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ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



MikeBehnken

Top San Francisco Free Attractions

Mill Valley, San Francisco, 1 Day

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Guide Description



AUTHOR NOTE: There are plenty of free things to see and do in San Francisco. There are tons of neighborhoods to explore, from the country's biggest Chinatown to the mural-lined alleys of the Latin-flavored Mission District (Balmy Alley, Precita Eyes, and Women's Building are the best) to the former hippie enclave of Haight-Ashbury, which happens to be perched on the edge of the natural wonderland of Golden Gate Park. You can also take a leisurely stroll down Lombard Street, of the city's most famous sights, or challenge yourself by walking up Telegraph Hill's shady streets to Coit Tower, which affords unparalleled views of the city and bay. In summer months, the Stern Grove Music Festival features free outdoor world music performances every Sunday; we recommend getting there early to stake a prime spot and enjoy a picnic.

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - San Francisco, Mill Valley



Golden Gate Park

1,000+ acres of green retreat in the heart of the city



Chinatown

North America's oldest.



Coit Tower

Towering view on top of Telegraph Hill



Haight-Ashbury

Counter culture shopping, center of the 60's



Mount Tamalpais State Park

Bay Area icon



Women's Building Mural

Largest mural in SF



Precita Eyes Muralists

Beautiful Murals of the Mission District



Lombard Street

World's crookedest street!

Day 1 - San Francisco, Mill Valley

QUICK NOTE

contact:

tel: (415) 831-2700
fax: +1 415 581 2540
<http://www.sfgov.org/>

location:

Stanyan & Fulton Sts
San Francisco CA 94118

1 Golden Gate Park

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

You can pedal a boat around Stow Lake, but a better bet is to rent a bike at the boathouse there and pedal around the park. On your way, check out the historic herd of bison (That's right, big shaggy buffalo) in their paddock near the lake.

DESCRIPTION: Spanning three miles from the edge of Haight-Ashbury all the way to the Pacific Ocean, Golden Gate Park contains so many mini-universes and attractions you'll want to (literally) stop and smell the roses on several occasions. Die-hard nature lovers can check out the Rose Garden, the Conservatory of Flowers, or the famous Japanese Tea Garden, featuring a classic pagoda, cherry blossoms, and landscaping straight out of the Land of the Rising Sun. Golden Gate Park's natural highlight, however, is the San Francisco Botanical Garden, which features a horticultural trip around the world (don't miss the redwood grove and succulents section). Don't miss Golden Gate Park's two world-class museums, the California Academy of Sciences and the De Young Museum. Both were completely rebuilt in their original locations in the past decade, and are worth a visit for their architecture alone. The park is also the perfect place to get active. There are tons of walking paths, several public tennis courts, an affordable pitch and put nine-hole golf course, sport fields, and picnic grounds. You can even rent a boat and head out for a delightful row on Stow Lake. Spring, summer, and fall bring a number of events to Golden Gate Park, including bluegrass, rock, and hip-hop concerts and Shakespeare in the Park performances. © NileGuide



[http2007](http://2007)

contact:

tel: +1 415 391 2000
<http://www.sanfranciscochina.com/>

location:

Bush St. and Kearny St.
San Francisco CA 94108

2 Chinatown

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Good dim sum is surprisingly hard to find, as many restaurants seem to favor grease as a main ingredient. Chinatown's best dim sum can be found at the Golden Door Restaurant and Yank Sing. For an absolutely delectable yet no-frills Chinese dining experience, head to local favorite House of Nanking.

DESCRIPTION: Red lanterns waving in the breeze. Incense wafting out of small temples. Esoteric medicinal herbs dangling in shop windows. Some aspects of San Francisco's



www.bluewaikiki.com

Chinatown, the oldest in America, hardly seem worlds apart from the motherland and haven't changed much from when the neighborhood was first built in the mid-19th century. Enter at the dragon-flanked gate on Bush Street at Grant Avenue and get lost in a wonderland of bustling produce markets, touches of ancient Chinese architecture, quirky gift and houseware shops, art galleries, clothing stores, dim sum eateries, and serene tea houses, the densest concentration of which are on Grant Avenue and Stockton Street. Some hot spots are Portsmouth Square, where you can admire the graceful movements of Tai Chi practitioners and the strategy of elderly chess players, and the Chinese Culture Center of San Francisco, where Sinophiles can take in art exhibits, be led on an informative, guided Heritage Walking Tour (excellent for those wishing to pick up on the area's rich history), or take a brush painting or traditional Chinese music workshop. © NileGuide

contact:
tel: (415) 362-0808
<http://www.coittower.org/>

location:
1 Telegraph Hill Boulevard
San Francisco CA 94133

hours:
Daily 10am-5pm

3 Coit Tower

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

The trek is entirely worth it; take the Filbert Steps (at the corner of Filbert and Kearny streets), which are steep but are the most direct path up to the tower

DESCRIPTION: The landmark Coit Tower was built in the 1930's as a tribute to the city's firefighters, at the behest of eccentric local celebrity Lillie Hitchcock Coit, an honorary firefighter herself. Today, Coit Tower stands proudly on the northeastern edge of the city in the scenic Telegraph Hill district. Although Coit Tower is accessed by an entirely uphill climb, visitors who brave it are treated to unparalleled views of the Bay and its bridges, Marin County, the East Bay, and the undulating San Francisco cityscape. Plus there's an incredible Art Deco mural that covers the entire circumference of the tower's interior ground-floor walls. Painted by 26 artists, this masterpiece depicts many aspects of '30's California industry and labor. Remember, the walk back is all downhill; head southwest into the nearby Italian-American enclave of North Beach for a cappuccino and gelato and some fabulous shopping on Grant Avenue. © NileGuide



contact:
tel: +1 415 391 2000 (Tourist Information)

location:
Haight and Ashbury Streets
San Francisco CA 94117

4 Haight-Ashbury

DESCRIPTION: This center of '60s psychedelic activity to this day retains counterculture credentials with a proliferation of piercing salons, bookstores brimming with hippie nostalgia, and off-beat shops set amid Victorian architecture. © NileGuide



contact:

tel: 415-388-2070
fax: (415) 893-1583
<http://www.parks.ca.gov/default.asp>

location:

7665 Redwood Blvd, Suite 150
Mill Valley CA 94941

5 Mount Tamalpais State Park

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

While all Mount Tam hikes are exceptional, we are partial to those that begin at Pantoll Station, as they lead to the lushest parts of the mountain; the one considerable drawback of starting from there, and not East Peak Station, is missing out on mountaintop views.

DESCRIPTION: From its exposed 2,751-foot peak boasting panoramic views of the Bay Area to the redwood-, fir-, and oak-sheltered hiking and mountain biking trails meandering down to its base, Mount Tamalpais State Park is a paragon of Northern California natural beauty. Home to over 73 native plant species and a host of wildlife, Mount Tam is the ideal place to bask in the great outdoors. After all, visitors can not only hike or bike, but also go horseback riding or camping; overnight cabins are onsite and two quaint inns are nearby to provide more comfort to those who aren't crazy about tents. Although nature is the main attraction at Mount Tamalpais State Park, locals also hike in with a picnic to attend the annual springtime open-air Broadway revival performance at the Mountain Theater, which has natural-stone amphitheatre seating. © NileGuide



contact:

tel: (415) 431-1180
fax: +1 415 861 8969
<http://www.womensbuilding.org>

location:

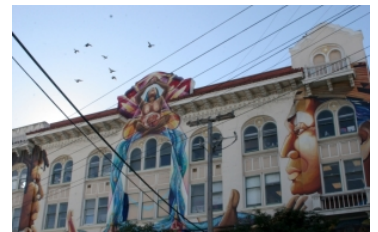
3543 18th Street
San Francisco CA 94110

hours:

24 hrs

6 Women's Building Mural

DESCRIPTION: The colorful mural that covers this building, Maestrapeace, portrays famous women of the last century. Images include Georgia O'Keefe and Audre Lord. Ten San Francisco artists and 80 female volunteers, some of them local schoolchildren, painted this mural in 1994. Not only is this most colorful mural in The City, it is also the largest. It is also, and this almost goes without saying here in the progressive Bay Area, a masterpiece of political correctness done in a disarmingly naive style. © wcities.com



wcities

contact:

tel: (415) 285-2287
<http://www.precitaeyes.org/>

location:

2981 24th St
San Francisco CA 94110

7 Precita Eyes Muralists

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Enjoy the rich history and culture of the Mission District seen through the eyes of influential artists.

DESCRIPTION: San Francisco's Mission District is known for more than just great Mexican food and offbeat dive bars. It is also home to one of the most impressive collections of public murals anywhere. While many are decades old, new murals are constantly being added to the scene by a flourishing group of professional muralists working out of the Precita Eyes muralist collective. This great resource also helps art lovers by preserving and interpreting these fantastic works of public art.



courtesy of precitaeyes.org

Tours given by muralist members of the collective present 75 murals in just 6 blocks. It's a great way to get to know one of San Francisco's richest neighborhoods.
© NileGuide

contact:
tel: (415) 391-2000

location:
Between Hyde &
Leavenworth streets
San Francisco CA 94133

8 Lombard Street

OUR LOCAL EXPERT SAYS:

Take the Powell-Hyde Cable Car line there, as it conveniently stops at the very top of the street.

DESCRIPTION: Famed as the "crookedest street in the world," the swath of Lombard Street between Hyde and Leavenworth streets in San Francisco's Russian Hill district is indeed full of twists and turns. Lombard Street was designed as a series of switchbacks in order to make its steep grade navigable by automobile. Today, you'll almost definitely see Lombard Street congested with cars making the celebrated drive down. Therefore, we recommend hoofing it—you'll be able to admire all the more slowly the lovely, brightly-colored houses flanked with bougainvillea and all manner of flowers, as well as the gorgeous view of North Beach, Telegraph Hill, and the bay. After winding down Lombard Street, head east to nearby North Beach for serious Italian eats, or north to the maritime delights of Fisherman's Wharf and Ghiradelli Square. © NileGuide



Photo courtesy of Lombard Street

San Francisco Snapshot

Local Info

Sun and fog, grandeur and blight, hipsters and suits, relaxed and industrious... San Francisco's juxtapositions are infinite. Arguably the most beautiful city in the United States, the city by the bay is also the most un-American city, in attitude as well as looks. Old Victorian homes blend with modern, shiny skyscrapers, and the skyline is neither wholly gray concrete nor red brick like its East Coast sister cities.

The second most densely populated city in the U.S., San Francisco is more akin to Europe than to America. The city has 63 miles of bike lanes within its seven-by-seven square miles, with some 40,000 residents cycling to work every day. On Sundays in the spring and summer, some streets are closed to car traffic and open to the public for biking, rollerblading, and just hanging out. Plazas attract farmer's markets, protests, and coffee-sipping denizens. San Francisco has always been iconoclastic, from the early Gold Rush Days, to the 1967 Summer of Love, to the legalization (and subsequent prohibition) of same-sex marriage, a movement which pushed five other states to do the same. Flanked on the east and west side by its beloved bridges, the metropolis could be easily perched next to the Mediterranean Sea. It's no wonder it attracts the third-highest number of foreign visitors in the U.S. each year.

San Francisco isn't so much a city as a collection of neighborhoods, each with its own character and micro-climate, which is why the city can have sun, fog and drizzle at the same time on the same day. In all, there are 27 distinct neighborhoods with dozens of sub-neighborhoods that mesh together like puzzle pieces.

Often only a block or two separates one from the other, one world from the next. The Tenderloin, San Francisco's skid row, borders sparkling and tourist-ridden Union Square; the modish Mission lies side by side with stroller-central Noe Valley; gritty Polk Gulch rubs rich Russian Hill; overlooked Western Addition nuzzles posh Pac Heights; blue-collar Chinatown kisses the corporate Financial District.

The characters who inhabit these communities are a paradox as well – Jimmy Choos pound the pavement

alongside friendly bums, and white-collar workers take the same bus as fuzzy boot-clad street performers. To label San Francisco's citizens as eclectic is an understatement. It's also an understatement to call them "unique." Don't be surprised if you find yourself amongst an impromptu pillow fight along the Embarcadero, a naked bike parade up Market Street, or a flash dance party on public transit.

Despite the stereotype, California does not a hot, sunny destination make. Most visitors underestimate the fog's chill, which is felt most strongly between 4-8pm, after which the wind tends to calm down. San Franciscans are a practical bunch; you'll rarely see a local without a spare scarf, hat, or long sleeves. They also shy away from wintry black and gray wardrobes; color plays a huge part in street fashion, and nobody looks twice if somebody dons a purple velvet suit while walking their dog or if a bride wears red instead of white to her wedding. San Franciscans also know that when it's hot, you take advantage of it, whether it's in November, March, or May. Beach days and mild nights do happen, but they are few and far between, and they are rarely enjoyed in the summer.

San Francisco boasts festivals nearly every weekend, from the largest Chinese New Year's Parade outside of China, to Pride, the oldest of the world's gay pride parades. Much of the population turns out for the annual Bay to Breakers run as well as the three-day Outside Lands concert in Golden Gate Park, both of which make San Francisco a party destination on par with New Orleans, Berlin, Austin, and Miami. Chances are high that you'll be in town for some event like the Stern Grove free concerts, Cinco de Mayo, Treasure Island Music festival, Carnaval, Fillmore Street Jazz festival, or the dozens of film festivals which descend upon the most cultured of cities yearly. Don't forget the Haight Street, Folsom Street, Union Street, North Beach, and Japantown neighborhood street fairs. And the list goes on...

Yet, even with endless fun at their fingertips, San Franciscans are a diligent bunch. It's no coincidence that the city is home to online powerhouses Twitter, Craigslist, Zynga, and Yelp, and only a few miles away you'll find Paypal, Google, and Facebook. San Francisco seems to be

experiencing a second boom to the dot-com era with hundreds of tech start-ups invading SOMA, Potrero Hill, and the blighted 5th street and Market corridor (Twitter recently got a tax break for moving here versus retreating to blander Silicon Valley).

Since the first dotcom boom in 2000, newfound wealth has made an obvious impression on the city. Old SOMA warehouses have turned into condos; decrepit Dogpatch industrial spaces have been transformed into airy live/work lofts; and just wait until 2017, when the "Grand Central Station of the West" opens. The new Transbay Transit Center project will add three 1,200 foot skyscrapers and 10 additional towers to the San Francisco skyline. Lest we forget, the highly anticipated eastern span of the Bay Bridge, with its single self-supporting suspension tower, is slated to finally open in 2013.

To some, all of this development has meant San Francisco has lost its counter culture character. Ridiculously high rents have driven many of the "hippies" out. Those that remain are finding it less hospitable. The Haight-Ashbury neighborhood has been populated with vagabonds ever since the Summer of Love and business owners are finally taking a stand against their loitering. The controversial Sit/Lie Law, which bans sitting or lying on sidewalks between 7 a.m. and 11 p.m., was just passed by voters.

Next to its cable cars and hills (you'll never forget your first ride over the crest of Nob Hill) San Francisco is known as epicurean heaven. Boasting around 3,600 restaurants, San Francisco has fantastic ethnic cuisine—sushi, Vietnamese, Thai, and Chinese, to name just a few. The large Hispanic population contributes dozens of popular taquerias; most are concentrated in the Mission district. The birth of California cuisine, pioneered by Alice Waters of the world famous Chez Panisse, turned the entire country on to fresh, local ingredients, a movement which is reflected across the board in San Francisco eateries like Zuni Café, Range, Michael Mina, and newcomer Prospect.

San Francisco's stunning beauty and easy access to nature make it a paradise for outdoor-lovers. There are over 50 city, state, and federal parks within the city itself, including the crown jewel: Golden Gate Park. Gorgeous golden beaches are mere

San Francisco Snapshot continued

minutes from downtown, mountain biking was born in the Marin hills just north of the Golden Gate Bridge, and the Golden Gate National Recreation Area covers close to 75,000 acres, including 59 miles of bay and ocean shoreline.

You won't find that kind of space in any other major American city. More

community-focused than Los Angeles, milder than Boston, more relaxed than New York, more focused than Miami, San Francisco is a destination of dreamers and achievers- people don't just talk the talk, they put their plans into action and aren't afraid to fail. Just look at the San Francisco Giants- even a baseball team

deemed "a bunch of rag tag misfits" can pull off a World Series championship...just sayin'. It's obvious San Franciscans love their city, and when you visit, you probably will too.

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