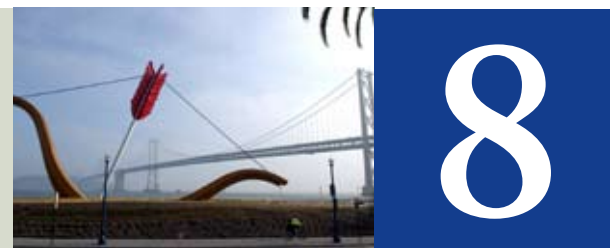


Take a Walk on the Wild Side: Great Walking Tours



There are many organized tour companies that offer unique walking tours of the city. Below is a list of free and commercial tours that will give you a unique perspective on the city. Also, in this guide we'll take you on four self-guided walking tours that will teach you a little more about San Francisco's history, and give you lots of interesting things to see. So put on your walking shoes, grab the camera and let's go!

Formal Tour Options:

FREE

City Guides founded in 1978 is a joint venture of the San Francisco Public Library and the Tides Foundation. This non-profit offers 30 different tours led by one of the 200 Volunteers who research, develop and organize tours 52 weeks every year. The tours cover architecture, history, legends, and lore of San Francisco. Walks last from 1-1/2 to 2 hours. Special tours in May and October offer a look at some of San Francisco lesser known neighborhoods. Walkers meet at the place and time designated in the current Tour Schedule. No reservations are required. Guests are encouraged to wear comfortable shoes and look for their City Guide at the meeting place.

You can find a complete tour schedule at sfcityguides.org 415-557-4266

UNIQUE COMMERCIAL TOURS

WOK WIZ

San Francisco has a long history of gastronomic delights and what better way to work off the calories than a walking tour that allows you to refuel in route? One of the best known is the Wok Wiz Chinatown Tour led by JdV local Shirley Fong Torres. Her daily tours start at 10am and last three hours, it includes information and lore about Chinatown, along with a visit to a tea shop, a temple and a light lunch served in Chinatown. Tickets start at \$40 and often sell out days in advance. <http://www.wokwiz.com>

DASHIELL HAMMETT TOUR

Don Herron knows and loves San Francisco. He has written several books about the literary history of San Francisco. His popular Dashiell Hammett Tour highlights Noir San Francisco. The Tours start at Noon on Sundays at the NW corner of Fulton and Larkin just outside the Main San Francisco Public Library. Cost is \$10 no need for reservations just show up and find the guy in the trench coat and snap brim hat. <http://www.donherron.com/tour.html>

VAMPIRE TOUR OF SAN FRANCISCO

Local actress Kitty Burns channels Mina Harker of Dracula fame and offers her undead insight to San Francisco. Tours are two hours and start at 8pm Friday and Saturday nights. Meet Mina at the corner of California and Taylor streets just outside Huntington Park. You are welcome to come in your best gothic/Victorian finery or just as you are. Cost is \$25. If it is raining call Mina first to make sure the tour will not be rained out. (650) 279-1840 • sfvampiretour.com

CRUISIN' THE CASTRO

Trevor Hailey established this tour in 1989 and it has been a hit ever since. This is a fun walking tour of the world's most famous gay neighborhood from an historical perspective. Tuesdays through Saturdays. \$35 per person (includes a full café brunch during the tour). Reservations are required. 255-1821 <http://www.cruisinthecastro.com/>

PRECITA MURAL WALK TOURS

Learn the fascinating stories behind the colorful and dramatic Mission District murals. Tours are offered Saturdays and Sunday at 11 a.m. (\$10), or Saturdays and Sundays 1:30p.m. (\$12). 285-2287 <http://www.precitaeyes.org/tours.html>

FLOWER POWER HAIGHT-ASHBURY WALKING TOUR

Let Rachel Heller show you the colorful, and often surprising, history of our most famous neighborhood. You'll learn about the Haight's early days as a Victorian resort destination and of its time as the center of the infamous 'Summer of Love.' Tuesdays and Saturdays, 9:30a.m., Friday at 11 a.m. \$20. • hippygourmet.com/haighttour.html

Four do it yourself walking tours

THE BARBARY COAST TOUR

San Francisco's Legendary Barbary Coast tour is a unique experience, giving you an overview of Bagdad by the Bay at its height. The tour covers the areas of Union Square, Chinatown, Northbeach and the infamous, wide open red light districts of old San Francisco. Daniel Bacon has written two guides to this tour which offer a depth of information. You can purchase them at Stacy's Books [581 Market Street], the San Francisco Historical Society Book Store [678 Mission] and at the Visitor Information Center in the Powell Street BART Station. They are also available through Amazon.com. This tour covers a lot of the same ground as the Filbert Steps and Alleys of Chinatown information below so if you are feeling ambitious combine all three!

The tour route is marked by round bronze markers laid into the sidewalk with arrows indicating direction of travel. There are 20 Historic sights and 5 museums along the route. On the following page is an abbreviated tour route with some of our favorite stops highlighted.

STARTING OUT: The Tour Begins at the old US Mint at the Corner of 5th and Mission Street. It hasn't been a mint for a long time. Currently the SF historical society is working to raise funds to retrofit it so it can be used as a SF History Museum. This is a wonderful example of Classic Greek Revival Architecture with Doric Columns. The Architect Alfred Mullett, a man ahead of his time, planned for the building to survive the earthquakes that happen here by designing the building to float. His inspiration worked because it was one of the few buildings to survive the earthquake and fire of 1906. Walk north on 5th Street and cross Market Street to reach Hallidie Plaza home to the Powell Street Bart Station and Information Center– Hallidie was the originator of the Cable Car, the ONLY moving historical landmark in the world. The cable car turnaround at the base of Powell Street is a hive of activity, not the least of which is the Conductors and Grips manually turning their cars around on the huge turntable set into the street.

Continue north on Powell Street to Union Square – The center of the 1906 fire storm. Maiden Lane off the square to the east was once a street of bordellos hence the name. Union Square recently underwent a renovation and is once again a welcome spot for visitors and the people who work in the many shops that line the square. From Maiden Lane walk north on Grant to Sutter, detour one and a half blocks east to the 100 block of Sutter Street to see the Hallidie Building which housed Mr. Hallidie's offices. Architecturally it is a gem, featuring a glass curtain that hangs about 6 feet in front of the building proper. When viewed from across the street, the curtain effect is complete with valance.

Walk back to Grant along Bush Street and enter Chinatown through the Chinatown Gate. [See the Chinatown's Intriguing Alleys tour information below for even more details] Grant Avenue is lined with shops selling everything from the Far East from tea to art. As you cross California Street take a moment to notice the message on Old St. Mary's Cathedral put there to warn men away from the brothels. A half block jog to the west will take you to Waverly Place in Chinatown – This location and name appear in Amy Tan's Joy Luck Club and is representative of the alleys that criss-cross the neighborhood, the largest and most densely populated Chinatown in the United States.

Many of the building have Pagoda Style roofs and decided Chinese influences one such building is the Bank of Canton (743 Washington) – A Pagoda Style Bank constructed in 1909 as the Chinese Telephone Exchange and signified the rebuilding of Chinatown destroyed by the post earthquake fire in 1906.

Walk east on Washington till you reach Portsmouth Square – This was the center of Yerbua Buena Village which became San Francisco. There are several monuments in the park worth examining and the park is particularly popular with the older folks as a ma jong and card parlor. From the square continue east on Commercial Street – Named for its purpose some really old buildings still exist here including several buildings that house fine press book binderies that continue the tradition of art and small press book production. During the Barbary Coast days this street was home to the Municipal Cribs where the ladies of the evening paid 25% of their earnings to the mayor and police.

Turn Left at Montgomery Street – Once the waterline and still the business center of San Francisco. Wells Fargo has a free museum at 420 Montgomery that highlights the history of the Bank and the city as they grew together. Where the Transamerica building is now was once the largest commercial building in SF, the Montgomery Block. When the pyramid was built in the 1970's, construction crews digging the base of the building found tunnels that led from Chinatown to the wharfs [at Battery Street at the time]. Take a few moments to enjoy the redwood grove just to the east of the Transamerica Pyramid a haven of quiet, green and art that is popular with the surrounding office crowd. Be sure to look for the plaque commemorating Boomer and Lazarus two street dogs, who along with Emperor Norton, are emblematic of San Francisco's fondness for characters. Also note the Cessna Printing building on Montgomery between Washington and Jackson. This building once housed the Black Cat the first gay bar in San Francisco. The round windows under the roofline are a decidedly artistic touch.

Proceed north to Jackson Street and the Jackson Square area. This area is home to some of the oldest existing buildings in SF. The fire of 1906 jumped this neighborhood. Look for the plaque on Hotelling Alley that commemorates this event. On the west side of this alley is the Belli [Melvin Belli, was a internationally known attorney with a well earned reputation for being a bit of a ladies man, a sharp dresser, and a strong drinker]building [as well as a few others in this area] was built on ships sunk at the wharfs. Rumor has it that the tide still rises and falls in the elevator shafts of the Belli building. It is currently undergoing renovation but the shell remains. Along Jackson, Washington, Pacific and Sansome are the buildings that represent all that remains of the Old Barbary Coast – The original red light district. Some of the buildings that now house offices still have the small 6x6 cribs [rooms with only partial walls] in them. Note the weathered metal posts on either side of Pacific between Montgomery and Kearney that were the markers for International City and the border of the red light district.

Walk west on Washington to Columbus. This will put you dead center for Beat San Francisco. The heart of the bohemian movement was at Columbus and Broadway. City lights, the Purple Onion, and Vesuvio remain today. The Condor at the corner of Broadway and Columbus was the first topless bar in San Francisco. It is now decidedly more family friendly offering Cajun – Creole food and Jazz. Strolling north and slightly east along Columbus will take you to Washington Square the heart of North Beach. This area remains largely Italian and has some of the city's best weather, food and coffee.

On Telegraph Hill to the east stands Coit Tower -- A tribute from Lily Coit who was quite the wild woman in her day, she loved fires and followed Engine Company 5 to all fires, eventually named an honorary member of Company 5. She never married and had quite the reputation for being one of the boys. If you brave the walk up hill to take in the view from the tower and enjoy the beautifully resorted WPA murals in the tower, take the steps down the back side of the hill to see some of the most unique sights in SF [For more details see the section below this on the Filbert Street Steps.] houses with no street access, stair step gardens, a certain apartment house that appeared in *Dark Passage* - Bogie may still be in the window of Lauren Bacall's apartment, and home to the famous Wild Parrots of Telegraph hill.

From the base of the steps proceed east to the Embarcadero and along the waterfront to Pier 39 and Fisherman's Wharf. This is a congregating point for both sea lions and tourists.

Walk west along Jefferson Street to Hyde Street Pier a floating museum with several historic vessels that highlight the relationship between the Bay and the City. From there it is just a short bay side walk to Aquatic Park home to the Maritime Museum. On your left is Ghirardelli Square, once the home of the premier SF chocolate maker, now a shopping center but the fountain in the center is a wonderful fantasy and they still make the best chocolate sundaes you'll ever have.

End your tour with a stop at the Buena Vista at the corner of Hyde and Northpoint just across from the cable car turnaround -- the originator of the Irish coffee. Have one before you take a cable car along the Hyde Street line. Stop at the Cable Car Barn to learn about the history and mechanics of this only in San Francisco mode of transportation.

The Filbert Steps

No street better represents "Old San Francisco" than the Filbert Street on the east side of Telegraph Hill. You will find some of the city's oldest homes and breath-taking views of the Bay Area as you take this gentle walk down the hill. Don't be surprised to see cats, raccoons, or a small red fox running through this Garden of Eden. We're sure that by the end of this walk you'll understand why Alistair Cooke, in his "America" series, stated that the Filbert Steps was his favorite spot in America.

STARTING OUT: Begin at the top of the hill, at Telegraph Hill Boulevard, near Coit Tower. (To get to the top of the hill take the #39 bus or walk up Filbert Street.) As you begin your descent, you will see a gorgeous flower garden in the foreground and in the distance a stunning bay view. This bohemian enclave has been home for artists, writers, and singers such as Joan Baez, Eddie Money and Armistead Maupin.

Overlooking Montgomery Street is the studio model of the "Creation" statue by Haig Patigan, used by the artist when designing a large scale version for the 1939 Treasure Island Exposition. You're sure to notice the outstanding Art Deco building at 1360 Montgomery. The four-story building has the classic moderne details of streamlined corners, glass blocks, and outstanding graffiti panels. (Watch the classic Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall film "Dark Passage" and look for this very building.) A significant number of houses were built in this area during the 1850 gold rush period, and many survived the 1906 quake and fire. The cottage at 224 Filbert, built in 1863 and thoroughly restored in 1978, is one of the oldest on the hill. Opposite, at 222 Filbert, is a simple frame building with a colorful history: One-time grocery, unlicensed saloon, and bordello. Legend has it that other cottages in this area were used to Shanghai unsuspecting sailors. Don't miss the short detour down Napier Lane, commonly referred to as "Cat Alley" for the many felines which reside in this hidden neighborhood. This is a charming little boardwalk lined with cottages and lush plants. Where Filbert and Napier meet is a gate leading to the Grace Marchant Gardens, dedicated to Mrs. Marchant for her lifetime devotion to restoring the area. Now Gary Kray, to whom Grace taught her art, tends the gardens religiously. The two most festive times to visit are Easter and Halloween. On Easter you'll see a variety of colorful Easter eggs. And on Halloween the neighbors pitch in by carving 200 pumpkins and placing them throughout the garden. At night the jack-o-lanterns' glow and the trick-or-treaters make the Filbert Steps an exciting Halloween sight.

As you reach the bottom of the wooden steps look over at the Walters Warehouse on the northwest corner of Sansome and Filbert. Why is that Moderne-style house, garden and guest house on the roof of that four-story building? Beats us, but it sure is a sight!

Continue down the concrete stairs and to your right you'll see the buildings of Alta Street clinging for dear life to the side of the hill. Recently, an apartment building at the end began to slide down the hill during a rainstorm. After months of planning, engineers were able to knock down the remains of the building without harming the gardens. At the bottom of the stairs you'll find Sansome Street which was at one time a pier, until the area was shored up with landfill. To finish your tour stroll through Levi's Plaza, the corporate headquarters of Levi Strauss. This park was designed by Lawrence Halprin, famous for his design of the Ghirardelli Square complex.

Chinatown's Intriguing Alleys

San Francisco's Chinatown has the largest concentration of Chinese outside of Asia. Grant Avenue, S.F.'s oldest street is the main thoroughfare. You'll find wonderful alleys and lanes that represent the rich ethnic fabric of this wonderful district.

STARTING OUT: Begin your tour at the Chinatown Gateway at the intersection of Grant Avenue and Bush Street. As you walk north along Grant you will see an endless array of Chinese gift shops and restaurants. Notice that underneath all of the Chinoiserie detail most of the buildings are standard Edwardian structures. Take a moment to read the plaque on the west coast's oldest Roman Catholic church, Old St. Mary's Cathedral, on the corner of Grant and California. Continue down Grant to Sacramento and turn left. One block up on the right hand side will be the entrance to colorful Waverly Place. This two block long street has had a rich history, including being the site for some very bloody tong wars in 1875; home to two of San Francisco's most notorious Gold Rush madams, Ah Toy and Belle Cora; and it's still the site of the oldest Chinese temple in the country, the Tien Hon Temple (also known as Tin How), at 125 Waverly. (Visiting this tiny temple on the top floor is okay, though pictures are not allowed, and a \$1 donation is requested. As at any place of worship, please be respectful.)

At Clay Street turn left to find Spofford Alley and a temple dedicated to Kwan Yin. This alley is reminiscent of the Hong Kong opium alleys depicted in many films. (In fact, it has been used in several American films.) Cross Washington Street to Ross Alley, known as "The Street of Gamblers" in the 1880's due to the many fan-tan gambling parlors. Today you can stop and listen for the tell-tale click-clack sounds that come from the mah-jongg clubs, and smell the sweet aroma that emanates from the Golden Gate Fortune Cookie Factory at 56 Ross Alley. To finish this tour turn right on Jackson Street, walk to Grant Street and cross over to the east side of the street. Continue south to 916 Grant, the site of Li Po, and a cocktail lounge that looks like an old opium den. Unfortunately, the interior is not as authentic as the exterior, but it is a good place to quench your thirst and catch your breath.

Nob Hill's Rich History

Called 'Snob Hill' by its detractors, this neighborhood best represents the legacy of San Francisco's history and culture. Nestled atop are four of the city's fanciest hotels, along with an exclusive club and the city's most ornate church, Grace Cathedral. This steep hill wasn't home to the city's elite, however, until the invention of cable cars in 1871. This allowed for easy access, and made the area desirable to the new silver and railroad barons who bought up huge parcels of land.

STARTING OUT: Begin this tour at the Masonic Temple on California Street, between Jones and Taylor. Built in 1958, this is one of the hill's newer structures and nothing to write home about, but its south-facing windows do provide timeless views. Across the street is the grand Grace Episcopal Cathedral, begun in 1925 and finally completed in 1964. Modeled after French Gothic designs, it is a tribute to modern construction materials with its use of steel and concrete, rather than the less stable stone used in traditional Gothic churches. The Cathedral and grounds are definitely worth a thorough exploration. Don't miss the labyrinth, the AIDS Memorial Chapel, and the Cathedral and Diocesan houses.

Cross Taylor Street and take a moment to relax in Huntington Park, once the site of a lavish mansion which, like most of the hill, was destroyed by the earthquake and fire of 1906. Next to the park is the Pacific-Union Club, a rather stuffy all-male club for the very rich. This impressive brownstone building was built in 1886 for James Flood, a former bar keep who made a fortune on the stock market by eaves-dropping on his patrons. Gutted by the fire of 1906, the mansion was then purchased and remodeled by the Pacific-Union Club.

If you're intrigued by the opulence of the landmark hotels, be sure to visit the lobbies of the Huntington, the Mark Hopkins, the Fairmont and the Stanford Court. The oldest of the group, the Fairmont, also gutted by the Great Fire, was restored by famed architect Julia Morgan, and reopened exactly one year after the quake. The glass-walled elevator to the Crown Room, at the top of the tower added in 1961, offers a stunning view of the bay.

Another famous view can be found at the Top of the Mark, the luxurious lounge which sits atop the Mark Hopkins Hotel. This is a good place to end your journey, and enjoy a cocktail as you ponder the complex and vividly colorful past of this wonderful city.

