

San Francisco & the Bay Area



If you've ever wondered where the envelope goes when it's pushed, here's your answer. Natural beauty and license to be outlandish continues to draw free-thinkers and wild parrots into the San Francisco Bay Area, today America's fifth-largest metropolitan region. Psychedelic drugs, newfangled technology, gay liberation, green ventures, free speech and culinary experimentation all became mainstream long ago in the Bay Area.

Never afraid to go for broke, the region has lost fortunes but never its spirit in Gold Rush panics, dot-com crashes and earthquakes. Losing your shirt has become a favorite local pastime, with surfers stripping down right in Santa Cruz parking lots, marchers at San Francisco's Pride Parade and pretty much anyone on hot weekends in clothing-optional Berkeley. This is no place to be shy: out here among eccentrics of every stripe, no one's going to notice a few tan lines.

With its fault lines and free thinkers, the Bay Area keeps only a tentative hold on the planet, not to mention the continental US. Stick around and you'll catch the continental drift, with breezes laced with Pacific salt, perpetually blooming flowers and a tantalizing whiff of unlimited possibility. Breathe in, and brace yourself: other places in California may surprise you, but only in the San Francisco Bay Area will you surprise yourself.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Tasting Northern California's seasonal bounty at the **Ferry Building Marketplace** (p54)
- Conquering SF's hills for top-of-the-world views – or taking the **cable car** (p84)
- Butterflies alighting on your shoulders in the Rainforest Dome at the **California Academy of Sciences** (p56)
- Watching fog drift over the Golden Gate Bridge from the **Marin Headlands** (p87)
- Hiking beneath the world's tallest trees at **Muir Woods National Monument** (p95)
- Exploring the wind-swept peninsula of **Point Reyes National Seashore** (p98)
- Biting into fresh-picked organic strawberries at **Swanton Berry Farm** (p86)



SAN FRANCISCO

pop 744,041

Welcome to the bubble, America's most liberal city, where you can say what you like and act like a freak without anyone noticing. 'Eclectic' doesn't begin to describe a town where you can begin your day with a leisurely breakfast of *huevos rancheros* in the Mission sun, picnic on Italian *panini* among parrots and poets on North Beach stairway gardens, get goose bumps watching the fog billow over the Golden Gate Bridge from a nude beach, dine Downtown on cutting-edge cuisine inspired by California's cornucopia of produce, and end up still partying at 5am with South of Market (SoMa) clubsters in a universal groove. So long, inhibitions; hello San Francisco.

Once you've ogled Victorians, ridden the cable cars and sailed to Alcatraz, explore the off-the-beaten-path neighborhoods to get a true sense of place. Don't underestimate poet George Sterling's 'cool, gray city of love': a couple of weeks here and you may start shopping for apartments – or at least a pair of chaps.

ORIENTATION

Compact San Francisco sits at the tip of a 30-mile-long peninsula and measures 7 miles by 7 miles. To the west lies the Pacific, to the east San Francisco Bay.

The city can be divided into three sections. Downtown resembles a generous slice of pie, its edges delimited by Van Ness Ave and Market St, with the rounded edge being the waterfront. Major downtown neighborhoods include the Financial District (FiDi), North Beach, Chinatown, Union Square, Nob Hill, Russian Hill and Fisherman's Wharf. To find numbered piers, note that even-numbered piers extend southward of the Ferry Building, and odd-numbered piers northward.

The area south of Market St is aptly called South of Market (SoMa). South of SoMa past Division is the hip, gritty Mission district.

West of Van Ness Ave to the Pacific are historic neighborhoods, including posh Pacific Heights and the Marina, Japantown, the Castro (the city's gay center) and the Haight district (of 1960s fame). Also here are the city's best parks – the Presidio, Lincoln Park and Golden Gate Park.

FAST FACTS

- **Average temperature low/high in San Francisco** January 46/58°F, September 56/71°F
- **San Francisco to Los Angeles** 382 miles, six to eight hours
- **San Francisco International Airport to downtown San Francisco** 14 miles, 20 to 45 minutes
- **Downtown San Francisco to downtown Napa** 48 miles, 60 to 90 minutes
- **Golden Gate Bridge to Muir Woods** 11 miles, 20 to 40 minutes

INFORMATION

Bookstores

A Different Light Bookstore (Map p61; ☎ 415-431-0891; www.adlbooks.com; 489 Castro St; ☎ 10am-11pm) Gay-specific titles.

Adobe Books (Map p61; ☎ 415-864-3936; http://adobebooksbackroomgallery.blogspot.com; 3166 16th St; ☎ 11am-midnight) Glorious chaos of used books complete with cat, sofas and back-room art gallery.

Books Inc (Map p61; ☎ 415-864-6777; www.booksinc.net; 2275 Market St; ☎ 10am-10pm) General interest with several branches in SF; check out the local bestsellers section.

Bound Together Anarchist Book Collective (Map p63; ☎ 415-431-8355; www.boundtogetherbooks.com; 1369 Haight St; ☎ 11:30am-7:30pm) All-volunteer nonprofit bookstore stocked with anti-superhero comics, organic farming manuals and other radical notions.

ourpick City Lights (Map pp58-9; ☎ 415-362-8193; www.citylights.com; 261 Columbus Ave; ☎ 10am-midnight) A free-speech landmark, bookseller and publisher; literature main floor, nonfiction cellar, legendary Beat poetry loft.

Fog City News (Map pp58-9; ☎ 415-543-7400; www.fogcitynews.com; 455 Market St) Stellar selection of magazines, international periodicals and gourmet chocolate.

Get Lost (Map pp58-9; ☎ 415-437-0529; 1825 Market St) Tops for travel books and maps.

Modern Times (Map p61; ☎ 415-282-9246; www.mtbs.com; 888 Valencia St; ☎ 10am-9pm Mon-Sat, 11am-6pm Sun) Good in-store events; great for politics.

Omnivore (Map p61; ☎ 415-282-4712; www.omnivorebooks.com; 3885a Caesar Chavez St; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Sat, noon-5pm Sun) Signed cookbooks by SF's top chefs, vintage recipe books and standing-room-only foodie events.