

Prepare to lose your heart

San Francisco captures visitors like few other cities, writes Lucy Gordan



SIR Francis Drake was one of the European explorers who sailed up the California coast in the 16th century but failed to enter the Golden Gate, undoubtedly obscured by fog. Nearly 200 years later, in 1769, a Spanish overland expedition led by Don Gaspar de Portola discovered San Francisco Bay, built a *presidio* (fort) and left behind a mission of Franciscan monks to convert the Ohlones Indians. Even so, the area remained *terra incognita* for more than the next century.

In 1848 gold was found in the nearby Sierra Nevada foothills. During the next two years, 100,000 prospectors, known as '49ers, from all over the globe passed through the Golden Gate. The sleepy village of 300 got the nickname "Instant City" as the population jumped to 25,000.

The Gold Rush transformed San Francisco into a cosmopolitan, high-living, anything-goes town. Its constant stream of visitors has never stopped, in spite of major earthquakes and the cold

pea-soup fogs, even in summer, that probably frustrated Drake. For many arrivals, it has been love at first sight. In 1859, Mark Twain, an indefatigable world traveller, wrote: "I fell in love with the most cordial and social city in the Union ... San Francisco was Paradise to me." A decade or so later, just after the Transcontinental Railroad was completed, the British author Rudyard Kipling confessed: "San Francisco has only one drawback. 'Tis hard to leave."

Perhaps better than any visitor, the Welsh poet Dylan Thomas captured the city's spirit in a letter to his wife on April 7, 1950: "But oh, San Francisco! It is and has everything. Here in Canada, five hours away by plane, you wouldn't think that such a place as San Francisco could exist. The wonderful sunlight there, the hills, the great bridges, the Pacific at your shoes. Beautiful Chinatown. Every race in the world. The sardine fleets





sailing out. The little cable cars whizzing down the city hills. The lobster, clams, & crabs ... And all the people are open and friendly."

Is it any wonder that every year, visitors outnumber the resident population five-fold, with almost a third of these three million people coming for conventions? Just as Thomas said, tolerant and laid-back San Francisco, which bills itself "the city that knows how", has something for everyone.

The city's main tourist attractions are the California Academy of Sciences, Coit Tower, Ghirardelli Square, Golden Gate Bridge, Golden Gate Park, Grant Avenue in Chinatown, Union Square, Japan Centre and Alcatraz Island. It's possible to link them all by taking the 49-Mile Scenic Drive. Just rent a car and follow the well-marked blue-and-white seagull signs.

However, San Francisco is a compact city best explored by foot, using the hills for orientation.

Whether the many newcomers over the past 150 years were first attracted by gold, silver, the Transcontinental Railroad, or fishing, or, most recently by Silicon Valley and gay and lesbian tolerance, they decided to stay. San Francisco is America's most popular place to call home: wherever you go, you'll find evidence of the city's many cultures.

A short walk will take you from Chinatown – second largest in the US after New York – to the Italian cafes, especially Trieste, Greco, Puccini, Roma and Vesuvio, particularly "in" with the 1950s Beat Generation, of North Beach, or from the South-East Asian communities of Tenderloin, which have transformed this once high-crime area, to the mainly Mexican Mission District. Here, in 1776, the Spanish Franciscan missionaries built the Mission Dolores, still a peaceful oasis and the city's oldest building.

Just to the west, the Castro District is the centre of San Francisco's large, high-profile, politically powerful gay and lesbian community. The intersection of Castro and 18th streets is the self-proclaimed "Gayest Four Corners of the World". A Different Light, a well-stocked bookshop at 489 Castro, is a place of pilgrimage as are the many swinging bars that line the street, a symbol for this minority of a freedom generally not found elsewhere.

Inside Alcatraz



Typical cell key

THE MAXIMUM-SECURITY prison on Alcatraz, dubbed "The Rock" by prisoners, housed an average of 264 of the country's most incorrigible criminals, who were transferred here for disobedience while serving time in prisons elsewhere in the US. The strict discipline at Alcatraz was enforced by the threat of a stint in the isolation cells of D Block, and by loss of privileges, including a trustee's job, time for recreation, use of the prison library and permission to see visitors.



D Block

In the silent, solitary confinement cells of D Block, prisoners had to endure hours of unrelieved boredom.



Broadway

The corridor that separates C and B blocks was nicknamed by prisoners after New York City's busiest thoroughfare.

Library from which prisoners could order "vetted" books






Control Room

Reinforced to withstand a siege, this controlled the 24-hour electric security system.

Main Block entrance

Visiting area

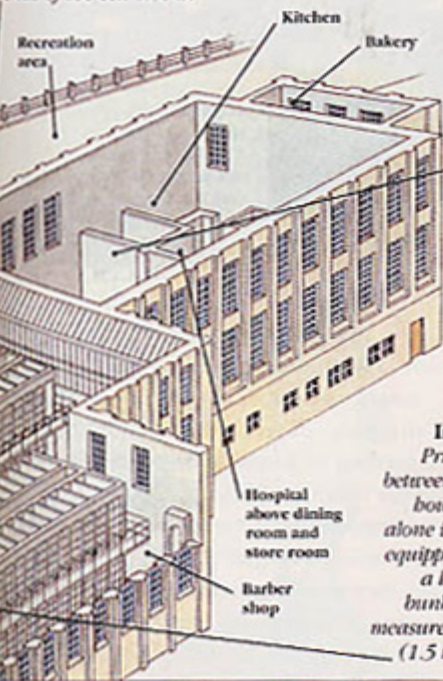
TIMELINE

1775 Spanish explorer Juan Manuel de Ayala names Alcatraz after the pelicans that inhabit it	1859 Fort Alcatraz completed; equipped with 100 cannon and 300 troops	1909-12 Army prisoners build the cell house	1972 Alcatraz becomes part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area
1848 John Fremont buys Alcatraz for US government	1857 Sally Port built	1864 First Pacific Coast lighthouse built on Alcatraz	1962 Frank Morris and the Anglin brothers escape
 John Fremont	 Sally Port		1963 Prison closed
			1969-71 Island occupied by American Indians
			1934 Federal Bureau of Prisons turns Alcatraz into a civilian prison

San Francisco's boom years occurred during the second half of the 19th century, when some San Franciscans made huge fortunes from the silver mines of Nevada's Comstock Lode, and from the Transcontinental Railroad. Many of their

magnificent homes were destroyed in the devastating earthquake of April 1906 – at least 3000 died and 250,000 were left homeless – but about 14,000 Victorian mansions survived. Some are in Castro, but most are in Haight-Ashbury near Mission,

Gun Gallery
Guards armed with pistols and rifles patrolled along the caged walkways at the ends of the cell blocks.



Dining Room
Inmates were well fed, the better to quell rebellion. Note the sample menu on display at the kitchen entrance.

Inside a Cell
Prisoners spent between 16 and 23 hours every day alone in stark cells, equipped with only a lavatory and bunk. Many cells measured 5 ft by 9 ft (1.5 m by 2.7 m).



FAMOUS INMATES

Al Capone
The notorious Prohibition-era gangster, "Scarface" Capone was actually convicted, in 1934, for income tax evasion! He spent much of his five-year sentence on Alcatraz in a hospital isolation cell, and finally left the prison mentally unbalanced.



Robert Stroud
During his 17 years on The Rock, Stroud spent most of his time in solitary confinement. Despite assertions to the contrary in the film *The Birdman of Alcatraz* (1962), Stroud was in fact prohibited from keeping birds in his prison cell.



Carnes, Thompson and Shockley
In May 1946, prisoners led by Clarence Carnes, Marion Thompson and Sam Shockley, overpowered guards and captured their guns. The prisoners failed to break out of the cell house, but three inmates and two officers were killed in the "Battle of Alcatraz". Carnes received an additional life sentence, and Shockley and Thompson were executed at San Quentin prison, for their part as ringleaders of the insurrection.

Anglin Brothers
John and Clarence Anglin, together with Frank Morris, chipped through the back walls of their cells, hiding the holes with cardboard grates. They left dummy heads in their beds and made a raft to enable their escape. They were never caught. Their story was dramatized in the film, *Escape from Alcatraz* (1979).



George Kelly
"Machine Gun" Kelly was The Rock's most dangerous inmate. He served 17 years for kidnapping and extortion.



where thousands of hippies held their "love-ins" during the 1960s, or on exclusive Nob Hill, easily accessible by cable car. You won't be alone: some 13 million passengers travel on the 28 kilometres of track each year – about 35,500 a day.

If you prefer modern architecture, at the downtown end of the line you can visit the many skyscrapers in the financial district. They were all designed by big-name architects between 1972 and 1985 when the environmentally-aware "Downtown

This look at Alcatraz Island is taken from the *San Francisco & Northern California Eyewitness Travel Guide*. © Dorling Kindersley Limited, London. Eyewitness Travel Guides are distributed in Australia by HarperCollins Publishers: phone (02) 9952 5000, fax (02) 9952 5666. Outside Australia/New Zealand, contact Dorling Kindersley, London – phone 44 171 836 5411, fax 44 171 836 7570.

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Plan" put an end to the "Manhattanisation" of San Francisco.

For culture in a gorgeous natural setting, take a walk in spectacular Golden Gate Park. Modelled after New York's Central Park, it is one of the world's largest urban parks. Both the city's art museums and the California Academy of Sciences, with its outstanding natural history collection, aquarium, planetarium and simulated "SafeQuake", call the park home. Among its many other attractions are the world-famous Japanese Tea Garden (here, in 1909, Japanese immigrant Makoto Hagiwara invented Chinese fortune cookies), meandering paths for health-conscious hikers, joggers and cyclists, and a wide range of other sports facilities. Don't miss the free concerts held on Sundays at the Spreckels Temple of Music.

If it's just plain fun you're after, go to the zippy waterfront. Start at the Maritime National Historic Park and stroll through Ghirardelli Square, with its mixture of crafts, boutiques and bistros; the Cannery, with its Museum of the City of San Francisco; the Wax and Ripley's Believe It or Not Museums; until you come to Fisherman's Wharf for a superb fish meal, and Pier 39 to explore UnderWater World, shop and ogle the acrobats, mime artists and sea lions.

Besides Fisherman's Wharf, three sights are truly unique to San Francisco. One is the self-guided tour of Alcatraz, the rocky, steep-sided island lying five kilometres east of Golden Gate, home to a maximum-security federal penitentiary from 1934 to 1964 (allow a half-day); second is a walk down hydrangea-planted Lombard Street, pictured left, the most crooked street in the world; and thirdly, the windy but



PHOTO: SAN FRANCISCO CONVENT AND VISITORS BUREAU

unforgettable two-kilometre walk or bike ride across the Golden Gate Bridge.

There are more than 5000 restaurants in San Francisco. Chinese, Italian and seafood predominate: Alioto's, Sabella's and Scoma's on Fisherman's Wharf are tops – but there's nothing like a take-away Dungeness crab, (in season only from mid-

November to June), boiled in an oil drum and served with garlic-flavored sourdough bread.

Sourdough bread first appeared in California during the Gold Rush. According to some, it originated in the Basque country of France. Others claim it was imported by a French pastry cook. It was popular with gold miners, who would take their precious leaven into the Sierra, ensuring they always had the necessary ingredients for the life-saving bread. A loaf

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SAN FRANCISCO STORY

- The early Spanish name for San Francisco was Yerba Buena – “good herb”. The Cultural Centre for the Arts and Moscone Convention Centre, recently constructed downtown, are located in Yerba Buena Gardens.

- San Francisco's first recorded earthquake was in 1838.

- Although the usual claim is that, like Rome, there are seven hills, San Francisco actually has 42.

- The city's motto, noted on its flag and seal, is *Oro en paz, fiero en guerra* – “Gold in peace, iron in war”.

- “Frisco” is a nickname for San Francisco used almost exclusively by out-of-towners. Local residents prefer the full name. Frisco was originally a moniker used primarily by seamen and soldiers anticipating a big night on the town.

- San Francisco has more than 360 pedestrian staircases, including the ancient wooden planks at the east end of Maconday Lane, the grand staircase sweeping up from Dewey Boulevard and Pacheco Street, and the garden-flanked Filbert Steps from Levi Plaza to Coit Tower.

- Denim jeans were first made in San Francisco for the miners during the Gold Rush. Levi Strauss moved to San Francisco in 1853 and had great success in the 1870s when he began using metal rivets to strengthen stress points in the garments. The company is still owned by his descendants.

- Much of the fill that built up the waterfront came from ships bringing the first gold seekers to California; they were ballasted with mud.

- San Francisco's official flower is the dahlia. Its official colors are gold and black.

- The original United Nations charter was drafted and signed at the Fairmont Hotel, on exclusive Nob Hill. A plaque in the Garden Room on the lobby level commemorates the occasion.

- On New Year's Eve, it's a San Francisco tradition in the financial and downtown districts to toss calendars out of office windows. The clean-up operation is costly, but locals seem reluctant to give up the practice.

- San Francisco's 11 sister cities are Abidjan, Assisi, Caracas, Cork, Haifa, Manila, Osaka, Seoul, Shanghai, Sydney and Taipei.



keeps for several days and makes a nice souvenir or gift.

Dim sum or small hors-d'oeuvres are an institution that came to San Francisco via Hong Kong. It is also known as yum cha. If you only have one Asian meal in San Francisco, it should be dim sum.

Most people eat dim sum for brunch. The restaurants tend to be open from 9 or 10am until mid-afternoon. Generally, waitresses come around with carts and you choose what looks good. When you've finished, the waitress counts the number of little plates on the table and draws up the bill accordingly.

The most popular dim sum dishes include *cha siu bow* (steamed buns with barbecued pork inside), *har cow* (delicate little dumplings stuffed with shrimp), and egg rolls. Ask for mango custard for dessert. For the best dim sum in town, go to the Hong Kong Flower Lounge, Ton Kiang or Yank Sing. Other exceptional Chinese cuisine can be sampled at Brandy Ho's and House of Nan King.

Born-to shoppers can certainly indulge in some retail therapy in San Francisco. Choose from endless kitsch at Fisherman's Wharf, home-made chocolate cable cars and Dungeness crabs from Ghirardelli Square's Chocolate Manufactory, and kites, assorted teas and back-scratchers from Grant Avenue in Chinatown. For upmarket purchases, visit the numerous



PHOTO: SAN FRANCISCO CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

big-name department stores around Union Square. Fashion store I. Magnin, with the poshest ladies room in town and Gump's, well known for oriental antiques especially pearls and jade, have been San Francisco landmarks since the 1860s.

A new arrival, completed in 1982, is the four towers of Embarcadero Centre house, the swanky Hyatt Regency Hotel with its breathtaking 17-storey atrium and more than 125 luxury shops and restaurants. Opened in October 1996, Skydeck, at the top of One Embarcadero Centre, is San Francisco's only viewing observatory and its newest tourist attraction.

For one-of-a-kind shops, browse through the poetry section at City Lights Booksellers & Publishers, owned by poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti and the first bookshop in the US to sell only paperbacks; William Stout Architectural Books is one of the few great architectural bookshops in the US; John Berggruen Gallery has the city's largest collection of works by both emerging and established artists; Cando K. Hishino is a gold mine for serious calligraphers and artists; Yankee Doodle Dandy specialises in pre-1935 quilts; and learn the tricks of the trade at Fortune Cookie Factory.



BRUCE WILKIE



The city of San Francisco's environs are also special. Across the bay is the University of California's Berkeley campus and Oakland, which is Jack London territory. Marin County, with its charming towns of Sausalito and Tiburon and the natural beauty of Mount Tamalpais, the giant redwoods in Muir Woods, the ocean at Stinson Beach and Point Reyes, is just across the Golden Gate Bridge. Only an hour or two by car or Greyhound bus, Lake Tahoe, Yosemite National Park, the ski slopes of the Sierra Nevada, unspoiled Mendocino, once a logging town, and the 273 wineries of the verdant Napa Valley, are just a bit farther afield to the north and east.

If you drive south along the coastal highway No. 1 you can visit the artists' colony of Carmel, home town of Clint Eastwood, stopping at Monterey to visit the homes of authors Robert Louis Stevenson and John Steinbeck, and the Aquarium.

When it comes time to leave this beautiful place, the words of the song *I left my heart in San Francisco*, will ring in your ears. As the author and native son William Saroyan once said: "No one invites the heart to come to life as San Francisco does."

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