

Bayside beauty

There's more to stunning San Francisco than cable cars and Alcatraz

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1 Bike the Bay

While most visitors are drawn to walk or ride the **Golden Gate Bridge**, biking **Crissy Field** below it is the more peaceful part of the experience; sounds are of the conversations of locals walking their dogs rather than multiple lanes of traffic whizzing by. Views of the bridge, the **bay** and **Alcatraz** (just a ferry ride away) are spectacular and the national parks-run "Warming Hut" is the perfect spot for an organic tea or treat. Of course, crossing the bridge is almost mandatory: walk or ride over it and catch a ferry back from **Sausalito** or, for those with more energy, cycle across then double back to cruise the forested **Presidio or Golden Gate Park**. On weekends or late afternoons, a rest on the grassy rise of Golden Gate Park's **Hippie Hill** comes with free entertainment from jugglers and fire twirlers practising their craft.

The famous golden Gate Bridge.
Inset: Lombard Street.

2 HIT THE HIPPIE TRAIL

As the birthplace of 60s counterculture, **The Haight's** bohemian reputation lives on. Vintage clothes horses will love the options here though they may bemoan the area's gentrification, which continues despite local opposition. Those shunning the hippie scene should try Union

Street, hugely popular with locals; or for chic boutiques, browse Fillmore Street between California and Bush. Of course, it's not all about clothes — North Beach's City Lights Bookstore is a must for book lovers and music fans will love Haight's Amoeba Records.
Haight & Ashbury Streets intersection



3 Head for the hills

Wandering the streets of San Francisco is better than a trip to the gym; with hills popping up seemingly out of nowhere, quads soon get a workout. The switchbacks of **Lombard Street** make a good warm-up but, despite its fame as the "crookedest"

street, Lombard's 18 per cent incline is nothing compared with its neighbours: the 31.5 gradient at nearby **Filbert** (between Leavenworth and Hyde) shows what the city's slopes are really made of. Once you tire of walking, an historic cable car ride is an effortless way to travel the same route and **Market Street** across to **Fisherman's Wharf** (via Chinatown) is the most popular line. Or simply grab a coffee and put the locals' saying into practice: "When you get tired of walking around San Francisco, you can always lean against it."



The Palace of Fine Arts.

4 PERUSE THE PALACE

After extensive restoration, the **Palace of Fine Arts** now reflects the “Roman ruins” feel its designer (architect Bernard Maybeck) was hoping for when he created the theatre and atrium in 1915. Built to celebrate the completion of the Panama Canal, the magnificent colonnades and rotunda sit next to a tranquil pond, a pleasant spot to daydream. Those with kids should reward them with a trip to the neighbouring Exploratorium, where hundreds



of science, art and human perception exhibits are on display. For a glimpse into the backstreets of North Beach and

beyond, arrive via the number 30 bus (beginning in Chinatown and ending a few blocks away). www.exploratorium.edu

9 Hunt out history

San Francisco **City Guides** obviously aren't scared of a few hills: after 35 years, this non-profit organisation continues to offer free walks through every nook and cranny of the city. Led by 250 volunteers, services are happily provided gratis, although donations are welcomed. While tourist hot spots like Fisherman's Wharf and Chinatown feature, take the chance to explore somewhere less obvious such as Nob Hill or Castro. www.sfcityguides.org

5 Eat like a local

Bay Area foodies take their work seriously and the results pay off for visitors. Ingredients are listed in great detail with organic, local and sustainable meals featured across the city. In restaurants, **SPQR** deserves the buzz as a new hot spot: food lovers up and down the coast are already making it part of their city visits despite its no-bookings policy. While the menu is influenced by Italy, fresh and inspired food is what has crowds vying for a table in the small but elegant room. The kitchen is even changing the reputation of unglamorous vegetables: **SPQR's** signature dish of fried Brussels sprouts

with garlic, capers, lemon and parsley (US \$7) has diners begging for the recipe. While in the area, it's worth knowing the newly revived **Jazz District** is just a stone's throw away. **1911 Fillmore Street (between Pine and Bush)**. **Antipasti US \$7; mains US \$18–\$20.**



7 Back to Berkeley

Berkeley makes a worthwhile day trip on numerous counts. While the half-hour BART train ride beneath the Bay will be excitement enough for some, activist types will enjoy strolling the tree-lined university campus where American free speech was revived. Dining at **Chez Panisse** is a must if it's in your budget. The upstairs cafe is the cheaper option (mains US \$18–27), while dinner downstairs is a set menu of 3–4 courses for US \$55 Mondays, \$65 Tuesdays to Thursdays and \$85 on weekends (plus, of course, taxes, drinks and tip). Founder Alice Waters is internationally regarded and her focus on sustainable and seasonal eating has influenced chefs throughout California and beyond. Bookings are essential. **Chez Panisse, 1517 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley**



Historic streetcar.

6 HIGHLIGHTS OF HIGH CULTURE

The San Francisco Symphony's acclaimed musical director Michael Tilson Thomas says making music is as necessary as eating, drinking or breathing. Contrary to popular opinion, you don't need a gown or tuxedo to enjoy classic music here; business or cocktail wear is fine. Last-minute “rush” tickets are available on the day from the box office (US \$20) but good planners will appreciate the full online schedule (tickets range from US \$25 to US \$80). www.sfsymphony.org

8 Soak up the hot springs

Peace pervades at **Kabuki Hot Springs** in the small pocket known as **Japantown**. For the optimum bath-house experience, start with a massage or facial (prices vary) then tackle the bath house (about US \$20) in its suggested order: 10-minute rounds in the communal steam room and sauna followed by a session in the hot pool (a toasty 40°C) and a bracing cold plunge. While nudity is optional, the iced, cucumber slices for puffy eyes appear the most common cover. Silence is maintained by a diplomatically worded sign next to a small gong offering guests the opportunity to “dong” for quiet if the experience gets too chatty. Women: W, F, Su. Men: M, Th, Sa. Tuesday is co-ed and clothed. www.kabukisprings.com; 1750 Geary Blvd (at Fillmore)

10 Forage at Ferry

This is a food city and nowhere is it better conveyed than **The Ferry Market** building. Dozens of gourmet and specialist producers peddle their wares in a daily delight to the tastebuds, enjoyed by tourists and locals alike. If you don't get your fill inside, the excellent **Farmer's Market** held outside on Tuesdays and Saturdays offers organic produce from local growers and is guaranteed to make a **Golden Gate Park** picnic one to remember. ♦