

Understand San Francisco

SAN FRANCISCO TODAY 244

Tech booms, green schemes, getting hitched again: San Francisco has a full agenda.

HISTORY 246

San Francisco has led the world with historic firsts, including civil rights and free speech – and the ability to Tweet, Instagram and Facebook about it.

LOCAL CUISINE & DRINKS..... 256

The tasty lowdown on sourdough, dim sum, sustainable seafood, beer, wine and other San Francisco menu staples.

LITERARY SAN FRANCISCO..... 259

San Francisco has more writers than any other US city – and poetry, 'zines and novels are thriving in this high-tech capital.

VISUAL ARTS 261

Graffiti, street theater and deliberate computer malfunctions give San Francisco galleries a definite edge.

SAN FRANCISCO MUSIC 264

From Journey to Janis, the Dead to Dave Brubeck – you never know what's next on San Francisco's eclectic playlist.

SAN FRANCISCO ARCHITECTURE 267

Color schemes that would make Queen Victoria faint, copper camouflage and other San Francisco architectural quirks.

San Francisco Today

Congratulations: you're right on time for SF's latest tech boom, art show, green initiative, water-saving idea and (fair warning) marriage proposal. SF has its ups and downs, but as anyone who's clung on to the side of a cable car will tell you, this town gives one hell of a ride.

Best on Film

Milk (2008) Sean Penn won an Oscar for his portrayal of America's first openly gay elected official.

Tales of the City (1993) Laura Linney unravels a mystery in SF's swinging '70s disco scene.

Harold and Maude (1971) Conservatory of Flowers and Sutro Baths make metaphorically apt backdrops for May-to-December romance.

Chan Is Missing (1982) When Chan disappears, two cabbies realize they don't know Chan, Chinatown or themselves.

Best in Print

Howl and Other Poems (Allen Ginsberg; 1956) Mind-altering, law-changing words defined a generation of 'angel-headed hipsters.'

Time and Materials (Robert Hass; 2007) Every Pulitzer Prize-winning syllable is as essential as a rivet in the Golden Gate Bridge.

On the Road (Jack Kerouac; 1957) Banged out in a San Francisco attic, Kerouac's travelogue set postwar America free.

Slouching Towards Bethlehem (Joan Didion; 1968) Scorching truth burns through San Francisco fog during the Summer of Love.

SF Goes Boom

The Bay Area currently leads the nation in job creation: mobile apps and social media are booming SF industries, with restaurants, bars, clubs and performance spaces flourishing as the tech money flows in.

But the economic upturn does have downsides. Longtime San Franciscans struggle to keep pace with rising house and food prices. Luxury buses whisking SF-based tech workers to Silicon Valley jobs have come to symbolize a growing income divide, as service workers commute long distances into SF via floundering public transit.

Arts Stage a Comeback

Through tech booms and busts, San Francisco prides itself on creativity. So when Mayor Ed Lee offered Twitter tax incentives in 2013 to keep its headquarters in San Francisco, artists demanded to know: what would the city do to keep arts in SF?

Good question. The city's top real estate owner is Academy of Art College – but warehouses that formerly housed galleries, rehearsal spaces and performance venues are increasingly occupied by start-ups. The city has more art-school grads than ever, but fewer places for them to make and show work.

San Francisco's arts community is rallying though. Nonprofits cut a deal with the city enabling them to buy buildings on a blighted stretch of Market St at subsidized rates. A gallery district has taken root in Potrero Flats, and performance venues have sprouted up in SoMa. Techie arts patrons bought a Dogpatch warehouse to create the Minnestoa Street Project arts center. Now no matter when you arrive in SF, it's showtime.