



San Francisco

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Best Places to Eat

- » Coi (p83)
- » Benu (p86)
- » La Taquería (p86)
- » Frances (p89)
- » Aziza (p91)

Best Places to Stay

- » Orchard Garden Hotel (p76)
- » Hotel Vitale (p80)
- » Hotel Bohème (p78)
- » Inn San Francisco (p80)
- » Argonaut Hotel (p79)

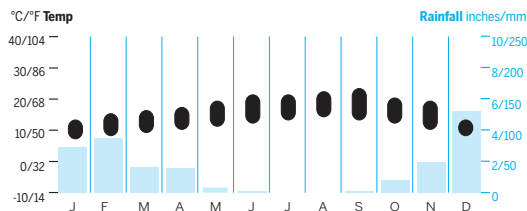
Why Go?

Get to know the world capital of weird from the inside out, from mural-lined alleyways named after poets to clothing-optional beaches on a former military base. But don't be too quick to dismiss San Francisco's wild ideas. Biotech, gay rights, personal computers, cable cars and organic fine dining were once considered outlandish too, before San Francisco introduced these underground ideas into the mainstream decades ago. San Francisco's morning fog erases the boundaries between land and ocean, reality and infinite possibility.

Rules are never strictly followed here, but bliss is. Golden Gate Bridge and Alcatraz are entirely optional – San Franciscans mostly admire them from afar – leaving you free to pursue inspiration through Golden Gate Park, past flamboyantly painted Victorian homes and through Mission galleries. Just don't be late for your sensational, sustainable dinner: in San Francisco, you can find happiness and eat it too.

When to Go

San Francisco



Jan–Mar Low-season rates, brisk but rarely cold days, and the colorful Lunar New Year parade.

May–Aug Farmers markets and festivals make up for high-season rates and chilly afternoon fog.

Sep–Nov Blue skies, free concerts, bargain hotel rates and flavor-bursting harvest cuisine.

Cable Cars

Groaning brakes and clanging brass bells only add to the thrills of San Francisco's cable cars, which have hardly changed since their introduction here in 1873. Cable cars still can't move in reverse, and require burly gripmen (and one buff gripwoman) to lean hard on hand-operated brakes to keep from careening downhill. The city receives many applicants for this job, but 80% fail the strenuous tests of upper-body strength and hand-eye coordination, and rarely try again. Today the cable car seems more like a steampunk carnival ride than modern transport, but it remains the killer app to conquer San Francisco's breakneck slopes. There are no seat belts, child seats or air bags on board – just jump onto the wooden sideboard, grab a strap, and enjoy the ride of your life.

DON'T MISS...

- » **Saloons** The Barbary Coast is roaring back to life with historically researched whiskey cocktails and staggering absinthe concoctions in San Francisco's great Western saloon revival (p92).
- » **Foraged fine dining** No SF tasting menu is complete without wild chanterelles, miner's lettuce from Berkeley hillsides or SF-backyard nasturtium flowers, from **Commonwealth** (p86) to **Coi** (p83).
- » **Green everything** Recent reports rank San Francisco as the greenest city in North America, with its LEED-certified green hotels, pioneering citywide composting laws and America's biggest stretch of urban greenery: **Golden Gate Park** (p53).
- » **Showtime** Bewigged satire, world premiere opera, year-round film festivals, Grammy-winning symphonies and legendary, jawdropping drag: no one puts on a show like San Francisco, and the cheering, back-talking local audiences demand encores in no uncertain terms.

SF's Best Free...

- » **Music** Golden Gate Park (p53) hosts free concerts summer through fall, from opera to Hardly Strictly Bluegrass (p76).
- » **Speech** City Lights Bookstore (p59) won a landmark free speech case over the publication of Allen Ginsberg's magnificent, incendiary *Howl*; take a seat in the designated Poet's Chair and celebrate your right to read freely.
- » **Love** Pride (p75) fills San Francisco streets with free candy, free condoms, and over a million people freely smooching total strangers under rainbow flags.
- » **Spirits** Anywhere within city limits, at any time – consider yourself warned.

DID YOU KNOW?

Despite slacker reputations cultivated at 30 medical marijuana clubs, San Franciscans hold more patents, read more books and earn more degrees per capita than residents of any other US city.

Fast Facts

- » **Population** 805,235
- » **Area** 7 square miles
- » **Telephone area code** 415

Planning Your Trip

- » **Three weeks before**
Book Alcatraz trips and dinner at Coi or Frances.
- » **Two weeks before** Build stamina for downtown hills, South of Market (SoMa) galleries and Mission bars.
- » **One week before** Score tickets to San Francisco Symphony or Opera, and assemble your costume – SF throws parades whenever.

Resources

- » **SF Bay Guardian** (www.sfbg.com) Hot tips on local entertainment, arts, politics.
- » **SFGate** (www.sfgate.com) News and event listings.