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U.S. SERIES

THE PACIFIC COAST & BEYOND

Greetings from SAN FRANCISCO

48 hours, solo, at your own pace

POCKET EDITION · 2027

48-HOUR GUIDE · SAFETY GUIDE · PLANNING CALENDAR

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Welcome to San Francisco

San Francisco is a city made to be crossed on foot, on a cable car, or on a ferry, and it rewards the traveler who is willing to climb a hill. The sights are small, the neighborhoods are distinct, and the fog and the light change the city every hour.

Traveling solo here works because San Francisco has always attracted people who arrived alone: gold seekers, writers, dreamers. Nobody looks twice at a single traveler at a counter in North Beach or a table by the window at a Mission taqueria. The city is used to people finding themselves here.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Read through once before you go. Day One covers the Ferry Building, North Beach, a cable car ride, and a classic seafood dinner. Day Two crosses the Golden Gate Bridge, climbs to the Painted Ladies, and explores the Mission. Section 03 is the new-for-2027 feature on the cable cars. Layers matter more than a map: the weather changes street by street.

ESSENTIAL QUICK FACTS

CURRENCY
US dollar (cards accepted nearly everywhere)

TRANSIT
Muni, BART, and cable cars · Clipper card

TIME ZONE
Pacific (UTC–8; UTC–7 in summer)

EMERGENCY
911 · non-emergency 311

TIPPING
18–20% in restaurants

SALES TAX
8.625% — added at the register

01 DAY ONE

The Embarcadero · North Beach · Fisherman's Wharf

The first day follows the waterfront and the hills above it, from the Ferry Building to the Beat-era streets of North Beach and the cable cars that connect them.

MORNING · 8:00 AM – 1:00 PM

8:00 AM

Ferry Building Marketplace

Begin at the 1898 clock tower on the Embarcadero. Pick up coffee and a pastry, and watch the ferries come in across the bay.

On Saturday mornings the farmers market fills the plaza outside.

9:30 AM

Coit Tower & the Filbert Steps

Climb the Greenwich Steps toward Telegraph Hill, past gardens and wild parrots, to the 1933 tower with its Depression-era murals and a 360-degree view.

The steep climb is worth it; the murals inside are free to see.

11:30 AM

City Lights Bookstore

The Beat-generation landmark, founded in 1953 as the first all-paperback bookstore in the country. Browse the poetry room upstairs.

Stand in Jack Kerouac Alley, just beside the shop.

12:30 PM

Lunch — Liguria Bakery

A North Beach bakery since 1911 that sells focaccia by the sheet, hot from the oven, until it runs out. Cash is easiest.

Arrive before noon; the best flavors sell out early.

AFTERNOON · 2:00 PM – 6:00 PM

2:00 PM

Cable Car to Fisherman's Wharf

Board the Powell-Hyde line near Powell and Market and ride over Nob Hill and down Hyde Street toward Aquatic Park, with the bay opening below.

Stand on the running board if you can, and hold on.

4:00 PM

Aquatic Park & the Maritime Museum

Skip the crowds at Pier 39 and walk the curved Aquatic Park pier for views of Alcatraz and the Golden Gate Bridge in the distance.

The Maritime National Historical Park's historic ships are a quieter alternative to the wharf.

EVENING · 6:30 PM – 10:00 PM

7:00 PM

Dinner — Tadich Grill

Founded in 1849, this is California's oldest continuously operated restaurant. Sit at the counter for cioppino, sand dabs, and a martini.

Weekday lunches and early dinners are the easiest times to get a seat.

9:00 PM

Vesuvio Cafe or Specs'

Two classic North Beach bars, steps apart on Columbus Avenue, with low light, local regulars, and a long Beat history.

Both are cozy places to sit alone with a drink.

02 DAY TWO

The Golden Gate · Alamo Square · The Mission

The second day heads west to the bridge, then east and south through the Painted Ladies and the Mission's murals.

MORNING · 8:30 AM – 1:00 PM

8:30 AM

Golden Gate Bridge

Walk across the bridge from the Presidio side, about 1.7 miles each way, with wind, fog, and a view of the Marin Headlands. The pedestrian path is free.

Go early, before the fog lifts or the crowds arrive.

10:30 AM

Palace of Fine Arts & Crissy Field

A 1915 rotunda and lagoon from the Panama-Pacific Exposition, and a lovely lakeside path along the bay at Crissy Field.

The colonnade is best photographed before noon.

12:00 PM

Lunch — Swan Oyster Depot

A 1912 seafood counter on Polk Street with a handful of stools. Order Dungeness crab, oysters, and a cup of clam chowder.

The line moves fast, and the counter closes by early evening.

AFTERNOON · 2:00 PM – 6:00 PM

2:00 PM

Alamo Square & the Painted Ladies

Climb the park for the postcard view of the Victorian houses against the skyline. Hayes Valley is a short walk away for coffee.

Come on a clear afternoon for the best light.

4:00 PM

The Mission's Murals

Walk Balmy Alley and Clarion Alley for street art and murals that tell the neighborhood's history, then rest in Dolores Park.

Keep valuables out of sight, and go with a plan.

EVENING · 6:00 PM – LATE

6:00 PM

Dinner — La Taqueria

A Mission burrito institution. The carne asada burrito is served without rice, which is the whole point.

Order at the counter and take a seat in the dining room.

8:00 PM

Live Music at SFJAZZ Center

A purpose-built jazz hall in Hayes Valley, with a program of jazz and world music year-round.

Check the calendar and buy tickets ahead.

03 THE CABLE CARS

The Cable Cars, Defined

DID YOU KNOW?

Did you know San Francisco's cable cars are the last manually operated cable car system in the world?

There is no engine on board. Each car clamps onto a steel cable that runs under the street at a steady pace, and a gripman works a lever to grab and release it. The cars were declared a National Historic Landmark in 1964, the only moving landmark in the country.

A SHORT HISTORY

Andrew Hallidie's first cable car climbed Clay Street in 1873, after he watched horses struggle on San Francisco's hills. By the 1890s the city had dozens of lines. Only three survive: Powell-Hyde, Powell-Mason, and California, which runs from the Financial District to Van Ness.

HOW TO RIDE

Buy a ticket in the MuniMobile or Clipper app, or on board. A single ride costs about $8, and a visitor passport covers cable cars and Muni for one to seven days. The California line is the least crowded, and the Powell lines are the most scenic.

BEST TIME TO GO

Ride early in the morning to avoid the long lines at the Powell and Market turnaround. The ride is best in clear weather, when the bay and Alcatraz are visible from the top of the hill.

04 WHERE TO EAT

Counters, bakeries, and old-school bars

San Francisco is a city of small, excellent places. Most seat a single diner at a counter or bar, and the oldest are the best.

BREAKFAST & LUNCH

Ferry Building Marketplace
EMBARCADERO · $8–25
Oysters, pastries, and coffee from dozens of local vendors, inside a 1898 ferry terminal.

Liguria Bakery
NORTH BEACH · $4–10
Focaccia since 1911. Arrive early; it sells out.

Swan Oyster Depot
POLK GULCH · $20–45
A 1912 seafood counter with a few stools and a loyal line.

La Taqueria
THE MISSION · $10–16
A burrito institution. The carne asada, served without rice, is the order.

DINNER & LATE NIGHT

Tadich Grill
FINANCIAL DISTRICT · $25–50
California's oldest restaurant, since 1849. Sit at the counter.

House of Prime Rib
NOB HILL · $40–60
A classic dinner of prime rib carved at your table since 1949, with bar seating for one.

Vesuvio Cafe
NORTH BEACH · $8–14
A Beat-era bar since 1948, with a colorful facade and upstairs seating.

Zuni Café
HAYES VALLEY · $30–55
A San Francisco institution since 1979, famous for its roast chicken with bread salad.

05 GETTING AROUND

Navigating San Francisco

The city is compact, about seven miles square, but hilly. Muni, BART, and the cable cars cover the main routes, and walking fills the rest.

Muni	about $3	Buses, light rail, and historic streetcars. Pay with Clipper or the MuniMobile app.
Cable cars	about $8	Three lines. Prepay in the app, or buy a visitor passport.
BART	about $10 from SFO	Trains connect SFO to Powell Street in about 30 minutes, and cross the bay to Oakland.
Ferries	by route	Boats leave the Ferry Building for Sausalito, Tiburon, and Alcatraz.
Rideshare & Waymo	by trip	Rideshare and driverless taxis operate across the city.
Walking	Free	Compact but steep. Plan routes to avoid the biggest hills.

Fares change, so check Muni's website or the app. Bring layers on every outing, even when it looks sunny.

06 BACKUP PLANS

San Francisco on a rainy afternoon

The fog and winter rains drive people inside. These are the best places to go.

GOLDEN GATE PARK

California Academy of Sciences

A natural history museum with an aquarium, planetarium, and rainforest under one living roof.

GOLDEN GATE PARK

de Young Museum

Art in the park; the free tower offers a view of the city.

SOMA

SFMOMA

One of the largest modern art museums in the country.

CIVIC CENTER

Asian Art Museum

One of the largest collections of Asian art outside Asia.

EMBARCADERO

Exploratorium

A hands-on science museum on the bay, fun for any age.

RICHMOND DISTRICT

Green Apple Books

An independent bookstore on Clement Street, good for a rainy hour.

07 NEIGHBORHOODS

Know your neighborhoods

WATERFRONT

The Embarcadero

The Ferry Building, a waterfront promenade, and the bay at your side.

BEATS & BAKERIES

North Beach & Chinatown

City Lights, Italian cafés, and the oldest Chinatown in North America.

TOURIST WATERFRONT

Fisherman's Wharf

Sea lions, the maritime park, and the cable car terminus.

MURALS & BURRITOS

The Mission

Street art, taquerias, and Dolores Park on sunny days.

VICTORIAN HILLS

Hayes Valley & Alamo Square

Painted Ladies, small shops, and good coffee.

GREEN & FOGGY

Golden Gate Park & the Presidio

Museums, gardens, and the bridge, in the city's largest open spaces.

08 GOOD TO KNOW

What nobody tells you

- Dress in layers. A sunny morning can turn foggy and cold by afternoon, even in summer.
- Never leave anything visible in a parked car. Smash-and-grab break-ins are the city's most common crime against visitors.
- Book Alcatraz tickets weeks ahead. They sell out, especially in summer.
- The hills are steep. Use a map that shows elevation, and rest between climbs.
- Tip 18–20% in restaurants. Sales tax is 8.625% and is added at the register.
- September and October are usually the warmest, clearest months, while summer is often foggy.

WHEN TO GO

Sep–Oct	Best overall	The warmest and clearest months, with the least fog.
Jun–Aug	Summer fog	Cool, windy, and foggy, with warm days inland.
Mar–May	Second best	Mild weather, spring blooms, and fewer crowds.
Nov–Feb	Off-season	Cooler and rainy, but a good time for museums and restaurants.

09 SOLO TRAVELER SAFETY

Is San Francisco safe?

Safe for visitors who take basic precautions. The city's main risk is property crime, especially car break-ins and phone snatching. Neighborhoods like the Tenderloin and parts of Mid-Market are best avoided at night, and Union Square calls for awareness.

NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY AT A GLANCE

The Presidio / Marina	●●●●●
Embarcadero / Ferry Building	●●●●○
North Beach	●●●●○
Hayes Valley / Alamo Square	●●●●○
The Mission (daytime)	●●●●○
Fisherman's Wharf	●●●●○
Tenderloin / Mid-Market at night	●●○○○

COMMON SCAMS

Never leave bags, laptops, or even coins visible in a parked car. Street-side vendors and card tricks near Union Square and the Wharf can involve pickpockets; keep your phone in a front pocket.

HEALTH & MEDICAL

Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital is the city's main trauma center, and several other hospitals serve the downtown. Pharmacies like Walgreens are common. Carry travel insurance.

SOLO TRAVELERS

Share your plan with someone back home, keep your phone charged, and take rideshare after dark between neighborhoods. Stay on busy streets, and keep your valuables out of sight.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Police, fire, medical	911
City services and non-emergency	311
Poison Control	1-800-222-1222
Trauma center	Zuckerberg SF General · 1001 Potrero Ave.

10 PLANNING CALENDAR

San Francisco, month by month

Exact dates shift each year, so confirm before booking.

FEB LUNAR NEW YEAR

- The Chinese New Year Parade fills Chinatown with floats, dancers, and lion dances.

APR CHERRY BLOSSOMS

- The Northern California Cherry Blossom Festival lights up Japantown.

MAY BAY TO BREAKERS

- A runners' costume parade crosses the city on the third Sunday of May.

JUN PRIDE

- San Francisco Pride fills Market Street on the last weekend of June.

AUG–OCT MUSIC & FALL

- Outside Lands fills Golden Gate Park in August, and Hardly Strictly Bluegrass offers free music in October.

OCT–DEC HOLIDAYS

- Fleet Week brings the Blue Angels in October, and holiday lights return in December.

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Every Stop, Mapped

Scan the code to open the free interactive San Francisco map — every stop in this guide, filterable by day, food, and transport.

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