

San Francisco Weekend Getaways

Sep 27, 2018 Sandy Bornstein 0

How do you take a short trip to San Francisco for sightseeing and still see all the major stops? You take this handy San Francisco vacation planner along with you from writer Sandy Bornstein who has been there and done that for RealFoodTraveler.com readers!

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San Francisco's beautiful skyline.

One could easily spend a week or longer exploring San Francisco's diverse neighborhoods, restaurants, and attractions. With only short trip to San Francisco, staying at the **Hilton San Francisco Union Square**, I had to select places that fit into a tight itinerary. Fortunately, I had visited this vibrant city a couple of decades ago, so I wasn't totally overwhelmed by the task of selecting a Friday afternoon to Sunday itinerary.

Sunny skies were going to prevail, so I planned a mix of inside and outside venues. If I had more time to explore San Francisco, I would have stopped in one or more of its numerous art museums or galleries, visited a couple of specialty museums, trekked through a few more neighborhoods, visited landmarks like **Muir Woods**, the **Presidio**, or **Alcatraz**, or indulged in more local cuisine. Instead, I decided to concentrate my attention on four distinct places—**Golden Gate Park**, a **San Francisco Bay boat ride**, an ethnic **food tour**, and a stroll along the waterfront from **Fisherman's Wharf** to the **Ferry Building Marketplace**.

TREKKING THROUGH GOLDEN GATE PARK

This heavily wooded city park is massive, more than 1,000 acres. Throughout the green space are numerous noteworthy attractions. I've included most of them. With a limited amount of time, it's best to review the website for the exact location of key places. While oversized maps are posted throughout the park, it's advisable to have a digital version on your phone or a printed version in hand.

Indoor venues have specific opening and closing times and are great places to find relief from the elements and a quick restroom break. Some of the places I mention are near one another. However, many are a considerable distance from another



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attraction. I occasionally used a ride share service to cut down excessive walking times from one location to the next. I decided not to drive a rental car since parking would be challenging.

Windmills

History buffs can trek to the western edge of the park to view two neglected windmills that now lay dormant. Both take visitors back to the beginning of the 20th century when these windmills pumped enormous amounts of water. Although both have fallen into disrepair, they offer unexpected photo opportunities in an urban park setting.



An unexpected but charming site – a windmill at Golden Gate Park.

Japanese Tea Garden

The Japanese Tea Garden is the oldest public Japanese garden in the United States. Like other similar gardens, it's a wonderful place to unwind and relax in a serene and peaceful setting. The lush landscaping with mature trees is dotted with waterfalls, flowering plants, bridges, ponds, a tall pagoda and the Japanese Tea House. I suggest arriving early to avoid the crowds.

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Tucked away and not-to-be-missed, the Japanese Garden in Golden Gate Park.

California Academy of Sciences

Under one roof, I was able to see planetary, aquatic, and historic exhibits that covered the past, present and future. The Rainforest of the World exhibit is an introduction to the tropical ecosystems of Costa Rico, Borneo, and Madagascar. The hands-on interactive exhibits throughout the building will engage children of all ages.

San Francisco Botanical Gardens

Early risers will love the 7:30am start time at the main gate. While San Francisco City and County residents always enjoy free admittance, out-of-town visitors who arrive between 7:30 and 9am are offered the same perk. This 55-acre garden has more than 8,500 plants from various parts of the world that change from season to season. I recommend downloading a map or picking one up at the gate before entering the maze-like system of paths that connect one area to the next.



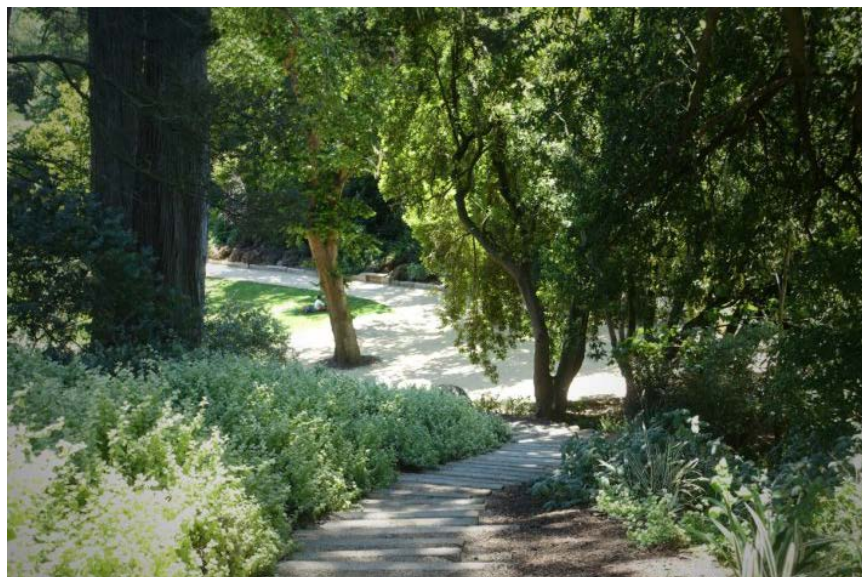
The Redwood Trail in Golden Gate Park.

De Young Museum

This museum is across from the California Academy of Sciences. I suggest picking one of these museums and spending the rest of your time enjoying Mother Nature. If art is your forte, this would be the best place to visit. The exhibits feature items from all over the world. Don't forget to wander through the contemporary sculpture garden. On a clear day, go to the Hamon Tower for a panoramic photo opportunity.

National AIDS Memorial Grove

By happenstance, I came upon this memorial that was established by President Clinton in 1996. Small groups of people were picnicking in the gardenlike area that was accessed by a handicap ramp and stairs. The Grove is located near Bowling Green Drive and Nancy Pelosi Drive.



The National AIDS Memorial Grove.

Conservatory of Flowers

The large selection of flowers and plants are housed in the oldest formal structure in the park that dates back to the 19th century. Since it is not located near any other major attractions, it is a less convenient option if you're trying to combine multiple park venues.

EXPLORE SAN FRANCISCO CULTURE VIA A FOOD TOUR

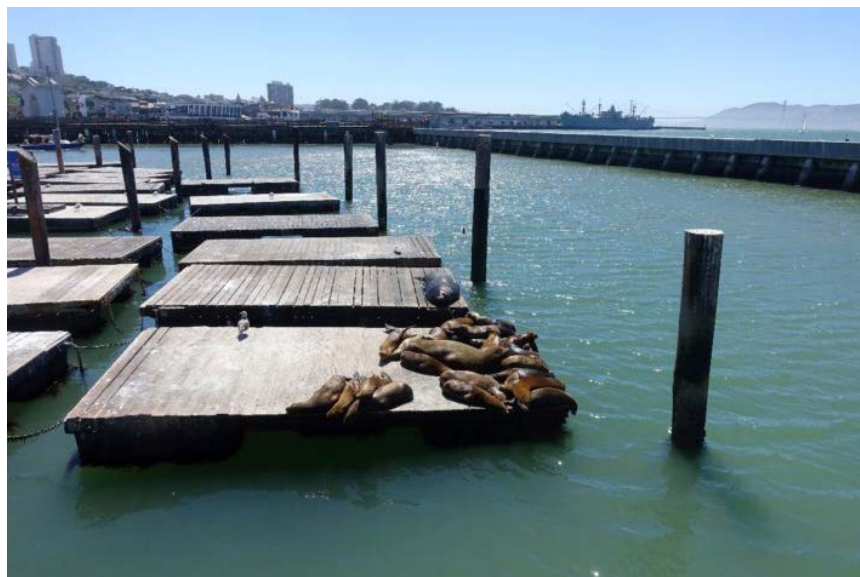
Food tours open the door to a better understanding of diverse cultures. In San Francisco there are numerous companies that provide walking tours that focus on a variety of cuisines at different times during the day. It's best to research your options and select the one that fits in best with your plans. I thoroughly enjoyed

my tour of **Chinatown** during a three-hour food tour. Read about that, [here](#).

CAPTURE THE CITY SKYLINE DURING A BOAT RIDE

Even though I tend to use foot power to explore a city, I occasionally need down time. I selected a 60-minute **Blue and Gold Fleet Cruise Adventure** so that I could continue to learn about San Francisco and take photos of the major landmarks while simultaneously taking a break from walking.

While entering and leaving the harbor, watch for clusters of sea lions sunning on the dock or consider walking to the nearby Sea Lion Center. In the summer months, most of the sea lions migrate south for their breeding season. A few linger year round. On weekends, it's advisable to purchase your cruise tickets early and to stand in the appropriate line well before the departure time.



See sea lions sunning themselves in San Francisco.

STROLL THE COASTLINE AND GRAB A BITE TO EAT

Since the cruise brought me to Pier 39 and the historic waterfront area, I spent some time among the hordes of tourists walking around Fisherman's Wharf.



Join the crowds on Pier 39.

Aquarium By the Bay is also located at Pier 39. Discover the Bay and the Under the Bay exhibits showcase marine life that is indigenous to the area.



Jellies and all manner of aquatic life are on display at Aquarium by the Bay.

To escape the crowds congregating near Fisherman's Wharf, I walked toward **The Embarcadero** and then into the **Ferry Building Marketplace**. Inside the latter building are multiple food options. I dined at **Gott's Roadside**, a restaurant that uses locally sourced ingredients to make its seasonal specials. My lobster sandwich with a glass of rose was a delightful end to a busy weekend.

This jam-packed itinerary lacked down time. A more leisurely pace might be recommended for less active travelers. While my time in San Francisco was brief, I did visit an assortment of popular attractions. Perhaps, sometime in the future, I'll be able to return so that I can experience more. — *Article by Sandy Bornstein. Photos courtesy The Traveling Bornsteins.*

Learn more about San Francisco on their travel

site: <http://www.sftravel.com/>

Hungry for more? Read about Sandy's adventures in San Francisco's Chinatown on a food tour, [here](#). Then, take a look at some of the other articles she has written for [RealFoodTraveler.com](#) which offer some great travel tips.

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Sandy has visited more than 40 countries and lived as an international teacher in Bangalore, India. Sandy's award-winning book, *May This Be the Best Year of Your Life*, is a resource for people contemplating an expat lifestyle and living outside their comfort zone. Sandy writes about food, family, intergenerational, and active midlife adventures highlighting land and water experiences, historical sites, and Jewish culture and history. You can follow Sandy on Facebook and Instagram.

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