

# North Beach & Chinatown

## Neighborhood Top Five

- 1 Wandering **Chinatown alleyways** (p100) to hear mah jong tiles, temple gongs and Chinese orchestras – the sounds of a community that's survived fire, earthquakes and even politicians.
- 2 Climbing Filbert St Steps past heckling parrots and fragrant gardens to panoramic **Coit Tower** (p101).
- 3 Reflecting in the Poet's Chair and celebrating free speech at **City Lights** (p112).
- 4 Time-traveling through the old Chinatown at the **Chinese Historical Society of America** (p106), then returning to the present at the **Chinese Culture Center** (p106).
- 5 Bar-crawling like Jack Kerouac to historic North Beach hotspots: **Specs'**, **Tosca Cafe** and **Vesuvio** (p110).



For more detail of this area, see Map p324 ➔

## Explore North Beach & Chinatown

From downtown, enter Dragon Gate onto Chinatown's main tourist drag, Grant Ave. The street is lined with pagoda-topped Chinatown deco buildings purpose-built in the 1920s by Look Tin Eli and other Chinatown merchants to attract curiosity seekers and souvenir shoppers – clearly their plan worked like a charm. It's hard to believe this cheerfully inauthentic, vintage-neon-signed attraction was once notorious, brothel-lined Dupont St – at least until you see the fascinating displays on 19th-century Chinatown at the Chinese American Historical Society. Duck into Chinatown's historic alleyways to glimpse a neighborhood that's survived against daunting odds, and detour for dim sum at City View.

Cross over into North Beach via Jack Kerouac Alley and City Lights bookstore, San Francisco's literary landmark and spiritual home to the Beat movement. Espresso at Caffè Trieste is all the additional inspiration necessary to free your inner 'beatnik' on the North Beach walking tour, or hike up garden-lined Filbert St steps to giddy panoramas and daring murals at Coit Tower. Descend in time for a happy hour bar crawl or dinner reservations at Coi, and you might be taken for a local.

## Local Life

- ➔ **Hangouts** Join regular crowds of writers at Caffè Trieste (p110), martial arts masters at Washington Square and skaters at Old St Mary's Park.
- ➔ **Foodie discoveries** Even been-there, eaten-that San Franciscans find new taste sensations at Jai Yun (p110), Red Blossom Tea Company (p113) and the herbal apothecaries lining Stockton St.
- ➔ **Local celebrity sightings** Keep an eye out for Robin Williams at Cobb's Comedy Club (p112), Sean Penn at Tosca Cafe (p111), Francis Ford Coppola at Columbus Tower (p102), and Tom Waits and Carlos Santana at 101 Music (p113).
- ➔ **Five-dollar bargains** Fly a butterfly kite from Chinatown Kite Shop (p114), rummage sale toy bins at Double Punch (p113) and carbo-load at Tony's Coal-fired Pizza & Slice House (p109).

## Getting There & Away

- ➔ **Bus** The key routes passing through downtown, Chinatown and North Beach are 1, 30, 41 and 45.
- ➔ **Cable car** From Downtown or the Wharf, take the Powell-Mason and Powell-Hyde lines through Chinatown and North Beach. The California St cable car passes through the southern end of Chinatown.

## Lonely Planet's Top Tip

Wild hawks and parrots circle above North Beach as though looking for a parking spot. The weekend parking situation is so dire that locals tend to avoid North Beach and Chinatown – forgetting there's public parking underneath Portsmouth Square. You may also luck into a spot at Good Luck Parking Garage, where spots are stenciled with fortune-cookie wisdom: 'You are not a has-been.'

## Best Places to Eat

- ➔ Coi (p108)
- ➔ Jai Yun (p110)
- ➔ City View (p109)
- ➔ Ristorante Ideale (p108)
- ➔ Molinari (p109)

For reviews, see p108 ➔

## Best Places to Drink

- ➔ Specs' (p110)
- ➔ Caffè Trieste (p110)
- ➔ Comstock Saloon (p110)
- ➔ Tosca Cafe (p111)
- ➔ 15 Romolo (p111)

For reviews, see p110 ➔

## Best Places for Artistic Inspiration

- ➔ City Lights (p112)
- ➔ Chinese Culture Center (p106)
- ➔ Coit Tower (p101)
- ➔ Bob Kaufman Alley (p106)
- ➔ Li Po (p111)
- ➔ Jack Kerouac Alley (p102)

For reviews, see p102 ➔