

Hidden Treasures of San Francisco



This was our favorite guide to write. It's always a thrill to whisper a couple of 'insider's tips' to visitors and see them come back a few hours later with a big smile on their faces. It's a wonder more hotels don't do this, but enough pats on our own backs, let's send you on your way to see things uniquely San Franciscan. While some of these phenomena may remind you of something somewhere else, it's likely that those simply don't measure up to what San Francisco claims!

Hidden Places

FILBERT STEPS/TELEGRAPH HILL

This is our favorite hidden place in San Francisco (for a detailed tour, ask for our guide on walking tours). While the Filbert Steps are full of the kind of history and romance that tourists expect from San Francisco, there are lots of other cozy places to get lost on Telegraph Hill. Check out the Greenwich Steps—they parallel Filbert and are nearly as impressive. Don't miss Alta Street, Montgomery Street down to Julius' Castle, and the view from the dead-end of Montgomery facing south (you've seen this view in many TV commercials). Then you can ramble through Levi's Plaza at the bottom.

RUSSIAN HILL PLACE AND MACONDRAY LANE

The enchantment of Macondray Lane is now a well-shared secret. This wooded section of Russian Hill, with its vines, century-old trees and quaint cottages, was home to many legendary artists and writers, including Bret Harte, Pop Demarest, and Mark Twain. In the compound, of small cottages that still populate this neighborhood, it's no wonder that art would flourish. Located between Vallejo and Union, Taylor and Leavenworth.

SAN FRANCISCO ART INSTITUTE

Not far from Macondray Lane is this fine art school that many locals don't even know much about...and far fewer have ever been to the remarkable campus with its bay views, Italianate architecture, historic Diego Rivera murals, anarchist art, and café. It's great to wander in and tap into the creative vibes...don't daydream too much, you might run into a nude model. Great art supply store, too.
800 Chestnut St., 771-7020.

ALAMO SQUARE

This historic district is the home of the "Painted Ladies," those colorful Victorians that you always see on San Francisco postcards. The Ladies are only six of several hundred Victorian-era houses still standing in this transitional neighborhood. There's a great picnic park where you can relax. Fulton, Steiner, Hayes, and Scott Streets bound the park. The Painted Ladies are in the 700 block of Steiner Street. Just around the corner on Fulton [between Steiner and Fillmore] take a moment to admire the sculpture of Ron Hingler whose Tibetan inspired sculptures fill the front yard of two houses!

WAVERLY PLACE IN CHINATOWN

This little alley finds many traditional Chinese coming to practice their Buddhist or Taoist rituals at three temples: Norras (109 Waverly Pl.), Tin How (125), and Jeng Sen (146). They are rather small places and difficult to find, located up narrow stairways and behind non-descript doorways.

ANGEL ISLAND

This 740-acre preserve is the largest island in the San Francisco Bay. The three trisecting trails are perfect retreats for cyclists, hikers, and picnickers on warm spring and fall days. You'll be amazed by the spectacular views. Take the Blue & Gold Fleet ferries from Pier 41. For schedules call 773-1188; for tickets call 705-5555.

FORT FUNSTON

Looking for a view of wind-swept coast? Go south on the Great Highway to Fort Funston where you'll also be treated to hang-gliders that fly precariously close to the cliffs

FORT MASON CENTER

It's good to know that San Francisco has gotten creative with its forts. (Check out hidden Fort Point just below the Golden Gate Bridge, too...and at the north east edge of the Presidio) Fort Mason is a cultural mecca with art galleries, museums, performing art theaters, workshop rooms, the famous vegetarian restaurant, Greens, and a spectacular view of the Golden Gate Bridge. Weekends are a particularly good time to visit as there may be an art fair. There is also a Friends of the Library Bookstore in building C. Get some great deals on books and support the library at the same time.

The Secrets of Golden Gate Park

Larger than New York's Central Park, Golden Gate Park is not hidden to tourists and is not a secret to natives. Yet we find that very few visitors know that so much exists in the confines of this former set of sand dunes: 11 lakes, two waterfalls, three museums, an historic band shell, a magnificent carousel, a nine-hole golf course, 21 tennis courts, a herd of bison, several specialized gardens, and some 60 statues. But there are a couple of other sites and activities which are even less known. Near Museum Way, toward the eastern part of the park, there is an entire street dedicated to roller skating/blading of the finest order. Roller blades, skates and bicycles are available for rental at a number of vendors on the periphery of the Park. If you are starting in the Haight, go to Skates On Haight (1818 Haight, near Stanyan, 752-8375). Stow Lake, just beyond the Japanese Tea Gardens, is a border between the people-oriented and nature-oriented areas of the Park. You can rent rowboats or paddleboats on the lake and cruise to Strawberry Hill, which sits at the lake's center. Discover its tranquil waterfall and the stunning views of the city. There are great miniature sights at Spreckels Lake, home to the miniature Yacht Club of Golden Gate Park. Finally, head west to the tulip garden and the Dutch Windmill. Restored to operating condition in 1981, this windmill once supplied the power for the entire Park's irrigation, but electrical pumps have now rendered it a mere decoration. Just north of this windmill is the Beach Chalet, a Brew Pub and Restaurant that has beautifully restored WPA murals on the first floor detailing the history and development of Golden Gate Park. Concerts, fairs and plays can be found at the Polo Fields, the Bandshell and other park locations during summer months.

Weird & Wonderful Museums

TATTOO ART MUSEUM

You can go for a tattoo or view the world's only tattoo museum at the shop of famous tattoo artist Lyle Tuttle.
841 Columbus Ave., 775-4991

CARTOON ART MUSEUM

A treasure trove of original cartoon pieces, including comic books, editorial, strip comics and animation cells, are on display at this novel museum. 655 Mission St., 227-8666 • cartoonart.org

THE SAN FRANCISCO ROOM

We don't think more than a few dozen San Franciscans even know this treasure trove exists. It features old "keys to the city," 1906 earthquake/fire artifacts, and a variety of fascinating books and photos. Purely for "Frisco-philes", this collection is often called the "San Francisco city attic." They have a small portion of their massive photo collection on line <http://www.sfpl.org/librarylocations/sfhistory/sfphoto.htm>
On the 6th floor of the Main Library, Larkin & Grove Streets, 557-4400

CABLE CAR BARN & MUSEUM

Displays the history of the cable cars and the underground cables that pull the cars along the tracks. 1201 Mason St., 474-1887
cablecarmuseum.org

MARKET STREET RAILWAY COMPANY

The museum is located at 77 Stewart Street on the northwest side of Hotel Vitale. Visitors can see how the historic streetcars were restored for use on the popular F Market line and view exhibits on the history of the transit system. They offer an overview of the history of San Francisco's public transit along with an eclectic array of souvenirs, books and memorabilia perfect for the train and trolley enthusiast. Open Wednesday through Sunday from 10 am to 6pm 974-1948. • streetcar.org

Only in San Francisco

ANCHOR STEAM BREWERY TOUR

San Francisco's last remaining real brewery produces ale that's a favorite in local pubs. This Potrero Hill brewery employs only 25 people, but the beer is distributed to almost every state in the country. There are generous samples at the end of the one-hour tour. Afterwards explore the area, which has some of the best weather in the city. 1705 Mariposa St.; for tour reservations call 863-8350. anchorbrewing.com

AUDIUM

This place is trippy; it feels like a 70's time warp has set in. Audium is the only theater in America constructed specifically for sound movement. Listeners are enveloped by sound from speakers in sloping walls, a floating floor, and suspended ceiling. One hundred thirty-six speakers create a "sound bath"-it's amazing how acute your auditory senses can be when you have no vision (it's pitch black). The inventor will sell you a ticket, engineer the show, and then meet in the lounge to answer your questions at the end. A true one-man-show. A very odd experience! Shows Friday and Saturday nights at 8pm. 1616 Bush St., 771-1616. • audium.org

GLIDE MEMORIAL CHURCH ON SUNDAYS

Reverend Cecil Williams knows how to throw a party and this weekly celebration is the wildest and most enlightening party in town. A microcosm of the city shows up at this African American rooted Methodist church to hear Cecil provide inspiration and to sing along with the spirited and nationally-recognized Glide choir. Prepare to be uplifted! Services every Sunday at 9 and 11a.m. Taylor and Ellis Streets, 771-6300.

MISSION BAY GOLF CENTER

Is it a mirage or are there dozens of golfers hacking away South of Market just steps from downtown? Two floors of golfers stare out at 400 yards of driving range with the bay in the background...maybe this is where the idea arose for the new AT&T Ballpark. There's a St. Andrew's putting green and café as well. 1200 6th St., 431-7888.

DEFENESTRATION

Look closely at the vacant building on the corner of 6th and Howard and you'll see the true meaning of defenestration - "throwing out the window." Sofas, refrigerators (complete with contents spilling out) and more seem to be leaping out the windows of this four-story building in a clever art piece by Brian Goggin. If you're truly taken with it, the whole shebang is for sale! Defenestration is at 214 6th Street.

WAVE ORGAN

If you love to listen to the sounds of crashing waves and lapping water you'll want to visit the Wave Organ near the Marina Yacht Harbor. Park at Marina Green and walk out to the end of the jetty and you'll see some cement benches to lounge on. Relax and tune in to the sounds emanating from this wave-activated sound sculpture. Created by two artists from stone and PVC pipes to create 'music' from nature. High tide brings the best sound. • exploratorium.edu/visit/wave_organ.html

Notes

Let us know your off-the-beaten path recommendations so we may share them with other Joie de Vivre Hotels guests! Please return your suggestions to the front desk staff.
