come with a group, since the area tends to be a little sketchy. Phone (415) 621-4455.

The nightclub known today as the Great American Music Hall has an interesting history. The spot started out in 1907 as a bordello, Sally Rand entranced audiences with her fan dances during the 1930s and it served as a Moose Lodge in the '50s. Classically decorated with marble columns, balconies and frescoed ceilings, the hall is now a venue for an eclectic array of acts, including folk, indie rock and blues performances. Heck, you can bring the kids (ages 6+, but check out who's playing first) and even have dinner. The hall is at 859 O'Farrell St. Phone (415) 885-0750.

It would be impossible to talk about the San Francisco music scene without mentioning The Fillmore. In the psychedelic mid-1960s promoter Bill Graham brought the biggest rock acts to this ballroom—The Grateful Dead, Jefferson Airplane, Jimi Hendrix, Buffalo Springfield—and it's still the room of choice for name performers. You can catch their acts at 1805 Geary Blvd. at Fillmore Street. Phone (415) 346 6000.

Spectator Sports

Bay Area fans vigorously support both professional and college sports teams. San Francisco's and nearby Oakland's professional and college teams—the Giants, Oakland A's, 49ers, Golden State Warriors, Raiders and Sharks—offer plenty to cheer for.

In addition to the venues listed below, the Cow Palace, 2600 Geneva Ave. at Santos Street (in Daly City), plays host to rodeos, ice shows and other events; phone (415) 404-4111.

Baseball

The San Francisco Giants play at AT&T Park. The stadium, at 24 Willie Mays Plaza, is southeast of downtown; phone (877) 473-4849 for ticket information. The rival Oakland A's play at the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum, I-880 at the 66th Avenue exit in Oakland; phone (510) 568-5600.

Basketball

The Bay Area's Golden State Warriors play at the Oracle Arena in Oakland, off I-880 at either the 66th Avenue or Hegenberger exit; phone (510) 986-2222 for ticket information.

Area universities whet hoop appetites as well. Just south in San Jose, the San Jose State University Spartans play their home games at the San Jose Event Center, 7th and E. San Carlos streets; phone (408) 924-1000. The University of California Golden Bears compete at Haas Pavilion in Berkeley; phone (510) 642-3277 or (800) 462-3277. And the University of San Francisco Dons draw fans to War Memorial Gymnasium, 2335 Golden Gate Ave.; phone (415) 422-2873.

Football

Two NFL teams serve the Bay Area. The San Francisco 49ers, dubbed the "team of the '80s" for its four Super Bowl wins following the 1981, 1984, 1988 and 1989 seasons, not to mention its clinching of the title following the 1994 season, play at Candlestick Park, at the southeast corner of the city off US 101 on Jamestown Avenue. For ticket

information phone (415) 656-4900. The Oakland Raiders play at the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum; phone (510) 569-2121 for Raiders ticket information.

Hockey

Farther south, members of the San Jose Sharks circle their prey. The Bay Area's NHL representatives take to the ice at the HP Pavilion at San Jose, 525 W. Santa Clara St. at Autumn Street; phone (408) 287-9200.

Recreation

San Francisco, frequently considered a metropolitan mecca, has an alter ego. The 76,500-acre Golden Gate National Recreation Area represents the city's pastoral side. Encompassing the northern and western city shoreline, it offers bracing scenery, miles of trails and several camping sites. The area attracts bird-watchers, beachcombers, hikers, bicyclists, surfers, surf fishers, picnickers and naturalists.

Bicycling

The recreational center of San Francisco is wooded Golden Gate Park, a refuge plunked in the middle of this compact city. Facilities are available for all sorts of activities, including bicycling, hiking, boating, horseback riding, golf and tennis.

Two marked bicycle routes meander through San Francisco. One winds its way through Golden Gate Park, ending up at Lake Merced in the southwestern city limits; the second proceeds from the south end of the city north across the Golden Gate Bridge into Marin County. The straightaway near the Ferry Building at the foot of Market Street, created by the demolition of the Embarcadero Freeway following the 1989 earthquake, offers a mercifully hill-free stretch.

Bay City Bike provides rentals, maps and recommended itineraries for those who want to pedal their way through the Bay Area. Two popular routes are over the Golden Gate Bridge to Sausalito, then back by ferry, and a ride through the Presidio and into Golden Gate Park. Bikes can be

rented at two locations, both at Fisherman's Wharf—2661 Taylor St. and 1325 Columbus Ave.; phone (415) 346-2453.

Bicycle rental outfits also can be found along Stanyan Street and Geary Boulevard near Golden Gate Park. Several area touring companies organize jaunts to the Sonoma wine country and other scenic spots around the Bay Area. Golden Gate Park Skate and Bike, 3038 Fulton St. at 6th Avenue, is another convenient outlet from which to rent a bike for a ride through Golden Gate Park, the Presidio or across the Golden Gate Bridge. You also can rent roller blades and roller skates; phone (415) 668-1117.

Fishing

Lake Merced, south of the San Francisco Zoo, sports largemouth bass, trout and catfish. Fly-casting pools are south of the bison paddock in Golden Gate Park next to the Angler's Lodge; bring your own equipment. Municipal fishing piers are scattered along the northern waterfront and at Aquatic Park, and fishing boats ply the waters of San Francisco Bay for striped bass and giant sturgeon.

Golf

Rain may dampen fairways during winter, but otherwise the mild weather is nearly ideal for a game. With space at such a premium, there are only a few public golf courses within city limits.

Municipal golf courses include Harding Park Golf Course on Lake Merced, Harding Road off Skyline Boulevard, (415) 664-4690; Lincoln Park Municipal Golf Course, 34th Avenue and Clement Street, overlooking the Golden Gate Bridge, (415) 221-9911; and the Presidio Golf Course on Finley at Arguello, (415) 561-4664. There also is a nine-hole course in Golden Gate Park, at 47th Avenue and John F. Kennedy Drive; phone (415) 751-8987.

Hiking

Hikers have numerous choices in both the city and its environs. Ocean Beach, the 4-mile stretch of sandy shoreline running along San

Francisco's Pacific back door, offers few frills but maximum atmosphere for a brisk hike.

The Golden Gate National Recreational Area's Mount Tamalpais State Park and the Marin Headlands, just across the Golden Gate Bridge, contain terrain ranging from gentle to strenuous. Many of the trails in the recreational area have an added bonus of sweeping views of San Francisco. Hiking among the redwoods of Muir Woods National Monument is also particularly scenic. Miles of hiking trails run through the Presidio as well.

Jogging and Walking

Stroll the foot trails from Golden Gate Park's eastern boundary to the ocean, admiring the manicured gardens and lush parklands along the way. For those who don't mind windy conditions, the Golden Gate Bridge has a walkway that offers breathtaking views.

One of the city's most popular jogging areas is the paved Golden Gate Promenade, which traverses Crissy Field. Run at the water's edge with a wonderful view of the Golden Gate Bridge.

If it's plain old exercise you're looking for, simply step outside your hotel room door. The city's steep hills provide challenging climbs and great views, and many of the steeper sidewalks have stairs. Try walking up the block of Lombard Street dubbed "the crookedest street in the world."

Tennis

Twenty-one well-maintained courts are located in Golden Gate Park off John F. Kennedy Drive opposite the Conservatory of Flowers. A fee is charged and reservations are required on weekends; phone (415) 753-7001. The San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department maintains some 150 public courts available on a first-come, first-served basis as well as eight indoor swimming pools and an outdoor pool; phone (415) 831-2700.

Water Sports

Sailing the blue waters of the bay offers year-round enjoyment and a close-up look at Alcatraz and Angel islands, the Golden Gate Bridge, the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge and Marin County's picturesque waterfront towns. Currents are tricky, however, so it's best to leave the sailing to others.

Boat rentals and charters are available throughout the greater Bay Area. Cass' Charters and Sailing School, 1702 Bridgeway in Sausalito, rents sailboats for cruising about the bay. Skippered charters also are available. Rental boats must depart from Sausalito; phone (415) 332-6789 or (800) 472-4595.

Row, paddle and electric boats can be rented at Stow Lake in Golden Gate Park—just the thing for a lazy sojourn around Strawberry Hill, which rises up out of the lake's middle. Phone (415) 752-0347 for rates and information.

Performing Arts

San Francisco's tempestuous 19th-century adolescence was more attuned to drinking and gambling than to the refined pleasures of the performing arts. Even so, 15 legitimate theaters operated amid the saloons of the Barbary Coast. Today residents and visitors alike can take advantage of a world-class symphony, opera and ballet companies, and theatrical fare—from touring Broadway blockbusters to a full house of offbeat experimental productions.

The city's two major performing arts facilities are just west of the Civic Center. A bronze Henry Moore sculpture squats in front of Louise M. Davies Symphony Hall. The building's wraparound design places seating around and even behind the orchestra. The War Memorial Opera House, opposite the Davies, plays host to opera, dance and performing arts troupes. The venerable structure appears as it did in 1931.

The *San Francisco Chronicle's* pink-page Datebook section, published in the newspaper's Sunday edition, carries complete listings of area

theaters and nightspots as well as information about upcoming events. TiXBay Area offers cash-only, half-price tickets for selected theater, dance and music events on the day of the performance, and also serves as a Ticketmaster ticket outlet (for credit card purchases). It is located inside the Union Square Garage, accessible through the Geary Street entrance; phone (415) 433-7827.

Dance

Innovative new productions as well as classics are performed by the San Francisco Ballet at the War Memorial Opera House. The company's repertory season lasts from February into early May, although the *Nutcracker Suite* is performed in December. For information phone (415) 865-2000.

Across the bay, the Oakland Ballet has been presenting its own revivals and contemporary productions since 1965. The season begins in September; performances take place at the Paramount Theater of the Arts, 2025 Broadway near the 19th Street BART station. Phone (510) 465-6400 for information or Ticketmaster at (510) 625-8497 for tickets.

Film

The Bay Area is a mecca for film lovers. Independent film-making tradition thrives here: Documentaries and experimental features are produced on cut-rate budgets throughout the city. Movie theaters in San Francisco are likely to show exclusively art-house or foreign films, and several colleges and universities also ensure a wide variety of fare.

The following show a mix of foreign and independent films in addition to repertory programs and revivals of old classics: the Castro Theatre, 429 Castro St., (415) 621-6120; Embarcadero Cinema, promenade level 1 at Embarcadero Center, (415) 267-4893; the Red Vic Movie House, 1727 Haight St., (415) 668-3994; the Roxie Cinema, 3117 16th St., (415) 863-1087; and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 701 Mission St. in the Yerba Buena Gardens complex, (415) 978-2787.

Music

Under the direction of Michael Tilson Thomas, the San Francisco

Symphony performs in Louise M. Davies Symphony Hall from September through June and also at the Flint Center for the Performing Arts, 21250 Stevens Creek Blvd. in Cupertino. Guest conductors and soloists of international stature round out the repertoire of standards. For ticket information phone (408) 864-8820.

As a free alternative to the often sold-out symphony productions, orchestral and band concerts take place summer Sundays in the natural amphitheater of Sigmund Stern Memorial Park, at Sloat Boulevard and 19th Avenue; phone (415) 252-6252 for concert information. Golden Gate Park also plays host to concerts throughout the year; phone (415) 831-5500.

During the academic year both students and faculty perform at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music's Hellman Hall, 1201 Ortega St. in the Sunset District. Phone (415) 503-6277 for 24-hour schedule and price information or (415) 864-7326 Mon.-Fri. 9-5 for tickets. Occasional classical music concerts take place at the Nob Hill Masonic Center, 1111 California St.; phone (415) 281-9217.

Opera

The San Francisco Opera, founded in 1923, is the resident company at the War Memorial Opera House. International names frequently appear during the season, which begins in early September and lasts into December. Many performances are sold out long in advance, but standing-room tickets are always made available the day of performance; they go on sale (cash only and one per person) at the box office, 301 Van Ness Ave., beginning at 10. Phone (415) 864-3330 for performance and additional ticket information.

Theater

Major touring plays and productions of Broadway shows are presented at the Curran Theater, 445 Geary St., and the Orpheum Theater, 1192 Market St. Musicals run at the Golden Gate Theater, at the intersection of Market and Taylor streets and Golden Gate Avenue, and at the Curran Theatre. Phone (415) 512-7770 for ticket information for all three venues.

The American Conservatory Theater (ACT) is San Francisco's major repertory group and presents plays at the 1910 Edwardian-style Geary Theatre, 405 Geary St.; phone (415) 749-2228. Another repertory company, Lamplighters Music Theatre specializes in operettas and musical spoofs, with an emphasis on Gilbert & Sullivan musicals. Performances are given Wednesday through Sunday at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 700 Howard St. at Third Street; the University of San Francisco Presentation Theater, 2350 Turk Blvd.; and at the Dean Leshner Regional Center for the Arts, 1601 Civic Dr. at Locust Street in Walnut Creek. Phone (925) 943-7469 for ticket information.

A uniquely San Francisco theater experience is "Beach Blanket Babylon" at Club Fugazi, 678 Green St. Running since 1974, the show features cabaret-style entertainment paired with outlandish costumes; phone (415) 421-4222 for reservations.

The Lorraine Hansberry Theatre showcases the works of African-American writers. The productions are staged at a variety of venues; phone (415) 474-8800. The Magic Theatre in Building D of Fort Mason, Marina Boulevard and Buchanan Street, presents West Coast premieres and occasional solo shows; phone (415) 441-8822. And the Cowell Theater, at Fort Mason, Marina Boulevard at Buchanan, features one-man shows and smaller performances; phone (415) 345-7575.

AAA Walking Tours - Downtown San Francisco

The tour takes 4-6 hours, depending on your pace and the number of listed sites you visit along the way.

Let's face it, San Francisco is known for its treacherous hills. Even so, areas like Union Square, the Financial District, Chinatown, North Beach, Telegraph Hill, Fisherman's Wharf and Russian Hill are best explored on foot. While the route makes the most of the city's flat streets, we still recommend wearing comfortable shoes for any unavoidable climbs. We'll warn you about approaching hills, and should you choose not to hoof it, you can hop on a bus or cable car at certain points along the tour.

Union Square, bordered by Geary, Powell, Post and Stockton streets, is a good place to start. To get there, take the Powell-Hyde cable car, which stops on the south side of the square. Parking is pricey, but if you must drive, underground spots are available at the Union Square Garage, accessed from Geary Street (one-way, westbound). Cheaper rates can be found at 330 Sutter St. (one-way, westbound) near Stockton Street.

Built in 1850, the square was named for demonstrations held here to support Union troops at the start of the Civil War. Standing in the palm-tree-framed park, you'll notice its focal point: the 97-foot-tall Dewey Monument, erected in 1903 to honor Commodore George Dewey's 1898 Manila Bay victory over the Spanish. A patina Goddess of Victory tops the column.

The square—heart of the downtown scene—teems with life. Vendors sell flowers, streetcar bells clang and people crowd the luxury hotels and department stores extending from the square. One such hotel is the historic Westin St. Francis, 335 Powell St., which survived the 1906 earthquake, purportedly serving breakfast to the masses on the morning of the disaster. Its spectacular lobby protects an antique grandfather clock: The ornate timepiece has served as a local meeting spot for years, coining the well-known phrase "Meet me at the St. Francis." The city's cable cars sport the expression.

Shopaholics may mistake Union Square and its environs for heaven. Some of the world's fanciest retailers and department stores can be found here: A gigantic Macy's dominates the Geary block, and Saks Fifth Avenue rubs elbows with Tiffany. Neiman Marcus, at Geary and Stockton streets, boasts a six-story rotunda topped with an elaborate stained-glass dome. Original to the City of Paris department store (1909), the arched ceiling features a mural of a sailing ship and crowns the store's restaurant—a perfect spot for afternoon tea.

After window-shopping along the square, head east on Maiden Lane. Part of the raucous Barbary Coast in the early 1900s, this small side street, then called Morton Street, was once lined with bordellos. Now the tract serves clients of a different sort at its chic bistros and boutiques.

Look to the left: The brick gallery at 140 Maiden Ln. was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright; it served as a prototype for the Guggenheim Museum in New York.

At Grant Avenue, turn left. A few blocks ahead is the entrance to Chinatown, marked by the famous green-tiled gate, bedecked with golden dragons. The gate was a gift to the city from the Republic of China in 1969. It is traditional for Chinese villages to have ceremonial gates similar to this one; the carved concrete guard dogs are said to ward off evil.

At Post, turn right. Admire the treasures in the windows of more swanky shops along this block. Note the Crocker Galleria, 50 Post St. at Kearny, designed to mimic the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan, Italy. Beneath its dome you'll find large English ivy topiaries among elite shops and cafes.

Make a sharp left onto Montgomery Street. You have entered the concrete canyons of "Wall Street West" San Francisco's financial district. Here, between Market and Sacramento streets and east toward The Embarcadero, is where deals have been made since the 1850s, when prospectors returned from the gold mines with treasure and created a demand for banks. The district remains one of the country's top four financial centers. From 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. the wide sidewalks are choked with hurried, well-dressed businesspeople, yet the street is nearly deserted when bankers' hours are over.

As befits a financial district, Montgomery is lined with skyscrapers that tickle the clouds. Lean and seemingly striped, the Wells Fargo Building, just north of Post Street at 44 Montgomery St., was built to house the bank's world headquarters. The concrete and steel structure stands 561 feet tall. At Bush Street, look right to locate the Mills Building at 220 Montgomery St. Built in 1892 (the tower was added in 1907), the steel building nearly occupies the entire block; its large lobby displays varied artwork. The 1928 Russ Building, 235 Montgomery St. just north of Bush, was the city's tallest building until the 1960s when the Transamerica Pyramid was constructed. Citizens referred to the 435-foot-tall building

simply as "the skyscraper." Its Gothic design was modeled after the Chicago Tribune tower.

Speaking of "the pyramid," San Francisco's most famous (and tallest) skyscraper, look north to spot this 48-story structure. Situated at 600 Montgomery St. where Columbus Avenue meets Washington Street, it sports nearly 6,000 windows, is topped with a 212-foot-tall spire and can be seen from almost anywhere in the city.

In its shadow is the Jackson Square Historical District, dating from gold rush heydays. Brick buildings with iron shutters lining Gold and Balance streets now contain antiques shops. Restaurants are decorated in Victorian style, and lampposts and hitching posts give the area an old-time feel.

Make a left onto California, a street shaded by more imposing buildings. Carved concrete faces, marble, brown stone and red brick decorate the facades of more banks and title companies; inside, magnificent chandeliers dangle in extravagant lobbies. Most notable is the 52-story Bank of America Center, 555 California St. (the accordionlike building on your left). The modern structure features carnelian marble; its top-floor restaurant, aptly named the Carnelian Room, provides stunning panoramas of the city. Bring your camera and some cash—you'll pay for the view with the price of one cocktail.

Continue up a relatively short but steep hill to Grant Avenue. Old St. Mary's Cathedral is on the right, sandwiched between sleek high-rises and Chinese architecture. Built in 1854, the Catholic church is said to be the first cathedral in California. It survived the 1906 earthquake and subsequent fires; following renovation, it was rededicated in 1909. Across the street in St. Mary's Square is a 12-foot-tall metal and granite statue of Dr. Sun Yat-sen, founder of the Republic of China.

As you turn right onto Grant Avenue, Chinatown's main drag, be prepared for sensory overload. Originally called Calle de Fundacion, the street is the city's oldest. Now, beneath Chinese calligraphy street signs, lampposts dressed like pagodas (entwined with golden dragons' tails)

and colorful filigreed balconies draped with laundry, there is an explosion of smells, sounds and activity. The narrow, crowded avenue is crammed with restaurants advertising dim sum; herb shops tempting passersby with ancient potions; delicatessens parading roasted ducks (with the heads still attached) hanging upside-down in the windows; newsstands selling Chinese reading materials; stores displaying fine antiques and jade sculpture; and souvenir shop bins filled with Chinese Barbie dolls, plastic Buddha statues, tea sets, embroidered slippers, postcards, ear-piercing cricket toys, bamboo flutes, Chinese iron balls, three-for-ten-dollar T-shirts and mah-jongg games—all identified with colorful Chinese signs.

To get a true feel for the neighborhood, visit on a Saturday morning, when residents pack the sidewalks, running errands and socializing. Women crowd the vegetable markets, picking over fresh water chestnuts and giant jackfruit. Scents of barbecued pork, simmering soup and incense mingle in the air, and you may be the only one speaking English; Chinatown is home to nearly 10,000 Chinese.

Browse the selections at the Canton Bazaar, 616 Grant Ave., a popular import shop; the Chinatown Kite Shop, 717 Grant Ave., a great spot for fish kites or hand-painted paper kites; and the Wok Shop, 718 Grant Ave., which peddles all sorts of Chinese kitchenware.

Check out the Bank of America branch at the northwest corner of Grant Avenue and Sacramento Street (701 Grant Ave.). In true pagoda style, dragons adorn the columns and guard the front doors.

Chinatown is known for its maze of tucked-away back alleys. Waverly Place, called “the street of the painted balconies,” is just west of Grant between Sacramento and Washington streets. Turn left on Clay, then right on Waverly Place. The smell of incense pervades the crowded little alley, which is reminiscent of streets found in New Orleans’ French Quarter—with a Chinese flair, of course. Red and green, considered symbols of happiness and longevity, respectively, embellish three temples: Jeng Sen at 146, Tin How at 125 and Norras at 109.

At Washington Street, turn right and continue just past Grant to the three-tiered Bank of Canton at 743 Washington St. Awash in blue, gold and vibrant red, it was built in 1909 to house the Chinatown Telephone Exchange (known as “China-5”)—which it did until 1945. Sandwiched between two brick buildings, it’s the area’s oldest pagoda-style edifice.

Backtrack to Grant Avenue and turn right. Leaving Chinatown, you’re now approaching the old stomping grounds of the Beat poets of the 1950s. Proceed about 2 blocks to Jack Kerouac Alley (just past Pacific) and turn right. A quasi-nucleus of the Beat movement, the Vesuvio saloon, 255 Columbus Ave. at Jack Kerouac Alley, is one of few remaining Beat landmarks. A faded sign over the front door proclaims, “We are itching to get away from Portland, Oregon!” Established in 1948, the bar was a favorite hangout for Bohemian types; its signature drink is appropriately named the Jack Kerouac.

Across the alley and just north of the saloon, at the corner of Columbus and Broadway, is City Lights, the first all-paperback bookstore in the country. Established in 1953 by poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti, the three-story, poetry-packed den also attracted Beat writers; a large section is devoted to their works.

Continue northwest along busy Columbus Avenue. Any idea where you are now? There are plenty of clues. First, notice the street signs, which say “Cristóforo Colombo Avenue.” Second, the light posts are emblazoned with Italian flags. Third, what’s with all the cafes, bakeries, delis, coffeehouses and gelato parlors? And that House of Gnocci? Why, it’s obvious—you’re in North Beach, San Francisco’s Little Italy. Italians settled here first, and later the writers followed. The name dates to early days when the neighborhood overlooked the water; the bay was filled in the mid-1800s.

If it’s time for lunch, this is the place. Settle into a chair at one of the many outdoor cafes and savor homemade Italian delicacies, or sample as you go. Visit a deli for a hard roll with salami and a bakery for a cannoli or cream puff, then stop by Caffè Trieste for the best coffee in town. To get there, turn right off of Columbus onto Vallejo Street, then

follow Vallejo to Grant. The coffeehouse, painted turquoise and red, is on the corner. Said to be the first espresso coffeehouse on the West Coast, it has been operated by the singing Giotto family since 1956.

Backtracking to Columbus, you'll pass the imposing National Shrine of St. Francis of Assisi, 610 Vallejo St. at Columbus. The 1860 Norman Gothic church is dedicated to St. Francis, the city's namesake.

Make a right on Columbus (continuing north), passing restaurants and the occasional cigar shop and pottery store until you reach Washington Square, at Union and Columbus.

In the same manner that North Beach is not a real beach, Washington Square is not a true square, but a pentagon. If the weather is good, you'll likely find people sunbathing and picnicking. Local artists sell their works, and residents practice tai chi in the grassy piazza, which features a statue of Benjamin Franklin (not George Washington, as its name would suggest), donated to the city in 1879.

Wander through the square. The terra-cotta towers of the 1884 Romanesque Church of Saints Peter and Paul overlook the north side. Known as the "fisherman's church," it offers mass in English, Italian and Cantonese and holds the Blessing of the Fleet each October.

Follow Filbert east to Stockton. At the corner of Filbert and Stockton, look directly east. Coit Tower, which some say resembles a fire hose nozzle, is visible above the neat row houses. That's your next stop. To get there, you have two options. You can walk (it's a scenic yet demanding uphill hike), or catch the number 39 (Coit) Muni bus (\$2 fare) to the top of Telegraph Hill. Meet the bus at the corner of Stockton and Union, in front of Joe DiMaggio's Italian Chop House.

Walkers should make a left onto Stockton, continue north for 2 blocks (following signs to Coit Tower), then turn right on Lombard Street. It's approximately 2 blocks to the base of Telegraph Hill, but keep in mind that in San Francisco, distance is misleading—these 2 blocks are nearly

vertical. An alternate route, if you're walking to Coit Tower, is to take either Filbert or Greenwich streets up the hill.

If you get tired, stop to admire the pretty row houses and gardens. Look left at Grant Avenue for a great view of the bay (in good weather it will be dotted with sailboats), the Golden Gate Bridge and, behind it, the rolling hills of Marin County. Also look west (behind you) for a great view of the zigzag block of Lombard, known as "the crookedest street in the world."

Once at the base of Telegraph Hill, catch your breath (or exit the bus) and take a peek at the Oakland Bay Bridge (to the east), with piers in the foreground. Follow shaded Telegraph Hill Boulevard as it circles to the top of the hill. A regal bronze statue of Christopher Columbus—donated by the Italian community and the focus of annual Columbus Day festivities—overlooks a panorama of the city. Behind the statue is the 210-foot-tall Coit Memorial Tower, built in 1933 with a donation from Lillie Hitchcock Coit, a local eccentric.

At the summit, the entire city and bay spread out before you. Notice crooked Lombard Street among the hilly lanes crammed with row houses (directly west); the Golden Gate Bridge and Presidio (northwest); Alcatraz (directly north); and the towers of the financial district (south). An elevator leading to the top of the tower offers more spectacular views.

No visit to Telegraph Hill is complete without exploring the Greenwich and Filbert steps—staircases hugging the east side of the slope. Locate the "Greenwich" sign behind the statue and follow the brick stairs down through a tropical oasis—flowering hillside gardens are hidden among quaint cottages, where social cats and wild parrots dwell.

You might choose to climb all the way down (the stairs end at Sansome Street), but to minimize the return hike, we recommend turning right onto Montgomery (about halfway down) and heading back up the wooden Filbert Steps. (Follow the lower—or eastern—side of Montgomery.) Where Montgomery meets the Filbert Steps, note the Malloch Apartment Building at 1360 Montgomery St. This 1937 Art Deco dwelling was featured in the movie "Dark Passage," which starred Lauren Bacall and

Humphrey Bogart. Return up the Filbert Steps to the base of Telegraph Hill.

From there, retrace your steps (or bus route), heading downhill along Telegraph Hill Boulevard and continuing down Lombard for about five blocks. At Lombard and Powell, look straight up Lombard (directly west) to catch another glimpse of cars winding their way down the city's crookedest street. Glances to the right as you pass Stockton and Powell streets afford splendid views of Victorian row houses with the bay as a backdrop. At Columbus, make a quick right, then another right onto Taylor Street, heading north. Follow Taylor 3 blocks to Bay Street, where you can see the cable cars being turned around (with a great deal of physical effort) at the end of the Powell-Mason line. Continue along Taylor; here, postcard stands hint of the kitschy souvenirs to come.

At Taylor and Jefferson streets is Fisherman's Wharf, marked by a nifty sign that makes its way into many a vacation photo. The wharf, built during the gold rush, is home to the city's fishing fleet, which docks along the Jefferson Street promenade. In the fog of the early morning, fishermen can be spotted unloading the catch of the day on Pier 45.

If you'd like, head east along the waterfront to Pier 39 and stroll past tourist shops selling everything from fog in a can to T-shirts proclaiming "I escaped from Alcatraz." Street performers pack Jefferson, Hyde, Beach, Leavenworth and Taylor streets—here you'll see folks painted from head to toe in silver or gold; mimes; stilt-walkers; palm readers; those dressed in goofy outfits posing for pictures; and others twirling hoops or juggling. Look out for the "Bushman"; he hides behind a tree branch and startles unsuspecting pedestrians.

More performers take the stage at Pier 39. Arguably the best entertainers are the barking sea lions that sunbathe on the dock just west of the pier; unlike much in this area, they were not transplanted to attract tourists. After exploring the shops and perhaps taking a whirl on the carousel, head west along Jefferson; you'll pass more souvenir shops as well as the Wax Museum at Fisherman's Wharf and Ripley's Believe It or Not! Museum.

At Jefferson and Taylor, the smell of fresh fish wafts in the air. Seagulls hover and squawk, looking for treats. You've entered "Fish Alley," where smart visitors will nibble on some "take-away" shrimp or Dungeness crab cocktails—cooked on site at one of the sidewalk vendors. Or indulge in some clam chowder: Boudin's is excellent, served in a sourdough bowl.

Continue along Jefferson for two blocks. At the corner of Leavenworth and Jefferson is the three-story brick Cannery, packed with shops and restaurants. The building, constructed in 1907, was originally owned by Del Monte and used to can peaches until it closed during the Great Depression. Its courtyard, shaded by 100-year-old olive trees, is a great place to kick back and listen to jazz bands that frequent the stage.

At Hyde Street, turn right and stroll along Hyde Street Pier, part of the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park. Here, four antique vessels comprise the nation's only floating national park, where you can tour the ships or participate in a boat building class. From the end of the pier, spot the giant Ghirardelli sign. That's your next stop. Leave the pier by heading south on Hyde to Beach Street, then turn right on Beach and proceed for 2 blocks to Ghirardelli Square. This collection of 19th-century brick factory buildings is where the chocolatier whipped up sweet concoctions until the 1960s. Visit the soda fountain to indulge in a sinfully delicious Ghirardelli hot fudge sundae.

Backtrack along Beach to Hyde, the end of the Powell & Hyde cable car line. While walking back (uphill) to Union Square may be an attractive option to some, it's much more fun to hop on a streetcar—the fare is \$5. Across from the cable car turnaround is the Buena Vista Cafe, where Irish coffee was introduced to America based on a recipe brought from Dublin in the 1950s.

Hold on tight while the car is pulled up Russian Hill (named for Russian sailors buried here), one of the city's steepest, and marvel at the mansions along the route. If you like, disembark at Lombard Street to peer (or climb) down the stairs—the view is best from the bottom, although the climb back up is a bit grueling. Neatly manicured hedges,

hydrangea bushes and Art Deco-style houses frame the curvy brick road. (If you depart the cable car, you will need to pay \$5 upon reboarding.)

Once en route again, look east at Greenwich Street for a great view of Coit Tower and one of San Francisco's extreme hills. The cable car will make a swift turn at Washington, passing the Cable Car Museum at Washington and Mason streets. Depart at Geary (Union Square), which is where the tour began.

Insider Info

Attraction Passes

CityPass and Go San Francisco Card – CityPass offers savings to those who plan visits to many San Francisco attractions. The pass (valid March 1, 2010, through February 28, 2011) covers a week of unlimited use of all Muni public transportation (including the city's cable cars, light rail and the city's bus system) as well as the price of admission to five attractions: the Aquarium of the Bay at Pier 39; the Blue & Gold Fleet's Bay Cruise Adventure; The California Academy of Sciences in Golden Gate Park; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and an option ticket for either the de Young Museum and the Legion of Honor museum or the Exploratorium museum in the Palace of Fine Arts.

A pass, valid for 9 days once the first attraction is visited (Muni portion valid for 7 days) is \$64; \$44 (ages 5-12). CityPass is available from participating attractions or at the San Francisco Visitor Information Center at Hallidie Plaza on Market Street at the cable car turnaround. For information phone (208) 787-4300 or (888) 330-5008.

Go San Francisco Card is an all-access attraction pass offering admission to more than 30 San Francisco area attractions plus more than 20 additional attractions and wineries in Santa Cruz, Monterey Peninsula and Wine Country. The card, which is purchased by the day (1, 2, 3, 5 or 7 consecutive calendar days), includes attractions such as the Aquarium of the Bay, Six Flags Discovery Kingdom (in Vallejo), The California Academy of Sciences, a bay cruise and a cable car ride. The card is

priced as low as \$23 per day (based on a 7-day card). Go San Francisco Card is available at the Red and White Fleet's ticket office at Pier 43 1/2; phone (800) 887-9103.

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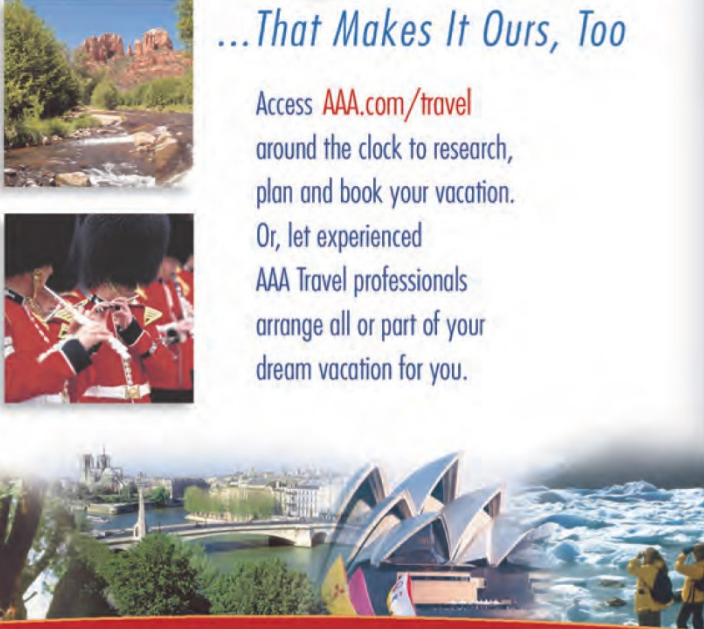
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