

Frommer's®

San Francisco with Kids

2nd Edition

by Noelle Salmi

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"Amazingly easy to use. Very portable, very complete."

—Booklist

"Detailed, accurate, and easy-to-read information for all price ranges."

—Glamour Magazine

"Hotel information is close to encyclopedic."

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"Frommer's Guides have a way of giving you a real feel for a place."

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About the Author

Noelle Salmi is a freelance writer who lived and worked in several U.S. cities and many foreign countries before moving to San Francisco in 2001. In addition to her work promoting investment overseas, she worked at a major daily newspaper and later at CNN in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Associated Press in Berlin, Germany; and United Press International in New York City. Her articles have appeared in the *Santa Clara Valley Weekly*, *Jornal do Brasil*, *The West Side Spirit*, *Emerging Markets*, *USA Today*, and *Bay Area Parent*. In addition to this guidebook, she is writing the first edition of *Frommer's San Francisco Day by Day*. She lives on Russian Hill with her husband Mika and daughters Annika and Natasha.

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Contents

List of Maps

vi

1	How to Feel Like a San Francisco Family	1
1	Frommer's Favorite San Francisco Experiences	2
	<i>San Francisco Timeline</i>	4
2	The Best Hotel Bets	7
	<i>San Francisco Firsts</i>	11
3	The Best Dining Bets	12
	<i>Kids' Guide to Dim Sum</i>	15
2	Planning Your Family Trip to San Francisco	17
1	Visitor Information	17
	<i>Online Traveler's Toolbox</i>	18
2	Money	18
	<i>What Things Cost in San Francisco</i>	20
	<i>Free (or Nearly Free) Things to Do with Your Kids in San Francisco</i>	21
3	When to Go	22
	<i>Kids' Favorite San Francisco Events</i>	23
4	What to Pack	26
5	Health, Insurance & Safety	27
	<i>Packing for Planes & Cars</i>	28
6	Words of Wisdom & Helpful Resources	30
7	Getting There	33
	<i>Flying with Film & Video</i>	35
	<i>In-Flight Fun For Kids</i>	38
8	The 21st-Century Traveler	41
9	Show & Tell: Getting the Kids Interested in San Francisco	45
3	Getting to Know San Francisco	47
1	Orientation	48
	<i>Neighborhoods in Brief</i>	48
2	Getting Around	57
	<i>Easy Riding: Ways to Save on Public Transportation</i>	60
	<i>Great Garages</i>	63
3	Planning Your Outings	63
	<i>San Francisco Parking Secrets</i>	64
	<i>Fast Facts: San Francisco</i>	66
4	Family-Friendly Accommodations	70
1	Union Square/Financial District	73
	<i>Making the Most of the Concierge</i>	77
2	South of Market (SoMa)	84
3	Fisherman's Wharf	89
4	The Embarcadero	92
5	Nob Hill	93
6	The Marina & Cow Hollow	96
7	Laurel Heights	98

5	Family-Friendly Dining	99
	<i>Dining Out in Peace</i>	100
1	Restaurants by Cuisine	101
2	Union Square/The Financial District	104
	<i>Belden Place—A Slice of Europe in SF</i>	109
3	South of Market	110
	<i>Food Courts</i>	114
4	Nob Hill	115
5	Chinatown	116
	<i>How to Tell Your Hakka from Your Hunan</i>	118
6	The Embarcadero/South Beach	119
7	North Beach	122
	<i>Sandwich Bars & Picnic Spots</i>	125
8	Fisherman's Wharf	126
9	Civic Center/Hayes Valley	129
10	Marina/Cow Hollow	130
11	Japantown/Pacific Heights/Presidio Heights	133
12	Russian Hill	135
13	The Haight	137
14	The Mission	140
15	The Castro & Noe Valley	144
16	The Richmond & Sunset	145
6	Exploring San Francisco with Your Kids	149
	<i>Suggested Itineraries for First-Time Visitors</i>	149
1	The Top Attractions	154
	<i>The What-to-Do-While-Waiting-for-the-Ferry-to-Alcatraz Quiz</i>	156
	<i>The Great San Francisco Cable Car Quiz</i>	159
	<i>Rainy-Day Activities</i>	164
	<i>Fortune Cookies</i>	166
	<i>Bringing Culture to the Little Ones</i>	170
	<i>The Pinnipeds Who Came for Dinner</i>	171
2	Museums for Everyone	174
	<i>I Spy with My Little Eyes—SFMOMA</i>	179
3	The Best Views	180
4	Outings on the Bay	182
5	Crossing the Golden Gate Bridge	183
6	Taking a Hike	184
7	Best Guided Tours for the Family	185
7	Neighborhood Strolls	188
	Walking Tour 1: Chinatown	188
	<i>The "Only in San Francisco" Checklist of Rare or Unusual Sights</i>	191
	Walking Tour 2: The Embarcadero & Fisherman's Wharf	192
	Walking Tour 3: South of Market	195
	Walking Tour 4: Russian Hill to Telegraph Hill	198
	Walking Tour 5: The Marina	200
	Walking Tour 6: The Vertical Tour	203

8 For the Active Family 206

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------|-----|
| 1 Parks & Playgrounds | 206 | 4 Sports & Games | 214 |
| 2 The Great Indoors | 212 | 5 Classes & Workshops | 221 |
| 3 Beachcombing | 213 | | |

9 Shopping with Your Kids 223

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----|------------------------------|-----|
| 1 The Shopping Scene | 223 | <i>Mall, Rats!</i> | 235 |
| 2 Shopping A to Z | 226 | | |

10 Entertainment for the Whole Family 240

- | | | | |
|--|-----|--|-----|
| 1 The Big Venues | 241 | 6 Movies | 256 |
| <i>Comings & Goings</i> | 244 | 7 Dance | 257 |
| 2 Seasonal Events | 247 | 8 Circus Shows | 258 |
| 3 Weekend Shows | 249 | 9 Spectator Sports | 258 |
| 4 Theater | 249 | <i>Take Me Out to the Ballpark</i> | 259 |
| <i>What to Do If You Have</i> | | 10 Story Hours | 260 |
| <i>a Sitter</i> | 252 | 11 Arcades | 261 |
| <i>All-Ages Music Venues</i> | 254 | | |
| 5 Concerts | 254 | | |

11 Side Trips from San Francisco 263

- | | | | |
|------------------------|-----|---|-----|
| 1 Berkeley | 263 | 4 Calistoga & the Napa Valley | 275 |
| 2 Oakland | 268 | 5 Amusement Parks | 278 |
| 3 Point Reyes National | | 6 Another Family Outing | |
| Seashore | 272 | by the Bay | 279 |

Appendix: For International Visitors 280

- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|--|-----|
| 1 Preparing for Your Trip | 280 | <i>Fast Facts: For the International</i> | |
| 2 Getting to the U.S. | 287 | <i>Traveler</i> | 289 |
| 3 Getting Around the U.S. | 288 | | |

Index 294

- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----|----------------------------|-----|
| General Index | 294 | Restaurant Index | 304 |
| Accommodations Index | 304 | | |

List of Maps

The Bay Area	3	Walking Tour: The Embarcadero & Fisherman's Wharf	193
San Francisco Neighborhoods	50	Walking Tour: SoMa	197
San Francisco Mass Transit	58	Walking Tour: Russian Hill to Telegraph Hill	199
Accommodations Near Union Square, the Financial District & Chinatown	74	Walking Tour: The Marina	201
Accommodations Around Town	86	Walking Tour: The Vertical Tour	204
Dining in Union Square & the Financial District	106	Golden Gate National Recreation Area	208
Dining Around Town	112	The Zoo & Lake Merced Area	217
Dining Near North Beach & Chinatown	117	San Francisco Shopping	228
Haight-Ashbury & the Castro	139	San Francisco Entertainment	242
The Mission District	141	The Civic Center	245
Major San Francisco Sights	150	Berkeley	265
Yerba Buena Gardens	155	Oakland	270
Fisherman's Wharf & Vicinity	169	Point Reyes National Seashore	273
Golden Gate Park	173	Napa Valley	277
Walking Tour: Chinatown	189		

*For my husband, Mika Salmi, and my daughters,
Annika and Natasha.*

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—Noelle Salmi

An Invitation to the Reader

In researching this book, we discovered many wonderful places—hotels, restaurants, shops, and more. We're sure you'll find others. Please tell us about them, so we can share the information with your fellow travelers in upcoming editions. If you were disappointed with a recommendation, we'd love to know that, too. Please write to:

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An Additional Note

Please be advised that travel information is subject to change at any time—and this is especially true of prices. We therefore suggest that you write or call ahead for confirmation when making your travel plans. The authors, editors, and publisher cannot be held responsible for the experiences of readers while traveling. Your safety is important to us, however, so we encourage you to stay alert and be aware of your surroundings. Keep a close eye on cameras, purses, and wallets, all favorite targets of thieves and pickpockets.

Other Great Guides for Your Trip:

Frommer's San Francisco
Frommer's California
San Francisco For Dummies
California For Dummies
Unofficial Guide to California with Kids

Frommer's Star Ratings, Icons & Abbreviations

Every hotel, restaurant, and attraction listing in this guide has been ranked for quality, value, service, amenities, and special features using a **star-rating system**. In country, state, and regional guides, we also rate towns and regions to help you narrow down your choices and budget your time accordingly. Hotels and restaurants are rated on a scale of zero (recommended) to three stars (exceptional). Attractions, shopping, nightlife, towns, and regions are rated according to the following scale: zero stars (recommended), one star (highly recommended), two stars (very highly recommended), and three stars (must-see).

In addition to the star-rating system, we also use **six feature icons** that point you to the great deals, in-the-know advice, and unique experiences that separate travelers from tourists. Throughout the book, look for:

-  **Finds** Special finds—those places only insiders know about
-  **Fun Fact** Fun facts—details that make travelers more informed and their trips more fun
-  **Moments** Special moments—those experiences that memories are made of
-  **Overrated** Places or experiences not worth your time or money
-  **Tips** Insider tips—great ways to save time and money
-  **Value** Great values—where to get the best deals

The following **abbreviations** are used for credit cards:

AE	American Express	DISC	Discover	V	Visa
DC	Diners Club	MC	MasterCard		

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Now that you have the guidebook to a great trip, visit our website at **www.frommers.com** for travel information on more than 3,000 destinations. With features updated regularly, we give you instant access to the most current trip-planning information available. At Frommers.com, you'll also find the best prices on fares, accommodations, and car rentals—and you can even book travel online through our travel booking partners. At Frommers.com, you'll also find the following:

- Online updates to our most popular guidebooks
- Vacation sweepstakes and contest giveaways
- Newsletter highlighting the hottest travel trends
- Online travel message boards with featured travel discussions

How to Feel Like a San Francisco Family

San Francisco has always had a way of calling me back. Although my life has been a whirlwind of travel, it's been punctuated by stays in this glorious part of the world. I was born not far from the city limits, and my parents often brought my brother and me into town. I can't say I remember much from those days because we moved to Puerto Rico before my third birthday and, after that, to Brazil and then Uruguay. But when we returned to the U.S., it was to Southern California, and because my parents retained a fondness for San Francisco, we visited the city regularly.

Perhaps it was inevitable that I would attend college in the Bay Area, so that weekends could be spent exploring San Francisco with roommates and friends. Upon graduating, I was off again: to work at a newspaper in Brazil and write for the Associated Press in Germany before heading to New York for grad school and a job promoting investment overseas. I was mostly on airplanes headed to far corners of the earth, but I fortunately found time to meet my husband, a nomad like myself. Although we moved to Seattle, my international job kept me flying and kept the frequent flier miles multiplying—until the birth of my first daughter, when the travel came to a screeching halt.

Then it happened. San Francisco harkened again. My husband's work brought us here, where our second daughter was born a few months later. Four years out, we are a certified San Francisco family—going to every birthday party venue in town; trekking out to the beach in summer, bundled up in jeans and jackets against the fog; loading up the kids' bikes in the car every week to take them somewhere flat to ride; buying our organic greens at the Farmer's Market; and considering steamed pork buns, shrimp dumplings, and stuffed crab claws (in other words, dim sum) a fine meal for breakfast.

Through all the travel, the Bay Area had always been my spiritual home, if not my real one. Now San Francisco is my family's true residence, one that welcomed us from the moment we arrived. It helps that the city is used to taking in people from all over the globe. Most of the San Franciscans we know seem to have started life somewhere else, although we're always impressed when we meet someone who actually grew up here. The city is so rich with history, culture, and little-known secrets that it's a treat to pick the brains of a lifelong resident. It's been especially exciting to begin writing guidebooks about San Francisco, giving me a terrific excuse to look a little deeper and learn a little more about the wonderful offerings here.

I've made an effort to provide some insights in this book that will make your family's stay in San Francisco more rewarding and memorable. Visits to the city's most famous attractions will certainly be enjoyable, but I hope that you take the time to stray off the beaten path—if even just a little. When in Fisherman's

Wharf, consider skipping the T-shirt shops and candy vendors of PIER 39 and heading instead to the Hyde Street Pier, where you can get a real sense of the city's seafaring past (while the kids climb all over antique ships). In Chinatown, go ahead and check out the colorful tourist stores on Grant Street, but don't miss the exotic and authentic grocers on Stockton Street. And although I know that cashew chicken at the big restaurant in the middle of Chinatown sounds appetizing, consider ordering dim sum out in the Richmond District instead.

One of the terrific things about San Francisco is that a whole lot of the sights and activities that appeal to tourists in general will appeal to families specifically. What kid doesn't enjoy a ride on a cable car? And although everyone loves a stroll along Crissy Field, younger ones will be especially delighted playing on the grassy hills and sandy beaches. Not to mention the ferry ride to Alcatraz Island, which is perfect family fare. Certainly, not every kid will be thrilled by a trip to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, but a terrific children's center is just across the street. For every adult attraction you ante up, I'll see you three that are fabulous with kids. In fact, having little ones is a great excuse to visit the Exploratorium, the California Academy of Sciences, and the San Francisco Zoo—all of which are first-rate.

So get started planning your trip. This chapter is a good place to begin; in it, I suggest some of our all-time favorite San Francisco family experiences, in addition to the best hotels and dining spots.

1 Frommer's Favorite San Francisco Experiences

• Shopping at the Ferry Plaza

Farmer's Market: Perhaps you haven't had a chance lately to stop and smell the roses, admire the tomatoes, or compare the peaches. If that's the case, hop on the F-Market streetcar to the Ferry Building and take a stroll around the best outdoor market in the Bay Area. It's a Saturday morning ritual for a great many San Franciscans who come down with their baskets and carefully select the season's finest from organic farmers and local purveyors of fresh sausages, free-range meats, olive oils, honey, and baked goods. The farmers offer tastes of their wares, so your kids may discover what just-picked-at-their-peak fruits taste like—a revelation if they've never had a perfectly ripe pear or apricot. Don't eat breakfast first; along with coffee drinks and a huge array of morning breads, pastries, and sweets from the very nicest bakeries, local restaurants

serve specialties that taste even better eaten with a view of the bay. See p. 235.

• Eating Dim Sum at Ton Kiang:

It's really worth getting on the 38-Geary bus first thing in the morning and trekking out to this Richmond restaurant (5821 Geary Blvd., between 22nd and 23rd aves.; ☎ 415/387-8273). Along the way your hunger will grow, and you'll be ready to seat yourselves down as servers come carrying trays laden with shrimp dumplings, pork buns, crisp-steamed vegetables, and other mouth-watering delicacies. See p. 148.

• Strolling through Chinatown:

Just steps away from Union Square, you can enter another world; one decorated by bright red, green, and gold banners. The knick-knack shops, traditional herbalists, vendors of ceremonial papers and incense, and grocery stores teeming with live frogs,

The Bay Area



San Francisco Timeline

1776 Spain leads the first colonizers to the area and establishes the Presidio of San Francisco and Mission Dolores, founding Yerba Buena (San Francisco).

1821 Mexico declares independence from Spain, and Yerba Buena remains under Mexican rule.

1846 Captain John Montgomery plants the U.S. flag into present-day Portsmouth Square to claim Yerba Buena for the United States. Yerba Buena is renamed San Francisco.

1848 James Marshall discovers gold at Sutter's Mill. Newspaperman Sam Brannan publicizes the discovery, and the Gold Rush begins.

1848 Domingo Ghirardelli sails to San Francisco to join his partner, James Lick, and begin what is to become the city's most famous chocolate factory.

1849 Isadore Boudin, an experienced French baker, introduces the ordinary sourdough yeast used by miners to a French-style loaf of bread and creates San Francisco sourdough bread.

1868 The *Daily Morning Chronicle*, later the *San Francisco Chronicle*, begins publishing.

1873 Andrew Hallidie, inspired by an accident he witnesses when a team of horses slips on a rainy San Francisco hill, invents the cable car.

1887 George Hearst purchases a small daily newspaper, the *San Francisco Examiner*, to promote his race for the U.S. Senate. His son, William Randolph Hearst, turns it into a very successful tabloid.

1892 The "Ellis Island of the West," Angel Island, opens initially as a quarantine station.

1906 On April 18 at 5:12am, a major earthquake rocks San Francisco and starts more than 50 fires, which burn uncontrollably for 3 days.

crabs, and other wriggly seafood are all a visual and cultural treat. A stop by the Golden Gate Fortune Cookie Company just adds to the fun. See chapter 7 for a self-guided walking tour of the neighborhood.

- **Hanging Out at Crissy Field:** What better way to spend the day than to slow down and take in the views of the Golden Gate Bridge and the city from the Bay Area's newest national park? Kids can run around on the hills, check out the gift shop, pile up rocks, or play in the sand. Buy some nice sand-

wiches at the Warming Hut and enjoy a picnic at one of the many bayside picnic tables. See p. 158.

- **Riding Bikes Down the Embarcadero:** The boulevard is wide and the street is flat, making the Embarcadero an easy family ride. Start at the Bike Hut (see chapter 8) and cruise down the street past the piers, stopping by the Ferry Building to buy picnic food. Walk the bikes down Pier 7 and see if anyone's caught a fish or crab at the end of the pier. Continue toward PIER 39 and Fisherman's Wharf. It may become too

Two-thirds of the city is destroyed, 250,000 people are left homeless, and more than 675 are dead or missing.

1927 Modern-age hockey dawns for the Bay Area with the creation of the California Hockey League.

1934 Alcatraz Island becomes a federal prison.

1936 The San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge opens on November 12. It remains one of the largest bridges in the world and carries over 270,000 vehicles each day—more traffic than any other toll bridge.

1937 The Golden Gate Bridge opens to pedestrian traffic on May 26 and to automobile traffic on May 27.

1945 The charter establishing the United Nations is signed in San Francisco's Herbst Theater.

1960 Candlestick Park opens for baseball and football. The last baseball game takes place in 1999.

1965 Jefferson Airplane opens at the Matrix, a club, on Fillmore.

1978 PIER 39 is built. One of San Francisco's most popular attractions, it gets an estimated 10.5 million visitors each year.

1989 On October 17 at 5:04pm, right before the start of the World Series between the Oakland A's and the San Francisco Giants, a 7.1 magnitude earthquake hits the Bay Area. One person dies at Candlestick Park from a heart attack.

2000 Pacific Bell Park (now SBC Park), the home to the San Francisco Giants, opens.

2004 San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom issues over 4000 same-sex marriage licenses, which are later annulled by the state's Supreme Court.

crowded to pedal here, but once you reach the Hyde Street Pier, space opens up. Keep going until you get to Aquatic Park, where you can stop to eat your pre-packed lunch.

- **Boating on Stow Lake:** Pile into one of the seriously dilapidated, but safe, electric motorboats (top speed is maybe 5 mph), rowboats, or pedal boats and circle this man-made lake as many times as you can. Bring stale bread for the ducks if you like, and relax as you admire the trees and revel in the laughter of the kids as they

attempt to keep the craft from bumping into other boats or landing on the bank. See chapter 8 for more information on this and other outdoor family adventures.

- **Checking out the scene at the Maritime National Historical Park:** Young kids will love playing captain from the top floor of the Maritime Museum (p. 168), running around on the grass at Victorian Park (or playing on the sandy beach), and exploring the antique ships of the Hyde Street Pier (p. 168). All the while, grownups can marvel at the lovely scenery.

Then everyone can grab a crepe at The Cannery, perhaps accompanied by music from a local performer.

- **Hanging out in Golden Gate Park:**

You don't need an agenda to fritter away the hours around San Francisco's most famous park. The Children's Playground has the best swings in the city, lots of climbing structures, a refurbished carousel, sand, and grass. The Japanese Tea Garden is so composed and elegant you'll want to meditate there, but the kids will prefer stepping over the stone walkways and scaling the Drum Bridge. Budding botanists will appreciate the dahlia garden outside the Conservatory of Flowers and will especially enjoy ogling the carnivorous plants inside. On Sundays, the park is closed to traffic; be sure to look for the skate dancers near 6th Avenue and Fulton Street who put on a fine show. See p. 172.

- **Taking the Ferry to Marin:** Bundle up and catch a Blue and Gold Ferry (p. 182) from Pier 41 to Sausalito or Tiburon. You can take bikes on the boats if you like, but both villages are petite and walkable. The ride is glorious. Remain outside for the full effect of the wind and salt spray. On a clear day, you'll have trouble deciding where to look; the scenery ahead is as thrilling as the view behind you. Sausalito is very touristy, but the stores are fun for window shopping. You can pick up burgers or veggie burritos at Hamburgers, a popular stand at 737 Bridgeway, and eat them with a view of the San Francisco skyline. Tiburon is even more upscale than Sausalito. It won't take long to tour the village; leave someone behind to claim a table at Guaymas, at 5 Main Street, where drinks and

passable Mexican food on the sunny deck make this trip a little vacation within your vacation.

- **Standing on Market Street Watching the Chinese New Year's Parade:**

The crowds are thick and the night can be chilly, but come early to get a good spot for a truly marvelous spectacle. The contestants from the Miss Chinatown USA pageant wave from their float, marching bands travel in from around the Bay Area, and an elaborate dragon winds its way along the route, the traditional finale. It seems like the entire city is either in the parade or watching it. Walk to Portsmouth Square afterward for the night market.

- **Sipping a Cappuccino or a Hot Chocolate in a North Beach Cafe:**

Preferably this is to be done at an outdoor table, midmorning, on a weekday when everyone else is at work. If the sun's out, all the better.

- **Cheering the Home Team at SBC Park:**

You don't even need to be a baseball fan to derive a lot of pleasure from an afternoon or evening at this gem of a baseball stadium (p. 258). Bleacher seats go on sale at the park on game days, but if you prefer something fancier, you can usually get good seats online from season ticket holders if nothing's available at Giants Dugout Stores or at the park ticket booth. Kids will have a field day playing at the Coca-Cola Fan Lot playground and chowing down on the notable food concessions. Transportation is a breeze on the N-Judah streetcar; it deposits you at the front gate. American league partisans have the option of taking BART (the local commuter train) across the bay to the Oakland Coliseum.

2 The Best Hotel Bets

- **Best All-Around Family Hotels:**

The **Argonaut** (495 Jefferson St.; ☎ 866/415-0704 or 415/563-0800) is my hands-down favorite in this category. It's a charming hotel in a family-friendly neck of the woods. Several kid-friendly attractions are either next door or less than one block away: grassy Victorian Park, the Aquatic Park beach, the Hyde Street Pier, the cable car turnaround, and The Cannery. The whimsical lobby and its adjacent National Maritime Visitor's Center will appeal to kids as well. The double queen rooms are well suited to families, and the in-house restaurant serves kids' meals in a beach pail. What more could you want? See p. 89 for a full review. The warm and friendly **Serrano Hotel** (405 Taylor St.; ☎ 877/294-9709 or 415/885-2500) helps kids entertain themselves by stocking the minibar with toys and making a game library available to guests (p. 78). The **Handlery Union Square** (351 Geary St.; ☎ 800/843-4343 or 415/781-7800) also gets my vote, mainly for its outdoor, heated pool (p. 81).

- **Best Amenities for Kids:** The **Pan Pacific** (500 Post St.; ☎ 415/771-8600) delights children with its kids' passports and visa stamps, in addition to coloring books (p. 76). The **Four Seasons** (757 Market St.; ☎ 415/633-3000) supplies cookies and milk on arrival for kids 6 and under and root beer and popcorn for those 7 and up. Kids staying in their own rooms get a specially stocked minibar, and bathrobes are supplied in sizes to fit the whole family. The concierge will also send up other family items—from cribs

to board games—on request (p. 85). The "Family Suite" in the **Hotel Del Sol** (3100 Webster St.; ☎ 877/433-5765 or 415/921-5520) has bunk beds, toys, and board games. Kids also get beach balls and sun visors (p. 97).

- **Best Suites:** All the rooms and two-bedroom suites at the wonderful **Nob Hill Lambourne** (725 Pine St.; ☎ 800/274-8466 or 415/433-2287) are furnished with kitchenettes, a rarity in the city. You'll pay handsomely, but the Lambourne doesn't skimp on quality (p. 96). Near Union Square, the **Cartwright Hotel** (524 Sutter St.; ☎ 800/227-3844 or 415/421-2865) has a few two-room suites that are beautifully decorated and can be an excellent value (p. 80). The homey suites at the **Cow Hollow Motor Inn** (2190 Lombard St.; ☎ 415/921-5800) contain two bathrooms, two bedrooms, and a kitchen—and must be booked far in advance. For value and space, these offer the sweetest suite deal in town (p. 96).

- **Best Indoor Pool:** You have to supervise your kids at every hotel pool, but if your kids don't need you to swim with them, you can work out on the poolside cardio equipment at the **Hotel Nikko** (p. 73), at 222 Mason St. (☎ 415/394-1111). If you'd prefer to take it easy, the lounge chairs and Japanese hot tub, all under an attractive glass ceiling, are a relaxing alternative. The lap pool at the **Palace Hotel** (2 New Montgomery St.; ☎ 800/325-3589 or 415/512-1111) is so lovely it looks like the setting for a photo shoot (p. 85). For value, you can't beat **The Sheehan** (620 Sutter St.;

- © 800/848-1529 or 415/775-6500), which has the largest indoor heated pool in town and room rates as low as \$85 (p. 84).
- **Best Outdoor Pool:** As you might have guessed, the competitors for this honor are few. Around Union Square, the award goes to the **Handlery** (651 Geary St.; © 800/843-4343 or 415/781-7800) for a small, heated pool in a pleasant patio (p. 81). Among Fisherman's Wharf hotels, the **Hyatt at Fisherman's Wharf** (555 N. Point St.; © 800/223-1234 or 415/563-1234) fields far and away the nicest pool (p. 90). The **Hotel Del Sol** (3100 Webster St.; © 877/433-5765 or 415/921-5520) wins for the best poolside decor, with palm trees and a hammock, but the pool itself is very small (p. 97).
 - **Best Spa:** Yes, this is a family travel guide, but that doesn't mean part of the family can't disappear for an hour or so for a well-deserved facial or massage. Hands-down, the most elegant spa with the latest treatments is found at the **Huntington Hotel** (1075 California St.; © 800/227-4683 or 415/474-5400). See p. 94.
 - **Best In-House Entertainment:** The Top of the Mark at the **Mark Hopkins InterContinental** (Number One Nob Hill; © 800/327-0200 or 415/392-3434) is terrific for drinks, views, or weekend dinner and dancing. If the kids are old enough to leave tucked in bed in a room downstairs, you'll have the pleasure of going out for a nice evening without venturing far from your temporary home (p. 94). At the **Hotel Bijou** (111 Mason St.; 800/771-1022 or 415/771-1200) the tiny in-house movie theater shows a double billing of filmed-in-San-Francisco movies nightly, so you can round out your day of sightseeing with a low-key evening activity (p. 82). If you want to do something silly with the kids, take them to the Tonga Room at the **Fairmont Hotel** (950 Mason St.; © 800/441-1414 or 415/772-5000) for appetizers and a mild tropical storm (p. 93).
 - **Best Lobby:** If the kids are into fairy tales, the **Fairmont Hotel** (950 Mason St.; © 800/441-1414 or 415/772-5000) will leave them waiting for Princess Aurora to arrive (p. 93). For the most stunning lobby in town, the truly opulent, yet tasteful, Art-Deco-inspired **Four Seasons** (757 Market St.; © 415/633-3000) tops the list (p. 85).
 - **Best If You Have a Car:** For stays around Union Square, the **Galleria Park Hotel** (191 Sutter St.; © 800/792-9639 or 415/781-3060) is built over a parking garage, so it won't take long to retrieve yours. Like all downtown hotels, parking charges are nuts—\$30 per day is average—so it's not economical to park here, just convenient (p. 76). One car per room gets free indoor parking at the **Cow Hollow Motor Inn & Suites** (2190 Lombard St.; © 415/921-5800); see p. 96 for a full review. A spot for your car also comes courtesy of the **Hotel Del Sol** (3100 Webster St.; © 877/433-5765 or 415/921-5520; p. 97) or the **Marina Hotel** (2576 Lombard St.; © 800/346-6118 or 415/921-9406; p. 97).
 - **Best If You Brought the Dog:** The **Hotel Monaco** (501 Geary St.; © 800/214-4220 or 415/292-0100) has packages for pooches that rival anything other hotels have for kids. I don't know if there's an underlying message there (p. 77). A sister property, the **Serrano Hotel** (405 Taylor St.;

☎ 877/294-9709 or 415/885-2500), will walk your dog by appointment and stocks gourmet pet food, treats, and comfy bedding (p. 78). The **Hotel Nikko** (222 Mason St.; ☎ 415/394-1111) also welcomes all dogs (p. 73).

- **Best for Walkers:** Steps from Chinatown and the Financial District, and still close to Union Square, the **Hotel Triton** (342 Grant Ave.; ☎ 800/433-6611 or 415/394-0500) is terrific for anyone who wants to get up and explore downtown (p. 78). If you prefer to stroll along the water, try the **Hyatt Regency San Francisco** (5 Embarcadero Center; ☎ 800/233-1234 or 415/788-1234); see p. 93 for a review. The **Argonaut Hotel** (495 Jefferson St.; ☎ 866/415-0704 or 415/563-0800) is next to one of the loveliest walking paths in town, which starts at Aquatic Park, runs through woodsy Fort Mason, and takes you along the scenic Marina waterfront (p. 89).
- **Best for Athletic Families.** Families with older kids might want to try the **Harbor Court Hotel** (165 Steuart St.; ☎ 800/346-0555 or 415/882-1300), next door to the YMCA, which has an Olympic-size pool and is open to hotel guests. The Embarcadero across the street is also a fine place to walk, jog, bike, in-line skate, or skateboard (p. 92). The **Four Seasons** (757 Market St.; ☎ 415/633-3000) abuts a massive sports club/L.A. health club (p. 85).
- **Best Views:** Request a room above the 15th floor at **The Argent** (50 3rd St.; ☎ 877/222-6699 or 415/974-6400) and put those huge picture windows to good use (p. 88). If it's the bay you crave, talk to the good people at the **Hyatt Regency San Francisco**

(5 Embarcadero Center; ☎ 800/233-1234 or 415/788-1234) and request a room with a view. The kids will enjoy the glass elevators with an indoor view as well (p. 93). Most of the hotels atop Nob Hill offer fine vistas, but the **Mark Hopkins Intercontinental** (p. 94) gets the top honors in this category. (Number One Nob Hill; ☎ 800/327-0200 or 415/392-3434).

- **Best Hotel Food:** The **Grand Café** and **Petite Café** in the **Hotel Monaco** (501 Geary St.; ☎ 800/214-4220 or 415/292-0100; p. 77) provide first-class dining just an elevator ride away. **Cortez** in the **Hotel Adagio** (550 Geary Blvd.; ☎ 800/228-8830 or 415/775-5000; p. 82) is one of the best new restaurants in town; although the evening *tapas* menu may be too sophisticated, and pricey, for a family meal, breakfasts are well executed. **Anzu** in the **Hotel Nikko** (222 Mason St.; ☎ 415/394-1111; p. 73) is tops for sushi. If the kids aren't ready for *hamachi*, children's menus are available. The best hotel restaurant for kids has to be **Puccini and Pinetti**, where kids can design their own pizzas. It's next to the **Monticello Inn** (127 Ellis St.; ☎ 800/669-7777 or 415/392-8800; p. 83). The **Dining Room at the Ritz-Carlton** (600 Stockton St.; ☎ 800/241-3333 or 415/296-7465; p. 95) is one of the most highly rated restaurants in town.
- **If Price Is No Object:** For extreme luxury and pampering, no San Francisco hotel better serves families than the **Four Seasons** (757 Market St.; ☎ 415/633-3000), reviewed on p. 85. If you prefer more traditional opulence, the **Ritz-Carlton** (600 Stockton St.; ☎ 800/241-3333 or

415/296-7465) provides a sumptuous hotel experience (p. 95). The **Pan Pacific Hotel** (500 Post St.; ☎ 800/327-8585 or 415/771-8600) is another luxe joint with good amenities for kids and staff happy to do your bidding. The valet switch in the bathroom rather sets the tone (p. 76).

- **If Price Is the Deal Breaker:** The most charming budget option near Union Square is the **Golden Gate Hotel** (775 Bush St.; ☎ 800/835-1118 or 415/392-3702). Rooms are small but clean and bright, and breakfast is part of the package (p. 81). If you want something dirt-cheap downtown, and you don't mind teeny-tiny and very bare but clean accommodations, try Chinatown's **Grant Plaza** (465 Grant Ave.; 415/434-3883), where the sixth-floor double-room and adjacent sitting room with fold-out sofa ring up at just \$109 (p. 84). For a family of three willing to share showers and store stuff in lockers, a private room at **Hostelling International San Francisco, Fisherman's Wharf** (Fort Mason, Building 240; ☎ 415/771-7277) can be had for as little as \$66, and comes with a bay view, continental breakfast, use of a kitchen, and free parking. Rates for a family of four start at \$88 (p. 91).

- **Best for Peace and Quiet:** Because the **Pan Pacific** (500 Post St.; ☎ 415/771-8600) is multi-storied and built as a hotel (rather than converted from some other purpose), larger-than-average rooms are far from the street and designed with soundproof windows, so that you'll hardly know you're in the city (p. 76). Even the lobby inside **The Huntington Hotel** (1075 California St.; ☎ 800/227-4683 or 415/474-5400) is quiet. Large rooms high

off the street lower the decibel level (p. 94).

- **Best for Baby:** Call the **Four Seasons** (757 Market St.; ☎ 415/633-3000) and tell them you're arriving with a baby. They'll set you up with a fully outfitted crib, diaper genie, diapers, wipes, baby shampoo, baby lotion, and so on (p. 85). If mom is bottle-feeding, the microwave oven in the kitchenette at the **Nob Hill Lam-bourne** (725 Pine St.; ☎ 800/274-8466 or 415/433-2287) will come in handy in the middle of the night (p. 96). **The Laurel Inn** (444 Presidio Ave.; ☎ 800/552-8735 or 415/567-8467) is another top pick for travelers with babies or toddlers, not just for the kitchenettes but also for the neighborhood, which is teeming with families (p. 98).
- **Best for Toddlers:** When you've got a 2- or 3-year old in tow, nothing comes in handier than a nearby park. You'll find a delightful one across the street from the **Huntington Hotel** (1075 California St.; ☎ 800/227-4683 or 415/474-5400). Also, if you snag one of the Huntington's rooms with a full kitchen, you'll know what to do when the little tyke wakes up at 5am demanding breakfast (p. 94). The **Marina Motel** (2576 Lombard St.; ☎ 800/346-6118 or 415/921-9406) is close to two great playgrounds: Moscone and Cow Hollow. Even if you can't snag a unit with a kitchen, all rooms have refrigerators (p. 97). If you'll be racing back to the hotel for your toddler's nap every afternoon, the **Serrano Hotel** (405 Taylor St.; ☎ 877/294-9709 or 415/885-2500), conveniently located near Union Square, is a good choice. It also keeps complimentary cribs, strollers, and booster seats on hand (p. 78).

Fun Fact San Francisco Firsts

- 1847** *The California Star*, a four-page weekly, becomes the first newspaper published in San Francisco.
- 1848** The first public school in California opens in San Francisco.
- 1852** The first legal execution in San Francisco takes place on Russian Hill.
- 1860** The first Pony Express rider begins a trip across the continent from Missouri to San Francisco. The 2,000-mile journey takes 10 days.
- 1880** The world's first motion picture premieres at the San Francisco Art Association Hall.
- 1888** The poem "Casey at the Bat" by Ernest L. Thayer is published for the first time in the *San Francisco Examiner* newspaper.
- 1911** The San Francisco symphony plays its first season.
- 1912** Women in San Francisco vote for the first time.
- 1937** Harold Wobber becomes the first person to commit suicide by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge.
- 1944** San Francisco Ballet produces the first full-length dance production of *The Nutcracker* in the United States.
- 1952** The Bay Area Educational Television company is founded, eventually becoming KQED, one of the first public broadcasting companies in America.
- 1964** The Condor Club in North Beach becomes the country's first topless dance bar.
- 1965** The band formerly known as "The Warlocks" plays for the first time as "The Grateful Dead" at San Francisco's Fillmore Auditorium.

- **Best for Teens:** The **Hotel Triton** (342 Grant Ave.; ☎ **800/433-6611** or 415/394-0500) will wake up the most disaffected teenager with rock 'n' roll in the lobby and a design palette that has "groovy" written all over it. Rooms are small so you won't be sharing, but that's good for the kid who needs some space (p. 78). The **W Hotel** lobby and bar (181 3rd St.; ☎ **415/777-5300**) is a whirlwind of activity that can be fascinating for teens. The clientele considers itself pretty hip. The location, across from Yerba Buena Center, means instant recreation for the kids at the Metreon (p. 88).

- **Best for Shoppers:** There's no better location for parcel-toting families than the **Westin St. Francis** (335 Powell St.; ☎ **800/WESTIN-1** or 415/397-7000). You can stock up in all those Union Square stores and have your packages back in your room in minutes, ready to reload (p. 79). If you're in a hurry, confine yourself to the San Francisco Shopping Centre at 5th and Mission streets and hurl your goodies into your room at the **Hotel Milano** (55 5th St.; ☎ **800/398-7555** or 415/543-8555) right next door (p. 89). The **Hyatt Regency San Francisco** (5 Embarcadero Center; ☎ **800/233-1234**

or 415/788-1234) is equally well placed for family shopping in the Embarcadero Center. After a long day of shopping, you can feed and entertain the kids as well at the center's cinemas and restaurants (p. 93).

- **Best for Large Families:** If you wanted to, you could get five kids comfortably situated in a king/king room at the **Monticello Inn** (127 Ellis St.; ☎ 800/669-7777 or 415/392-8800). With room service, it'd be quite a party (p. 83). The **Hyatt at Fisherman's Wharf** (555 N. Point St.; ☎ 800/223-1234 or 415/563-1234) can set you up in connecting double/doubles and on request will provide a fridge. Even better, there are coin-op washers and dryers on every floor, which, if you can get the kids to do a load, will make

your return home calmer (p. 90). The absolute best hotel for big or extended families is **The Laurel Inn** (444 Presidio Ave.; ☎ 800/552-8735 or 415/567-8467) because you can request interconnecting rooms with two double beds and one of the kitchenette units, creating your own personalized suite (p. 98).

- **Best for Long Stays:** Around the Marina, the **Cow Hollow Motor Inn & Suites** (2190 Lombard St.; ☎ 415/921-5800) provides apartment-style suites with full kitchens and discounts for stays over 5 days (p. 96). The kitchen units at the **Marina Motel** (2576 Lombard St.; ☎ 800/346-6118 or 415/921-9406) are available to those staying 7 nights or more (p. 97).

3 The Best Dining Bets

- **Best Diner:** Film buffs should check out **Mel's Drive-In** (2165 Lombard St.; ☎ 415/921-2867, and three other locations), which inspired George Lucas's *American Graffiti*. Kids love the meals delivered in paper Cadillacs and the plentiful balloons (p. 147).
- **Best Burger:** At nearly \$7 for a cheeseburger, the burgers at **Burger Joint** (700 Haight St.; ☎ 415/864-3833; 807 Valencia St.; ☎ 415/824-3494) don't come cheap. Considering they're made with only the finest ingredients, including naturally-raised Niman Ranch beef, they're worth every penny (p. 138). **Taylor's Refresher** (1 Market St.; ☎ 415/328-3663) comes in a close second, with burgers made from all-natural, local beef, topped with a tasty "secret sauce" and garnished with lettuce and tomatoes fresh from the Farmer's Market (p. 122).
- **Best Milkshake:** It's close, but I'm giving this one to **Taylor's Refresher**. Both it and **Burger Joint** (see "Best Burger," above) use San Francisco's luscious Double Rainbow ice cream for their first-rate strawberry, vanilla, and chocolate shakes. But in the summer Taylor's branches out with a to-die-for blueberry shake. See p. 122.
- **Best for Breakfast:** For its inventive omelets, terrific pancakes, and fresh-baked breads, **Ella's** takes the prize in the early meal category (500 Presidio Ave.; ☎ 415/441-5669); see p. 134 for a review. Of course, while in San Francisco, you could always branch out and have dim sum for breakfast (see below), which I highly recommend.
- **Best Children's Menu:** Kids aren't limited to chicken fingers and fries at friendly **Puccini and Pinetti** (129 Ellis St.; ☎ 415/392-5500). The children's menu

includes a salad, fruit, soup, and spaghetti, along with the irresistible make-your-own-pizza option. See p. 108.

- **Best Decor:** Step into **Ana Mandara** and step into Vietnam—complete with tropical foliage, a façade of a Vietnamese home, and Indochinese artifacts. (891 Beach St.; ☎ 415/771-6800). See p. 126.
- **Best Views:** Perched atop a bluff over the open ocean, the **Cliff House Bistro** (1090 Point Lobos Ave.; ☎ 415/386-3330) affords a vista that will take your breath away (p. 145). If you can't make it out to the Sunset District, try **McCormick and Kuleto's** (900 North Point St.; ☎ 415/929-1730) in Ghirardelli Square for a view of the San Francisco Bay, Alcatraz Island, and the historic ships of the Hyde Street Pier (p. 127).
- **Best If You Have a Sitter:** **Gary Danko** (800 N. Point; ☎ 415/749-2060; p. 126) and **Fleur de Lys** (777 Sutter St.; ☎ 415/673-7779; p. 104) are among the best restaurants in the city, if not the state; better yet, the country.
- **Best for a Nice Dinner with Older Kids:** **Delfina** (3621 18th St.; ☎ 415/552-4055) is a terrific restaurant with a friendly, hip vibe that older kids will enjoy. The Tuscan/Italian food is also terrific (p. 140). Another great spot to take older kids is **Café Kati** (1963 Sutter St.; ☎ 415/775-7313). They'll appreciate the intimate, but unpretentious, dining area and the inventive Western-Asian fusion menu (p. 133).
- **Best for a Nice Dinner with the Grandparents:** Everyone will be delighted with a meal at **Moose's** (1652 Stockton St.; ☎ 415/989-7800), a San Francisco institution. The older generation can enjoy traditional dishes while parents savor inventive California cuisine and kids order off the children's menu. A view of Washington Park and live piano accompaniment will enhance the already terrific dining experience. See p. 122.
- **Best for Big Groups:** If the whole family is in town, head on over to **Kokkari's** (200 Jackson St.; ☎ 415/981-0983). The spacious dining room in back can fit even the largest parties, and private dining rooms are also a possibility. The delightful Greek menu includes appetizers that are perfect for sharing and main courses to please every taste. See p. 119.
- **Best Pizza:** For Neapolitan wood-oven fired pizza that tastes good even without cheese, you can't beat **A16** (2355 Chestnut St.; ☎ 415/771-2216); see p. 131 for a review. The cornmeal-crust pizza at **Vicolo's** (150 Ivy Alley; ☎ 415/863-2382; p. 130) leaves my mouth watering to think about it, but for a true-blue slice of American-style cheesy pizza that kids love, **ZA Pizza** (1919 Hyde St.; ☎ 415/771-3100; p. 137) takes the cake—or, pie, as it were.
- **Best Barbecue:** No whining and no deconstructing the barbecue sauce: you're not in Kansas City, Dorothy. In San Francisco we think **Memphis Minnie's** (576 Haight St.; ☎ 415/864-8461) does a fine job of smoking brisket and ribs. The slaw is good, too. See p. 138.
- **Best Vegetarian:** You can't beat **Greens** (Building A, Fort Mason; ☎ 415/771-6222) for excellent meatless cuisine, not to mention a lovely, airy dining room and fabulous views (p. 130). Greens offers vegan dishes as well, but for those wishing to avoid any animal products whatsoever, **Millennium** (p. 105) is the choice (580 Geary St.; ☎ 415/345-3900).

- **Best Bakery:** **Tartine** actually has to advertise when its bread comes out of the oven (after 4pm, by the way). Otherwise, folks would be hanging around all day to get a loaf of walnut bread, which sells out immediately (600 Guerrero St.; ☎ 415/487-2600). See p. 143.
- **Best Café:** Not that kids really dig hanging out at cafes, but ours (and plenty of other customers') love the croissants at **Boulangé de Polk**. They munch happily while parents sip café au lait and people-watch from the sidewalk tables (2310 Polk St.; ☎ 415/345-1107). See p. 136.
- **Best Chinese in Chinatown:** The **R&G Lounge** gets my nod because of its authentic and refreshingly different menu (631 Kearny St.; ☎ 415/982-7877). See p. 119.
- **Best Chinese Outside Chinatown:** In offering an out-of-Chinatown choice, I'm going to make a plug for **Dragon Well** (2142 Chestnut St.; ☎ 415/474-6888), which offers Chinese food that has been California-ized, with an emphasis on very fresh, high-quality ingredients and a lot less grease. See p. 132.
- **Best Dim Sum:** There's little argument among San Franciscans about where to find the best dim sum. It's at **Ton Kiang** (p. 148) in the Richmond District (5821 Geary Blvd.; ☎ 415/387-8273). If you just can't head out that way during your stay, rest assured. You can still enjoy excellent, albeit pricier, dim sum at **Yank Sing** (101 Spear St., in the Rincon Center; ☎ 415/957-9300); see the box "Kids' Guide to Dim Sum," below.
- **Best Thai:** Thai seems to be the new Chinese, with pad Thai overtaking sweet and sour pork as favored take-out fare. For excellent Thai, try **Marnee Thai** in the Sunset (1243 9th Ave.; ☎ 415/731-9999). See p. 147.
- **Best Ethnic Restaurant for Kids:** If the arched ceilings, hand-painted Arabesque plates, and delectable Moroccan menu at **Aziza** aren't exotic enough, head into the back room, which is full of North African-styled sofas and cushions. Better yet, wait until 7pm on weekends, when the belly dancer arrives (5800 Geary Blvd.; ☎ 415/752-2222). See p. 145.
- **Best Italian:** For a terrific family meal, **Trattoria Contadina** (1800 Mason St.; ☎ 415/982-5728) offers hearty pastas and a friendly ma-and-pa atmosphere (p. 124). For truly exceptional Italian cuisine, you can do no better than **Antica Trattoria** (2400 Polk St.; ☎ 415/928-5797), reviewed on p. 124.
- **Best Fish:** At **Great Eastern** (649 Jackson St.; ☎ 415/986-2500) your dinner gets plucked from the fish tanks in the back of the dining room, so there's no question the fish is fresh (p. 116). The longtime favorite of city hall movers and shakers, **Hayes Street Grill** (320 Hayes St.; ☎ 415/863-5545) uses the Bay Area's finest purveyors of fish, meat, and produce and puts out bright, simple plates of recognizable food (p. 129).
- **Best Mexican:** **Cafe Marimba** (2317 Chestnut St.; ☎ 415/776-1506) serves fresh Oaxacan recipes and makes corn tortillas on the premises (p. 131). For a humble but terrific burrito, head down to the Mission to **La Corneta Taqueria** (2731 Mission St.; ☎ 415/643-7001), reviewed on p. 142.
- **Best for Aspiring Gourmands:** Let them check out the small-plates trend at **Isa** (3324 Steiner St.; ☎ 415/567-9588), where the

Kids' Guide to Dim Sum

For some reason, the whole communal aspect of dim sum seems to make my kids more adventurous. Waiters come with plates of food and everyone seated decides whether or not to go for it. When a plate is placed in the middle of the table, you're all in on the fun of trying it together. Of course, it helps that we've figured out what we think our kids will like and have learned to avoid anything that could truly shock them. I'm passing this knowledge on to you with a list of dim sum that first-timers will definitely enjoy. And if you see fresh-steamed asparagus, snow pea shoots, or any other vegetables being offered, order them as well. They are all excellent.

- **Har gau:** Shrimp dumplings encased in a translucent wrapper and steamed
- **Siu mai:** Rectangles of pork and shrimp in a sheer noodle wrapper
- **Gau choi gau:** Chives, alone or with shrimp or scallops
- **Jun jui kau:** Rice pearl balls with seasoned ground pork and rice
- **Law mai gai:** Sticky rice with bits of meat and mushrooms wrapped in a lotus leaf
- **Char siu bau:** Steamed pork buns—bits of barbecued meat in a doughy roll
- **Guk char siu ban:** Baked pork buns—bits of barbecued meat in a glazed roll
- **Chun guen:** Spring rolls—smaller, less crowded versions of egg rolls
- **Gau ji:** Pot stickers—a thick, crescent-shaped dough filled with ground pork

Where to go: **Yank Sing**, in the Embarcadero at Rincon Center (101 Spear St.; ☎ 415/957-9300), is considered by those in the know to be one of the premier dim sum houses in town. A bit more expensive than most (but still a good bargain), Yank Sing specializes in this fare, so novices will be starting at the top. Highly recommended. Out in the Richmond District at 5821 Geary Blvd. between 22nd and 23rd streets is our favorite, **Ton Kiang** (☎ 415/387-8273). Dim sum is served every day, and the price is always right. This would be a convenient place to stop before a trip to the **Palace of the Legion of Honor** (p. 176).

chef serves up “French *tapas*” like baked goat cheese and potato-wrapped halibut. See p. 131.

- **Best Ice Cream:** And the winner is . . . **Mitchell's** (688 San Jose Ave.; ☎ 415/648-2300) for creamy, luscious ice creams in flavors both exotic (baby coconut, sweet corn) and comforting (Mexican chocolate, vanilla). See p. 143.

- **Best Afternoon Tea:** Treat the kids to a special Prince or Princess Tea at the **Palace Hotel's Garden Court** (2 New Montgomery St., at Market St.; ☎ 415/512-1111; p. 110). Closer in tone to an English village teashop is **Lovejoy's Tea Room** (1351 Church St.; ☎ 415/648-5895), often filled with ladies having a tête-à-tête

and little girls practicing to be big girls (p. 144).

- **Best Outdoor Dining (Daytime):** The very best outdoor dining area belongs to the **Park Chalet** (p. 146), which opens onto an expansive garden at the western edge of Golden Gate Park. In fact, with glass walls and a glass ceiling, the whole restaurant feels like you're outdoors (1000 Great Hwy.; ☎ 415/386-8439). A much smaller outdoor dining area next to a pleasant lawn can be found at **Town's End** (2 Townsend St.; ☎ 415/512-0749), reviewed on p. 121.

- **Best Outdoor Dining (Evening):** For a first-class dinner and Oscar-category films under the stars, head to **Foreign Cinema** (2534 Mission St.; ☎ 415/648-7600). See p. 140.
- **Best Delivery:** For basic Italian at terrific prices delivered to your hotel or home, **Pasta Pomodoro** (1875 Union St.; ☎ 415/771-7900, and other locations) is a very good thing. Their salads and fresh vegetables really round out a meal. See p. 145.

Planning Your Family Trip to San Francisco

Planning a trip is half the fun. It's also critical, especially when you're dealing with a group whose members may all have different interests. Make the kids active participants in your upcoming adventure by talking through the activities you can all enjoy. This chapter provides updated information on those activities, with details on when to go and how to get there.

1 Visitor Information

Besides this book, your primary source for city information is the **San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau**, 900 Market St., Lower Level, Hallidie Plaza, San Francisco, CA 94142-2809 (☎ 415/391-2000). You can order a visitor's information kit by mail, through the website (www.sfvisitor.org), or over the phone. It contains a comprehensive planning guide and walking tour itineraries. The bureau will send one kit free of charge to addresses within the Continental U.S. (it takes 2–3 weeks to receive the packet); shipping is charged for addresses outside the country. If you or any of your traveling companions are wheelchair-bound, request the free *Access Guide*, which discusses in detail how to most easily navigate the city.

For information on excursions just outside the city limits, contact the **Oakland Convention and Visitors Bureau**, 463 11th St., Oakland, CA (☎ 510/839-9000; www.oaklandcvb.com); the **Berkeley Convention & Visitors Bureau**, 2015 Center St., Berkeley, CA (☎ 800/847-4823 or 510/549-7040; www.berkeleycvb.com); and the **Marin County Convention & Visitors Bureau**, 1013 Larkspur Landing Circle, Larkspur,

CA (☎ 866/925-2060 or 415/925-2060; www.visitmarin.org).

The tourist bureau is helpful but doesn't provide the local skinny. *San Francisco Magazine* and its hipper counterpart *7x7* can be useful sources for arts and entertainment information, plus the articles often offer some insight or gossip into what's happening under the surface locally. If your newsstand doesn't carry them, try ordering copies from any major bookstore or checking their websites at www.sanfranciscomagazine.com and www.7x7mag.com.

The city's free monthly parenting magazine, *Bay Area Parent*, publishes a San Francisco/Peninsula edition (<http://sanfrancisco.parenthood.com>), which lists kid-friendly goings-on in town. Copies are readily available at kids' clothing stores and activity areas (swimming pools, gymnasia, and so on) in residential neighborhoods, but they may be harder to come by downtown. Berkeley-based *Parent's Press* (www.parentspress.com) is another free monthly with info travelers may find helpful.

Two excellent websites target San Francisco families and are worth studying before you arrive. Both

Online Traveler's Toolbox

Veteran travelers usually carry some essential items to make their trips easier. Following is a selection of online tools to bookmark and use.

- **Airplane Seating and Food:** Find out which seats to reserve and which to avoid (and more) on all major domestic airlines at www.seatguru.com. And check out the type of meal (with photos) you'll likely be served on airlines around the world at www.airlinemeals.com.
- **Mapquest** (www.mapquest.com): This best of the mapping sites lets you choose a specific address or destination, and in seconds, it will return a map and detailed directions.
- **Travel Safety** (<http://travel.state.gov>, www.fco.gov.uk/travel, www.voyage.gc.ca, www.dfat.gov.au/consular/advice): These government sites offer health and safety information for American, British, Canadian, and Australian travelers, respectively.
- **Universal Currency Converter** (www.xe.com/ucc): See what your dollar or pound is worth in more than 100 other countries.
- **Visa ATM Locator** (www.visa.com), for locations of PLUS ATMs worldwide, or **MasterCard ATM Locator** (www.mastercard.com), for locations of Cirrus ATMs worldwide.

www.gokid.org and www.gocitykids.com rely on input from the local community, although GoCityKids seems to be updated more regularly. You can sign up to receive a weekly e-mail calendar from the GoCityKids editors, a good idea for locals looking for inspiration, as well as for tourists who can find a wealth of well-organized information. (GoCityKids covers other metropolitan regions, too.) Other good websites are the *San Francisco Chronicle's* online

newspaper, www.sfgate.com, with archived restaurant reviews and a visitor guide; and <http://sanfrancisco.citysearch.com>, probably the most comprehensive Internet site with links and reviews for entertainment, food, shopping, and events. The *San Francisco Bay Guardian* (www.sfbg.com), the city's weekly alternative paper, posts an events calendar with a slight edge as well. Its music listings are particularly good.

2 Money

ATMS

As in most cities these days, obtaining money is a simple matter of lining up at the nearest ATM and plugging in your bankcard. You'll see Wells Fargo, Bank of America, Washington Mutual, and Citibank automated teller machines liberally scattered all over the city and on practically every block in the Financial District next to Union Square. They all assess fees of \$1.50 to \$3, on top of whatever your own bank charges.

The **Cirrus** (☎ 800/424-7787; www.mastercard.com) and **PLUS** (☎ 800/843-7587; www.visa.com) networks span the globe; look at the back of your bank card to see which network you're on, then call or check online for ATM locations at your destination. Be sure to find out your daily withdrawal limit before you depart.

TRAVELER'S CHECKS

Traveler's checks are something of an anachronism from the days before the

ATM made cash accessible at any time. These days, traveler's checks are less necessary because most cities have 24-hour ATMs that allow you to withdraw small amounts of cash as needed. However, keep in mind that you will likely be charged an ATM withdrawal fee if the bank is not your own, so if you're withdrawing money every day, you might be better off with traveler's checks—provided that you don't mind showing identification every time you want to cash one.

You can get traveler's checks at almost any bank. **American Express** offers denominations of \$20, \$50, \$100, \$500, and (for cardholders only) \$1,000. You'll pay a service charge ranging from 1% to 4%. You can also get American Express traveler's checks over the phone by calling ☎ **800/221-7282**; Amex gold and platinum cardholders who use this number are exempt from the 1% fee.

Visa offers traveler's checks at Citibank locations nationwide, as well as at several other banks. The service charge ranges between 1.5% and 2%; checks come in denominations of \$20, \$50, \$100, \$500, and \$1,000. Call ☎ **800/732-1322** for information. AAA members can obtain Visa checks without a fee at most AAA offices or by calling ☎ **866/339-3378**. **MasterCard** also offers traveler's checks. Call ☎ **800/223-9920** for a location near you.

If you choose to carry traveler's checks, be sure to keep a record of their serial numbers separate from your checks in the event that they are stolen or lost. You'll get a refund faster if you know the numbers.

CREDIT CARDS

Credit cards are a safe way to carry money: They provide a convenient record of all your expenses, and they generally offer good exchange rates. You can also withdraw cash advances from your credit cards at banks or ATMs, provided you know your PIN.

If you've forgotten yours, or didn't even know you had one, call the number on the back of your credit card and ask the bank to send it to you; it usually takes 5 to 7 business days.

Some credit card companies recommend that you notify them of any impending trip so that they don't become suspicious when the card is used numerous times in an unusual location and block your charges. Even if you don't call your credit card company in advance, you can always call the card's toll-free emergency number if a charge is refused—a good reason to carry the phone number with you. But perhaps the most important lesson here is to carry more than one card with you on your trip; a card might not work for any number of reasons, so having a backup is the smart way to go.

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR WALLET GETS STOLEN

Be sure to tell all of your credit card companies the minute you discover your wallet has been lost or stolen and file a report at the nearest police precinct. Your credit card company or insurer may require a police report number or record of the loss. Most credit card companies have an emergency toll-free number to call if your card is lost or stolen; they may be able to wire you a cash advance immediately or deliver an emergency credit card in a day or two. Visa's U.S. emergency number is ☎ **800/847-2911** or 410/581-9994. American Express cardholders and traveler's check holders should call ☎ **800/221-7282**. MasterCard holders should call ☎ **800/307-7309** or 636/722-7111. For other credit cards, call the toll-free number directory at ☎ **800/555-1212**.

If you need emergency cash over the weekend when all banks and American Express offices are closed, you can have money wired to you via **Western Union** (☎ **800/325-6000**; www.westernunion.com).

What Things Cost in San Francisco

Taxi from airport to Union Square (excluding tip)	\$35
One-way adult Muni/bus fare to any city destination	\$1.25
One-way youth Muni/bus fare to any city destination	35¢
A 3-day adult Muni Passport (also good for cable car)	\$15
Regular movie at the Metreon for two adults and two kids	\$34
IMAX tickets at the Metreon for two adults and two kids	\$60
Alcatraz tickets for two adults and two kids aged 5–11	\$53.50
San Francisco Zoo tickets for two adults and two kids aged 3–11	\$28
Slice of pizza	\$2.75
Plain kids' noodles at Zao Noodle Bar	99¢
Dim Sum brunch for four at Ton Kiang	\$45
Package of 34 Huggies disposable diapers from Walgreen's	\$11
Mitchell's Ice Cream cone	\$2
A small fresh orange juice at the Westin St. Francis Hotel	\$3
Four hours of parking in the Union Square Garage	\$12

Identity theft or fraud are potential complications of losing your wallet, especially if you've lost your driver's license along with your cash and credit cards. Notify the major credit-reporting bureaus immediately; placing a fraud alert on your records may protect you against liability for criminal activity. The three major U.S. credit-reporting agencies are **Equifax** (☎ 800/766-0008; www.equifax.com), **Experian** (☎ 888/397-3742; www.experian.com), and **TransUnion** (☎ 800/680-7289; www.transunion.com). Finally, if you've lost all forms of photo ID call your airline and explain the situation; they might allow you to board the plane if you have a copy of your passport or birth certificate and a copy of the police report you've filed.

LOWERING THE COST OF FAMILY TRAVEL

Traveling with kids can really add to the cost of a trip. Below are some ways to cut expenses.

- **Share a hotel room with your children.** No, you won't have any privacy, but you will reduce

expenses. A room with two double beds costs the same as a room with one queen, and the majority of hotels won't charge you the additional-person fee if that person is related to you and under 18. I've noted the policies in this regard for all the hotel listings in this book. Do be aware that hotels keep track of occupancy and there is a limit—anywhere from two to four or maybe five bodies per guest room, depending on the room size.

- **Reserve a hotel room with a kitchenette.** There aren't a lot in San Francisco, but they do exist, and if you use them to prepare breakfast or even a bag lunch, you will save quite a bit. At a minimum, request a small fridge and coffeemaker, if your room doesn't already have one.
- **Be adventurous diners.** The Mission, Chinatown, and the Richmond district have wonderful, inexpensive ethnic restaurants (Mexican, Chinese, and Middle Eastern, among others) that will

Value Free (or Nearly Free) Things to Do with Your Kids in San Francisco

- Take a **City Guides walking tour** (p. 185) in an interesting neighborhood.
- Walk across the **Golden Gate Bridge**.
- Check out the **free outdoor concerts** and events at Yerba Buena Gardens Thursdays at noon and weekends between May and October.
- Take the kids to **Golden Gate Park's Children's Playground**.
- Hang out at **Crissy Field**. Relish the priceless vista while your kids run around on the grassy hills or play at the beach.
- Mosey through **Chinatown**. The sights and sounds of this colorful neighborhood are a cultural experience many people would pay to have.
- Visit the lovely **Hyde Street Pier** at no charge. Adults must pay \$5 to board the ships, but kids are free. The nearby **National Maritime Museum** is free.
- Ascend **Nob Hill**. Admire the stained glass at Grace Cathedral, regard the lobby of the Fairmont Hotel, and then take in the panoramic view from the top floor bar of the InterContinental Mark Hopkins Hotel.
- Visit the **California Palace of the Legion of Honor** museum, free every Tuesday. The **Asian Art Museum**, **San Francisco Museum of Modern Art**, and **Cartoon Art Museum** are free the first Tuesday of the month, and the **California Academy of Sciences**, **Exploratorium**, and **San Francisco Zoo** are free the first Wednesday of the month.
- Ride the Powell/Mason cable car to the **Cable Car Barn and Museum** (p. 175) for a close-up look at how the cars work.
- View displays of antique equipment, artifacts from the 1906 earthquake, and local firefighting memorabilia at the **San Francisco Fire Department Museum** (p. 178).
- Head to the **Main Library's children's wing** (p. 260) or bring your wee ones to **story hour** at most public library branches, generally held Tuesday and Thursday mornings. For a schedule, check www.sfppl.org.
- Tour the city on a Muni bus (p. 57 for suggestions).
- Walk down the crooked part of **Lombard Street**.
- Climb the **Filbert Steps**.

expand your horizons without depleting your pocketbook.

- **Purchase a SF Municipal Railway (Muni) Passport** (see chapter 3) and use buses and streetcars in lieu of renting a car or taking taxis.
- **Minimize the use of a car while in the city.** Parking is prohibitively expensive and frustrating. You'll not only save money, but you may have a more relaxed vacation.

• **Take advantage of what's free.**

Although it may be difficult to schedule your trip around museums' free admission days, which are mostly only once a month, there are other ways to spend a lovely day without constantly digging into your wallet. (See the box "Free (or Nearly Free) Things to Do with Your Kids in San Francisco," above.)

3 When to Go

Considering summer is when most kids have vacation, you may be planning to visit San Francisco sometime between **June and August**. Just be warned that the city is at its foggiest at that time. The good news is that most of California is very warm then—so if your trip includes other stops in the state, you may even welcome the city's brisk morning fog.

Expect crowds around Fisherman's Wharf and on the F-Market streetcars. Book Alcatraz Island tickets at least 1 week ahead of time and, after 9am, expect to wait in long lines to board the Powell Street cable cars. Fortunately, since San Francisco sees fewer conventions in the summer, you may actually get better hotel rates downtown (although not at Fisherman's Wharf).

The city puts on a show all summer and into fall, with music and dance festivals, street fairs, and special events. Yerba Buena Center, one of the best places for families, offers free world-class concerts in the gardens. It's also prime baseball season; if you're all fans, you'll be delighted to spend the afternoon at SBC Park.

September and October are usually great months in San Francisco; the fog disappears and the air is warm. Of course, school schedules may be an issue then, but perhaps you can fit in a long weekend in the city. Fall brings a huge spike in conventions, but business is normally conducted during the week, leaving hotels to offer weekend packages and discounts.

If you can handle the vagaries of the weather, **winter** is a terrific season to visit. You'll feel like you have the city to yourself during weekdays when everyone else is at work. On the weekends, folks from the surrounding areas make their way into town for shopping and theater. San Francisco is a delight after Thanksgiving, as Union Square puts up a massive Christmas tree and surrounding stores dress themselves up in festive decorations. In November, Chinatown merchants hold a night market fair at Portsmouth Square on Saturdays until 11pm, and shoppers have a field day finishing up their holiday shopping.

Also in early winter, hotels like the Ritz-Carlton hold children's holiday teas, and an outdoor ice skating rink opens at the Embarcadero Center. The San Francisco Ballet dusts off *The Nutcracker* and the American Conservatory Theater gives Scrooge nightmares in its annual performances of *A Christmas Carol*. The air is crisp, the temperatures cool. You won't go home with a tan, but you can have quite a bit of fun.

Spring sees a full calendar of meetings at the Moscone Convention Center, but, as in the fall, hotel rooms become available for leisure travelers on the weekends. San Francisco weather is best in late spring, and Golden Gate Park is particularly beautiful at that time, with trees budding in the Strybing Arboretum and the cherry trees blossoming in the Japanese Tea Garden.

For up-to-the-minute weather reports log onto www.sfgate.com/weather.

Tips Convention Info

The San Francisco Conventions and Visitors Bureau publishes a summary list of major conventions and trade shows on its website, www.sfvistor.org/convention. It's wise to check it out before you cement your travel dates, just to find out if you're likely to be competing with your orthodontist or attorney for a hotel room.

San Francisco's Average Temperatures (°F) and Rainfall (Inches)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
High	56	59	60	61	63	64	64	65	69	68	63	57
Low	46	48	49	49	51	53	53	54	56	55	52	47
Rain	4.5	2.8	2.6	1.5	0.4	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	1.1	2.5	3.5

San Francisco's Average Temperatures (°C) and Rainfall (Centimeters)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
High	13	15	16	16	17	18	18	18	21	20	17	14
Low	8	9	9	9	11	12	12	12	13	13	11	8
Rain	11.5	7	6.5	4	1	0.5	0.25	0.25	0.5	3	6.5	9

KIDS' FAVORITE SAN FRANCISCO EVENTS

If you have any flexibility in scheduling your trip, some events, such as the Chinese New Year Parade, are so special that it might be worth tweaking your dates to fit them in. It's also fun to discover that an event or performance just happens to be slated during your visit. You can peruse a calendar of events published by the Convention and Visitors Bureau at www.sfvistor.org/calendar. In addition, you can subscribe to www.go.citykids.com, which offers a weekly e-mail calendar, and also has a calendar you can search by date, with information and phone numbers for all events listed.

Things change, so if your heart is set on participating in any events listed below, phone or check the sponsoring organization's website for dates and times.

January

Anniversary of the Sea Lions' Arrival at PIER 39. Sure, you can watch these pinnipeds loll around, sunbathe, and bark at one another most of the year, but January is the month they arrived at PIER 39. (They came for the herring in 1990.) Toward the middle of the month, PIER 39 honors these mammoth mammals with a special party and guests from the Marine Mammal Center. Call ☎ **415/705-5500** or visit www.pier39.com.

February

Chinese New Year Parade and Celebration is a memorable 2-week event culminating in the exciting,

loud, and lengthy Chinese New Year's parade down Market Street to Columbus Avenue on the final Saturday evening. Spectators pack the sidewalks, so you'll want to find a good spot early on. Chinatown itself is filled with color and bustles even more than usual, with families buying food for holiday dinners and special red envelopes to fill with New Year's gifts of money for the kids. Call the Chinese Chamber of Commerce at ☎ **415/391-9680** or visit www.chineseparade.com.

March

The **St. Patrick's Day Parade** that runs along Market Street to the Civic Center is always lively. There's a large expatriate Irish community in town, and Ireland's patron saint traditionally gets his due here. Call ☎ **415/675-9885** or visit www.uissf.org.

On Easter Sunday, the truly festive **Union Street Easter Parade & Spring Celebration**, between Gough and Fillmore streets, includes pony rides, a petting zoo, kids' rides and games, a climbing wall, a kids' activities area, costumed characters, and a parade. Phone ☎ **800/310-6563** or visit <http://sresproductions.com/pages/ueasterparade.html>.

April

Japantown has held an annual **Cherry Blossom Festival** since

1967. The festival takes place over two weekends and offers many events for families, including demonstrations of traditional dance, *taiko* drumming, tea ceremonies, and flower arrangement. There's also a parade, copious food, and, of course, beautiful trees in bloom. Call ☎ **415/563-2313** or visit www.nccbf.org.

May

Cinco de Mayo (5th of May) is a major Mexican festival celebrating the Battle of Puebla against French occupation forces in 1862. A parade down Mission Street is followed by a festival at Civic Center Plaza with music, arts, crafts, low-rider cars, and delicious food that most kids will love. The parade is free; the festival has a small admission charge of around \$5 for adults (free for kids under 12). Visit www.latinbayarea.com. This fiesta is more family-oriented than **Carnaval** (www.carnaval.com) later in the month, which is wilder and very crowded.

The **Youth Arts Festival** is a week-long exhibition of the visual, performing, and literary arts by middle school and high school students throughout the city. The opening day of the festival, which takes place at Yerba Buena Center, is the most exciting, with activities and an awards presentation. Admission is free. Call ☎ **415/543-1718** or visit www.ybgf.org.

Bay to Breakers started after the 1906 earthquake as a way to boost the city's spirits and remains today the longest consecutively run footrace in the world. Although it attracts top-level international athletes, what will interest your kids are the thousands of participants donned in the wackiest outfits imaginable. Call ☎ **415/359-2800** or visit www.baytobreakers.com.

June

Union Street Art Festival, usually held around the end of May or beginning of June, includes special children's art activities among all the food, wine, and crafts booths and music stages. This is a particularly crowded street fair and parking is next to impossible, so come by public transportation and foot. Call ☎ **800/310-6563** or visit www.unionstreetfestival.com.

The **Haight Street Fair** features tie-dye galore, food, entertainment, and the colorful presence of neighborhood characters. Admission is free. Call ☎ **415/863-3489** or visit www.haightstreetfair.org.

The **Ethnic Dance Festival** is usually held the last three weekends in June and takes place at the Palace of Fine Arts behind the Exploratorium. Music and Dance groups from all over the world entertain. Tickets are \$20 to \$30. Call ☎ **415/474-3914** or visit www.ethnicdancefestival.org.

Make*A*Circus decamps in parks all around the city throughout the summer beginning at Golden Gate Park on Father's Day. The 3-hour shows start with untraditional circus performances and include clowning, stilt walking, and juggling workshops for the audience. Kids under 10 are especially entranced, but older kids and parents will be too. Admission is free. For dates and locations call ☎ **415/242-1414**.

Stern Grove Midsummer Music Festival is one of the great free events of the summer. All sorts of performances—opera, Latin music, jazz—are held Sunday afternoons at 2pm in Sigmund Stern Grove at 19th Avenue and Sloat Boulevard. The venue is easily reached on M-Oceanview or K-Ingleside Muni streetcars or the 27-Monterey bus. Bring a picnic and a blanket. Call

☎ 415/252-6252 or visit www.sterngrove.org.

July

Fourth of July provides a few venues for celebrations. The Waterfront Festival takes place around PIER 39 and at Ghirardelli Square and culminates in a fireworks show beginning at 9pm. Call ☎ 415/705-5500 or visit www.pier39.com. Yerba Buena Gardens offers an **Ol' Fashioned Fourth of July Alternative Family Picnic** with bands, speeches, and games. Call ☎ 415/543-1718 or visit www.ybgf.org. Both are free.

Books by the Bay, sponsored by the Northern California Booksellers Association, is one of San Francisco's most beloved yearly events, and it's free. Many Bay Area authors participate in outdoor readings and book signings at Yerba Buena Gardens, plus there's live music, food, and a children's stage. Call ☎ 415/561-7686 or visit www.booksbythebay.com.

September

A La Carte, A La Park takes place around Labor Day weekend in Sharon Meadows at Golden Gate Park. It's an all-day, crowded affair. To make the most of it, set up a blanket or camp chairs near the stage, so you take turns listening to music and waiting in line to sample food. Tickets are \$10 for adults 12 and over (free for kids under 12) and can be purchased through Ticketweb (☎ 415/458-1988 or visit www.eventswestca.com). Tastings cost \$1 to \$5.

Ghirardelli Square Chocolate Festival is an annual benefit for Open Hand, a worthy local charity that delivers food to homebound AIDs patients. Chocoholics wander from one tasting to another, provided by local shops and restaurants. Serious eaters can enter the sundae-eating

contest. The prize is the winner's weight in chocolate! (Phone ☎ 415/775-5500 or visit www.ghirardellisq.com.)

San Francisco Blues Festival is a fun weekend at Fort Mason. The festival is complete with food and a few booths with T-shirts and CDs, but the draw is the excellent roster of local and national blues musicians and the setting. For information and tickets call ☎ 415/979-5588 or www.sfblues.com.

Sand Castle Classic, an annual fundraiser for Leap, an artists-in-residence program, turns Ocean Beach into a fantastical canvas for sand castles, pyramids, wild animals, and flights of fancy. Takes place at the end of the month. Free, but donations are appreciated. Call ☎ 415/512-1899 or visit www.leap4kids.org.

October

San Francisco Comedy Day Celebration is also held at Golden Gate Park's Sharon Meadow. Although you do pay if you want food, drink, or the T-shirt that proves you were there, the laughs are free. Visit www.comedyday.com.

The Clement Street Kids Festival is a fairly new street fair on Clement Street between 4th and 6th avenues that features kids' entertainment, activities, music, and food. It's free and sponsored by the neighborhood Merchants Association. Call ☎ 800/310-6563 or visit www.clementstreetfestival.com.

Fleet Week, the second weekend of October, honors the armed forces and usually brings the Blue Angels to our skies, but the ace pilots were mysteriously unavailable in 2004. Their replacement, the Canadian Snowbirds, were almost as dramatic, but not nearly as loud, a fact appreciated by younger children.

Plenty of other aerial acrobatics are also on display. PIER 39 presents music and additional fleet week activities. For a detailed listing of events see www.fleetweek.us and www.airshownetwork.com.

San Francisco Italian Heritage Parade celebrates Christopher Columbus's contribution to our fair land with a 12:30pm parade beginning at Jefferson and Stockton streets and ending at Washington Square, where the festivities continue. Visit www.sfcolumbusday.org.

Halloween, which seems almost like an official city holiday in San Francisco, isn't just for adults. The **Randall Museum Halloween Festival** is a daytime event on the Saturday before Halloween for 2- to 12-year-olds. Pumpkin carving, entertainment, and crafts are among the day's offerings at this local treasure. Costumes are most appropriate. Call ☎ **415/554-9600** or visit www.randallmuseum.org. The Cannery also hosts a free daytime **Halloween Festival** with a costume contest and pumpkin parade for kids 12 and under, as well as live entertainment, a magic show, face painting, arts and crafts, and trick-or-treating in The Cannery shops. Call ☎ **415/771-3112** or visit www.thecannery.com.

Down at Yerba Buena Gardens, little ones will be pleased with the **Gardens Ghoullery Walk**, wherein costumed kiddos collect goodies while it's still daylight. This takes place the Sunday before Halloween. Call ☎ **415/543-1718** or visit www.ybgf.org.

November

Embarcadero Center Lighting Ceremony and Celebration is fun if you can get close enough to watch the performances in the ice skating rink. Even if you can't make it for the building lighting (the four towers gleam during the holiday season), the ice rink is open until after the New Year for public skating. Skates, for feet of all sizes, may be rented at the ticket booth.

Ritz-Carlton Teddy Bear Teas for children are always sellouts so make reservations well in advance, especially if you can only attend on a weekend. The holiday teas start after Thanksgiving, but the reservations book opens in August; call ☎ **415/773-6198**.

December

Christmas at Sea, especially suited to children under 10, takes place on board the historic ships docked at the Hyde Street Pier (p. 168). Singing, cider, and stories. Call ☎ **415/561-6662** or visit www.maritime.org.

4 What to Pack

Unlike most other California cities, San Francisco is a walking town, so the important things to pack are comfortable shoes and clothes you can layer. You may want to pack one pair of shorts per family member for the occasional late spring heat wave or for the Indian summer months of September and October. Generally, though, San Francisco temperatures are moderate to cool and often change several times a day. You'll be

best off with pants, a short-sleeved shirt, a sweater, and a light jacket. That way, you can peel off or put on clothes as the chilly fog burns off, the warm sun comes out, and then the fog rolls back in—all in the space of a few hours.

San Francisco is a casual city, so you won't need anything dressy unless you are going to an upscale restaurant or attending a specific event that requires it.

 Tips Leave That Baby Gear at Home

There's no reason to schlep like a Sherpa when you can rent nearly anything you'll need while on vacation. All brands of baby and toddler gear are available by the day or week through a company called Littleluggage (☎ 877/FLYBABY; www.littleluggage.com), and they deliver to your hotel.

When traveling with a toddler or baby, a front-pack is the easiest item with which to navigate on public transportation. A lightweight and inexpensive umbrella stroller is the next best option, as it folds quickly and takes up little room. You can rent baby equipment that is too bulky to pack (such as a double stroller), and nearly every hotel will have cribs, of varying quality, on hand. Most restaurants supply highchairs, although you can tote a lightweight portable chair that attaches to tabletops (visit www.babycenter.com or www.amazon.com if it isn't available at your local baby store.) You won't need to cart lots of diapers or formula; Walgreen's Pharmacies are conveniently located all over the city.

As for older kids, keep them to one bag apiece and invest in suitcases or duffle bags with wheels; you do not

want to be lugging their luggage as well as your own. Kids are usually happy with one or two pair of shoes, such as sneakers or hiking boots, and sandals, jeans, and T-shirts or whatever's fashionable. They should also pack a sweatshirt or sweater and a jacket to layer over short-sleeved shirts (or the inevitable tank top if you're traveling with teenaged girls). Backpacks for all kids over 5 are de rigueur unless you happen to be bringing a pack mule to carry the discarded jackets, cameras, books, pens, paper, postcards, portable disc players, suntan lotion, baseball caps, water bottles, maps, and sunglasses that seemed so necessary when you left the hotel. It would also be helpful to have each child, teens included, bring a book (or crayons and paper for preschoolers) to read when they get bored or just need an escape from the rest of the family.

5 Health, Insurance & Safety

When traveling anywhere, always bring your medical insurance cards for every member of the family. Emergency medical care in San Francisco is readily available at area hospitals, but things will go more smoothly if you can prove you have insurance. Uninsured visitors can receive emergency care at San Francisco General Hospital (see "Fast Facts," at the end of chapter 3). For medical problems that aren't life-threatening, your hotel can enlist the services of an on-call doctor who will make a house call (also see "Fast Facts"). These doctors do not accept insurance payments, but your provider will likely reimburse you.

Consult a pharmacist for minor health matters—your hotel can direct you to the closest drugstore. Walgreen's has two 24-hour locations, at 498 Castro St. in Noe Valley (☎ 415/861-6276) and 3201 Divisadero St. at Lombard Street in the Marina District (☎ 415/931-6415). If your child has asthma or any medical condition that requires medication, and there's a chance you'll require extra inhalers, an EpiPen, or whatever, make sure you bring along a prescription from your pediatrician. If your child accidentally swallows something scary, call the State Poison Control hot line, available 24 hours a day, at ☎ 800/876-4766.

Packing for Planes & Cars

FOR A PLANE TRIP

When traveling with kids, consider packing the following in your carry-on:

- The number of diapers your child wears in a day, plus an extra three.
- A changing pad in case the plane's restroom has no pull-out changing table.
- A minimal number of toys; a coloring book and stuffed animal will suffice.
- Bottles for infants, sippy cups and snacks for toddlers.
- A goodie bag with surprises, like a Discman with a CD of music or stories, books, or small plastic toys.

For more detailed advice on flying with children, see "Getting There," later in this chapter.

FOR A CAR TRIP

If you will be renting a car in San Francisco, inquire about reserving a child safety seat. Most major rental car agencies have these available for a small fee. (Avis, for example, charges \$5 per day or \$25 per week.)

Driving to San Francisco? Long-distance car travel with kids presents a completely different packing challenge. Pack the following to help your car trip go more smoothly:

- A cooler with drinks, snacks, fruits, and veggies.
- A flashlight to help locate items that have rolled under your seat for the 10th time in the last 5 minutes!
- Window shades for the sun.
- Audiotapes of stories or children's songs. Many parents put a DVD player or computer that plays DVDs in between the two front seats so kids can watch movies. Because a DVD can last up to a couple hours, it's a great help for long stretches with nothing to do.

Other items to consider bringing include a first-aid kit, a box of wipes for clean-ups, blankets, plastic bags for motion sickness, and a change of clothes. Always have a cellphone in case of emergencies.

Along with important medications, be sure to pack an emergency pair of glasses or contact lenses.

TRAVEL INSURANCE

Check your existing insurance policies before you buy travel insurance to cover trip cancellation, lost luggage, medical expenses, or car rentals. You're likely to have partial or complete coverage. But if you need some, ask your travel agent about a comprehensive package. The cost of travel insurance

varies widely, depending on the cost and length of your trip, your age and overall health, and the type of trip you're taking; expect to pay 5% to 8% of the vacation itself. Some insurers provide packages for specialty vacations, such as skiing or backpacking. More dangerous activities may be excluded from basic policies. Always, always check the fine print before you sign on; more and more policies have built-in exclusions and restrictions that may leave you out in the cold if

something does go awry. Protect yourself further by paying for the insurance with a credit card—by law, consumers can get their money back on goods and services not received if they report the loss within 60 days after the charge is listed on their credit card statement.

For information, contact one of the following recommended insurers:

- **Access America** (☎ 866/807-3982; www.accessamerica.com)
- **Travel Guard International** (☎ 800/826-4919; www.travelguard.com)
- **Travel Insured International** (☎ 800/243-3174; www.travelinsured.com)
- **Travelex Insurance Services** (☎ 888/457-4602; www.travelex-insurance.com)

TRIP-CANCELLATION INSURANCE (TCI)

There are three major types of trip-cancellation insurance—one, in the event that you prepay a cruise or tour that gets cancelled, and you can't get your money back; a second when you or someone in your family gets sick or dies, and you can't travel (but beware that you may not be covered for a preexisting condition); and a third, when bad weather makes travel impossible. Some insurers provide coverage for events like jury duty; natural disasters close to home, like floods or fire; even the loss of a job. A few companies have added provisions for cancellations due to terrorist activities. Always check the fine print before signing on, and don't buy trip-cancellation insurance from the tour operator that may be responsible for the cancellation; buy it only from a reputable

travel insurance agency. Don't overbuy. You won't be reimbursed for more than the cost of your trip.

SAFETY

The general caveats about not walking alone at night, staying in well-lighted areas, and carrying a minimum of cash and jewels on your person are as true in San Francisco as in every major city. Although San Francisco isn't crime-ridden, it is not a 24-hour town like New York, for example, and you really are putting yourself at risk if you venture out at 2am. However, since this is a family travel book, let's assume your real worries have to do with keeping your children safe while on vacation.

First, give everyone in your party the hotel's business card upon arrival, and, if you have a cellular phone, write that number on the back of the card. Make sure these stay in pockets or backpacks—preferably a front pocket, which is also the safest place for wallets. Never keep valuables in backpacks, as they can be easily and quickly yanked away. Tell your kids that if they turn around and don't see you standing next to them, they shouldn't panic. They may simply have gotten disoriented in the crowd, or you may have turned out of their line of sight. When this happens, they should call out your name—not simply “Mom” or “Dad”—in a clear, loud voice. The last thing you want them to do is wander off trying to find you. If you'll be traveling with teenagers who may want some space, consider short-range walkie-talkies. You most often see these on ski slopes, but they are ideal for families that need to keep in touch.

Tips Quick ID

Tie a colorful ribbon or piece of yarn around your luggage handle, or slap a distinctive sticker on the side of your bag. This makes it less likely that someone will mistakenly appropriate it. And if your luggage gets lost, it will be easier to find.

Discuss with your kids what to do if they get lost: you don't want them walking the streets looking for your hotel. If they don't immediately spot a police officer, they might ask the nearest hotel concierge, store clerk, or restaurant hostess to help—by calling the police or your hotel, for example. Take your child's age and level of common sense into consideration when you think about what he or she could do in the unlikely case that he or she did become lost. Explain whom to avoid (for example, anyone holding a sign, talking to himself or herself, or begging with dogs and cats as props) and whom to approach for assistance.

Teenagers, who may be used to some freedom at home, are another matter. If they aren't familiar with busy urban centers and if they haven't already developed some street smarts, I'd think twice before allowing them to wander around alone even during the daytime. There are places where you can give them some space—Sony Metreon (p. 162), the San Francisco Centre (p. 235), and SBC Park (p. 258), for example—but it's preferable that they hang out with a companion.

The streets of San Francisco, like most big cities, are filled with drivers who are frustrated and/or talking on their cellphones, so be careful crossing them. This is not the city in which to play chicken with automobiles. Use the crosswalks, wait for the light to turn green, and check first to make sure some idiot isn't going to run the red light. Be especially careful with buses, particularly those making turns.

Children generally love riding on the streetcars and especially the cable

cars. Inside the Muni/BART underground stations, keep yourself and your kids away from the edge of the platform. On cable cars, you are not allowed to hang body parts out the side, despite myriad photos showing people doing just that. It's an excellent way to get hurt the minute a truck or a bus passes by. Jumping on or off a moving cable car is equally dangerous.

Finally, we do have some dodgy neighborhoods you might consider avoiding. The Tenderloin (p. 57) isn't great, although it is home to a huge immigrant population that manages to live side by side with the drug addicts, hookers, and vagrants. Evenings are particularly rough; daytime is okay. Parts of Van Ness Avenue, from Civic Center to Broadway Street, are grimy and every single median is a platform for someone asking for money. Sixth and Seventh streets from Market Street east to Harrison Street are home to an assortment of folks that aren't making a go of it in mainstream society; this is another area to avoid any time day or night.

Like most of the world, San Francisco has long had its problems with residents who have drug and/or alcohol problems, who are mentally unstable, or who live on the edge for other reasons. In all likelihood, you will be panhandled at some point, or, at the very least, your children will ask you what's going on with the crazy guy pushing a shopping cart down the street. You'll have to make your own choices about giving alms or not; but do be prepared for questions from your kids. Consider it a learning experience.

6 Words of Wisdom & Helpful Resources

My husband and I grew up traveling from one country and city to another. Our wanderlust did not end when our children were born, and we have taken them with us to places near and far.

Here are some words of advice when vacationing with kids:

- Family vacations are about spending time together and having fun. They should not be a marathon to

cover as much territory as possible. Pick and choose what you're going to see and do so judiciously, keeping in mind that you won't see and do everything.

- Tired people, no matter their age, are difficult to deal with, so keep the pace slow, plan time to rest, and don't stay up too late at night.
- Hungry people can be worse than tired people, so start the day with a good breakfast, schedule time for lunch, and carry snacks with you.
- You may have arrived together, but you needn't travel in a pack. If it's possible to split up the kids among the adults to give everyone a break, do so—even if just for an hour.
- Be flexible and maintain a sense of humor. If three cable cars packed to the rafters have passed you by, perhaps the fates are telling you to walk. (See "Getting Around," in chapter 3 for more advice.)
- Plan something for everyone in your itinerary. If you want to analyze modern art at the museum, that's okay. Just reward kids for their patience by spending the afternoon rowing boats on Stow Lake or bowling at Yerba Buena Gardens.
- Ask your children what they would like to do during the trip. Give them some options, make a calendar, and follow through on some of their suggestions. This doesn't mean they are in charge. It means they get to participate in a bit of decision-making.

ADVICE FOR SINGLE PARENTS

Parents traveling without partners will appreciate San Francisco's low-key, friendly disposition. Chances are hotel staff, restaurant employees, and people on the street will be happy to assist you in a pinch. It's good to keep a relaxed attitude when traveling with kids, but it's especially important when only one of you is corralling the

offspring. Go slowly and don't try to do too much; just savor the break from the routine and the opportunity to be in a new setting together.

Online, the **Single Parent Travel Network** (www.singleparenttravel.net) offers excellent advice, travel specials, a bulletin board, and a free electronic newsletter. The **Family Travel Forum** (www.familytravelforum.com) also hosts a single parent travel bulletin board for tips from fellow travelers.

ADVICE FOR GRANDPARENTS

Mention the fact that you're a senior citizen when you make your travel reservations. Check with your airline (especially America West, Continental, and American) to see if they offer senior discounts; many hotels also offer discounts for seniors. In most cities, people over the age of 60 qualify for reduced admission to theaters, museums, and other attractions, as well as discounted fares on public transportation.

One reliable agency that targets traveling grandparents is **Elderhostel** (☎ 877/426-8056; www.elderhostel.org), which arranges study programs for those aged 55 and over in the U.S. and in more than 80 countries around the world. Of particular interest are the "Intergenerational" programs, which include Grand Canyon adventures and a Harry Potter-themed trip to Oxford, England. Most courses last 5 to 7 days in the U.S. (2–4 weeks abroad), and many include airfare, accommodations in university dormitories or modest inns, meals, and tuition.

Members of **AARP** (☎ 888/687-2277; www.aarp.org) get discounts on hotels, airfares, and car rentals. AARP offers members a wide range of benefits, including *AARP: The Magazine* and a monthly newsletter. Anyone over 50 can join.

The **U.S. National Park Service** offers a **Golden Age Passport** that gives seniors 62 years or older lifetime

Tips Making the Most of your Maturity

Members of **AARP**, 601 E St. NW, Washington, DC 20049 (☎ 800/424-3410 or 202/434-2277; www.aarp.org), get discounts on hotels, airfares, and car rentals. AARP offers members a wide range of benefits, including *AARP: The Magazine* and a monthly newsletter. Anyone over 50 can join.

entrance to all properties administered by the National Park Service—national parks, monuments, historic sites, recreation areas, and national wildlife refuges—for a one-time processing fee of \$10, which must be purchased in person at any NPS facility that charges an entrance fee. In addition to free entry, a Golden Age Passport offers a 50% discount on federal-use fees charged for such facilities as camping, swimming, parking, boat launching, and tours. For more information, go to www.nps.gov/fees_passes.htm or call ☎ 888/467-2757.

FOR GAY & LESBIAN PARENTS

San Francisco is well known as a bastion of gay and lesbian households, many of which include kids. If you hope to connect with any, start by contacting **Our Family Coalition** (☎ 415/981-1960; www.ourfamily.org), a grass-roots organization for families with gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender members. Check their website for a calendar of social and educational events. You might also want to visit the **San Francisco Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center** at 1800 Market St., San Francisco, CA 94102 (☎ 415/865-5555). It's easily reached on the F-Market and J-Church streetcars.

Online sites to check out include www.familypride.org, www.rfamilyvacations.com, and www.gayparentingpage.com.

FOR FAMILIES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Most of San Francisco's major museums and attractions have wheelchair

ramps. Many hotels offer special accommodations and services for wheelchair users and other visitors with disabilities, including extra-large bathrooms and telecommunications devices for hearing-impaired travelers. The San Francisco Convention and Visitors' Bureau should have the most up-to-date information.

Travelers in wheelchairs can request special ramped taxis by calling **Yellow Cab** (☎ 415/626-2345), which charges regular rates for the service. Travelers with disabilities can also get a free copy of the *Muni Access Guide*, published by the San Francisco Municipal Railway Accessible Services Program, 949 Presidio Ave. (☎ 415/923-6142), which is staffed weekdays from 8am to 5pm.

Flying Wheels Travel (☎ 507/451-5005; www.flyingwheelstravel.com) offers escorted tours and cruises that emphasize sports and private tours in minivans with lifts. **Accessible Journeys** (☎ 800/846-4537 or 610/521-0339; www.disabilitytravel.com) caters specifically to slow walkers and wheelchair travelers and their families and friends.

Organizations offering assistance to disabled travelers include **MossRehab** (www.mossresourcenet.org), which provides a library of accessible-travel resources online; the **Society for Accessible Travel and Hospitality** (☎ 212/447-7284; www.sath.org; annual membership fees: \$45 adults, \$30 seniors and students), which offers a wealth of travel resources for all types of disabilities and informed recommendations on destinations, access guides, travel agents, tour operators, vehicle rentals,

and companion services; and the **American Foundation for the Blind** (☎ 800/232-5463; www.afb.org), a referral resource that includes information on traveling with Seeing Eye dogs.

The U.S. National Park Service offers a **Golden Access Passport** that gives free lifetime entrance to all properties administered by the National Park Service—national parks, monuments, historic sites, recreation areas, and national wildlife refuges—for persons who are visually impaired or

permanently disabled, regardless of age. You may pick up a Golden Access Passport at any NPS entrance fee area by showing proof of medically determined disability and eligibility for receiving benefits under federal law. In addition to free entry, the Golden Access Passport offers a 50% discount on federal-use fees charged for such facilities as camping, swimming, parking, boat launching, and tours. For more information, go to www.nps.gov/fees_passes.htm or call ☎ 888/467-2757.

7 Getting There

BY PLANE

The two major airports closest to San Francisco are **San Francisco International (SFO)**, which is 14 miles south of downtown, and **Oakland International Airport**, which is across the Bay Bridge off Interstate 880. SFO is closer and more airlines fly into this major hub. Oakland is smaller and easier to navigate, but fares for cabs and shuttle buses into the city will be about 50% higher.

It's worth checking your options flying into either airport, as you'll sometimes find a cheaper or more convenient flight arriving in Oakland. The Oakland airport also often enjoys better weather than San Francisco, where flights can be delayed due to foggy conditions or be relegated to circling the skies while waiting for an

available runway. The great news at SFO is the beautiful new International Terminal and the BART extension.

Airlines that fly into the Bay Area include **Air Canada** (☎ 888/247-2262; www.aircanada.ca), **Alaska Airlines** (☎ 800/252-7522; www.alaskaair.com), **America West** (☎ 800/235-9292 in the U.S. or 800/363-2597 in Canada or Mexico; www.americawest.com), **American Airlines** (☎ 800/433-7300; www.aa.com), **British Airways** (☎ 800/247-9297; www.british-airways.com), **Continental Airlines** (☎ 800/525-0280; www.continental.com), **Delta** (☎ 800/221-1212; www.delta.com), **JetBlue** (☎ 800-538-2583; www.jetblue.com), **Northwest Airlines** (☎ 800/225-2525; www.nwa.com), **Southwest Airlines** (☎ 800/435-9792;

Tips Kids with Colds

It's even more difficult for kids to make their ears pop during takeoff and landing than it is for adults. The eustachian tube is especially narrow in children, and the passage is even tighter when mucous membranes are swollen. This can make ascent and descent especially painful—even dangerous—for a child with congested sinuses. If your little one is suffering from a cold or the flu, it's best to keep him grounded until he recuperates, if that's an option. If you simply must travel with your child as scheduled, give him an oral child's decongestant an hour before ascent and descent or administer a spray decongestant before and during takeoff and landing.

www.southwest.com), **United Airlines** (☎ 800/241-6522; www.ual.com), and **US Airways** (☎ 800/428-4322; www.usairways.com).

AIR TRAVEL SECURITY MEASURES

With the federalization of airport security, security procedures at U.S. airports are more stable and consistent than ever. Generally, you'll be fine if you arrive at the airport **1 hour** before a domestic flight and **2 hours** before an international flight; if you show up late, tell an airline employee and she'll probably whisk you to the front of the line.

Bring a **current, government-issued photo ID** such as a driver's license or passport. Keep your ID at the ready to show at check-in, the security checkpoint, and sometimes even the gate. Children under 18 do not need government-issued photo IDs for domestic flights, but they do for international flights to most countries.

The TSA has phased out **gate check-in** at all U.S. airports. Passengers with e-tickets can still beat the ticket-counter lines by using **airport electronic kiosks** or **online check-in** from your home computer. Ask your airline which alternatives are available, and if you're using a kiosk, bring the credit card you used to book the ticket or your frequent-flier card. If you're checking bags or looking to snag an exit-row seat, you will be able to do so using most airlines' kiosks; again, call your airline for up-to-date information. **Curbside check-in** is also a good way to avoid lines, although a few airlines still ban curbside check-in; call before you go.

Security checkpoint lines are getting shorter, but some doozies remain. If you have trouble standing for long periods of time, tell an airline employee; the airline will provide a

wheelchair. Speed up security by **not wearing metal objects** such as big belt buckles. If you've got metallic body parts, a note from your doctor can prevent a long chat with the security screeners. Keep in mind that only **ticketed passengers** are allowed past security.

Federalization has stabilized **what you can carry on** and **what you can't**. The general rule is that sharp things are out, nail clippers are okay, and food and beverages must be passed through the X-ray machine—but that security screeners can't make you drink from your coffee cup. Bring food in your carry-on rather than checking it, as explosive-detection machines used on checked luggage have been known to mistake food (especially chocolate, for some reason) for bombs. Travelers in the U.S. are allowed one carry-on bag, plus a "personal item" such as a purse, briefcase, or laptop bag. Carry-on hoarders can stuff all sorts of things into a laptop bag; as long as it has a laptop in it, it's still considered a personal item. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has issued a list of restricted items; check its website (www.tsa.gov) for details.

Airport screeners may decide that your checked luggage needs to be searched by hand. You can now purchase luggage locks that allow screeners to open and re-lock a checked bag if hand-searching is necessary. Look for Travel Sentry certified locks at luggage or travel shops and Brookstone stores (you can buy them online at www.brookstone.com). These locks, approved by the TSA, can be opened by luggage inspectors with a special code or key. For more information on the locks, visit www.travelsentry.org. If you use something other than TSA-approved locks, your lock will be cut off your suitcase if a TSA agent needs to hand-search your luggage.

Flying with Film & Video

Never pack film—developed or undeveloped—in checked bags, as the new, more powerful scanners in U.S. airports can fog film. The film you carry with you can be damaged by scanners as well. X-ray damage is cumulative; the faster the film, and the more times you put it through a scanner, the more likely the damage. Film under 800 ASA is usually safe for up to five scans. If you're taking your film through additional scans, U.S. regulations permit you to demand hand inspections. In international airports, you're at the mercy of airport officials. On international flights, store your film in transparent baggies, so you can remove it easily before you go through scanners. Keep in mind that airports are not the only places where your camera may be scanned: highly trafficked attractions are X-raying visitors' bags with increasing frequency.

Most photo supply stores sell protective pouches designed to block damaging X-rays. The pouches fit both film and loaded cameras. They should protect your film in checked baggage, but they also may raise alarms and result in a hand inspection.

You'll have little to worry about if you are traveling with **digital cameras**. Unlike film, which is sensitive to light, the digital camera and storage cards are not affected by airport X-rays, according to Nikon. Still, if you plan to travel extensively, you may want to play it safe and hand-carry your digital equipment or ask that it be inspected by hand.

Carry-on scanners will not damage **videotape** in video cameras, but the magnetic fields emitted by the walk-through security gateways and handheld inspection wands will. Always place your loaded camcorder on the screening conveyor belt or have it hand-inspected. Be sure your batteries are charged, as you may be required to turn the device on to ensure that it's what it appears to be.

FLYING FOR LESS: TIPS FOR GETTING THE BEST AIRFARES

Passengers sharing the same airplane cabin rarely pay the same fare. Travelers who need to purchase tickets at the last minute, change their itinerary at a moment's notice, or fly one-way often get stuck paying the premium rate. Here are some ways to keep your airfare costs down.

- Passengers who can book their ticket **long in advance**, who can **stay over Saturday night**, or who **fly midweek** or at **less-trafficked hours** might pay a fraction of the

full fare. If your schedule is flexible, say so, and ask if you can secure a cheaper fare by changing your flight plans.

- You can also save on airfares by keeping an eye out in local newspapers for **promotional specials** or **fare wars**, when airlines lower prices on their most popular routes. You rarely see fare wars offered for peak travel times, but if you can travel in the off-months, you may snag a bargain.
- Search **the Internet** for cheap fares. See "The 21st-Century Traveler," later in this chapter.

- **Consolidators**, also known as bucket shops, are great sources for international tickets, although they usually can't beat the Internet on fares within North America. Start by looking in Sunday newspaper travel sections; U.S. travelers should focus on the *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *Miami Herald*. For less-developed destinations, small travel agents who cater to immigrant communities in large cities often have the best deals.

Beware: Bucket shop tickets are usually nonrefundable or rigged with stiff cancellation penalties, often as high as 50% to 75% of the ticket price, and some put you on charter airlines, which may leave at inconvenient times and experience delays. Several reliable consolidators are worldwide and available on the Net. **STA Travel** (www.statravel.com) is now the world's leader in student travel, thanks to their purchase of Council Travel. It also offers good fares for travelers of all ages. **ELTExpress** (☎ 800/TRAV-800; www.eltexpress.com) started in Europe and has excellent fares worldwide, but particularly to that continent. It also has "local" websites in 12 countries. **FlyCheap** (☎ 800/FLY-CHEAP; www.1800flycheap.com) is owned by package-holiday megalith MyTravel and so has especially good access to fares for sunny destinations. **Air**

Tickets Direct (☎ 800/778-3447; www.airticketsdirect.com) is based in Montréal and leverages the currently weak Canadian dollar for low fares; it'll also book trips to places that U.S. travel agents won't touch, such as Cuba.

- Join **frequent-flier clubs**. Accrue enough miles, and you'll be rewarded with free flights and elite status. It's free, and you'll get the best choice of seats, faster response to phone inquiries, and prompter service if your luggage is stolen, your flight is canceled or delayed, or if you want to change your seat. You don't need to fly to build frequent-flier miles—**frequent-flier credit cards** can provide thousands of miles for doing your everyday shopping.

FLYING WITH KIDS

If you plan carefully, you can make it fun to fly with your kids.

- You'll save yourself a good bit of aggravation by **reserving a seat in the bulkhead row**. You'll have more legroom, your children will be able to spread out and play on the floor underfoot, and the airline might provide bassinets (ask in advance). You're also more likely to find sympathetic company in the bulkhead area, as families with children tend to be seated there.

Travel in the Age of Bankruptcy

To protect yourself from airline bankruptcy, **buy your tickets with a credit card**. The Fair Credit Billing Act guarantees that you can get your money back from the credit card company if a travel supplier goes under (and if you request the refund within 60 days of the bankruptcy). **Travel insurance** can also help, but make sure it covers against "carrier default" for your specific travel provider. And be aware that if a U.S. airline goes bust mid-trip, a 2001 federal law requires other carriers to take you to your destination (albeit on a space-available basis) for a fee of no more than \$25, provided you rebook within 60 days of the cancellation.

- Be sure to **pack items for your kids in your carry-on luggage.** See the “Packing for Planes & Cars” box on p. 28 for specific advice.
- **Have a long talk with your children** before you depart for your trip. If they’ve never flown before, explain to them what to expect. If they’re old enough, you may even want to describe how flight works and how air travel is even safer than riding in a car. Explain to your kids the importance of good behavior in the air—how their own safety can depend upon their being quiet and staying in their seats during the trip.
- **Pay extra careful attention to the safety instructions** before takeoff. Consult the safety chart behind the seat in front of you and show it to your children. Be sure you know how to operate the oxygen masks, as you will be expected to secure yours first and then help your children with theirs. Be especially mindful of the location of emergency exits. Before takeoff, plot out an evacuation strategy for you and your children in your mind’s eye.
- Ask the flight attendant **if the plane has any special safety equipment for children.** Make a member of the crew aware of any medical problems your children have that could manifest during flight.
- **Be sure you’ve slept sufficiently** for your trip. If you fall asleep in the air and your child manages to break away, there are all sorts of sharp objects that could cause injury. Especially during meal-times, it’s dangerous for a child to be crawling or walking around the cabin unaccompanied by an adult.
- **Be sure your child’s seatbelt remains fastened properly,** and try to reserve the seat closest to the

aisle for yourself. This will make it harder for your children to wander off—in case, for instance, you’re taking the redeye or a long flight and you do happen to nod off. You will also protect your child from jostling passersby and falling objects—in the rare but entirely possible instance that an overhead bin pops open.

In the event of an accident, unrestrained children often don’t make it—even when the parent does. Experience has shown that it’s impossible for a parent to hold onto a child in the event of a crash, and children often die of impact injuries.

For the same reason, sudden turbulence is also a danger to a child who is not buckled into his own seat belt or seat restraint. According to *Consumer Reports Travel Letter*, the most common flying injuries result when unanticipated turbulence strikes and hurtles passengers from their seats.

- **Try to sit near the lavatory,** though not so close that your children are jostled by the crowds that tend to gather there. Consolidate trips there as much as possible.
- **Try to accompany children to the lavatory.** They can be easily bumped and possibly injured as they make their way down tight aisles. It’s especially dangerous for children to wander while flight attendants are blocking passage with their service carts. On crowded flights, the flight crew may need as much as an hour to serve dinner. It’s wise to encourage your kids to use the rest room as you see the attendants preparing to serve.
- Be sure to **bring clean, self-containing compact toys.** Leave electronic games at home. They can interfere with the aircraft navigational system, and their noisiness,

In-Flight Fun For Kids

With one of these children's game books on board, even the longest plane ride will go faster.

Brain Quest for the Car: 1100 Questions and Answers All About America

by Sharon Gold

Retail price: \$10.95

Ages 7 to 12

This book features cards with questions about American geography, culture, and customs.

Vacation Fun Mad Libs: World's Greatest Party Game

by Roger Price and Leonard Stern

Retail price: \$3.99

Ages 8 and up

As suggested by the title, this book is chock-full of Mad Libs. Your kids will want to keep playing even after you're touched down.

however lulling to children's ears, will surely not win the favor of your adult neighbors. Magnetic checker sets, on the other hand, are a perfect distraction, and small coloring books and crayons also work well, as do card games like Go Fish.

- Some airlines **serve children's meals first**. When you board, ask a flight attendant if this is possible, especially if your children are very young or seated toward the back of the plane. After all, if your kids have a happy flight experience, everyone else in the cabin is more likely to as well.
- You'll certainly be grateful to yourself for packing **tidy snacks** like rolled dried fruit, which are much less sticky and wet and more compact and packable than actual fruit. Blueberry or raisin bagels also make for a neat, healthy sweet and yield fewer crumbs than cookies or cakes. Ginger snaps, crisp and not as crumbly as softer cookies, will also help curb mild cases of motion sickness. And don't forget to stash

a few resealable plastic bags in your purse. They'll prove invaluable for storing everything from half-eaten crackers and fruit to checker pieces and matchbox cars.

CHILD SEATS: THEY'RE A MUST

According to *Consumer Reports Travel Letter*, the National Transportation Safety Board says that, since 1991, the deaths of five children and injury to four could have been prevented had the children been sitting in restraint systems during their flights. Even in the event of moderate turbulence, children sitting on a parent's lap can be thrust forward and injured. When you consider that a commercial aircraft hits a significant amount of turbulence at least once a day on average, you'd do well to think about investing a few hundred dollars for a safety seat.

The FAA recommends that children under 20 pounds ride in a rear-facing child-restraint system, and says children that weigh 20 to 40 pounds should sit in a forward-facing child-restraint system. Children over 40 pounds should sit in a regular seat and wear a seat belt.

All child seats manufactured after 1985 are certified for airline use, but make sure your chair will fit in an airline seat—it must be less than 16 inches wide. You may not use booster seats or seatless vests or harness systems. Safety seats must be placed in window seats—except in exit rows, where they are prohibited, so as not to block the passage of other travelers in the case of an emergency.

GETTING TO & FROM THE AIRPORT

San Francisco International Airport (SFO)

SFO (www.flysfo.com) consists of four main terminals: North (Terminal 3), South (Terminal 1), Central (Terminal 2), and International. The baggage level of each terminal also houses an information booth. Bank of America operates a branch on the mezzanine level of the North terminal, and you can locate ATMs on the upper level of all terminals. The number for **general information** is ☎ **650/821-8211**; for **transit information** call ☎ **650/817-1717**. The traveler's information desk in each terminal can also give you information on how to get where you're going.

To access the rental car center from the Airport terminals, take the AirTrain Blue Line, which operates daily 24 hours a day. AirTrain stations are

located in all terminals, parking garages, the Rental Car Center, and SFO's BART station. If you'll need a car seat (required for children who weigh less than 60 lb.), inquire about them when you make your rental reservations. Once you have loaded up the vehicle, follow the airport signs to Highway 101 north to drive into San Francisco. Stay toward the left so you don't end up on Highway 280. If your destination is Union Square, Nob Hill, or SoMa, exit at 4th Street. Traffic is manageable until rush hour, from 3 to 7pm.

If you aren't driving, you can reach your destination by taxi, shuttle, and BART. **Taxis** pick up passengers at the center island outside the baggage claim level of the airport. The 14-mile drive to Union Square takes 20 to 30 minutes depending on the time of day and should cost around \$35 plus tip.

Shuttle vans offer door-to-door service from the airport, but the driver may make up to three stops before reaching your hotel. Shuttles pick up passengers from the upper-level center islands; a uniformed guide will direct you to the appropriate van. Be prepared to wait from 10 to 20 minutes for the one heading in your direction. Look for exact shuttle fares posted throughout the airport—most are now charging around \$13 per person,

Tips Don't Stow It—Ship It

If ease of travel is your main concern and money is no object, you can ship your luggage with one of the growing number of luggage-service companies that pick up, track, and deliver your luggage (often through couriers such as Federal Express) with minimum hassle for you. Traveling luggage-free may be ultra-convenient, but it's not cheap: one-way overnight shipping can cost from \$100 to \$200, depending on what you're sending. Still, for some people, it's a sensible solution to lugging heavy baggage. Specialists in door-to-door luggage delivery are **Virtual Bellhop** (www.virtualbellhop.com), **SkyCap International** (www.skycapinternational.com), and **Luggage Express** (www.usxpluggagexpress.com).

which may make a cab a better deal. **SuperShuttle** (☎ 800/258-3826; www.supershuttle.com) is my favorite of the services and you don't need advance reservations from the airport. (You do need reservations for a shuttle to the airport, however.)

After years of wrangling and millions of dollars in construction, the **Bay Area Rapid Transit** (BART; ☎ 510/464-6000; www.bart.gov) extension to SFO is now operational. The airport's BART station is located in the International Terminal. The AirTrain connects passengers to all terminals, the BART rail station, and the car rental center. The BART train, which departs from the international terminal, takes about 30 minutes to reach downtown San Francisco and costs \$4.95, making it by far the most inexpensive way to reach the city. I'm a huge fan of mass transit and would encourage you to use BART, but I have one caveat: If you will be traveling with lots of luggage and not enough hands to manage it, take a cab. Otherwise, you may end up at the Powell Street BART station facing a 10-minute walk to your hotel (San Francisco doesn't have huge numbers of taxis on its streets like London or New York, so don't count on catching a cab). If you're also dealing with tired children, the journey from BART to your lodgings isn't going to make a wonderful start to the vacation.

Oakland International

Oakland International (☎ 510/563-3300) consists of two terminals, one of which (Terminal 2) is pretty much devoted to Southwest Airlines. Both have ATMs and there are information booths near the entrances. All the major **rental car companies** have counters inside the terminals as well. If you are driving into San Francisco, exit the airport on Hegenberger Road. Follow it north to Highway 880 toward San Francisco. From there, follow the signs to Highway 80 to San

Francisco. When you reach the Bay Bridge, you'll stop at a toll booth and pay \$3 to cross. On the other side, take the 5th Street exit to get to Union Square.

All ground transportation at the airport is on one level. **Bayporter Express** (☎ 877/467-1800) is the best choice for a shuttle into town. It picks up passengers from Terminal 1 at the center island and from Terminal 2 around the corner from baggage claim. The fare to San Francisco is \$26 for one person, \$38 for two in the same party, and \$7 for kids under 12. You need to make reservations for the 45- to 90-minute drive. Cabs will run \$40 or more depending on traffic and take 30 to 40 minutes.

BART is another option. You can catch the **AirBART shuttle** (☎ 510/465-2278), which runs every 15 minutes in front of either terminal. The fare is \$2 (adult) and 50¢ (children) for the 15-minute ride to the Oakland Coliseum BART station. From there, you'll transfer to a BART train into San Francisco; the fare is \$3.15. Purchase your tickets from well-marked kiosks inside the airport or at the BART station. If you're staying around Union Street, you'll probably want to get off at the Powell Street stop.

BY CAR

You can get to San Francisco along three major highways. Interstate 5 runs through the center of the state and intersects with Interstate 80, which goes to the Bay Bridge. The drive from Los Angeles to San Francisco on I-5 is about 6 hours and there aren't many places to stop for food, so plan accordingly. Highway 101 is the other major roadway from Southern California and it's the route to use for reaching Marin County, Napa and Sonoma, and other points north. The drive from Los Angeles to San Francisco on 101 takes 7 hours if you don't stop along the way. If you are taking a

leisurely drive through California, Highway 1, which runs along the coast, is the most scenic route and takes you by Santa Cruz and Monterey, both fun cities for kids. The trip takes at least 8 hours.

Approach the city with patience if you have decided to motor here. The freeways seem to become more crowded every day and afternoon rush hour on the Bay Bridge is a misnomer: no one rushes anywhere. Traffic on the Golden Gate Bridge on the weekends is also pretty dreadful. Make sure the kids have plenty of things to do in the car—portable cassette or CD players with books on tape and music are nearly as important as a spare tire.

Drivers arriving from the east will cross the Bay Bridge (\$3 toll) and head toward downtown on 5th Street or toward North Beach and Fisherman's Wharf on Fremont Street. Cars coming from the south on Highway 101 will see the city skyline on their left a

few miles past Monster Park (the former Candlestick) Park. Downtown exits here are either 7th or 4th streets. If you're driving from the coast heading south, you'll enter San Francisco by the Golden Gate Bridge. Once you pass the tollbooth (\$5 toll!), exit along the bay to Van Ness Avenue.

BY TRAIN

Amtrak (☎ 800/872-7245 or 800/USA-RAIL) doesn't stop in San Francisco proper but lands in Emeryville, just south of Berkeley in the East Bay. From the station, an Amtrak bus takes passengers into downtown San Francisco. The buses stop at the Ferry Building at the foot of Market Street and at the Cal Train station, where you can catch the streetcar to Embarcadero Station and thus into town. The Ferry Building is more convenient to the hotels discussed in this book, as long as you manage to hail a cab.

8 The 21st-Century Traveler

PLANNING YOUR TRIP ONLINE

SURFING FOR AIRFARES

The “big three” online travel agencies, **Expedia.com**, **Travelocity.com**, and **Orbitz.com**, sell most of the air tickets bought on the Internet. (Canadian travelers should try expedia.ca and Travelocity.ca; U.K. residents can go for expedia.co.uk and opodo.co.uk.) Each has different business deals with the airlines and may offer different fares on the same flights, so it's wise to shop around. Of the smaller travel agency websites, **SideStep** (www.sidestep.com) has gotten the best reviews from Frommer's authors. It's a browser add-on that purports to “search 140 sites at once,” but in reality only beats competitors' fares as often as other sites do.

Also remember to check **airline websites**; you can often shave a few bucks from a fare by booking online

directly through the airline and avoiding a travel agency's transaction fee. For the websites of airlines that fly to and from San Francisco, go to “Getting There,” earlier in this chapter.

Great **last-minute deals** are available through free weekly e-mail services provided directly by the airlines. Sign up for weekly e-mail alerts at airline websites or check sites that specialize in last-minute deals, such as **Smarterliving.com**, **Site59.com**, and **Lastminutetravel.com**. The website **www.itravelnet.com** lists numerous bargain sites and airlines around the world.

If you're willing to give up some control over your flight details, use an “opaque” fare service like **Priceline** (www.priceline.com or www.priceline.co.uk) or its smaller competitor **Hotwire** (www.hotwire.com). Both offer rock-bottom prices in exchange for travel on a “mystery airline” at a

mysterious time of day, often with a mysterious change of planes en route. The mystery airlines are all major, well-known carriers, and the airlines' routing computers have gotten a lot better than they used to be. But your chances of getting a 6am or 11pm flight are pretty high, and you might find this to be too inconvenient with kids in tow. Hotwire tells you flight prices before you buy; Priceline usually has better deals than Hotwire, but you have to play their "name our price" game. If you're new at this, the helpful folks at **BiddingForTravel** (www.biddingfortravel.com) do a good job of demystifying Priceline's prices and strategies. Priceline also now offers non-opaque deals that allow you to pick exact flight options.

SURFING FOR HOTELS

Shopping online for hotels is generally done one of two ways: by booking through the hotel's own website or through an independent booking agency (or a fare-service agency like Priceline). Internet hotel agencies have multiplied in mind-boggling numbers of late, and you must shop around, as prices can vary considerably from site to site. Keep in mind that hotels at the top of a site's listing may be there for no other reason than that they paid money to get the placement.

Of the "big three" sites, **Expedia** offers a long list of special deals and "virtual tours" or photos of available rooms so you can see what you're paying for. **Travelocity** posts unvarnished customer reviews and ranks its properties according to the AAA rating system. Also reliable are **Hotels.com** and **Quikbook.com**. An excellent free program, **TravelAxe** (www.travelaxenet.com), can search multiple hotel sites at once and conveniently lists the total price of the room, including the taxes and service charges. Another booking site, **Travelweb** (www.travelweb.com), is partly owned by the hotels it represents (including the Hilton, Hyatt,

and Starwood chains) and is therefore plugged directly into the hotels' reservations systems—unlike independent online agencies, which have to fax or e-mail reservation requests to the hotel, a good portion of which get misplaced in the shuffle. Many of the major sites are undergoing improvements in service and ease of use; in the meantime, it's a good idea to **get a confirmation number** and **make a printout** of any online booking transaction.

In the opaque fare service category, **Priceline** and **Hotwire** are even better for hotels than for airfares; with both, you're allowed to pick the neighborhood and quality level of your hotel before offering up your money. On the down side, many hotels stick Priceline guests in their least desirable rooms. Be sure to go to the Bidding-forTravel website (see above) before bidding on a hotel room on Priceline; it features a fairly up-to-date list of hotels that Priceline uses in major cities. For both Priceline and Hotwire, you pay upfront, and the fee is nonrefundable. **Note:** Some hotels do not provide loyalty program credits or points or other frequent-stay amenities when you book a room through opaque online services.

SURFING FOR RENTAL CARS

For booking rental cars online, the best deals are usually found at rental-car company websites, although all the major online travel agencies also offer rental-car reservations services. Priceline and Hotwire work well for rental cars, too; the only "mystery" is which major rental company you get, and for most travelers the difference between Hertz, Avis, and Budget is negligible.

INTERNET ACCESS AWAY FROM HOME WITHOUT YOUR OWN COMPUTER

It's hard nowadays to find a city that *doesn't* have a few cybercafes. Although

there's no definitive directory for cybercafes, two places to start looking are **www.cybercaptive.com** and **www.cybercafe.com**. San Francisco doesn't have many cybercafes, but most of its **public libraries** offer free Internet access. In addition, **Kinko's** and similar businesses offer Internet access for a fee. Avoid **hotel business centers** and **Internet kiosks** unless you're willing to pay exorbitant rates.

To retrieve your e-mail, ask your **Internet Service Provider (ISP)** if it has a Web-based interface tied to your existing e-mail account. If your ISP doesn't have such an interface, you can use the free **mail2web** service (www.mail2web.com) to view and reply to your home e-mail. For more flexibility, you may want to open a free, Web-based e-mail account with **Yahoo! Mail** (<http://mail.yahoo.com>) or **Fastmail** (www.fastmail.fm). Your home ISP may be able to forward your e-mail to the Web-based account automatically.

If you need to access files on your office computer, look into a service called **GoToMyPC** (www.gotomypc.com). The service provides a Web-based interface for you to access and manipulate a distant PC from anywhere—even a cybercafé—provided your “target” PC is on and has an always-on connection to the Internet (such as with Road Runner cable). The service offers top-quality security, but if you're worried about hackers, use your own laptop rather than a cybercafé computer to access the GoToMyPC system.

WITH YOUR OWN COMPUTER

Wi-fi (wireless fidelity) is the buzzword in computer access, and more and more hotels, cafes, and retailers are signing on as wireless “hotspots” from where you can get high-speed connection without cable wires, networking hardware, or a phone line

(see below). **T-Mobile Hotspot** (www.t-mobile.com/hotspot) serves up wireless connections at more than 1,000 Starbucks coffee shops nationwide. **Boingo** (www.boingo.com) and **Wayport** (www.wayport.com) have set up networks in airports and high-class hotel lobbies. iPass providers (see below) also give you access to a few hundred wireless hotel lobby setups. Best of all, you don't need to be staying at the Four Seasons to use the hotel's network; just set yourself up on a nice couch in the lobby. The companies' pricing policies can be Byzantine, with a variety of monthly, per-connection, and per-minute plans, but in general you pay around \$30 a month for limited access—and as more and more companies jump on the wireless bandwagon, prices are likely to get even more competitive.

There are also places that provide **free wireless networks** in cities around the world. To locate these free hotspots, go to **www.personaltelco.net/index.cgi/WirelessCommunities**.

If wi-fi is not available at your destination, most business-class hotels throughout the world offer dataports for laptop modems, and many hotels in the U.S. now offer free high-speed Internet access using an Ethernet network cable. (You can bring your own cables, but most hotels rent them for around \$10; call your hotel in advance to see what your options are.)

In addition, major Internet Service Providers (ISP) have **local access numbers** around the world, allowing you to go online by simply placing a local call. Check your ISP's website or call its toll-free number and ask how you can use your current account away from home and how much it will cost.

If you're traveling outside the reach of your ISP, the **iPass** network has dial-up numbers in most of the world's countries. You'll have to sign up with an iPass provider, who will

then tell you how to set up your computer for your destination(s). For a list of iPass providers, go to www.ipass.com. One solid provider is **i2roam** (www.i2roam.com; ☎ 866/811-6209 or 920/235-0475).

Wherever you go, bring a **connection kit** of the right power and phone adapters, a spare phone cord, and a spare Ethernet network cable—or find out whether your hotel supplies them to guests. In the United States, the current is 120 volts and adapters should have two flat, parallel prongs.

USING A CELLPHONE

Thanks to the United States' fragmented cellphone system, there's no guarantee your cellphone will work in all parts of the country. It's a good bet that your phone will work in major cities. But take a look at your wireless company's coverage map on its website before heading out—T-Mobile, Sprint, and Nextel are particularly weak in rural areas. If you need to stay in touch at a destination where you know your phone won't work, **rent** a phone that will from **InTouch USA** (☎ 800/872-7626; www.intouchglobal.com) or a rental car location, but beware that you'll pay \$1 a minute or more for airtime.

In downtown San Francisco, **Triptel Mobile Rental Phones** (☎ 415/474-3330; 1525 Van Ness Ave., between California and Pine sts.) rents cellular phones at \$3 per day, or \$15 per week. Airtime rates are 95¢ per minute for domestic calls, with an additional \$1.25 per minute for international calls. Triptel also sells SIM cards for travelers bringing their own phones.

If you're venturing deep into national parks, you may want to consider renting a **satellite phone** ("**satphones**"), which are different from cellphones in that they connect to satellites rather than ground-based towers. A satphone is more costly than

a cellphone but works where there's no cellular signal and no towers. Unfortunately, you'll pay at least \$2 per minute to use the phone, and it only works where you can see the horizon (i.e., usually not indoors). In North America, you can rent Iridium satellite phones from **RoadPost** (☎ 888/290-1606 or 905/272-5665; www.roadpost.com). InTouch USA (see above) offers a wider range of satphones but charges higher rates.

If you're not from the U.S., you'll be appalled at the poor reach of our **GSM (Global System for Mobiles) wireless network**, which is used by much of the rest of the world. Your phone will probably work in most major U.S. cities; it definitely won't work in many rural areas. And you may or may not be able to send SMS (text messaging) home. Assume nothing—call your wireless provider and get the full scoop. In a worst-case scenario, you can always rent a phone; InTouch USA delivers to hotels.

The three letters that define much of the world's **wireless capabilities** are GSM (Global System for Mobiles), a big, seamless network that makes for easy cross-border cellphone use throughout Europe and dozens of other countries worldwide. In the U.S., T-Mobile, AT&T Wireless, and Cingular use this quasi-universal system; in Canada, Microcell and some Rogers customers are GSM, and all Europeans and most Australians use GSM.

If your cellphone is on a GSM system, and you have a world-capable multiband phone such as many Sony Ericsson, Motorola, or Samsung models, you can make and receive calls across much of the globe. Just call your wireless operator and ask for "international roaming" to be activated on your account. Unfortunately, per-minute charges can be high.

That's why it's important to buy an "unlocked" world phone from the get-go. Having an unlocked phone allows

you to install a cheap, prepaid removable computer memory phone chip (called a **SIM card**) in your destination. (Show your phone to the salesperson; not all phones work on all networks.) You'll get a local phone number and much, much lower calling rates. Getting an already locked phone unlocked can be a complicated process, but it can be done; just call your cellular operator and say you'll be going abroad for several months and want to use the phone with a local provider.

For many, **renting** a phone is a good idea. (Even worldphone owners will have to rent new phones if they're traveling to non-GSM regions.) Although you can rent a phone from any number of overseas sites, including kiosks at airports and at car-rental agencies, we suggest renting the phone before you leave home. That way you can give loved ones and business associates your new number, make sure the phone works, and take the phone wherever you go—especially helpful for overseas trips through several countries.

Phone rental isn't cheap. You'll usually pay \$40 to \$50 per week, plus air-time fees of at least a dollar a minute. If you're traveling to Europe, though, local rental companies often offer free incoming calls within their home country, which can save you big bucks. The bottom line: shop around.

Two good wireless rental companies are **InTouch USA** (☎ 800/872-7626; www.intouchglobal.com) and **Road-Post** (☎ 888/290-1606 or 905/272-5665; www.roadpost.com). Give them your itinerary, and they'll tell you what wireless products you need.

For trips of more than a few weeks spent in one country, **buying a phone** becomes economically attractive, as many nations have cheap, no-questions-asked prepaid phone systems. Once you arrive at your destination, stop by a local cellphone shop and get the cheapest package; you'll probably pay less than \$100 for a phone and a starter calling card. Local calls may be as low as 10¢ per minute, and incoming calls may be free.

9 Show & Tell: Getting the Kids Interested in San Francisco

As one of the most beautiful places on the planet, San Francisco has been a favorite of movie studios since the birth of film. In fact, the first public motion picture was presented in San Francisco—silhouettes of a horse, a dog, and a human gymnast were shown to viewers using a primitive projector made from a box with light, a lens, and a reflector. The following list of films and books will pique the interest of the most recalcitrant traveler in the jewel of the left coast, although you probably won't find much resistance to begin with for this trip.

For younger children, rent the 1998 version of *The Parent Trap*. This remake, no longer starring Haley Mills, darn it, has a fabulous scene at the famous Fairmont Hotel atop Nob

Hill. Or screen Disney's modern Cinderella story, *The Princess Diaries*. Its heroine, Mia, an awkward young girl who lives with her widowed mom, discovers that she is an actual princess when her enchanting grandmother comes to visit. Another classic is *Mrs. Doubtfire* starring the city's own Robin Williams, who passes himself off as a British nanny in order to spend time with his children after separating from their mother, played by Sally Field. The family lives on Steiner Street and there are several great shots of the city in the film. For older kids, there is an endless supply of great material, from *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, where the Enterprise and its crew set down in San Francisco to seek "nuclear wessels" across San Francisco Bay to the zany Barbra Streisand and Ryan

O'Neill screwball comedy *What's Up, Doc?* The film which takes viewers down Lombard Street, through the Chinese New Year Parade, and down the Alta Plaza steps in Pacific Heights to the Bay. Another must-see film is *Foul Play* with Chevy Chase and Goldie Hawn racing frantically up and down just about every hill in the city in a quest to save the pope from being murdered at the Opera House. And who can resist the Dirty Harry movies, starring Clint Eastwood as the hard-boiled detective? Alfred Hitchcock also loved San Francisco and set three of his films here, including *Vertigo*.

Books are also useful to raise awareness of the city. For younger readers there are some great picture and storybooks available about San Francisco. Herb Caen, the city's famous columnist until his death in 1997, brought together some of its most famous characteristics—fog, cable cars, and Chinese New Year—in an enchanting tale, *The Cable Car and the Dragon* (Chronicle Books, 1986). *Humphrey, the Lost Whale: A True Story* (Heian, 1986), by Wendy Tokuda and Richard Hall, is a beautiful book available in English and Japanese. It tells the tale of a group of local people who band together to save a humpback whale that swims into San Francisco Bay by mistake. *The City by the Bay: A Magical Journey Around San Francisco* (Chronicle Books, 1993), by Tricia Brown and the Junior League of San

Francisco, is a wonderful picture book that turns famous neighborhoods and landmarks into whimsical illustrations. This is perfect for introducing kids 4 to 8 years old to the culture and sights of the city. Another terrific book is a reprint of a 1962 classic by Miroslav Sasek, *This is San Francisco* (Universe Publishing, 2003). Even older kids will love the drawings of fishtailed Cadillacs and drive-in restaurants in this detail-rich picture book.

Older children might enjoy a travel guide geared to their age group. *Kid-ding Around San Francisco* (Avalon Travel Publishing, 1996), by Bobi Martin offers tips on the neighborhoods, historical facts, and provides readers with a great resource for their trip. Included are activities and trivia to keep kids busy while in the city and a scrapbook at the back encourages them to create memories of their visit. A novel set in the city can also act as a catalyst to interest older children. In *Peppermints in the Parlor* (Atheneum, 1980), by Barbara Brooks Wallace, recently orphaned Emily Luccock finds herself embroiled in a murder mystery in Golden Gate Park when she moves to San Francisco to live with her aunt and uncle. In Sid Fleischman's *By the Great Horn Spoon!* (Little Brown & Co., 1963), a 12-year-old boy strikes it rich in San Francisco during the gold rush after stowing away on a journey from Boston.

Getting to Know San Francisco

San Francisco has a lot going for it. For its geographic setting, it ranks as one of the loveliest cities on earth. The tolerant, open-minded population includes a dynamic mix of cultures from around the globe. The city produces some of the most innovative cuisine in the country and is home to a plethora of cultural institutions as well. Finally, from this little nook in Northern California, one can readily visit some of the most dramatic mountains, beautiful beaches, and stunning national parks in the world.

San Francisco occupies the northernmost tip of a 32-mile-long peninsula. Its western coast is battered by a chilly and unrelentingly forceful piece of the Pacific Ocean, while its eastern side looks out onto the calm waters of San Francisco Bay, the Bay Bridge, and the towns and mountains beyond. To the north, the photogenic Golden Gate Bridge spans the tiny opening to the bay, less than 2 miles in length, and connects San Francisco to the picturesque hills of Marin County. San Francisco has its own share of hills, and as such offers visitors one fabulous view after another.

The city's three quarters of a million residents include ethnic groups from every corner of the globe. Enclaves of African-American, Chinese, El Salvadoran, Brazilian, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Mexican, Middle Eastern, Russian, and Vietnamese residents, among others, make it possible for

locals and visitors alike to experience a world of cultures within 47 square miles. San Francisco's cosmopolitan roots can be traced to the gold rush. Before then the sleepy town of Yerba Buena—settled by the Spanish in 1776, claimed by Mexico in 1822, and declared part of the U.S. in 1848 (and renamed San Francisco)—was little more than a military outpost, a port, and some ranchland. That all changed when newspaper publisher Sam Brannan took it upon himself in 1849 to publicize the discovery of gold in the American River, 130 miles east.

The gold rush attracted a rash of fortune hunters, adventurers, savvy business folk, and opportunists from across America, as well as immigrants from as far away as China. The vast majority made no money digging for gold; their luck came from ending up in San Francisco. Newcomers quickly created havens within the city to support and sustain their cultures. Neighborhoods emerged with predominant characteristics and, whether by foresight or fate, over the decades they have managed to maintain their individuality despite the forces of popular culture. San Franciscans, although there's no single accurate description of that species, believe in the virtues of diversity and self-expression. And that's another reason why, along with those hills and that view, you just have to love it here.

1 Orientation

VISITOR INFORMATION

The San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau operates the **Visitor Information Center** on the lower level of Hallidie Plaza on Powell and Market streets (☎ 415/391-2000). The staff is multilingual and genuinely helpful. Visit the information center for books; maps; Municipal Railway passes for buses, streetcars, and cable cars; souvenirs; and tons of brochures to guide you further. It's open Monday through Friday 9am to 5pm and weekends 9am to 3pm.

Around Fisherman's Wharf and elsewhere, you may see manned booths with signs proclaiming themselves tourist information centers. These booths are operated by organizations like the Fisherman's Wharf Merchants' Association or by businesses such as tour companies, boat lines, or other attractions, and, as such, are not the best source of unbiased advice. For that, you should phone or visit the Visitor Information Center.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

The city's 47-plus miles are divided up into neighborhoods as diverse and interesting as their inhabitants. Streets, for the most part, are laid out in a traditional grid pattern, with two major exceptions: Market Street and Columbus Avenue. Market Street cuts through town from the Embarcadero up toward Twin Peaks in the Sunset District. Columbus Avenue runs at an angle through North Beach starting at the Transamerica Pyramid and ending near the Hyde Street Pier. Another important thoroughfare, Geary Boulevard, runs all the way from Market Street through town to Ocean Beach.

Even the traditionally laid out roads are confusing when a hill gets in the way and the street ends abruptly only to emerge on the other side, which is particularly annoying if you're driving. Travel with a map; I like the *SF Transit Map and Guide*. Numbered *streets*, by the way, are downtown, south of Market Street. Numbered *avenues* (notice the subtle difference) are found in the Richmond and Sunset districts southwest of downtown.

NEIGHBORHOODS IN BRIEF

Union Square Named for the historic plaza it encompasses, Union Square is the cultural and commercial heart of San Francisco. The roughly 22 square blocks bordered by Market, Mason, Bush, and Kearny streets house San Francisco's greatest concentration of hotels in every rate category, clothing stores, galleries, and theaters. Equally plentiful in Union Square are restaurants, although they cater mainly to tourists and businesspeople. (With a few exceptions, San Francisco's better dining options, whatever the price range, are located in other neighborhoods.)

You will find no shortage of noise and congestion here, but green space is another matter. The actual Union Square plaza, located within Stockton, Powell, Geary, and Post streets, once provided the greenery that is otherwise absent in the city center, but the newly designed plaza—reopened in 2002 after a \$25 million restoration—has done away with most of it. In an effort to make the plaza less welcoming to the homeless residents who dozed there, the city replaced its lawns with a 245-foot-long floor of granite and a few scattered plants. At least the new design is better suited

to hosting the square's frequent art exhibits and cultural events. Also on the plaza you'll find a cafe and the **Tix Bay Area half-price ticket booth** (see the introduction to chapter 10 for more information on the Tix booth).

Despite Union Square's urban feel—with not a playground to speak of—families may want to consider lodging in this area because it offers the most options for hotels. Moreover, it's close to many other city attractions, with readily available public transportation. Finally, if your children are actually old enough to enjoy shopping as much as you do, this could be the neighborhood for you.

South of Market SoMa, as the blocks encompassed by Market, 10th, Steuart, and King streets (including South Beach and SBC Park) are familiarly known, exemplifies the best and worst of urban life. Here you will find some of the city's top cultural institutions, such as the **San Francisco Museum of Modern Art** (p. 178) and the **Yerba Buena Center for the Arts** (p. 162). With its lovely gardens, galleries, and performance space, and numerous attractions for children of all ages, the Yerba Buena Center is a testament to successful urban planning.

Also in SoMa, you'll find the continuously expanding **Moscone Convention Center**; the **Sony Metreon** (p. 162), with its own collection of kid-friendly attractions; and the temporary home of the **California Academy of Sciences** (p. 176). Delightful bay views and the **SBC baseball stadium** (p. 258) are around the corner in nearby South Beach. Brand new restaurants seem to pop up daily in this former industrial neighborhood, and two museums—the Jewish

Museum and the Mexican Museum—are slated to move into new homes here in the near future.

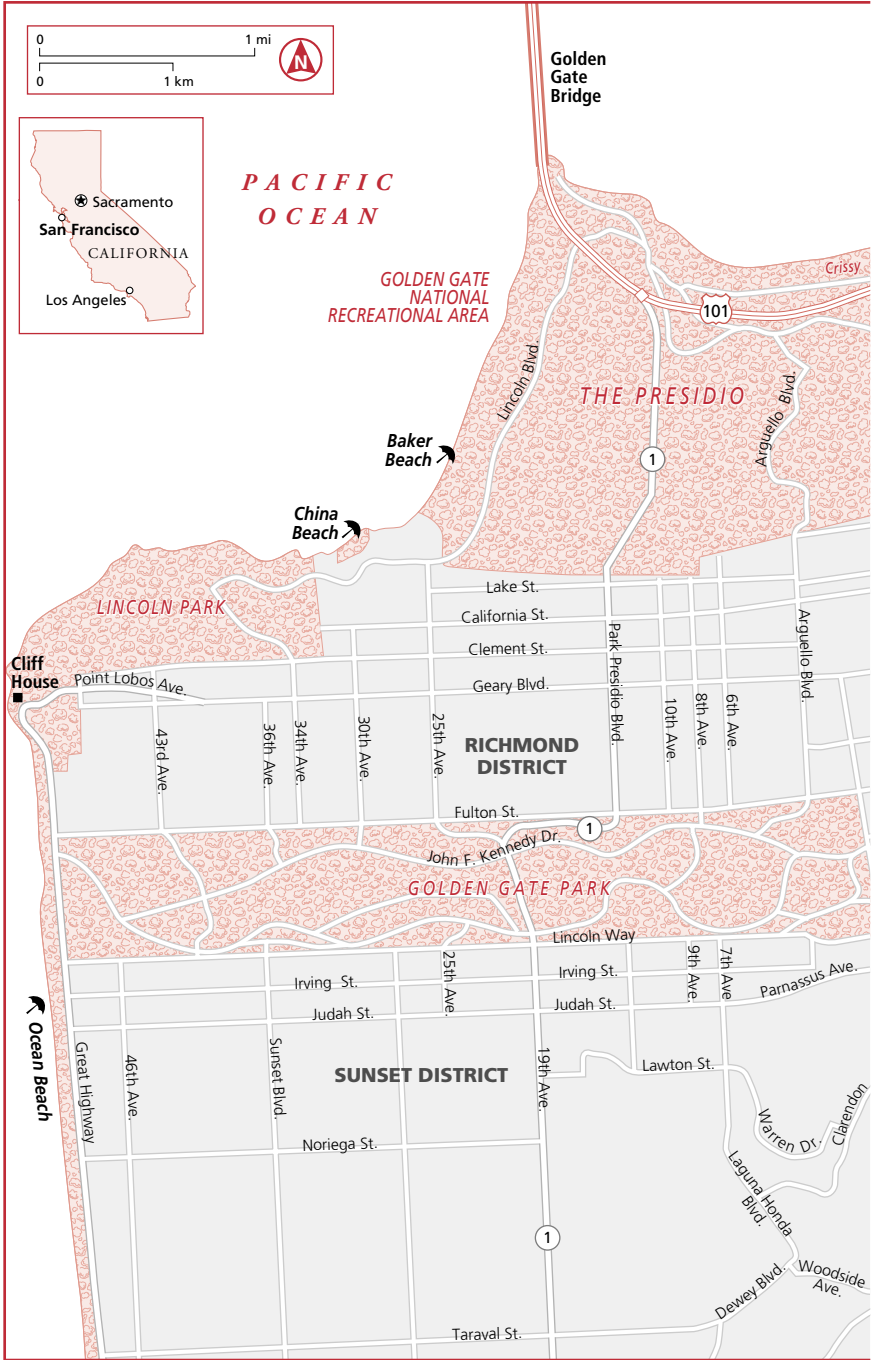
But the ongoing development has not yet reached all of SoMa, and just 1 block west of the toniest shopping mall in town is the heart of skid row: 6th and 7th streets below Market Street. Market Street itself is also home to a large share of the city's homeless residents. So although SoMa has some of the city's greatest cultural attractions and even a few of its best hotels, families with young children may prefer lodging in a less gritty part of town.

Chinatown It's with good reason that Chinatown is the second most visited destination in San Francisco, behind Fisherman's Wharf. The densely populated area between Broadway, Taylor, Bush, and Montgomery streets is every bit as colorful, crowded, and atmospheric as advertised. The much-photographed Dragon Gate entrance on Grant Street leads to one tourist shop after another, all visually enhanced by colorful banners in red, gold, and green.

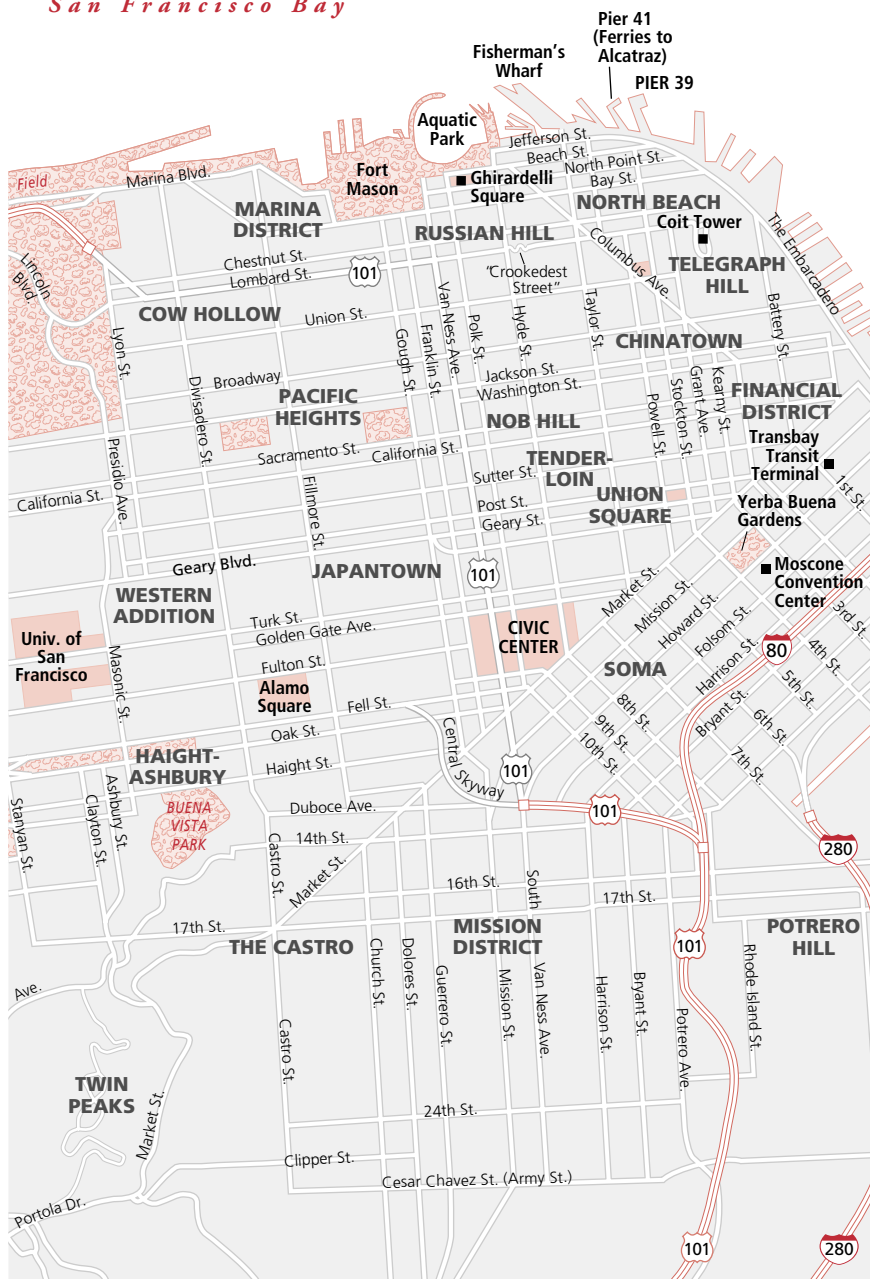
If you're in the market for a rhinestone tiara or sets of chopsticks, this is nirvana. Kids love all the little knickknacks: you could lose many hours poking around the stores, snacking on warm pork buns, and wandering the alleyways. Stockton Street, with its exotic grocery stores and traditional herb shops, is equally alluring. Overall, Chinatown is great for shopping and eating, and several of its restaurants are listed in chapter 5. Given the noise and crowds, however, it's not a great area for hotels, and I've listed only one.

Fisherman's Wharf This is one of the country's most popular tourist attractions, just behind Disneyworld and Disneyland. Depending

San Francisco Neighborhoods



San Francisco Bay



where you are in Fisherman's Wharf, it can feel a lot like Disneyland as well. Stretching from Van Ness Avenue to Kearny Street, and from the piers to Bay Street, the wharf is home to **PIER 39** (p. 170), a conglomeration of tacky tourist shops and overpriced restaurants. The pier certainly has a lot for kids to love, including an aquarium; a carousel; playful stores like Puppets on the Pier; an endless array of chocolate, ice cream, and cookie shops; and the noisy, smelly, but irresistible sea lions. Steps away from the pier, the cheesy attractions continue, with places like the **Rainforest Cafe** (p. 127) offering lackluster food in a gimmicky environment.

Now that I've dampened your expectations, let me say that the western side of Fisherman's Wharf, opposite from PIER 39, is actually quite nice, getting better every year, and certainly worth a visit. Glimpses of the area's maritime past are visible in the wonderful antique boats of the **Hyde Street Pier** (p. 168) and recorded in the **Maritime Museum** (p. 168). Here you'll also find an upscale shopping mall at **Ghirardelli Square** (p. 167), a pleasant stretch of lawn for kids to run around, a tiny beach, the Cannery courtyard, and the Municipal Pier, with its sweeping views of the bay and the Golden Gate Bridge.

With all the tourists, it's no surprise most of the national chains have hotels here, many with pools. Although most of the lodging here is not very inspiring, it is certainly geared towards families.

North Beach Landfill came between the waves and North Beach over 100 years ago, just one of many changes this historic neighborhood has experienced. Situated roughly from Broadway to Lombard and Grant to Taylor streets, it

rubs shoulders with Telegraph Hill to the east and Russian Hill to the west. Columbus Avenue, the main artery, cuts through at an angle, brushing up against Washington Square Park, the village square. Once populated by the Italian immigrants from Genoa and Sicily who founded the area's fishing industry, North Beach is slowly giving way to Chinatown—at least on its southern edge, as Chinese shops creep up Stockton Street past Broadway.

There's still plenty of Mediterranean warmth, lots of pasta, and cafes galore. Although no good family accommodations exist in North Beach, it's a delightful spot to come to stroll, shop, and dine.

The Embarcadero If one can use the term *idyllic* to describe an urban amble, then a walk along the Embarcadero anywhere between Beach Street and the SBC Park baseball stadium certainly qualifies. Although the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake wreaked havoc on homes and lives throughout the Bay Area, one positive outcome was the release of the waterfront from the ugly shadow of the Embarcadero Freeway, which was damaged and subsequently demolished. The renewal of this area has been astonishing and has added immeasurably to the beauty of the city. In the past 3 years, an extension to the Municipal Railway lines has brought streetcar service to the entire Embarcadero as far as Fisherman's Wharf.

Most recently, the 1896 **Ferry Building** (p. 160) at the foot of Market Street was completely rehabilitated. The attractive building now contains an array of gourmet food stores and excellent restaurants. Outside, you can browse the Ferry Plaza Farmer's Market four times a week, and excursions to the

Saturday market have become a regular part of many a San Franciscan's schedule. Not far from the Ferry Building, the **Embarcadero Center** (see "The Shopping Scene," in chapter 9), a set of five multiuse towers along Drumm Street beginning at Market Street, houses upscale chain stores, restaurants, and a movieplex.

The few hotels that grace the area are priced in the high-moderate to luxury range, but dining options run the gamut from very inexpensive to big-night-out. Just slightly off the beaten tourist path, this would be a fun, convenient area in which to stay with kids of any age.

Nob Hill Along California Street from Leavenworth to Stockton streets, Nob Hill is one of the oldest and most fashionable neighborhoods in town. It was once the exclusive turf of the railroad barons Leland Stanford, Mark Hopkins, Charles Crocker, and Collis P. Huntington—collectively known as the "Big Four." The properties where their mansions once stood now support fancy hotels, a private club, expensive apartment buildings, and the striking Grace Cathedral. This is a wonderful place for families to stay: Huntington Park and the largely residential feel provide a nice respite from the congestion of the city center, yet it's just a 5-minute walk from Union Square. Also, the California cable car line runs right by most of the hotels. The downside for those on foot is a steep uphill walk from Union Square to get back to the hotel. There's also cost: most of the hotels here are lovely, but also quite pricey.

Financial District Encompassing prime real estate roughly between Montgomery Street and the Embarcadero on the west side of Market Street, the Financial District is the

business center of San Francisco. The once-controversial Transamerica Pyramid at Montgomery and Clay streets is a skyline landmark, worth a closer look for the miniature forest of redwood trees planted next to the building on the east side. Eating lunch around here is easy: Belden Place, an alley between Kearny, Bush, and Pine streets, offers outdoor dining in good weather and European ambience all year round, and the Crocker Galleria between Post, Sutter, and Montgomery streets offers good fast food, in addition to upscale shopping opportunities.

Despite these perks, this wouldn't be my first choice of a neighborhood to stay in. The streets are practically deserted at night, except for homeless people. But on the upside, it's really quiet.

Civic Center and Hayes Valley With the opening of the Asian Art Museum in its brilliant new building on Larkin Street, Civic Center is even more of a must-stop for visitors. Bound by Golden Gate Avenues and Franklin, Hyde, and Market streets, this is home to City Hall; the opera, ballet, and symphony stages; the new main library; and the Civic Center Plaza. However, as a meeting ground for much of the city's homeless population, the neighborhood is less than ideal after dark. It's busy during the performing arts season, but even then, take a cab at night. The area has some hotels, but families should think twice before lodging around here.

Hayes Valley, west of Civic Center and tucked between Franklin, Webster, Grove, and Page streets, is dotted with hip boutiques featuring local designers, gift shops, and restaurants that leave you feeling like you've discovered something

cool. As a transitional neighborhood, this isn't the safest place to stay, but it might be worth a trip during the day for some shopping.

The Marina and Cow Hollow

Trendy single urbanites and young families call these picturesque neighborhoods home. The commercial blocks of the Marina and Cow Hollow, Chestnut Street and Union Street, are delightfully crammed with cafes, boutiques, and gift shops. Restaurants abound, some of them inexpensive, and most of them family-friendly.

In addition to the prime shopping, you'll find several choice attractions here, including the **Exploratorium and the Palace of Fine Arts** (p. 160), the **Marina Green** (p. 152), and **Fort Mason** (p. 177), all of which have major kid appeal. It's also in good proximity to the Golden Gate Bridge and the Presidio. A fair number of travelers end up staying in the Marina, especially those attached to automobiles, because the parking is either free or at least reasonable. Most accommodations are in the motel range and line Lombard Street, but there are some better-than-average places to sleep. Know where you're going if you venture out for the evening; sections of Lombard are dicey late at night.

The Presidio Founded in 1776 as a Spanish garrison, this northwest corner of San Francisco remained a military installation for over 200 years. The U.S. took over in 1846 and later planted several pine and eucalyptus trees, eventually changing the sandy, barren hills into a delightful wooded area with over 400,000 trees. In 1994, the army handed over control of all 1,500 acres to the National Park Service, to become part of the **Golden Gate National Recreation Area** (p. 208). Today families come

here to hike, play golf, sunbathe at Baker Beach, visit the beautiful Palace of the Legion of Honor, and even play a few rounds at a little bowling alley. The old officer's club has a well-stocked visitor's center, and the old military PX market is now "Sports Basement," the cheapest place in town to buy sporting equipment.

My all-time favorite part of the Presidio is **Crissy Field** (p. 158), which was reopened in 2002 as the Bay Area's newest national park. An easy walk along Crissy Walk takes you all the way to Fort Point, at the foot of the Golden Gate Bridge. The Presidio has no tourist accommodations, just plenty of things to do.

Japantown and the Western Addition

Once upon a time, this neighborhood off Geary Boulevard, between Webster and Laguna streets, housed one of the largest concentrations of Japanese outside Japan. During World War II, when the city's Japanese residents were interred in camps, the area became home to other settlers, some of them African Americans who were recruited to California to work in the shipyards. Today, Japantown houses just 4% of San Francisco's Japanese population. South of Geary Boulevard, which cut the neighborhood in two when it was widened in the '60s, the area is predominately African American and residential.

At first glance, Japantown appears to consist of a large pagoda and an unattractive indoor shopping center. Hidden inside these cement blocks, however, are good, inexpensive Japanese restaurants and some interesting shops. The **AMC-Kabuki movie theaters** (p. 256) anchor one corner and the communal bathhouse, Kabuki Hot Springs (a longtime local favorite), is located next door. The Peace

Tips Getting to Golden Gate Park

When you study a map of the city, it appears as if it's an easy walk along Hayes, Oak, Fell, Page, or Haight streets from Civic Center to Golden Gate Park. Appearances are deceiving. You'll encounter a number of hills along this route, which takes you through areas that are somewhat blighted, noisy with traffic, rough in spots, and unattractive. Save your legs for the park and get there on a bus or streetcar.

Plaza, with its flat, cement waterfall, is also a good place for kids to stretch their legs. Japantown sponsors two festivals every year, the Cherry Blossom Festival (see chapter 2) in April and the Nihonmachi Street Fair in August (☎ 415/771-9861 for exact dates).

Alamo Square (between Hayes, Fulton, Steiner, and Scott sts.) fronts the group of restored Victorian homes known as "postcard row." The houses are so picture-perfect, they have become as much a symbol of San Francisco as the Golden Gate Bridge and the cable cars.

Pacific Heights The most expensive neighborhood in San Francisco is bordered by Broadway, Pine, Divisadero, and Franklin streets. Even the private schools here are housed in mansions. If you have an interest in architecture, you'll enjoy visiting the Haas-Lilienthal House, an 1886 Queen Anne Victorian decorated with period furniture at 2007 Franklin St. at Washington Street. Get the children to come along by promising them a peek at Mrs. Doubtfire's fictional digs on 2640 Steiner at Broadway. Danielle Steel, the romance writer, lives in the 1913, 55-room Spreckles Mansion, which takes up all the space between Washington, Jackson, Gough, and Octavia streets, if you can imagine that. Directly in front of Ms. Steele's house is Lafayette Park, which has a small playground as well. An even better park is Alta Plaza, at Steiner and Clay streets.

The playground and tennis courts there afford great city views.

Neighborhood residents do much of their shopping along Fillmore Street from California to Jackson, and there are some excellent restaurants here, too. It's a wonderful neighborhood in which to spend some time—too bad the cozy inns here are all geared towards couples.

Russian Hill Circled by Broadway, Polk, Chestnut, and Taylor streets, this hill was named for the Russian fur traders rumored to be buried here in the 1820s. The Polk Street section of the neighborhood has become Frenchified of late and sports some *très* chic antiques shops, cafes, and a brasserie. Hyde Street provides upside access to the wiggly part of Lombard Street (the Powell-Hyde cable car takes you right there), and Macondry Lane, immortalized in Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City*, is tucked between Leavenworth and Taylor just north of Green Street. Your kids may be excited to know that the ice cream shop at the corner of Hyde and Union streets is the original Swensen's Creamery. It's a very residential area, with no real accommodations options.

Haight-Ashbury Bordered on the west by Golden Gate Park, on the north by Fulton Street, on the east by Divisadero Street, and by Waller Street to the south, gritty Haight-Ashbury has never fully put

the 1960s behind it. This isn't a complete bummer, by any means; the main drag, Haight Street, is filled with vintage clothes—much of it on hangers and for sale—as well as independently-owned stores that you won't see in your local indoor mall. The street is also action-packed, albeit with people looking for handouts, but it's historic, man. Although the wacky Red Victorian Bed & Breakfast is worth a visit, I wouldn't recommend families overnight there or at any of the other local bed and breakfasts. As I recall from my own visits to San Francisco in bygone years, teens feel a magnetic pull to this place. If you have some with you, definitely have lunch here on your way to or from Golden Gate Park.

Laurel Heights and Presidio Heights

In this small, upscale residential neighborhood centered around California Street between Presidio and Arguello streets, one could get the impression that a baby stroller is the price of admission. There are lots of them here, all filled with actual babies, and there are lots of stores catering to young families in the Laurel Village Shopping Center and on Sacramento Street just 1 block to the north. Come here to check out the delightful children's clothing stores, to do some grown-up shopping for home furnishings and fancy shoes, or to gawk at the large homes in Presidio Heights. Technically in the Presidio, but bordering Presidio Heights, is the Julius Kahn Park, with a fabulous playground and grassy fields. The one worthwhile family hotel here, the **Laurel Inn** (p. 98), is great for families who want to stay in a “real” neighborhood.

The Mission District Stretching from 16th Street to Cesar Chavez Street, between Dolores Street and Potrero Avenue, the predominately

Hispanic Mission District is lively, congested, and earthy. For tourists, Mission Dolores at 16th Street and lovely palm tree-lined Dolores Street are worth a visit if you're interested in historic San Francisco.

Dolores Park (p. 211), 2 blocks south, is a fine spot for views and a little Frisbee—but beware the unleashed dogs. The 24th Street corridor is a terrific market street for Latino food lovers, and Valencia and Guerrero streets between 16th and 23rd streets are brimming with hip little dining and drinking venues. The Mission has been redefining itself over the past decade. It's the heart of the Latino community, a little bit funky, a little bit hipper than thou—and it's frankly unsafe on certain blocks. Don't linger around the BART stations on 16th or 24th streets and don't hang around late at night unless you're with people who know the area. Do come for dinner, but make sure to take a cab back to your hotel. (Parking is nearly impossible here, so driving isn't recommended anyway.) The **Precita Eyes Mural Art Center** (p. 187) offers guided tours of Mission District murals and high points—a great way to gain some insight into the community.

The Castro A huge rainbow flag, the symbol of gay activism, reigns over the center of this historic community where Market Street meets Castro Street. There aren't many family-friendly hotels here, but you'll find many fun, well-priced restaurants in the area. The Castro Theater is handsome to look at and fun to attend, particularly if you can catch one of the legendary sing-along screenings of the *Sound of Music*. Otherwise, there's not much for children around here.

Noe Valley Over the past decade, families moved in droves into this hilly neighborhood south of the

Castro, transforming petite Victorians into stylishly remodeled homes. You'll find a number of shops and cafes on 24th Street between Diamond and Church streets and the playground at Douglass and 27th Street is delightful. The neighborhood is otherwise pretty quiet.

The Richmond District The largely residential Richmond District reaches from Arguello to the Pacific on the northern edge of Golden Gate Park. It's a bit out of the way to base yourself here, but there are some attractions that will appeal to visitors. The main drag, Geary Boulevard, boasts all kinds of Asian, Russian, and Middle Eastern restaurants and groceries. Clement Street is the other Chinatown, less dense but still filled with imports, small bakeries, and delicatessens. The **California Palace of the Legion of Honor** museum in Lincoln Park (p. 176), the **Cliff House** (p. 181), and **Land's End** (p. 184) all have Richmond District zip codes.

The Sunset District This is the city's other large residential area, on the southern side of Golden Gate Park. It borders Ocean Beach, which can be splendid on the few sunny days of summer. Just be wary of ocean currents, which are dangerous

at all times of year, and especially so in fall and winter. The **San Francisco Zoo** (p. 161) is the Sunset's main visitor attraction, followed by Stern Grove's summer Sunday concerts or a hike at **Fort Funston** (p. 184). If you happen to take the N-Judah streetcar to Golden Gate Park, you might want to browse the stores and restaurants along Irving Street and 9th Avenue. Like the Richmond, this isn't an area most people would choose to stay in because it's too far from downtown.

The Tenderloin The blocks enclosed by Sutter and Taylor streets and Van Ness and Golden Gate avenues, directly west of Union Square, are known as the Tenderloin. This is home to recent immigrants who are living alongside massage parlors, flophouses, bars, and individuals in various stages of deterioration doing what they can to hold on. It's rough. This is no place to roam in the evening, with or without children, so I don't recommend choosing a hotel in this neighborhood. The one haven very worth dropping by is **Glide Memorial Church** on O'Farrell and Jones Street. Sunday services there are eye-opening: a mix of old-fashioned sermonizing, rousing music, and a cross-section of residents.

2 Getting Around

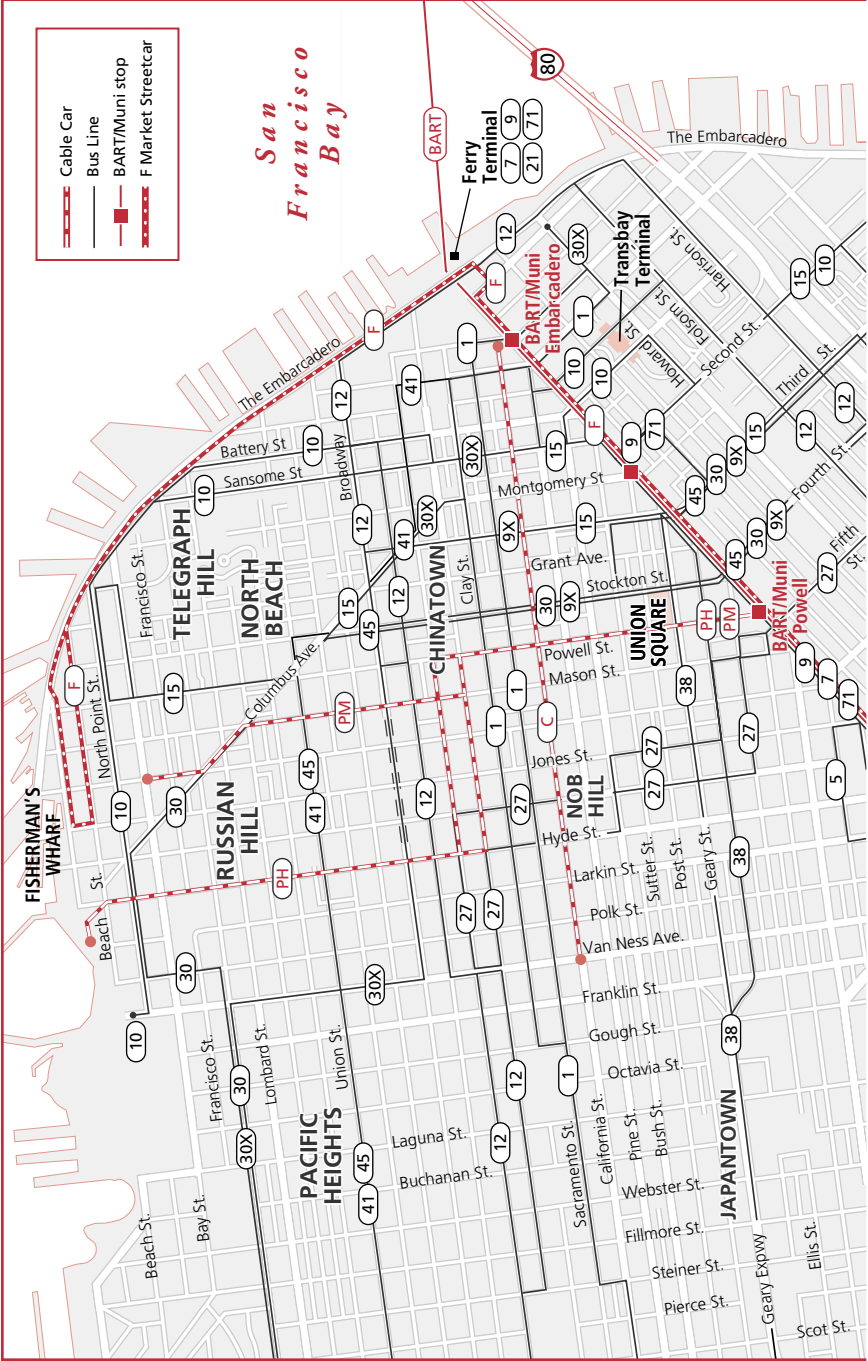
BY PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

San Francisco's Municipal Railway, known simply as "Muni" (☎ 415/673-6864), operates the city's buses, streetcars and cable cars. For detailed route information, call Muni or visit its website at www.sfmuni.com. Another helpful website is <http://transit.511.org>, which also lists schedules and route maps.

CITY BUSES & STREETCARS

Muni streetcars run underground exclusively from Van Ness Avenue to the Embarcadero and mostly aboveground in the outlying neighborhoods, from 6am until 1am. Five lines, the J, K, L, M, and N, make identical stops below Market Street, including Van Ness Avenue, Civic Center, Powell and Montgomery streets, and the Embarcadero. Past Van Ness Avenue the routes veer in different directions. The N-Judah services the Haight-Ashbury area and parallels Golden Gate Park on its way down Judah Street to the ocean. At the

San Francisco Mass Transit



Value Easy Riding: Ways to Save on Public Transportation

Muni passports can be a bargain for visitors who plan to take buses, streetcars, or cable cars often. A 1-day passport is \$9; a 3-day passport is \$15; and a 7-day passport is \$20. Kid and senior passports don't exist, but Muni sells monthly Youth/Discount Passes for \$10. Passports and \$2 Muni maps (a necessary item) can be purchased at the Visitor Information Center on Hallidie Plaza, at Tix Bay Area on Union Square, and at the baggage level information booths at SFO. Passes and passports can be found at the cable car ticket booths at Powell and Market or Beach and Hyde streets. Single-day passports are available on board the cable cars as well. For other outlets, check Muni's website at www.sfmuni.com.

Dedicated tourists should consider investing in **Citypass**, a booklet of discounted tickets to five major attractions, including the Museum of Modern Art, the Palace of the Legion of Honor, the California Academy of Sciences, the Exploratorium, and a Blue & Gold Bay Cruise or Alcatraz tour. Citypass also contains a 7-day Muni Passport, making this an attractive package if you can manage to visit all of the above. Citypass is \$40 for adults and \$31 for kids age 5 to 17. They can be purchased at the participating attractions, at the Visitors Information Center at Hallidie Plaza, or in advance from Blue & Gold Fleet Cruise (☎ 415/705-5555; www.citypass.com).

Embarcadero, this line also travels to Pac Bell Park by way of King Street near the Cal Train station. The J-Church line passes near Mission Dolores and the Castro on its way to Noe Valley and points south. The L-Taraval travels through the Sunset District within walking distance of the San Francisco Zoo.

The F-Market line was started up in 2000 and equipped with a collection of carefully restored vintage streetcars from around the United States and Europe. These charming old-timers run from the Castro all the way along Market Street to the Embarcadero and Fisherman's Wharf. A popular method to reach the Ferry building and the piers, these cars are packed during summer and on weekends.

Muni buses, many of which are connected to an overhead electrical system, run from 6am until midnight. Bus stops are indicated by street corner signs and yellow bands painted on utility poles and curbs. Muni has 80 lines, so you can probably get to where you'd like to go . . . eventually. This isn't exactly rapid transit.

Fares on buses and streetcars are \$1.25 for adults and 35¢ for children 5 to 17, seniors 65 and over, and disabled individuals. Kids under 5 ride free. Exact change is required. When you enter the front door and drop your fare into the fare box, the driver will hand you a paper transfer, valid for up to 2 hours of rides in any direction. Turnstiles inside the underground Muni stations accept only coins; change machines are located on the walls next to the BART ticket dispensers.

There is no simple way to handle strollers on either buses or streetcars, although, with the exception of the F-Market cars, streetcars are more spacious. If you are traveling with a baby, an easy-to-fold umbrella stroller will be the most practical piece of equipment. If you can manage with a baby front pack or backpack, you'll be even better off. Toddlers are another issue. Since you really will

need a stroller at some point during a walk, you'll have to practice releasing the closure and folding the stroller while holding the child at the same time. This is even more fun if you have more than one small child to deal with.

CABLE CARS

No visit to San Francisco would be complete without a ride on one of the cable cars. Three cable car routes traverse the downtown area. The most scenic is the Powell-Hyde line, starting off at Powell and Market and ending at the turnaround by Ghirardelli Square. Next is the Powell-Mason line, which also begins at Powell and Market and then meanders through North Beach, ending on the east side of Fisherman's Wharf. The third is the California Street line that leaves from Market and California, crests at Nob Hill, and ends abruptly at Van Ness Avenue. The queues to board the Powell Street cars at the turnarounds, at either end, can be daunting; but if you don't board there, you may not get on. Tickets are \$2 one-way, making those Muni passes look even better.

Cable cars run from 6:30am to 1:30am. To avoid standing in line, plan on traveling during off-peak hours. A great idea is to wake the family early and ride the cable car to a breakfast spot. Or take the cable car back to your hotel after dinner. Alternatively, you could head for the California Street cars, which are less popular because the route isn't as exciting, although the hill is quite steep. For more on the cable cars, see chapter 6.

BART

Please note: **Bay Area Rapid Transit** (BART; ☎ 415/989-2278) is not Muni. Both systems share the same underground stations downtown, but the similarities end there. BART tickets are not valid on Muni and vice versa. The sleek silver and blue BART trains travel along the Market Street corridor, then make stops on Mission Street (16th and 24th sts.), in Glen Park, and south in Colma and the San Francisco International Airport. Other lines head to Berkeley, Oakland and other East Bay cities. Purchase BART tickets from machines inside the stations. Fares to and from any point within San Francisco are \$1.25; outside the city they range up to \$5. For schedules and route information, call the number above or log on to the website www.bart.gov.

BY CAR

Driving in San Francisco can be frustrating, to say the least. If you are unfamiliar with the territory and your copilot has issues reading maps, your vacation could turn chilly (or very, very loud) from the moment you exit the motorway. Along with aggressive local drivers, one-way streets, no right/left turns when you really need one, and dead ends, there's a decided lack of parking and too many overanxious meter maids ready to pounce. Fortunately, it isn't necessary to drive to most of the places you'll want to go. When driving is imperative, you can easily rent a car for the day. For those of you who are arriving in the city by car, park at your hotel and do your best to use public transportation or walk.

Tips Mapping Out Your Visit

Let the kids help plan a city tour by Muni with the help of an official San Francisco Muni Street and Transit Map, which you can order by mail. Send a check or money order for \$2.50, made payable to S.F. City and County. Include your name and address and mail to: Muni Map, 1145 Market St., Floor 3, San Francisco, CA 94103-1547. Allow 2 weeks for delivery.

RENTAL CARS

There's no reason to rent a car at the airport only to park it in San Francisco while you tour on foot or by Muni. With a reservation, you can pick up a rental car in the city on the day you'll be using it. Most rental car companies will be delighted to pick you up and drop you off right at your hotel if necessary, but many have offices near Union Square.

Companies that have offices downtown include **Avis**, 675 Post St. (☎ 415/929-4555; www.avis.com); **Budget**, 321 Mason St. (☎ 415/928-7864; www.budget.com); **Enterprise**, 222 Mason St. (☎ 415/837-1700; www.enterprise.com); **Hertz**, 433 Mason St. (☎ 415/771-2200; www.hertz.com); and **Thrifty**, 520 Mason St. (☎ 415/788-6906; www.thrifty.com).

DRIVING RULES

California law requires that both drivers and passengers wear seat belts. Children up to age 6 or who weigh less than 60 pounds must use a car seat or booster seat. Cars may turn right on a red light (unless otherwise indicated) after making a complete stop and yielding to traffic and pedestrians. Also, make a complete stop at stop signs, not a rolling stop; our local traffic police love to write tickets for that seemingly innocuous offense. Cable cars and streetcars always have the right-of-way, as do pedestrians, whether or not they use intersections and crosswalks—although if they don't, they're at risk for a jaywalking ticket or worse. On Market Street, one lane is exclusively for buses. Avoid driving on Market Street anyway, because the way the lights are timed is infuriating, and you can't make a left turn anywhere. Pull over when using a cellphone.

PARKING

Park in a city-owned garage. They seem expensive, but not compared to the ticket you're going to get if you attempt to park on the street for any length of time. Legal street parking spaces do exist; they are next to unpainted curbs and usually are accompanied by meters. Yellow, white, green, and red curbs are all off limits; the exceptions are commercial zones (the yellow curbs), which are open to cars after delivery hours. Pay attention to the signs liberally posted on the streets. Be very aware of tow-away zones. You cannot park on most streets downtown between 4 and 6pm without running the risk of having your vehicle towed. And never park in front of a driveway. Otherwise, AutoReturn, an independent contractor for the City's towing services, may take your vehicle to its storage lot at 415 7th Street, between Harrison & Folsom streets. If you return to your parking space but your car isn't there, phone ☎ 415/553-1239 to see if it's been towed or merely stolen. It's likely been towed, and that means you get to visit City Tow to pay the fine and the storage charges. Such a misadventure will run you a minimum of \$170 (most forms of payment accepted).

Tips Feeding the Meters

Most city parking meters take nickels, dimes, and quarters, and have time limits of anywhere from 15 minutes to 4 hours. Meters that are green on top usually have 15 to 30-minute time limits. Even if you come back and put more quarters in the meter, overstaying the time limit can still be cause for a ticket. Check your tires to make sure a meter maid has not swiped them with chalk (usually in bright orange or blue).

Great Garages

When you approach a garage, read the signs carefully. You may see a sign offering a cheap all-day rate. In fact, that rate may apply only to cars that arrive early in the morning. After that, rates can be as high as \$3 every 15 minutes! The garage by PIER 39 advertises a \$6 flat rate in bold letters; impossibly small writing underneath explains that validation from one of PIER 39's overpriced restaurants is required. The best rates are at city-owned garages, many of which are listed here:

Union Square Garage, 333 Post St.; \$2/first hour, \$12/4 hours.

Sutter-Stockton Garage, 444 Stockton St. (Union Sq.); \$2/first hour, \$8/4 hours.

Ellis-O'Farrell Garage, 123 O'Farrell St. (Union Sq.); \$2/first hour, \$6/4 hours.

Fifth and Mission Garage, 833 Mission St. (SoMa); \$2/first hour, \$8/4 hours.

Portsmouth Square Garage, 733 Kearny St. at Clay (Chinatown); \$2/first hour, \$8/4 hours.

North Beach Garage, 735 Vallejo St. near Powell; \$2/first hour, \$8/4 hours.

BY TAXI

Hailing a cab on most city streets is a hit-or-miss proposition, but spotting a taxi downtown is easier, especially in front of hotels. When moving around with kids, it's probably best to phone (or have your hotel phone) a cab company because that's the only way to guarantee that you'll be retrieved. The major cab companies are **Desoto Cab** (☎ 415/970-1300), **Luxor Cabs** (☎ 415/282-4141), **Pacific Cab** (☎ 415/986-7220), **Veteran's Cab** (☎ 415/552-1300), and **Yellow Cab** (☎ 415/626-2345).

Rates are around \$2.85 for the first mile and \$2.25 for each additional mile. If you take a cab from the airport to downtown, a \$2 San Francisco Airport exit fee is added to the fare. The approximate fare from the airport is \$25 to \$37, depending where you're staying. According to one of the companies I contacted, taxis are not required to provide infant or child car seats. If you hire a town car (for example, to bring you and your kids from the airport), they should be able to provide one, but be sure to ask when you make your reservation.

3 Planning Your Outings

Successful touring with kids requires preplanning or an extremely mellow attitude, and preferably both. (In fact, an extremely mellow attitude is as important as a warm jacket.) Deciding beforehand, even the night before, what you'd like to do each day is much preferable to winging it. Otherwise, you're going to waste time debating whether to go to Fisherman's Wharf or the zoo or Chinatown and not be prepared for any of them. Before you arrive in San Francisco, spend some time with the kids talking about all the activities and attractions the city has to offer and make a list that includes some adult-oriented sites and some kid-oriented ones.

Tips San Francisco Parking Secrets

- Purchase a roll of quarters for the meters and keep them in the glove compartment so you can take advantage of any street spaces you're lucky enough to encounter.
- Between 4 and 6pm parking is prohibited on major crosstown roads and pretty much anywhere downtown. Start cruising the Financial District, Union Square, Nob Hill, or SoMa about 10 minutes before 6pm and get ready to pounce on the space of your choice.
- Take the first parking spot that's within walking distance of your destination. (And by walking distance I don't mean two doors down; I mean more like 4 blocks.)
- Street parking spaces are usually spoken for before they are actually available. Watch for people walking towards cars with keys in hand and for brake lights turning on. Wait for the space to open up and take it.
- Pay close attention to street signs. In some neighborhoods, parking for non-residents (those without a city-issued sticker on their bumper) is limited to 1 or 2 hours.
- If parking places suddenly seem widely available, check the signs. It may be street sweeping time. Meter maids parade along the street writing \$35 tickets just before the sweepers show up. Once the machines have rumbled by, you can safely park.
- Curb your car's wheels when parking on a hill: turn them toward the curb when facing downhill and away from the curb when parking uphill. Although this won't actually contribute to your finding a parking place, it will help you retain any that you have found. It will also keep you from getting a ticket.
- Be grateful for parking garages and use them. City-owned garages are cheaper than privately owned ones.
- Sometimes, the old parking karma just isn't working. If valet parking is available, take it. It's worth it to avoid a headache.

Make a family calendar, but don't overschedule; one outing in the morning and one in the afternoon is enough, because playing tourist can be exhausting. Once you've all had some input into deciding where to go and what to do, give everyone old enough to carry a backpack a copy of the itinerary. That way, if someone starts to whine about going to their chosen attraction, you can point to the calendar and remind them that their time will come. This advice is good no matter what ages your kids are, assuming that they are old enough to state an opinion.

Getting around the city with your children should be hassle free, for the most part. The one exception is if it's necessary to cart around baby paraphernalia such as strollers and diaper bags because it's difficult to get on and off buses when your hands are full and the bus is crowded. In this case, you'll want to plan your itinerary to decrease your dependence on public transportation and walk as much as possible, or take advantage of the wider entrances and exits on Muni

streetcars. Again, for families with kids of any age, always factor in extra time to get around—even if you are driving, since there's a good chance you'll either get lost or spend 20 minutes looking for parking. Our buses are slow; in addition to the scheduled stops, there's traffic to deal with and the occasional breakdown. The streetcars are a little better time-wise, but can be crowded. Remember, in a new destination, part of the pleasure really is in the journey itself. That's certainly the case in San Francisco.

TOP NEIGHBORHOODS FOR FAMILY OUTINGS

UNION SQUARE

Although few obvious children's attractions exist in what is first and foremost a shopping paradise, Union Square is the psychological heart of the city and should be considered as a launching pad for other excursions. Kids may find the crowds, clanging cable cars, and big buildings exciting. Moreover, Union Square itself now hosts entertainment, both ad hoc and planned. In the winter months, the plaza's enormous Christmas tree and Macy's holiday decorations are especially festive. Specifically kid-friendly activities here include riding the glass elevator at the St. Francis Hotel, greeting the beefeater-clad doorman at the Sir Francis Drake, and visiting the Disney Store. Teens may enjoy checking out the Levi's and Diesel stores, among other shops.

When Nature Calls: The ladies lounge at Neiman Marcus has one of the better bathrooms in town and is the best indoor place to nurse your baby. Macy's also has several restrooms. The big hotels are also great for bathroom breaks.

SOUTH OF MARKET (SOMA)

The walk from Union Square east to the SoMa neighborhood takes maybe 5 minutes and brings you into an amazing cultural zone. The Yerba Buena Gardens, the Metreon, the Cartoon Art Museum, SFMOMA (the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art), and the California Academy of Sciences can all be reached on foot and can certainly make up a full day's program. Families with determined teens may want to tour the San Francisco Shopping Centre at 5th and Market streets as well.

When Nature Calls: Nordstrom's department store in the San Francisco Centre is the best rest stop, especially for nursing moms. The W Hotel (p. 88) is also a classy place to freshen up, and the Metreon (p. 162) is well equipped with toilets.

CHINATOWN

North of Union Square, a short walk up Grant Street, is the entrance to Chinatown. The draw here for you and yours is the sights and sounds of a community that is steeped in local history but which preserves its unique foreign culture. Possible stops include the playgrounds at St. Mary's Square or Portsmouth Square, the Chinese Cultural Center, the Canton Bazaar, the Golden Gate Fortune Cookie Company, and lunch.

When Nature Calls: Local merchants probably will not let you to use their bathrooms (few shopkeepers will in any neighborhood), so in an emergency make your way to the Chinatown Holiday Inn across from Portsmouth Square on Kearny Street. Remind everyone to use the toilet after lunch if you are eating at a restaurant. Nursing moms can feel free to feed their babies on a park bench here or anywhere in town, really. Just throw a blanket over your shoulder and chest for a little privacy.

Tips Enjoying Fisherman's Wharf

Fisherman's Wharf is on the water, of course. That often means fog, or at least a cool breeze. So bring sweaters. If you plan to take the ferry to Alcatraz, bring jackets as well. Schedule rest/play periods to help avoid meltdowns and consider packing snacks—the food in this area can be crummy and expensive.

FISHERMAN'S WHARF

Children could easily be entertained here for an entire day. For a more tranquil visit, hang out on the Ghirardelli side, where kids can climb aboard the Hyde Street Pier boats, frolic at the Aquatic Park beach, and listen to music in the Cannery courtyard. For a healthy dose of over-stimulation, walk east to see PIER 39's sea lions, the Aquarium of the Bay, and the Musée Mécanique, and to catch the ferries to Alcatraz. Two scenic public transportation options from Union Square are the Powell-Hyde cable car or the F-Market streetcar.

When Nature Calls: The best public restroom here is on the Hyde Street Pier. Public bathrooms are also located in the Cannery, at Ghirardelli, and on PIER 39. Nursing moms will have to grab a blanket and a bench. Try the Cannery courtyard or the east side of PIER 39.

GOLDEN GATE PARK

The 1000-plus acres making up this urban oasis are filled with activities that will excite both children and their parents. Kids will love the Children's Playground, carousel, Japanese Tea Garden, and Stow Lake, and adults can admire Strybing Arboretum and the beautifully restored Conservatory of Flowers. It's easy to get to the park using public transportation, but kids may tire of the walk to reach the various attractions within it. A rest stop at one of the cafes or restaurants on 9th Avenue may help. Although the California Academy of Sciences will be at its temporary SoMa home until 2008, the park's highly anticipated MH de Young Museum is slated to open in the fall of 2005.

When Nature Calls: Public restrooms are available near the Children's Playground, Stow Lake, and the Conservatory of Flowers. Nursing moms can head for the Arboretum.

FAST FACTS: San Francisco

American Automobile Association (AAA) The office at 150 Van Ness Ave. provides maps and other information for members. Call ☎ 800/222-4357 for emergency roadside service or ☎ 415/565-2012 for general information.

American Express For traveler's checks, travel information, and member services visit the office at 455 Market St., at 1st Street (☎ 415/536-2600). Open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5:30pm, Saturday from 10am to 2pm.

Area Codes Local area codes are 415 for San Francisco, 650 for San Mateo County, and 510 for Oakland and Berkeley.

ATM Networks You'll practically trip over ATMs in the Financial District and on Market Street. Try to avoid using them after dark.

Babysitters Most hotel concierge will simply provide referrals to a babysitting service, which guests must then call on their own. Three recommended local companies supply short-term sitters: **American Child Care Service** (☎ 415/285-2300; www.americanchildcare.com), **Bay Area 2nd Mom** (☎ 888/926-3666; www.2ndmom.com), and **Town & Country Resources** (☎ 800/398-8810 or 415/567-0956; www.tandcr.com). All advertise that their nannies are thoroughly screened and trained, and all have 4-hour minimums. Hourly fees range from \$14 to \$25. For \$100 per child, you can give them a memorable night out through the **Explorer's Club** (☎ 415/902-7014; www.eckidsclub.com), a tour company catering to kids (see p. 185 for a full review).

Business Hours Most retail stores open at 10am and close at 6pm. Many have extended hours on Thursday and Friday nights. Department stores are also open on Sundays from noon until 5pm.

Camera Repair Discount Camera at 33 Kearny St. near Union Square (☎ 415/392-1100) is a terrific resource for equipment and repairs.

Car Rentals See "Getting Around," earlier in this chapter.

Climate See "When to Go," in chapter 2.

Dentists Call the **San Francisco Dental Society** for 24-hour referrals (☎ 415/928-7337). The **San Francisco Dental Office**, 131 Steuart St. (☎ 415/777-5115), offers emergency service and comprehensive dental care Monday, Tuesday, and Friday from 8am to 4:30pm, Wednesday and Thursday from 10:30am to 6:30pm.

Doctors **St. Francis Memorial Hospital**, 900 Hyde St., between Bush and Pine streets (☎ 415/353-6000), offers 24-hour emergency care. The hospital's physician-referral service number is ☎ 800/333-1355. Your hotel can also contact on-call doctors who make house calls.

Driving Rules See "Getting Around," earlier in this chapter.

Earthquakes California gets them, but you most likely won't experience the real thing firsthand. Just in case, you should know a few basic precautionary measures. When you're inside a building, seek cover; do not run outside. Stand under a doorway or against a wall, or get under a sturdy table, and stay away from windows. When you exit a building after a substantial quake, use stairwells, not elevators. If you are in a car, pull over to the shoulder and stop—but not until you are away from bridges, overpasses, telephone poles, and power lines. Stay in your car. If you are outside walking, stay away from trees, power lines, and the sides of buildings. If you are in an area with tall buildings, find a doorway in which to stand. Above all, do not panic and frighten your children. Earthquakes end quickly.

Embassies & Consulates See the appendix, "For International Visitors."

Emergencies Dial 911 for police, fire, or medical emergencies.

Hospitals **San Francisco General Hospital**, 1001 Potrero Ave. (☎ 415/206-8000), accepts uninsured emergency patients, but the wait can be brutally long and uncomfortable.

Hot Lines The following hot lines are available in San Francisco: **Poison Control Center** ☎ 800/876-4766, **Rape Crisis Center** ☎ 415/647-7273, **Family Service Agency** ☎ 415/474-7310.

Information The **San Francisco Visitors Information Center** is in the lower level of Hallidie Plaza, 900 Market St., at Powell Street (☎ 415/391-2000).

Internet Access Perhaps because everyone already has a computer here, San Francisco has few Internet cafes. The closest one to Union Square is **Cafe.com**, 120 Mason St. near Eddy Street (☎ 415/433-4001), open Monday through Saturday. Other options, without the ambience, include **Copy Central**, 110 Sutter St. at Montgomery Street (☎ 415/392-6470), and **Kinko's**, 1967 Market St., near Gough (☎ 415-252-0864). If you are staying in the Marina, the closest Kinko's is on 3225 Fillmore St. near Lombard Street (☎ 415/441-2995). The **Main Library**, 100 Larkin St. at McAllister Street (☎ 415/557-4400), also has a number of terminals you can use for free. If you have your own computer, several places offer wireless Internet access, including some hotel lobbies and cafes like the **Grove**, with locations on Chestnut Street and Fillmore Street (p. 132).

Liquor Laws No one under 21 can drink or purchase alcohol legally in California. All clubs, bars, supermarkets, and liquor stores check the identification of anyone who appears younger than 30. Alcohol is sold 7 days a week at supermarkets, corner stores, and wine shops between the hours of 6am and 2am. Bars do not serve liquor past 2am.

Maps The best city map I've seen and used is the **San Francisco Transit Rider Map and Guide**, published by Great Pacific Recreation and Travel Maps (www.greatpacificmaps.com). Order a copy from the company's website or buy one at the Visitors Information Center. AAA is an excellent source of maps, free to members.

Newspapers & Magazines The major papers are the morning *San Francisco Chronicle* and the afternoon *San Francisco Examiner*. They are distributed from sidewalk kiosks and boxes. The free weekly *San Francisco Bay Guardian* is the best source of events listings. Find a copy in cafes and in sidewalk newspaper boxes around the city. *San Francisco* and 7x7 magazines are the monthly city glossies at newsstands everywhere.

Pets All the hotels in the Kimpton chain (such as the Monaco, Serrano, and Argonaut) accept dogs and cats, as do some upscale properties like the Ritz-Carlton. Other hotels, such as the Nikko, limit pets to dogs. Dogs must be leashed in most city parks, and you must pick up after them.

Pharmacies **Walgreens**, the Starbucks of drugstores, has stores just about everywhere. Phone ☎ 800/WALGREEN for the address and phone number of the nearest store. Around Union Square, Walgreen's is at 135 Powell St. (☎ 415/391-4433), open Monday through Saturday from 8am to midnight and Sunday from 9am to 9pm, but the pharmacy has more limited hours. Branches at Divisadero Street (at Lombard Street) and Castro (at 18th Street) have 24-hour pharmacies.

Police The emergency number is ☎ 911. Call from any phone (no coins are needed from pay phones). The non-emergency number is ☎ 415/553-0123.

Radio Stations Find our National Public Radio affiliate, KQED, at 88.5 FM. News and sports may be found at KCBS 710 AM.

Reservation Services For hotel reservations, call **SF Reservations**, ☎ 800/677-1500 or 510/628-4450; www.hotelres.com.

Restrooms Dark green public lavatories are located by Union Square on Geary Street, on the waterfront at PIER 39, on Market Street near the cable car turnaround, on Powell Street, and at the Civic Center, among other locations. They cost 25¢ and are clean and safe. Also try hotels, museums, department stores, and service stations. Most restaurants reserve their facilities for patrons only.

Safety See "Health, Insurance & Safety," in Chapter 2.

Smoking California law prohibits smoking in public buildings, restaurants, and bars. Many hotels are completely nonsmoking, and others have limited floors for smokers. Inquire when you phone for reservations.

Taxes Sales tax of 8.5% is added to all purchases. The hotel tax is 14%.

Taxis See "Getting Around," earlier in this chapter.

Telephones For directory assistance, dial ☎ 411. Pay phones (which are getting difficult to find) cost 35¢ to 50¢ for local calls.

Time Zone California is on Pacific Standard Time, 3 hours behind New York and 8 hours behind London.

Useful Telephone Numbers For transit information, phone ☎ 415/817-1717.

Family-Friendly Accommodations

Families seeking a place to hang their hats will find plenty of options in San Francisco. In addition to several internationally recognized hotel chains, the city boasts an outstanding collection of smaller hotels in every price category. Companies like Kimpton Hotels and Joie de Vivre Hospitality have transformed a number of historic buildings (and even some lowly motels) into luxurious boutique inns, delightful mid-priced hotels, and inexpensive, but festive, family accommodations.

Although downtown hotels rely mainly on convention and business travelers to fill rooms, they are becoming increasingly kid-friendly—especially as it becomes more popular to take family along on work trips. Many higher-end hotels offer kids' gift packs at check-in, and concierges provide information on child-oriented activities in town. Several hotel restaurants also feature kids' menus. Moreover, nearly all city hotels allow children to stay free in parents' rooms and provide cribs at no charge.

Because many hotels in the city center are housed in older buildings, guestrooms are often small and interconnecting rooms not an option. At remodel time, some of these hotels

have expanded bathroom counter space and made other efforts to better accommodate families, but be prepared for cozy quarters nonetheless, particularly in more moderately priced accommodations. The most family-oriented hotels are in Fisherman's Wharf and the Marina, but most of them lack the charm of the downtown hotels. There are a few notable exceptions, which I've listed in this chapter.

Do consider some of the more unique hotels San Francisco has to offer. The selection of boutique hotels is quite inspiring. For those who prefer the known comforts of bigger hotel chains, not to worry: I've included a considerable selection of those as well.

When choosing a part of town in which to stay, think about family members' special needs or interests. Perhaps a little one takes a mid-day nap, so a central location would be best. If you've got active young children, you may appreciate the playgrounds within walking distance of Marina or Nob Hill hotels. Teens may prefer Union Square or SoMa for proximity to shopping and the Sony Metreon. If your family's main interests are classic attractions like Alcatraz and Ghirardelli Square, Fisherman's Wharf could be the place (although

Tips Rubber Ducky Not Included

Most hotel bathrooms have combination shower/bathtubs, but lower priced accommodations may have only showers. If your kids are still in the tub-only phase, ask about bathtubs when making your reservation.

 Tips Reservation Tips

Many hotels will provide you with a booking reference number. Upon request, hotels will send you written confirmation of your reservation by either fax, e-mail, or snail mail. Keep this paperwork handy, as it will be helpful if you decide to modify your plans at all. If you do cancel a reservation, request a cancellation number. This is very important, especially if you made your reservation with a credit card.

the heavy concentration of tourists has its drawbacks, such as overpriced, mediocre food). I've briefly described the merits of each neighborhood in terms of lodging in this chapter, but you can also refer to the "Neighborhoods in Brief" section of Chapter 3.

To get the most bang for your buck at any price point, timing helps. If you can be flexible with your dates, you may benefit from reduced hotel rates. Downtown hotels are cheapest on weekends, whereas the opposite is often true in the Marina and Fisherman's Wharf. During conventions, Union Square and SoMa hotel rates jump, but you could luck out if a hotel hasn't managed to sell all of its rooms. It may be willing to offer steep discounts.

Whereas downtown hotel prices don't vary much with the seasons, Marina and Fisherman's Wharf rates climb in the summer. Given the summertime fog, the price increase has less to do with the best time to visit San Francisco than with when most families take their vacations. If you buck the trend and come in the late winter, you'll save money.

The cheapest rooming option is usually one room with two queen beds. With little ones, that could mean lights out well before mom and dad are ready to pack it in. If that's the case, or if you've got older kids who need their space, the next best option is a suite, which tends to run cheaper than two interconnecting rooms. Just be alert: some hotels throw a pullout sofa into

an extra-big room and call it a suite. If you want separate rooms, make sure that's what you're getting.

Finally, if you are planning a longer visit, you may want to consider bucking the hotel options altogether and lodge in a house or apartment. Agencies offer furnished apartments for stays as brief as 4 nights, and some Internet sites offer home exchanges with families in other cities and countries. I've listed some of these agencies and sites below.

RESERVATION SERVICES San Francisco Reservations ((C) 800/677-1500 or 510/628-4450; www.hotelres.com) is a Bay Area company with a local call center. This is a no-fee service with access to 300 hotels in the Bay Area, a well designed website, and accurate descriptions. Online resources for good rates include www.placestostay.com and www.hotels.com. For bed-and-breakfast reservations, try Bed & Breakfast Inns Online ((C) 615/868-1946; www.bbonline.com).

American Marketing Systems (www.amsires.com) and **Executive Suites** (www.executivesuites-sf.com) offer furnished apartment rentals for stays of a few days or more, although rates can be high. To research house exchanges, check out **Homelink International** (www.homelink.org), which has over 14,000 listings in several countries, and **Homebase Holidays** (www.homebase-hols.com).

A NOTE ON PRICES Please note that I have listed "rack rates"—a hotel's highest room price and the one

they prefer to see in print—in categorizing my hotel picks. You will probably get a much better quote when you call over the phone. Although occupancy rates have been steadily increasing over the last few years, they are still recovering from a slump in 2001. Weekend discounts, family packages, and other promotions are not unknown. In this chapter, I've classified hotels based on cost for a family of four staying in one room, unless a specific hotel has space constraints that require staying in a suite or two connecting rooms. An **Inexpensive** rating means the family can stay for \$150 per night or less; **Moderate** means a bill of \$150 to \$225; **Expensive** is \$225 to \$300; and **Very Expensive** is over \$300 a night. This does not include the 14% hotel tax, nor does it include parking, which can run from free to \$50 a night.

GETTING THE BEST RATE

Despite the slow rise in average hotel room prices (\$143 for the first half of 2004 over \$138 for the previous year) and average occupancy rates (they are now at 70%), every moderate and high-end hotel I visited insisted guests can almost certainly book rooms at rates well below the published rack rates.

The first step to doing so is checking multiple sources. Surf the Internet first and then call both the central reservations number, if there is one, and in-house reservations. Find which source has the best deal. Many hotels will not only match a rate you may have found on the Internet; in some cases, they will beat it.

It's important that you check with in-house reservations. I've had three different websites indicate a hotel was booked only to call the hotel directly and find that it had one room left (a suite, which didn't fit into the Internet's standard room category) that it was willing to rent for a steal. Moreover, folks in-house will be able to provide you the most detailed information about the hotel and the specific room type you may be interested in. You can also tell the hotel agent that you are traveling with children and inquire about special offers they may have.

As your arrival date nears, inquire again if any special deals have come up. At check-in, don't hesitate to ask if you can upgrade to a bigger room or a higher floor. If the hotel has no hope of selling these better rooms for the next few nights, they may be willing to upgrade you at no additional charge.

KITCHENETTES Kitchenettes are a rarity in San Francisco, and I've noted nearly all that are available. Reserve for them well in advance.

POOLS Some kids will be happy anywhere you take them as long as there's a pool. But given San Francisco real estate prices, few hotels devote precious space to swimming facilities, and most of the pools that do exist are petite. Almost all the San Francisco hotels with pools are listed in this chapter.

ACCESSIBILITY The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that hotels built within the past 20 years be handicapped-friendly. However, San

Tips Meals on a Budget

Having breakfast in your hotel room cuts back on restaurant bills. Also, some kids wake up at the crack of dawn when in new surroundings or time zones, well before any cafes are open. If you can't get a kitchenette, a fridge (and a coffeemaker for mom and dad) will do. If they're not already in your room, many hotels will provide these at no charge. Buy some paper plates and plastic cutlery and you're all set.

Tips The Corner Room

Don't forget to ask if the hotel has a corner room. In some instances, the corner room has more light (windows on two walls) and more space than a standard room, but costs the same.

San Francisco hotels are often located in older buildings that are exempt from this rule. If you or anyone in your family requires appropriately designed

hotel rooms, look for a property that's been remodeled recently or built after 1985. Discuss your needs with the reservations clerk.

1 Union Square/Financial District

This is the heart of the city, the focal point for shopping and entertainment. It's exciting, urban, and uniquely San Franciscan—and it's where you'll find the greatest range of accommodations. The downside for some families is the congestion and lack of greenery.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Hotel Nikko ★ Although this Eastern-influenced hotel caters largely to corporate travelers, I include it because it holds one of the few, and one of the most spacious, indoor swimming pools in the city. The pool is connected to the Nikko's health club, but the staff insists guests tend to exercise in the early morning and evening, which means the rest of the day children can splash around freely. The pool is located in an expansive glass-roofed atrium, which also houses exercise equipment and Japanese hot tubs, so you can work out or enjoy a soak while you keep on eye on the kids.

Decor is tastefully understated, and rooms get a lot of natural sunlight. With a pullout sofa and "guest washroom," the Nikko's junior suites are quite family-friendly. Even standard double/double rooms are large and have entryways that give the impression of more space. Views start above the 10th floor. Rooms on the three executive-level "Nikko Floors" also have vanities and more spacious bathrooms, and the Nikko Lounge offers board games and Internet access, so your teenagers can still IM their pals at home. The Nikko welcomes all pets. (Just be sure to inform the hotel if you plan to leave a Great Dane in your room for the day, so they can alert the housekeeping staff!) The white marble lobby is stark, but kids will enjoy the indoor fountain, which has become a multi-currency wishing well. The hotel also houses the excellent Anzu restaurant (children's menu available) and a well-regarded sushi bar.

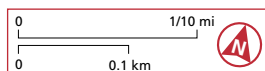
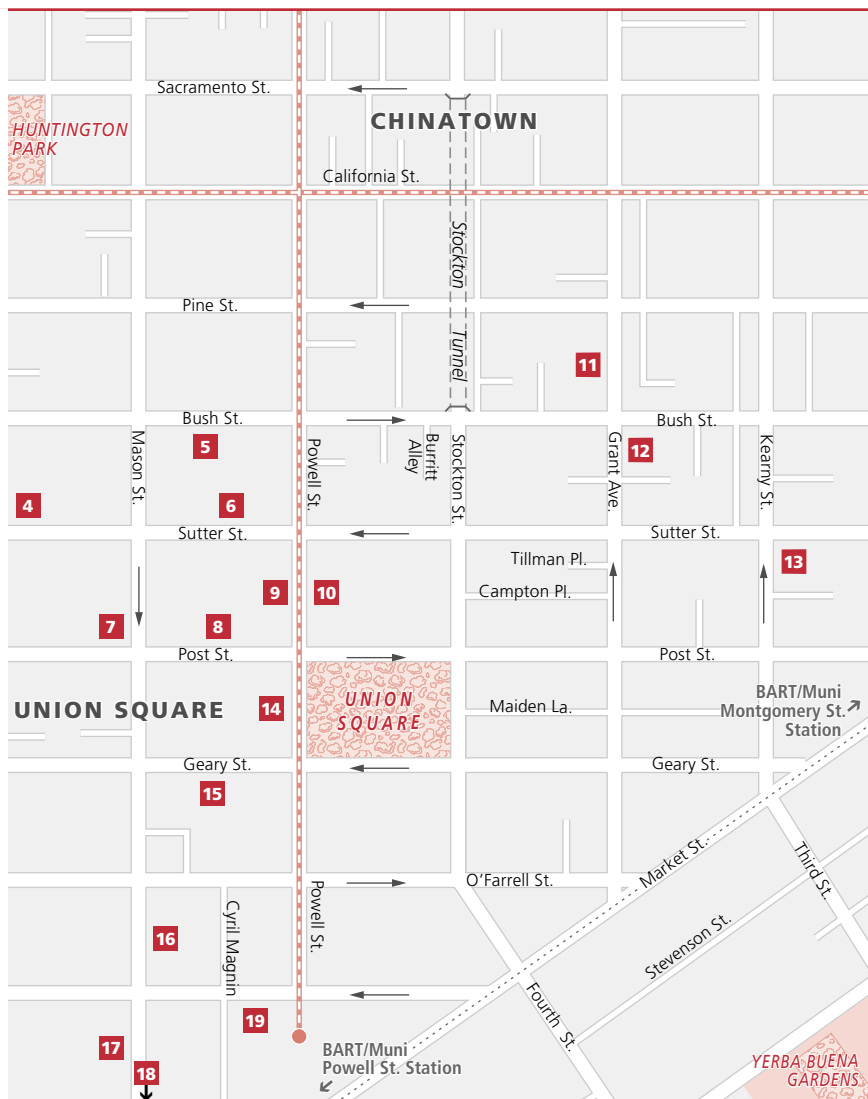
222 Mason St. (between Ellis and O'Farrell sts.), San Francisco 94102. ☎ 415/394-1111. Fax 415/421-0455. www.hotelnikkosf.com. 532 units. \$139–\$350 double; \$500–\$550 suite. Kids under 18 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways and cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$39; oversized vehicles \$44. Pets welcome. **Amenities:** Restaurant; pool; health club; concierge; business center; salon; gift shop; room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; executive level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, CD player, fax, high-speed Internet access, minibar, fridge on request, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Choosing a Neighborhood

Read the "Neighborhoods in Brief" section, in chapter 3, to help you decide which neighborhood to base yourself in.

Accommodations Near Union Square, the Financial District & Chinatown





- BART/Muni
- Cable Car
- ← One Way

Taking the Night Off

See “Fast Facts,” in chapter 3, for information on hiring babysitters. When a hotel says it provides babysitting, it really means it has a list of recommended agencies that provide bonded, screened caregivers. It’s up to you to make the arrangements, which ideally should be done in advance.

Pan Pacific Hotel ★★☆☆ Part of a chain of upscale hotels based in the Far East, this is the hotel’s only property on the U.S. mainland. Its reputation for service is flawless, so I shouldn’t have been surprised to discover that the staff puts some real thought into engaging the kids. Stop at the concierge desk as soon as you can to ask for a delightful coloring booklet featuring line drawings of famous San Francisco sites. They’ll put anyone in the mood to sightsee. Even better is the hotel’s special passport for kids. The concierge takes an ID-style photo of the child, pastes it into a small booklet, and will stamp a “visa” inside when your child comes back to report on the day’s activities. The “visa” stamps include the Golden Gate Bridge, a cable car, and even a buffalo for those who spot these elusive beasts in Golden Gate Park. I can’t think of a nicer keepsake that won’t take up luggage space.

As for the facilities, they are somewhat imposing. Built around an atrium, glass-fronted elevators whiz guests to the third-floor lobby and beyond. All the rooms have a good amount of square footage and muted, swanky furnishings, as well as large LCD televisions. The lovely marble bathrooms have deep-soaking tubs. Suites are enormous and could accommodate large families if configured with two doubles and one king bed. Rooms above the 17th floor have the best views.

500 Post St. (at Mason St.), San Francisco, CA 94102. ☎ 800/327-8585 or 415/771-8600. Fax 415/398-0267. www.panpacific.com. 338 units. \$360–\$420 double; from \$670 suite. Kids under 18 stay free in parent’s room. Rollaways and cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$39. **Amenities:** Restaurant; fitness center; concierge; business center; room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed internet access, minibar, fridge, hair dryer, iron, safe.

EXPENSIVE

Galleria Park Hotel ★☆☆ Closer to the financial district than other hotels in the Union Square vicinity, this small, luxury property is quieter at night than many of its downtown counterparts. Setting it apart from its competitors are a unique rooftop jogging track/garden that offers an out-of-the-way spot to let off some steam and an easy-access parking garage underneath the hotel. If you have a car and need it quickly, the valet won’t have to hike a few blocks to fetch it. Also appealing is the hotel’s proximity to the Galleria Shopping Center next door, which has a very respectable food court.

The building was originally constructed in 1911, so rooms and bathrooms are small to moderate in size. They have been renovated in the past few years and are comfortable, conservatively decorated, and pleasing. Double/doubles are going to be cozy, but weekend and winter rates are low enough that you could aim for two connecting rooms. Suites are certainly another option. The king-bedded one-bedroom suites have separate living rooms with a pullout sofa. It’s not large enough to add a crib or rollaway, however. The lobby area retains an old-fashioned charm and the staff, especially the concierge, is well-trained and friendly. Enjoy free coffee/tea in the morning and a wine reception in the evening.

191 Sutter St. (at Kearny St.), San Francisco, CA 94104. ☎ 800/792-9639 or 415/781-3060. Fax 415/433-4409. www.galleriapark.com. 177 units. \$179–\$299 double; \$309–\$429 suite. Kids under 16 stay

Making the Most of the Concierge

Nearly all upscale hotels have concierges, and many smaller inns offer concierge services from the front desk. Too often, these people go underutilized by guests who don't know the full range of services concierges can provide. Beyond merely giving directions to Fisherman's Wharf, concierges are there to act as guests' problem solvers. The best ones take real pleasure in helping, and the more challenging the request, the better. When you're on vacation, why not truly relax, and let the concierge be your personal assistant during your stay?

House Cars: Upper-end hotels often have house cars available to drop off guests in the Financial District or elsewhere within 5 miles of the hotel. Businesspeople use the service most, but any guest can enjoy this perk. If you want to take the kids to SBC Park to watch some baseball, or you need a ride to a restaurant, request a house car through the concierge desk. There's usually no charge, but you may tip the driver at your discretion.

Restaurants: Every concierge will make dinner reservations for guests, and I recommend having the concierge phone ahead no matter where you are dining. If a restaurant is booked, the concierge may have more pull squeezing you in than you would on your own. But don't ask the concierge for any old restaurant recommendation. (I've been to some unremarkable, touristy places that way.) It's more effective to name two or three options and have the concierge tell you more about each one.

Other Services: You needn't limit requests to restaurant reservations. Concierges can also book Alcatraz or other cruises, car rentals, or even spa treatments—whatever requires a phone call. They can buy tickets to a sporting or entertainment venue or amend airline reservations.

Solutions: Did a child get sick? Head right to the concierge, who will make it a personal mission to ensure your kid is seen by a doctor as soon as possible. Concierges will also oblige less urgent requests, like reserving doggy day care or finding a last minute gift. You don't even have to be checked into the hotel. You can fax and e-mail the concierge with your arrival date and particular request. If he or she does go beyond the call of duty, gratuities are always appreciated—although never expected.

free in parent's room. Rollaways \$10, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$32. **Amenities:** Restaurant; exercise room; concierge; room service (limited hours); babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, fridge, hair dryer, iron.

Hotel Monaco ★★ A star in the illustrious hotel chain founded by entrepreneur Bill Kimpton, this refurbished 1910 landmark is a refreshing change from other high-end hotels. The Art Deco decor in the impressive lobby is vibrant and festive, and sure to please any child who sees it. Kids will also love the freshly baked cookies at the front desk and the pet goldfish that keeps them company in their hotel room (on request). This property is so pet-friendly it offers special packages for pooches, and guests actually check in with dogs more regularly than with children.

The vividly designed rooms and bathrooms are larger than those at the Serrano down the block; the doubles here are just spacious enough for a crib. Suites come with a very large bathroom, sofa bed in the living room, a VCR, and two televisions.

Parents will like the complimentary wine and cheese reception in the lobby daily at 5pm. Dining options include the Grand Café (p. 105), inside a beautifully restored turn-of-the-20th-century ballroom. Simpler fare and a menu more suited for kids are found in the adjacent Petite Café. Adults can take turns pretending they're at a resort at the newly renovated spa and health club on the bottom floor. If you're flying, check to see if the house car is available to take you to the airport; the cost is about the same as a taxi.

501 Geary St. (at Taylor St.), San Francisco, CA 94102. ☎ 800/214-4220 or 415/292-0100. Fax 415/292-0111. www.monaco-sf.com. 201 units. \$179–\$399 double; \$219–\$489 suite. Kids under 18 stay free in parent's room. No rollaways, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$35. Pets welcome. **Amenities:** Restaurant; health club/spa/exercise room; concierge; courtesy car; room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV with movies, video games, high-speed Internet access, CD player, minibar, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Hotel Triton ★★ You'll score big points with your pre-teens or teenagers at this rock n' roll-themed boutique hotel. Staffed by creative types wearing studded leather belts or hipster outfits, this may be the zaniest property in the colorful Kimpton chain. The fantastical lobby decor is rivaled only by the groovy tunes spun by the hotel staff, and suites have been designed by the likes of Carlos Santana, Jerry Garcia, and Woody Harrelson. Moreover, the hotel is expanding its seventh-floor "eco" concept—with biodegradable soaps, organic cotton sheets, and filtered air and water—to the entire hotel. Coffee and biscotti are served lobby-side in the morning, and a DJ often provides music for the free wine and beer hour in the evening.

Of course there's a catch: the whimsical rooms and bathrooms are teensy. Because interconnecting rooms are not available, families have the choice of occupying two separate rooms, squeezing into a double/double, or reserving a suite. Although kids may love to stay in the Red Hot Chili Peppers suite, be aware that most suites are actually one-room studios with a king bed and a queen-size sleeper sofa. Of course, the diminutive size may be worth it if your child is fortunate enough to share an elevator ride with one of the many bands that often stay at the hotel.

342 Grant Ave. (at Bush St.), San Francisco, CA 94108. ☎ 800/433-6611 or 415/394-0500. Fax 415/394-0555. www.hoteltriton.com. 140 units. \$149–\$189 double; \$225–\$389 suite. Kids stay free in parent's room. No rollaways, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$32. Pets welcome. **Amenities:** Exercise room; concierge; business center; room service (limited hours); laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV with movies and games, fax, high-speed Internet access, CD, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

Serrano Hotel ★★ The Serrano is one of the most family-friendly options in the neighborhood. The richly-colored Spanish Revival lobby isn't overwhelmingly large, and cozy seating under a beamed ceiling is arranged in small groups. During the complimentary evening wine reception, a tarot card reader drops by to entertain and a chair masseuse is on hand—which could be what your shoulders ordered, if you've been carrying your tired kids around town. As at most Kimpton hotels, one TV channel dedicates itself to yoga, and a complimentary yoga basket is available from the lobby. Guests can borrow games from an extensive game library to play in the lobby or in the privacy of their rooms. In keeping with the whimsical theme, you'll find yo-yos, mini Etch A Sketches, and cards, all for a fee, in the minibars. Another unique perk for young families

are complimentary strollers and booster seats. Check the website for family and pet packages.

The building dates from the 1920s, although it was entirely renovated in 1999. Rooms are lushly designed with lots of warm colors and patterns, double-paned windows, and small, well-stocked bathrooms. Double/doubles are too little for a family of four. Instead, consider a queen deluxe with a connecting double/double (best for large families); an executive king with a bed, sofa bed, and large marble bathroom; or a suite. The suites have a king bed and king sofa bed, each in its own room. Corner rooms have views and are a bit more spacious. The hotel's Ponzu restaurant serves breakfast and tasty Asian-inspired dinner dishes.

405 Taylor St. (at O'Farrell St.), San Francisco, CA 94102. ☎ 877/294-9709 or 415/885-2500. Fax 415/474-4879. www.serranohotel.com. 236 units. \$139–\$299 double; \$239–\$449 suite. Kids 18 and under stay free in parent's room. Extra guest over 18, \$15. Cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$35, oversized vehicles \$45. Small pets welcome. **Amenities:** Restaurant; exercise room and sauna; concierge; business center; room service (limited hours); babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV with movies and games, high-speed Internet access, minibar/fridge, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Sir Francis Drake If you can snag a great deal at this historic hotel, it's an option worth considering. But if you can't find a room rate well below the advertised rack rates, I wouldn't recommend it. Certainly, the 1928 hotel is in a premier location by Union Square and on the cable car line. The Harry Denton Starlight Lounge on the top floor is legendary, only slightly less famous than the hotel's beefeater-clad doormen (Tom Sweeney, who has been opening doors to guests for over a quarter-century, is a verifiable San Francisco icon). And the grandiose, chandelier-lit lobby, complete with a sweeping marble staircase, offers a majestic taste of the Old World.

Unfortunately, many of the colorfully decorated rooms are small, and the bathrooms even tinier, with hardly any counter space. That said, if you don't mind forgoing queen beds, the executive double-double rooms are relatively spacious and have a bonus second bathroom. They can be had for \$199, if you search the Kimpton website for specials. There are some interconnecting rooms as well. Unlike at other Kimpton properties, you will find neither complimentary morning coffee nor afternoon wine in the lobby, but the hotel does have two very good restaurants on site: Café Espresso and Scala's Bistro. If you can get a room on one of the upper floors, where the view is better and the street noise less audible, and you lock in a good room rate, I recommend giving this grand old hotel a try.

450 Powell St. (at Sutter St.), San Francisco, CA 94102. ☎ 800/227-5490 or 415/392-7755. Fax 415/391-8719. www.sirfrancisdrake.com. 417 units. \$239–\$319 double. Suites from \$599. Kids 18 and under stay free in parent's room. Rollaways \$20, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$35, oversized vehicles \$37. Pets welcome. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; lounge; exercise room; concierge; business center; room service (limited hours); babysitting; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV with movies and games, high-speed wireless Internet access, minibar/fridge, hair dryer, iron.

Westin St. Francis *Overrated* The historic St. Francis Hotel, a survivor of the 1906 earthquake, is a veritable hubbub of activity. With its location just across from Union Square and steps away from serious shopping, downtown theaters, and the cable cars, the hotel's expansive lobby has always been a convenient meeting place for countless tourists, walking tours, friends taking tea, and the occasional elementary school group on a field trip to ride the glass elevators to the 27th floor. Travelers under 12 receive Westin Kids Club backpacks containing age-appropriate promotional items like light socket covers and sippy cups. Rooms are outfitted with comfortable "Heavenly" beds and showers (a Westin brand) and good linens.

Despite its enormous size, perpetually crowded lobby, and, quite frankly, impersonal feel, the hotel's prime location on Union Square seems to make it very popular. If high energy, location, and the historical aspects intrigue you, here's some advice: phone in-house reservations and be as specific as possible about your needs. Prices can fluctuate wildly due to the many room configurations, some less desirable than others. Standard queen rooms are barely large enough for two. Traditional queen rooms have more space, and can accommodate a crib or rollaway. The deluxe double/doubles are very spacious with renovated bathrooms, and the Grandview rooms have smarter decor. Ask for a view or a corner room if you want natural light and avoid rooms by the ever-busy elevators. Hallways go on forever. If your child has forgotten his sweatshirt, you'll have to go back to the room with him unless he's outfitted with a compass and a map.

335 Powell St. (at Geary St.), San Francisco, CA 94102. ☎ 800/WESTIN-1 or 415/397-7000. Fax 415/774-0124. www.westin.com. 1195 units. \$149–\$569 double; \$250–\$5,000 suite. Kids under 18 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways \$30, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$39, oversized vehicles \$45. Small dogs welcome. **Amenities:** Restaurant/bar; health club; concierge; business center; shopping arcade; room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high speed internet access, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

MODERATE

Cartwright Hotel ★ *Value* Guest rooms in this low-key, old-fashioned hotel are on the small side, so you really can't share with the kids. Although it was renovated in 2004 with brand-new furniture, the bathrooms are also petite. That said, the two-bedroom suites are a real find because you can sometimes snag one for around \$200—or even less, in the off-season. They're comfortable and cozy, with softly colored walls, and a few are furnished with antiques. The hotel's complimentary deluxe breakfast includes a station where the kids can make their own waffles. Early evenings, the staff hosts a wine reception to help you unwind from a busy day of sightseeing. A library off the lobby, equipped with comfy sofas, a large-screen television, and free wireless Internet access (bring your own laptop), is another plus.

Location-wise, the hotel receives extra points. It's just north of Union Square, 3 blocks from the Chinatown Gate. All the cable car lines are nearby without being so close that you hear their every bell and whirr. The staff also provides concierge services, such as making dinner reservations. If you like a truly European ambience, where you drop your keys off at the reception desk and see the same faces each morning and afternoon, you'll be pleased. For independent vacationers who require comfort and value, but not hand-holding, the Cartwright delivers.

524 Sutter St. (near Powell St.), San Francisco, CA 94102. ☎ 800/227-3844 or 415/421-2865. Fax 415/983-6244. www.cartwrighthotel.com. 114 units. \$109–\$259 double; \$179–\$369 suite. Kids under 18 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways \$20, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Self-parking \$24. Pets welcome. *In room:* TV, dataport, minibar, hair dryer (on request), iron (on request).

Chancellor Hotel Across the street from Saks Fifth Avenue and less than a block from Union Square, the Chancellor, built in 1914, is a typical old-time San Francisco hotel. Its prime location makes up for unimaginative decor, as do nice touches such a coffee, apples, and cookies at the reception desk, a pleasant staff, free local calls, and a menu of 12 pillows including selections such as firm, soft, hypoallergenic, down, and even snore-reducing (which could be useful when sharing rooms). Rooms come with one queen bed or two twin beds, and interconnecting rooms are available. The hotel has two suites, each with a double bed and pullout sofa. From higher-floor, street-side bedrooms ending in 00

through 05 you'll have views of the cable cars and Union Square. Bathrooms are moderately sized, and each tub comes with its own rubber ducky.

The in-house restaurant, Luques, serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner from a menu featuring organic produce and locally raised meats. Check the website or call the hotel about special package rates, which can be much lower than published rates. In addition to valet parking, off-site self-parking is available for \$22 a day. Older kids will appreciate the free high-speed Internet access available in the lobby.

433 Powell St. (between Post and Sutter sts.), San Francisco, CA 94102. ☎ 800/428-4748 or 415/362-2004. Fax 415/362-1403. www.chancellorhotel.com. 137 units. \$175 double; \$230–\$300 suite. Rollaways \$15, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$30; oversized vehicles \$41; self-parking \$22/day. **Amenities:** Restaurant; concierge; room service (limited hours); laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV with movies, high-speed Internet access, fridge (on request), hair dryer, iron, safe.

Golden Gate Hotel  *Value* This charming 1913 Edwardian bed-and-breakfast sits on a relatively quiet block, close to the cable car lines and within walking distance of Nob Hill, Union Square, and Chinatown. The cozy rooms, decorated with white wicker furniture, antique bureaus, and floral prints, have either two twin beds or one queen and space for little else. At most, you could squeeze a crib into the queen room. However, one bargain configuration includes a room with a queen bed and a tiny connecting room with two twin beds—all for a low family rate of \$150. The queen room has a bath, but there are also shared tubs and toilets in the hall.

Innkeepers John and Renate Kenaste are polite hosts who maintain some nice touches in their family-run inn, like vintage clawfoot bathtubs, an antique bird-cage elevator, and complimentary afternoon tea with homemade cookies. The continental breakfast included in the room rate features coffee, tea, croissants, and muffins. There's also Captain Nemo, the house cat, and Humphrey, a golden retriever. If you have family members who are allergic to animals, you'll have to pass on this good deal.

775 Bush St. (between Powell and Mason sts.), San Francisco, CA 94108. ☎ 800/835-1118 or 415/392-3702. Fax 415/392-6202. www.goldengatehotel.com. 23 units, some with shared bathrooms. Rooms with shared bath \$85 double, rooms with private bath \$115 double. Futon \$15, cribs free. AE, DC, MC, V. Self-parking \$15. **Amenities:** Continental breakfast. *In room:* TV, wireless Internet access, hair dryer (on request), iron (on request).

The Handlery Union Square  *Value* A family-owned and -operated hotel for over 50 years, the Handlery is notable for being the only downtown hotel with an outdoor, heated pool. Although the lobby feels like a throwback to an eighties nightclub, the staff is excellent and the hotel is a good deal in a central location. Older kids will be happy with the wireless high speed Internet access (for a fee) all over the hotel, including in guestrooms. The recently remodeled room decor is pleasant, but guest rooms and bathrooms in the historic Geary Street side of the hotel are small—the king-bedded standards have just enough room for a crib. The Club Rooms on the O'Farrell Street side are quite spacious, with a dressing area, robes, and extra amenities. Because the tiled pool deck gets occasional sun, the best rooms in the house are poolside Club Rooms, which aren't much more expensive than those in the historic section. Connecting rooms are available, as are rooms with two queen beds, and Club Rooms also have sleeper sofas for added value. You'll probably want to go out to eat—the Daily Grill, the hotel's on-site restaurant, is lackluster.

351 Geary St. (between Powell and Mason sts.), San Francisco, CA 94102. ☎ 800/843-4343 or 415/781-7800. Fax 415/781-0269. www.handlery.com. 377 units. \$189–\$289 double; \$325–\$750 suite. Kids

under 15 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways \$10, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$29. **Amenities:** Restaurant; pool; sauna; concierge; barbershop; gift shop; room service (limited hours); babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV with movies and video games, high-speed Internet access, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Hotel Adagio ★★ *Value* Hospitality company Joie de Vivre took over this property (formerly the Shannon Court Hotel), poured in \$13 million dollars, changed the name, and completely transformed the interior. Reopened in 2003 after a multi-month closure, the Hotel Adagio emerged as one of the best values in Union Square. Inspired by the color scheme of the original 1929 Spanish Revivalist decor, the new modern furnishings come in pleasing shades of burnt sienna, orange, and brown. Guest rooms are more spacious than in most historic buildings, and the bathroom fixtures have been completely updated as well. Although bathroom counter space is limited, it is more generous than at other downtown hotels in this price range. Moreover, guest rooms come equipped with two phone lines (one cordless), flat-screen TVs, and spacious closets.

If you go for two interconnecting rooms (rooms ending in 04 and 05; a double-double and a king room), this hotel ends up in the expensive category for a family of four. But the rooms with two queen beds, of which there are 25 in the hotel, are quite spacious and can comfortably fit four people, with plenty of floor space left over for luggage. In addition, the “junior suites,” which are really one big room, combine a king bed and a queen pullout sofa bed. Some of the junior suites also have bigger bathrooms with even more counter space.

The front desk provides concierge services, and if they know your kids are coming, will welcome them to the hotel with a small toy. The exercise room is spacious and well-equipped, and the business center has free high-speed wireless Internet access, as do all the guestrooms. The lobby serves complimentary coffee in the morning and lemonade and cookies in the afternoon. The on-site restaurant, Cortez, is excellent.

550 Geary St. (between Taylor and Jones sts.), San Francisco, CA 94102. ☎ 800/228-8830 or 415/775-5000. Fax 415/775-9388. www.thehoteladagio.com. 171 units. \$159–\$209 double; from \$289 suite. Kids under 18 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways \$20, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$30, oversized vehicles \$35. Self-parking available for \$14. Pets welcome. **Amenities:** Restaurant; exercise room; courtesy car; business center; room service (limited hours); massage (in-room); babysitting; laundry service; same-day dry cleaning; executive-level rooms. *In room:* TV with movies and video games, high-speed Internet access, mini-bar/fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Hotel Bijou Movie-loving families can take advantage of the 10-seat screening room, “Le Petit Theatre Bijou,” located off the hotel lobby. A double bill of films shot in San Francisco plays every evening at 7 and 9:30pm. The hotel will also feature kids' movies on request at other times of the day. There's even a candy counter at the front desk.

The Joie de Vivre hotel group livened up this 1911 building with plenty of vibrant paint: think burgundy, yellow and purple. But the guest rooms, named after locally made films, remain tiny, and the bathrooms are especially small. Given its location on a less savory section of Mason Street, the Bijou is best left to experienced travelers with savvy kids who want an inexpensive, but fun, hotel.

111 Mason St. (at Eddy St.), San Francisco, CA 94102. ☎ 800/771-1022 or 415/771-1200. Fax 415/346-3196. www.hotelbijou.com. 65 units. \$109–\$159 double. Kids 12 and under stay free in parent's room. Rollaways \$15, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$25; oversize vehicles \$35. **Amenities:** Continental breakfast; concierge; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV, dataport, hair dryer, iron.

Hotel Metropolis The Metropolis bears mentioning as the only hotel in San Francisco that boasts a suite just for kids. Designed by the hotel's president, who is also a mother, the kids' room of the suite has a bunk bed, a child-size desk, a huge chalkboard, and loads of toys. A bedroom for parents is connected to this miniature play land, as is a living room that can accommodate the nanny or more siblings. The suite is frequently booked and the hotel is considering adding another. If you can't get the suite, ask if any of the interconnecting doubles are available. More adventurous kids may actually prefer staying in a guest room that actually feels like a hotel, rather than another kid's IKEA-furnished bedroom. All the rooms are compact and the bathrooms tiny, but the decor is light and fresh.

Unfortunately, the hotel is located at the south end of Mason Street, on one of the grittier blocks around Union Square, and I might feel uncomfortable returning late in the evening (although a security guard is on duty overnight and the reception desk is staffed 24 hrs.). Even 1 block north is an improvement, so just use caution and consider taking a cab if you're out late.

25 Mason St. (between Eddy and Turk sts.), San Francisco, CA 94102. ☎ 800/553-1900 or 415/775-4600. Fax 415/775-4606. www.hotelmetropolis.com. 105 units. \$75–\$125 double; \$225–\$325 suite. Kids under 17 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways \$10, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$29. **Amenities:** Exercise room; business center; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV with movies and video games, fax, dataport, 24-hour coffee/tea service, hair dryer, iron, safe.

The Inn at Union Square This diminutive hotel primarily serves business travelers but is worth considering for its competitive rates and location just 1 block from Union Square. The bright and airy rooms come mainly with king and queen beds, although there is one room with two double beds. There are no adjoining rooms, but the more spacious rooms can comfortably fit a rollaway, and suites with pullout sofa beds are also available. Every floor (except the second) has a separate clubroom featuring complimentary breakfast in the mornings, wine and appetizers in the evenings, and hot tea and cookies after 8pm. The clubrooms also have fridges for guests' use. Gym passes are also available.

Concierge services are available from the front desk. In all, the hotel's small size makes for an intimate feel and personalized service, which must be why satisfied guests return again and again.

440 Post St. (between Mason and Powell sts.), San Francisco, CA 94102. ☎ 800/288-4346 or 415/397-3510. Fax 415/989-0529. www.unionsquare.com. 30 units. \$159–\$189 double; \$199–\$269 suite. Kids under 16 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways and cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$28, oversized vehicles \$35, self-parking \$22. **Amenities:** Laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV with movies, fax, high-speed Internet access, 24-hour coffee/tea service, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Monticello Inn ★★ As one might surmise from the name, this charming hotel has a decidedly Jeffersonian bent, buttressed by its Federal-period lobby and literary theme. The hotel even hosts weekly book readings in the “library” on Wednesday evenings, and keeps a selection of classics in the suites for guests' use. The tastefully-decorated lobby and recently redecorated rooms, hued in royal blue and white, are appealing. Although none of this may sound specifically family-oriented, the central location, friendly staff, and great rates make this an option worth considering. Check for special family deals that include parking and attraction coupons, or other deals such as the “literary rate” package. Room configurations include one-bedroom suites with a sofa bed in the parlor and robes in the closets, compact double/doubles, and spacious king/king

rooms in which the beds face each other. (This last configuration seems made for a slumber party.) A restaurant connected to the building, Puccini and Panetti, has a special children's menu, coloring books, and enough pizza and pasta dishes to calm any hunger pangs. Along with lunch, dinner, and takeout, the restaurant also provides room service from 5 to 10pm.

127 Ellis St. (between Powell and Mason sts.), San Francisco, CA 94102. ☎ **800/669-7777** or 415/392-8800. Fax 415/398-2650. www.monticelloinn.com. 91 units. \$109–\$289 double; \$299 suite. Kids under 18 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways \$25, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$29. **Amenities:** Restaurant; concierge; room service (limited hours); laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV with movies and video games, minibar, hair dryer, iron.

INEXPENSIVE

Grant Plaza This no-frills bargain sits in the heart of bustling Chinatown, 1 block from the Chinatown gate and 3 blocks from Union Square. The bare-bones rooms are compact and most of the tiny bathrooms only have showers, not tubs, but the hotel is clean and well-kept. Rooms with two double beds start at \$89 and some interconnecting rooms are available. A handful of double-double rooms have bathrooms with tubs and connect to a walk-in-closet-sized sitting room with a pullout sofa bed. You could almost call it a suite, and it's just \$20 extra. Make sure you get rooms on the top floor, which are newer and much nicer than those on other floors. The hotel has no kitchen, but with cafes and restaurants just steps away from the hotel lobby, who needs one? Another plus is a self-parking option at the nearby Sutter Garage for \$18 a day.

465 Grant Ave. (at Pine St.), San Francisco, CA 94108. ☎ **415/434-3883**. Fax 415/434-3886. www.grantplaza.com. 72 units. \$69–\$99 double; \$109 suite. Kids under 18 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways and cribs \$10. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Self-parking \$18. **Amenities:** High-speed Internet access; icemaker. *In room:* TV, iron (on request).

The Sheehan *Value* This locally-owned former YMCA, which is just 3 blocks from Union Square and 3 blocks from Nob Hill, boasts the largest heated indoor swimming pool in the city. The hotel is walking distance to both the Powell Street cable car turnaround and the California Street cable car line.

The guest rooms above the spare but spacious lobby are large by most standards, plain, and serviceable. The decor is reminiscent of a generic motel and the bathroom fixtures need updating, but with rates as low as \$85 a night—which includes breakfast with cereal, baked goods, and coffee—this is an unequivocal bargain. Although there are no adjoining rooms, some very large rooms contain two queen beds. With an indoor pool to boot, you can overlook the stains in the well-worn carpets. Just keep in mind that it is uphill from Union Square, so young kids may begrudge you the walk back at the end of the day.

620 Sutter St. (at Mason St.), San Francisco, CA 94102. ☎ **800/848-1529** or 415/775-6500. Fax 415/775-3271. www.sheehanhotel.com. 65 units. \$85–\$115 double. Kids 12 and under stay free in parent's room. Extra guest over 12, \$10. Rollaways \$10, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Self-parking \$18. **Amenities:** Continental breakfast; pool; exercise room; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV, hair dryer.

2 South of Market (SoMa)

Hotels here are close to shopping, museums, and great family entertainment, including the Yerba Buena Center (p. 162). As an up-and-coming part of town, SoMa enjoys some of the city's newest restaurants and attractions. The downside to the newness is constant construction. Also, some sections of the neighborhood have not yet “emerged,” and the unsavory 6th and 7th Streets should definitely be avoided.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Four Seasons ★★☆☆ This is unquestionably the most luxurious hotel in San Francisco. The lobby is a sleek, spacious, multi-roomed tribute to Art Deco elegance. One conversation with any of the extremely professional concierges makes it clear the Four Seasons will stop at nothing to ensure that every family member's needs are met. Milk and cookies greet kids 6 and under; those 7 and up get root beer and popcorn. Children staying in their own room receive a personal minibar key, entitling them to such goodies as milk, Oreos, and granola bars (and unlike the room rates, these snacks—at a dollar or two apiece—are deliberately inexpensive to keep parents happy). The hotel even supplies bathrobes to fit every member of the family. Parents of infants get a fully outfitted crib, diaper genie, wipes, baby shampoo, and so on.

Each of the tastefully opulent and sizable rooms is outfitted with a Sony Playstation and CD player. The concierge can also send up a VCR, DVD player, or board games on request. Several interconnecting rooms, such as a king room and a double queen, are available. The junior suites feature a king room and living room with a foldout sofa bed. All of the spacious marble bathrooms have separate tubs and showers. Four Seasons guests have access to the adjacent Sports Club/LA, which has a pool. For kids planning to splash around, the concierge will supply passes to the Marriot hotel pool, which is accessible via the hotel's back entrance.

757 Market St. (at 3rd St.), San Francisco, CA 94103. ☎ 415/633-3000. Fax 415-633-3001. www.fourseasons.com/sanfrancisco. 277 units. \$469–\$600 double; from \$800 suite. Kids under 18 stay free in parent's room. No rollaways, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$39. Small pets welcome (1 per room). **Amenities:** Restaurant (with kids' menu); bar; health club; concierge; courtesy car; business center; room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV with movies, games, high-speed Internet access, minibar, coffemaker on request, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Palace Hotel ★★☆☆ This landmark hotel—built in 1875, rebuilt after the 1906 fire, restored in 1991, and still honored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation—is aptly named. The over-the-top decor, complete with burgundy carpeting, massive chandeliers, marble columns, and the spectacular glass-roofed Garden Court restaurant (made with 80,000 panes of glass), will make kids think they've entered into an actual royal residence. Bedrooms, though not nearly as ornate, are sizable, and even the standard doubles are large enough to accommodate a crib. Marble bathrooms and 14-foot ceilings add to the grandeur; in-room refrigerators, 24-hour room service, and three restaurants, including the excellent Kyo-ya (Japanese/sushi), add convenience. The Palace Spa contains an attractive indoor lap pool with a glass ceiling (children must be supervised by someone 16 or over).

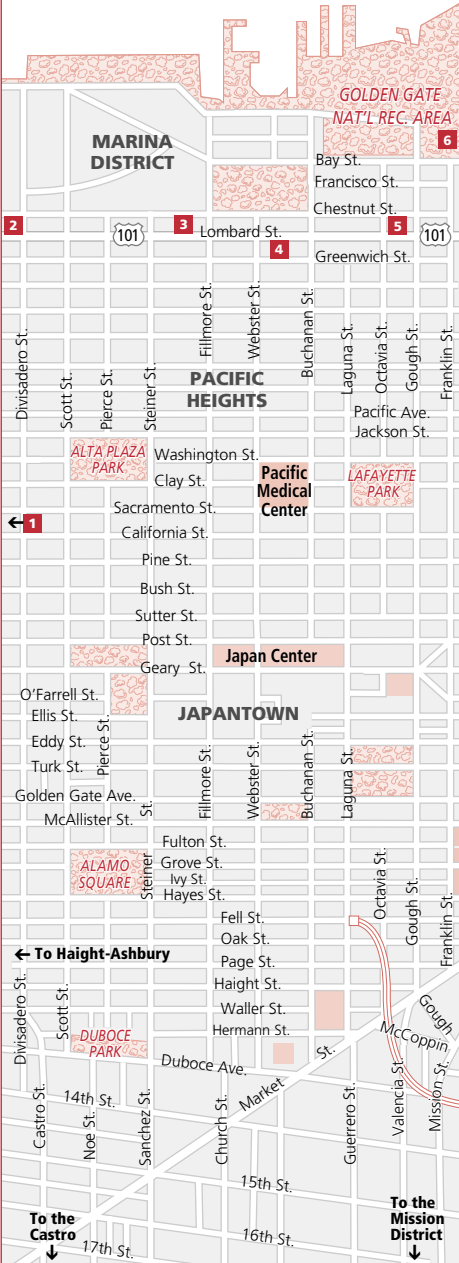
The hotel is close to several SoMa attractions, including the SFMOMA and Yerba Buena Center, and the Montgomery Street Muni/BART station and F-Market streetcar stops are on the corner. At check-in, kids receive gift bags

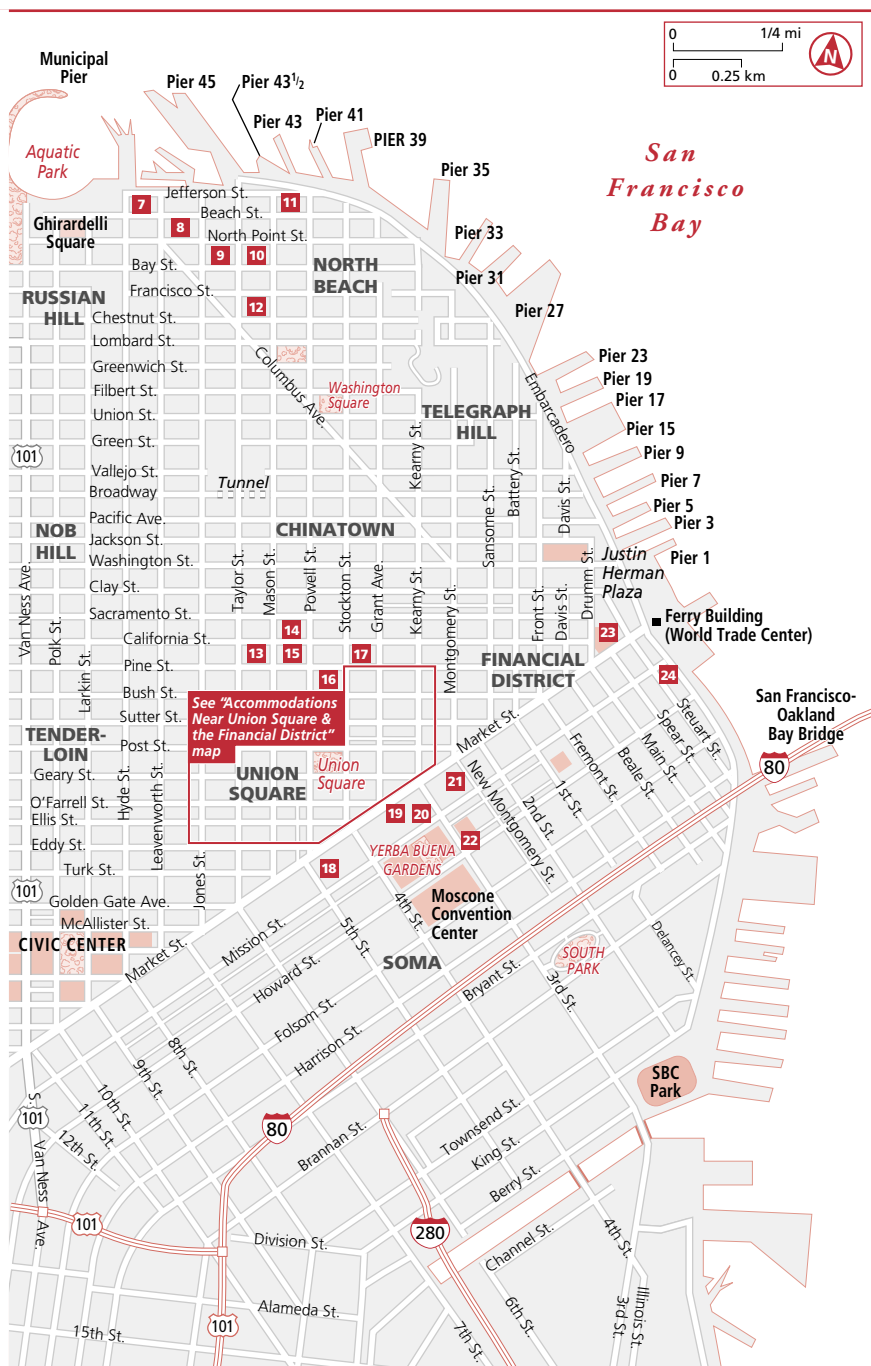
Fun Fact **Stump the Tour Guide**

Everyone knows that Enrico Caruso, the world-famous opera star, was staying at the Palace Hotel when the great earthquake of 1906 struck. He is remembered, too, for running out of the hotel and vowing never to return to San Francisco. **Question:** What was he wearing when he made his escape? **Answer:** A towel. I don't know if he returned it.

Accommodations Around Town

- The Argent 20
- The Argonaut 7
- Cow Hollow Motor Inn & Suites 3
- Fairmont Hotel 14
- Four Seasons 19
- Harbor Court Hotel 24
- Holiday Inn Fisherman's Wharf 8
- Hostelling International
San Francisco Fisherman's Wharf 6
- Hotel Del Sol 4
- Hotel Milano 18
- The Huntington Hotel 13
- Hyatt at Fisherman's Wharf 9
- Hyatt Regency San Francisco 23
- The Laurel Inn 1
- The Marina Inn 5
- Marina Motel 2
- Mark Hopkins Intercontinental 15
- Nob Hill Lambourne 16
- Palace Hotel 21
- Radisson Hotel Fisherman's Wharf 11
- Ritz-Carlton 17
- San Remo Hotel 12
- Tuscan Inn 10
- W Hotel 22





with cups and caps, as well as a list of kid-friendly sights and activities. Week-end specials can include rates well below the published rack rates.

2 New Montgomery St. (at Market St.), San Francisco, CA 94105. ☎ 800/325-3589 or 415/512-1111. Fax 415/543-0671. www.sfpalace.com. 552 units. \$499–\$559 double; from \$775 suite. Kids under 17 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways \$50, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$40. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants (2 with kids' menus); bar; pool; spa/exercise room; concierge; courtesy car; business center; room service; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet access, fridge, hair dryer, iron, safe.

EXPENSIVE

The Argent ★ In an enviable position south of Market Street, the polished Argent is a skip and a jump from the Museum of Modern Art, Yerba Buena Center, the San Francisco Centre, and the Metreon. Fisherman's Wharf is an easy destination to reach via the F-Market streetcars, which are just steps away from the hotel. Because this is primarily a corporate hotel, you can often find excellent deals over weekends and holidays when the nearby convention center is quiet. Check the website for the lowest prices and packages.

Although the hotel isn't considered a family destination, it has its own "kids' concierge" who compiles an updated list of local events to be handed out with a goody bag of small toys and coloring books. The best rooms for families are deluxe double/doubles, which start on the 15th floor (below that are standard rooms). The deluxe rooms are more spacious than the standards, with floor-to-ceiling windows that take advantage of the beautiful vistas. Connecting rooms—generally a king and a double/double—are available as long as you specify your preference when you make your reservation. Also, be sure to check the Internet for special packages.

50 3rd St. (at Market St.), San Francisco, CA 94103. ☎ 877/222-6699 or 415/974-6400. Fax 415/543-8268. www.argenthotel.com. 667 units. \$179–\$349 double; \$529–\$1,800 suite. Kids under 18 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways \$25, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$39. **Amenities:** Restaurant/bar; exercise room; sauna; concierge; courtesy car; business center; room service (limited hours); massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet access, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

W Hotel ★ This ultra-hip hotel seems better suited to families with older children. Teens will feel quite sophisticated hanging around the lobby or cafe at this trendy hotel, playing the chess or backgammon games that sit on small tables, or taking notes on the hip young things who work and play here. Right across the street from Yerba Buena Center and 1 block from the Metreon, it's a perfect location for young adults, who could easily entertain themselves for hours at the Metreon alone.

The ultra-cool attitude continues in the guest rooms, which are sleek, modern, and subtly accented—rather than overcome—by color. Wall units house entertainment centers, and shutters replace curtains on the windows. (The clean lines are handsome, but they don't block light completely.) Sharing a double/double could cut housing rates back to the moderate range. Connecting king and double/double rooms work well for larger families. Rollaway beds are only allowed in "Groovy Corner" king rooms. "Style Suites," starting at \$1000, connect a Groovy Corner room with a sitting room that has a Murphy bed. Other child-pleasing features include an indoor lap pool and room service. Adults will appreciate the views and the 24-hour concierge services, dubbed "Whatever/Whenever."

181 3rd St. (at Howard St.), San Francisco, CA 94103. ☎ 415/777-5300. Fax 415/817-7823. www.whotels.com. 423 units. \$199–\$329 double; \$1000–\$1,800 suite. Kids under 18 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways

\$35, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$45. Dogs and cats welcome (\$25 per day). **Amenities:** Restaurant (no kids' menus); bar; pool; exercise room; concierge; business center; room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV/VCR/DVD, CD player (on request), high-speed Internet access, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

MODERATE

Hotel Milano Designed to resemble an Italian villa, this small, modern hotel is one of the better SoMa hotels in this price category. The convenient location is steps away from several entertainment venues, the San Francisco Centre shopping mall, the Sony Metreon, and Yerba Buena Gardens. You can also reach the Muni and the F-Market streetcars in moments.

Room sizes vary, but the larger rooms are certainly more spacious than typical downtown hotels in this price range. Bathrooms use lots of black marble; bedrooms are masculine in feel with black-trimmed woods and upholstery—but the hotel is about due for some fresh fabrics on windows and beds. The double/doubles are really dual queens and big enough to share with the kids and still have space for your luggage. There are no connecting rooms or suites suitable for a crowd, but the staff does its best to provide families with the largest rooms available.

55 5th St. (between Mission and Market sts.), San Francisco, CA 94103. ☎ 800/398-7555 or 415/543-8555. Fax 415/543-5885. www.hotelmilano.citysearch.com. 108 units. \$109–\$299 double. Kids under 12 stay free in parent's room. Additional person \$20. Rollaways \$20, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$28, oversized vehicles \$35. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; fitness center; concierge; room service (limited hours); babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; executive level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, fax, dataport, minibar, fridge, hair dryer, iron, safe.

3 Fisherman's Wharf

As the most visited tourist destination in San Francisco, Fisherman's Wharf (p. 167) has plenty of great family activities, and a few of its hotels have outdoor pools. But the lopsided ratio of tourists to locals makes for a slew of tacky T-shirt shops and lousy restaurants. At least it's next to the bay, and the area's western edge, towards Ghirardelli, is quite scenic.

MODERATE–EXPENSIVE

The Argonaut ★★☆☆ I've long wondered why anyone would want to stay in Fisherman's Wharf. Upon seeing the Argonaut, which opened its doors in August 2003, I not only stopped wondering, I wanted to check in immediately. It helps that the hotel is located on the wharf's more picturesque western end. The hotel building, originally built in 1907 and now property of the National Park Service, is part of the Cannery, a historic structure that once housed the world's largest peach canning facility. The \$40 million restoration to create this attractive new hotel left the red brick walls, Douglas fir beams, and wood-plank floors beautifully intact.

The overall decor, which pokes fun at traditional nautical themes, is fresh and appealing. It extends to the sizable guest rooms and bathrooms, which are hued in bright blue, white, and silver. Room configurations include two queens or one king, and a few king rooms also have a pullout sofa. Bay views are an option, as are interconnecting rooms and suites. Rooms have DVD and CD players, and if you pop down to the lobby for the complimentary wine hour, your teens or tweens can take advantage of the two free computers with high-speed wireless Internet access there.

Too bad the Argonaut doesn't have a pool. Then again, if it did, the other wharf hotels might go out of business. When you call, ask whether the Neptune's Adventure package is still available. At last check, it granted a family of four a

double queen room, passes to PIER 39 attractions and the Hyde Street Pier, clever kids' gifts, tickets for the cable car a mere block away, and a full breakfast at the hotel's Blue Mermaid Chowder House (p. 128), one of the few good family restaurants in the area.

495 Jefferson St. (at Hyde St.), San Francisco, CA 94109. ☎ 866/415-0704 or 415/563-0800. Fax 415/563-2800. www.argonathotel.com. 252 units. \$199–\$229 double. Suites \$399–\$699. Kids under 18 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways \$20, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$32, \$42 for oversized vehicles. Pets welcome. **Amenities:** Restaurant (with children's menu); concierge; courtesy car; room service (limited hours); babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV with games and movies, DVD player, CD player, high-speed Internet access, minibar/fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

MODERATE

Holiday Inn Fisherman's Wharf This is one of the few hotels in town with an outdoor pool and patio, fun to have on hand when the weather cooperates. It's the best part of the property, which sits off busy North Point Street and Columbus Avenue. The entrance is welcoming, but the guest rooms, coming off a poorly lit hallway, are unimpressive, and some are rather bleak. Bathrooms are better; while on the small side, they include some useful amenities such as magnifying mirrors. The in-house restaurants are mediocre, although they do adhere to the "Kids Eat Free" corporate promotion for guests under 12 dining with their parents. Fisherman's Wharf seems to attract all the major chains that advertise heavily for family travelers. For the price, you can do better.

1300 Columbus Ave. (at N. Point St.), San Francisco, CA 94133. ☎ 415/771-9000. Fax 415/771-7006. www.sixcontinentshotels.com/h/d/hi/ha/SFOFW. 585 units. \$199–\$244 double; \$350 and up suite. Kids under 18 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways \$5, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Self parking \$28. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; coffee shop; heated outdoor pool; exercise room; concierge; business center; room service (limited hours); babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; laundromat on site; executive-level rooms; gift shop. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed wireless Internet access, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Hyatt at Fisherman's Wharf ★ If you must stay in Fisherman's Wharf and your kids, or you, really want a pool, the Hyatt is the best choice; it ranks a good notch above the other big hotel chains in the neighborhood. Its outdoor pool sits in a protected courtyard away from the street with an inviting spa, attractive chaises and tables, and a nearby indoor shower. The guest rooms and bathrooms, already designed with families in mind, were to be fully renovated as this book went to press. The hotel staff promised "a completely new product," which will include furnishings in more vibrant and appealing colors. Connecting rooms and double/doubles are available, and complimentary rollaways are available upon request. In-room coffeemakers are available, but the most practical amenities may be the coin-operated washer/dryers on every floor.

The hotel's restaurant serves all day in a sports bar-like atmosphere with a total of 28 TVs, one of them measuring a whopping 126 inches. Older kids will enjoy the game room, complete with two pool tables, a shuffleboard and arcade machines. The staff is friendly and helpful, especially the concierge, who will provide you with discount coupons for wharf attractions. Look for room deals on the Hyatt website, but don't expect attractive weekend rates. Weekends here see high occupancy.

555 N. Point St. (between Jones and Taylor sts.), San Francisco, CA 94133. ☎ 800/233-1234 or 415/563-1234. Fax 415/563-2218. www.fishermanswharf.hyatt.com. 313 units. \$168–\$268 double. \$400–\$1200 suites. Kids 18 and under stay free in parent's room. Rollaways and cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$34. **Amenities:** Restaurant; heated outdoor pool; exercise room; Jacuzzi; sauna; concierge; courtesy car; room service (limited hours); babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed wireless Internet access, fridge (on request, \$10 per day), coffeemaker (on request), hair dryer, iron, safe.

Radisson Hotel Fisherman's Wharf If you want a waterfront view and an outdoor pool without breaking the bank, you'll find them here. The Radisson holds the distinction of being the only big chain hotel in Fisherman's Wharf actually on the waterfront. Jefferson Street runs in front of the hotel, but beyond that is just the bay itself. Also, it's sandwiched between the most popular piers on the Wharf, PIER 39 to the east and Piers 41 and 43, from where the Bay Cruises and the Alcatraz ferries depart, to the west. And it has an outdoor heated pool.

Otherwise, there isn't much charm to the place. One wonders what the architects who built structures like this in the 1960s were thinking, and the dreary color scheme desperately needs a touch-up. The concrete complex covers an entire city block, and shares retail space with other big chains like the Gap, Subway, Ben & Jerry's, and the International House of Pancakes (which is the closest breakfast spot, unless you buy a cup of java from the coffee cart inelegantly occupying the lobby). At least the guest rooms and bathrooms are a decent size and, of course, you've got the bay vistas to remind you that you are, in fact, in San Francisco.

250 Beach St. (between Mason and Powell sts.), San Francisco, CA 94133. ☎ 800/333-3333 or 415/392-6700. Fax 415/986-7853. www.radisson.com/sanfranciscoca_wharf. 355 units. \$149–\$259 double. Kids 18 and under stay free in parent's room. Rollaways \$10, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Self parking \$28. **Amenities:** Restaurant; heated outdoor pool; exercise room; concierge; business center; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV with pay-per-view, high-speed Internet access, fridge (on request), coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Tuscan Inn ★★ For years, the Tuscan Inn could proudly call itself the best hotel in Fisherman's Wharf. Now that title will have to be passed on to the Argonaut. (Both hotels are part of the Kimpton Hotel group, which I've already praised in this chapter.) Tuscan Inn rates are lower than the Argonaut's, but the inn is located on the less picturesque end of Fisherman's Wharf and doesn't have bay views. One thing both hotels lack is a pool, so if you're dead-set on one in this neighborhood, you'll have to go with one of the national chains.

What the Tuscan Inn does have are spacious guest rooms and bathrooms handsomely furnished in warm, inviting colors. Rooms are filled with amenities, including a combination honor bar/fridge, and you can bring Fido with you too. The comfortable lobby puts out hot chocolate and biscotti in the mornings, not just coffee and tea, and hosts a complimentary wine hour in the evenings. More important, the concierge here is friendly and intelligent, setting the tone for the rest of the staff.

Room configurations include double/doubles, but if you are coming to the city between November and April, check on off-season rates for king premieres (a king bed and a sofa bed) or suites, which are sometimes available at excellent rates. The hotel's Café Pescatore (p. 128), specializing in reasonably-priced Italian fare, opens onto a pleasant outdoor dining area on the sidewalk.

425 N. Point St. (between Mason and Taylor sts.), San Francisco, CA 94133. ☎ 800/648-4626 or 415/561-1100. Fax 415/561-1199. www.tuscaninn.com. 221 units. \$139–\$189 double; \$239–\$289 suite. Kids under 18 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways \$20, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$26. Pets welcome (\$25 per room). **Amenities:** Restaurant (with children's menu); concierge; courtesy car; room service (limited hours); babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; executive-level rooms; free local calls. *In room:* A/C, TV, wireless Internet access, minibar/fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

INEXPENSIVE

Hostelling International San Francisco, Fisherman's Wharf This option is best for small, adventurous families. Beds here are bunked dorm-style, and bathrooms are down the hall. What sets this place apart from other hostels

is its location in the middle of a national park at Fort Mason. Through the windows of this converted army barrack, trees frame a view of Alcatraz and the San Francisco Bay. Although most rooms hold 8 to 12 beds, a few rooms have only 3 or 4 beds. These smaller rooms have the best vistas and can be reserved for families. All guests have access to a full kitchen, complimentary continental breakfast, free parking, and a common area with a cozy fireplace. The caveat is that rates are per person, which is why this option may be best for families of three. Although it's a great atmosphere with interesting types of people from around the world, the plastic-covered mattresses, shared showers, and absence of closets (you get a tiny locker) may not be worth the cost for four people.

Fort Mason, Building 240, San Francisco, CA 94123. ☎ 415/771-7277. www.sfhostel.org. 164 beds. Singles \$22–\$29, includes breakfast. MC, V. **Amenities:** Continental breakfast; laundry facilities.

San Remo Hotel Built in 1906 by Bank of Italy (later Bank of America) founder A. P. Giannini, this charming Italianate Victorian originally housed Italian immigrants, among others, made homeless after the earthquake and fire. These days, European travelers and vacationing families on a budget are happy to find the San Remo. An unabashedly old-fashioned pension, the period furnishings, beveled glass, and Victorian detailing take you back to a bona fide slice of San Francisco that's all but disappeared. The bedrooms, which look like they were decorated by someone's grandmother, are small and quaint. Reminiscent of European boarding houses, rooms do not have phones, televisions, or en suite bathrooms. Guests share one of many polished and tidy restrooms down the hall. They also make use of the coin-operated laundry facilities.

Families of three can stay in a room with one queen and one twin. Larger families will be relegated to twin-bedded rooms for the kids and queen rooms for the adults—the rooms don't connect, so this hotel isn't ideal for families with younger kids. The location is within walking distance to North Beach, Fisherman's Wharf, and public transportation, but this is a tough neighborhood in which to park. Bottom line: the San Remo isn't for everybody. If you expect a high level of service and comfort on your vacation, you'll be better off at a mainstream hotel.

2237 Mason St. (near Chestnut St.), San Francisco, CA 94133. ☎ 800/352-7366 or 415/776-8688. Fax 415/776-2811. www.sanremohotel.com. 62 units. \$75–\$85 double. No rollaways or cribs. AE, DC, MC, V. Self-parking \$14. **Amenities:** Laundry facilities.

4 The Embarcadero

Following the 1989 earthquake and the 1990s building boom, this forgotten part of town saw the construction of brand new condominiums and commercial space. Although hotels remain scarce, the proximity to downtown, the Ferry Building, and plentiful public transportation make this waterfront neighborhood an ideal place to stay.

EXPENSIVE

Harbor Court Hotel ⚡ This hotel has one of the chicest-looking lobbies in the city—inviting, trendy, and intimate without being too cool for us regular folk. One of the better restaurants in town is off the lobby as well: Ozumo serves sushi, Japanese grill dishes, and a range of sakes. As delicious as that hip restaurant is, I wouldn't call it a family-friendly destination. In fact, the entire hotel is really more for couples and business travelers, as it has no double/double rooms. You can reserve a twin-bedded room for the kiddies, but you'll be sleeping

elsewhere because the maximum occupancy here is two, unless you splurge on the two-bedroom suite. That basically makes it suitable for families who are happy to offload the kids down the hall, or couples toting a baby.

But the location is imminently attractive, and the Embarcadero is a wonderful place for visitors of all ages to walk, skip, or ride a bike. Active kids will also love the big, bright YMCA next door, which offers full privileges for hotel guests. It has an Olympic-sized pool, indoor basketball courts, and even a babysitting facility. Check the website for packages and weekend specials.

165 Steuart St. (between Mission and Howard sts.), San Francisco, CA 94105. ☎ 800/346-0555 or 415/882-1300. Fax 415/882-1313. www.harborcourthotel.com. 131 units. \$139–\$209 double; \$450 suite. No rollaways, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$32. **Amenities:** Restaurant; complimentary evening beer and wine reception; pool; health club; concierge; courtesy car; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* A/C, TV, fax, dataport, minibar, complimentary morning coffee and tea, iron.

Hyatt Regency San Francisco ★ Although it's a huge corporate hotel where your children are likely to get lost if they head to your room without a detailed map, the Hyatt Regency's terrific location at the foot of Market Street makes up for every failing. Guests can enjoy the delightful Ferry Building across the street, and several shops, restaurants, and cinemas are at hand throughout the Embarcadero Center. Rooms are well equipped and very spacious, and many have bay views. There are two restaurants, sundries, and an on-site fitness center. This is definitely the best hotel in the area for families in terms of space and amenities. I remember staying here when I was a kid, and being enthralled with the indoor glass elevators that travel up the massive, 17-story indoor atrium, which were featured in the Mel Brooks film *High Anxiety*. Kids today still find those elevators an entertainment center in and of themselves.

5 Embarcadero Center (at Market St.), San Francisco, CA 94111. ☎ 800/233-1234 or 415/788-1234. Fax 415/398-2567. www.sanfrancisco.regency.hyatt.com. 805 units. \$179–\$320 double. Rollaways and cribs free. Kids under 18 stay free in parent's room. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$38. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; bar; exercise room; concierge; business center; gift shop; room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV, dataport, minibar, fridge on request, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

5 Nob Hill

The hillcrest where San Francisco's early millionaires built their mansions is home to some of the city's most elegant hotels. Views from guestrooms here are among the best in town, and the area feels residential even though it's just a few blocks from the city center. Kids will enjoy the nearby park and playground. The downside for little ones is the steep walk uphill from Union Square, but you can always catch the California cable car line, which runs close by. Room rates here are very high, but if your timing is right you may get a good deal.

VERY EXPENSIVE

Fairmont Hotel ★★ ★ Children of any age will be impressed arriving at this landmark 1907 hotel, which adorns one side of Nob Hill with its imposing façade and colorful flags. Inside, the expansive lobby's high ceilings, marble columns, and chandeliers will leave little girls expecting Cinderella to turn up. Despite the splendor, and an \$85 million restoration completed in 2001, the overall feeling is relaxed and friendly. Guestrooms in the historic building are spacious by any standard, and the closets are so large that many will comfortably fit a crib or even a rollaway! If you prefer separate showers and tubs—and a stellar view—select a room in the tower building. Numerous combinations of suites and rooms, with king beds, queens, or double/doubles, are available.

If you stay here, be sure to mention that you're traveling with kids when you call. (Phone in-house reservations.) The hotel has age-appropriate amenities like milk and cookies at check-in, knapsacks, and maps, plus 8- to 11-year-olds qualify to act as "doorman for a day." Now, don't get excited: no one's putting your kids to work while you take off for Saks. But kids do get to wear a hat, blow a whistle, and have a photo taken with the doorman—all at no charge. The gorgeous Laurel Court dining room serves afternoon tea with a choice of menus, including one specifically for children. The kitschy Tonga Room provides a tropical rainstorm during happy hour (with inexpensive hors d'oeuvres). If your kids are *Eloise* fans, or just have excellent taste, they'll love this hotel.

950 Mason St. (at California St.), San Francisco, CA 94108. ☎ 800/441-1414 or 415/772-5000. www.fairmont.com. 591 units. \$199–\$449 double; from \$500 suite. Kids under 18 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways \$30, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$41 plus tax. **Amenities:** 2 restaurants; outdoor terrace; bar; concierge; business center; salon; room service; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; complimentary morning coffee and tea in lobby. *In room:* A/C, TV with movies and games, fax, high-speed Internet access (additional charge), dataport, minibar, hair dryer, iron, safe.

The Huntington Hotel ★★ Owned and operated for over 80 years by a local family, the Huntington Hotel keeps a lower profile than the neighboring Nob Hill hotels, but is equally upscale. For those traveling with young children, there are a few reasons to consider this hotel. The location is great: Huntington Park across the street has a nice playground for under-8s, which may offer a well deserved break for a kid who has followed parents around the sights all day. Grace Cathedral, kitty-corner to the hotel, is also a serene place to walk and stretch your legs, and the cable car stop is next door. Moreover, the building was originally conceived as an apartment bloc, so many of the rooms are very spacious and can easily fit a crib.

The hotel's most family-friendly feature may be the seven suites that have kitchenettes, a rarity in upscale hotels. In addition to the suites, connecting king and a double/double rooms are also an option. Although elegant, the decor is a bit heavy and in need of updating. The Luxury and Huntington rooms on the upper floors have great views, but the Deluxe and Superior rooms on the lower floors are larger. The hotel's exquisitely beautiful spa, which unfortunately is not open to guests under 16, is one of the nicest in San Francisco and offers divine treatments of every sort. The Big Four restaurant, dark and clubby, exudes more than a hint of old San Francisco.

1075 California St. (at Taylor St.), San Francisco, CA 94108. ☎ 800/227-4683 or 415/474-5400. Fax 415/474-6227. www.huntingtonhotel.com. 135 units. \$315–\$375 double; \$485–\$1110 suite. Kids under 5 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways \$40, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$29. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; pool (over 16 only); spa/exercise room; concierge; courtesy car; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV with movies, fax, high-speed Internet access, kitchenettes available, hair dryer, safe.

Mark Hopkins Intercontinental ★★ The Mark Hopkins, named after the founder of the Central Pacific Railroad, opened in 1926 and remains a San Francisco landmark. As part of the Intercontinental group, the hotel is very family-friendly, providing a teddy bear and a backpack of kids' amenities for 2- to 11-year-olds, as well as kids' menus in all the restaurants. (Ask about the "Kids in Tow" program when you make a reservation.) With advance notice, the hotel will rent strollers or other baby paraphernalia for you.

The property underwent a vast renovation/modernization a few years ago and completely updated the guest rooms, which are classy and plush, with fine fabrics and maple furnishings. Views from the upper floors are unsurpassed. The

big news for families is the recent opening of the hotel's new Club Intercontinental, located on the lobby floor. For an additional \$50 a day per room (no additional charge if you're staying in a suite), families have access to an entertainment and food lounge that will be a big hit with older children. Kids can choose from over 50 DVDs at "TV Central," peruse a collection of teen magazines, listen to XM satellite radio on wireless headsets, or play board games. The plethora of food—including baked goods and fruits for breakfast, lunch snacks at noon, high tea with mini sandwiches in the afternoon, and a "sweet dreams" offering of milk and cookies in the evening—means you'll take care of at least one daily meal for the whole family, making the club's daily access charge well worth it.

The 19th-floor Top of the Mark restaurant/bar offers a Sunday brunch and keeps coloring books on hand for small guests who like to keep busy. It's been a landmark since 1939, and many non-guests make their way up to gawk at the view from the panoramic windows. With a *prix-fixe* gourmet dinner and dancing on weekend evenings to a live orchestra, you needn't stray far from the kiddies to enjoy a lively night out on the town.

Number One Nob Hill (at California and Mason sts.), San Francisco, CA 94108. ☎ 800/327-0200 or 415/392-3434. Fax 415/421-3302. www.markhopkins.net. 380 units. \$355–\$485 double; \$395–\$3,000 suite. Kids under 18 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways \$30, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$44. **Amenities:** Restaurant; bar; exercise room; concierge; business center; massage (also in-room); babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; concierge-level rooms; town car (first-come, first-served); doctor upon request. *In room:* A/C, TV, high-speed Internet access (additional fee), dataport, minibar, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron, safe.

Ritz-Carlton ★★ The only real competition at this supreme service level in San Francisco is the Four Seasons. If you want sleek, modern sophistication, stay there. For more traditional elegance, choose the Ritz. The secret for getting the most out of this hotel is to communicate your every wish to reservations, letting them know whether you're traveling with the nanny, are celebrating a special occasion, or your child just brought home a perfect report card. These folks are looking for a reason to spoil you. If your little boy is into action figures, let the concierges know and they'll gladly oblige with a super-hero welcome gift. Pets under 10 pounds are welcome and also entitled to customized amenities, like doggie beds and bowls.

Rooms range from deluxe doubles to executive suites, which are larger than most one-bedroom apartments in San Francisco. A deluxe with two double beds will still have plenty of room for a crib or rollaway, but if you're sharing with your kids, ask for one of the Stockton Street rooms, which are a bit larger. A handful of connecting rooms are also available. An extra \$100 per night will grant you access to the Club Lounge, which comes with a dedicated concierge and a constant parade of food, from an ample breakfast to evening hors d'oeuvres with fruit, snacks, and drinks. Although more expensive than the Mark Hopkins lounge, it may still be a worthwhile investment. Visits during the holidays are especially fun for kids—the Ritz organizes a kids' Halloween tea in October and a teddy bear tea in December and other annual events as well. During non-holiday times of year, kids can participate in a scavenger hunt throughout the hotel, with prizes awarded at the front desk.

600 Stockton St. (at California St.), San Francisco, CA 94108. ☎ 800/241-3333 or 415/296-7465. Fax 415/291-0288. www.ritzcarlton.com. 336 units. From \$500 double; \$850 suite. Up to 4 guests of any age per room at no additional charge. Rollaways \$35, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$50. **Amenities:** 3 restaurants; bar; indoor pool; health club; concierge; courtesy car; business center; room service; massage; laundry service; dry cleaning; executive-level rooms. *In room:* A/C, TV with games and movies, high-speed Internet access, dataport, minibar, fridge, hair dryer, iron, safe.

EXPENSIVE

Nob Hill Lambourne ★★ *Finds* This classy boutique hotel is a true bargain for the neighborhood. Rooms and suites are generously sized and, amazingly, all are equipped with kitchenettes consisting of a small fridge, two-burner stove, a microwave, and utensils for four. Six suites are furnished with a queen bed in the bedroom and a queen-size sofa bed in the parlor, with room left over for a crib or rollaway. A continental breakfast buffet featuring fresh fruit, yogurt, cereals, and juice is included in the tariff, as is the daily newspaper, an evening wine reception, and coffee and tea all day. The theme here is health and well-being, so you won't find chocolates on your down pillow in the evening; someone with your best interests at heart leaves vitamins instead. If those apples in the hallway appeal, go ahead and take one. The honor bar is stocked with organic items like Newman's Own Organic cookies, and all cleaning products are free of synthetic chemicals.

The location, across the street from the Ritz-Carlton, has a residential feel, although Pine Street, a one-way street heading out of the financial center, is noisy during the evening rush hour. It's an otherwise calm spot in a busy city, one that many aware families are seeking out, so make reservations in advance.

725 Pine St. (between Powell and Stockton sts.), San Francisco 94108. ☎ 800/274-8466 or 415/433-2287. Fax 415/433-0975. www.nobhilllambourne.com. 20 units. \$139–\$189 double; \$219–\$289 suite. Kids under 13 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways \$20, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Valet parking \$30. **Amenities:** Continental breakfast; concierge; massage; babysitting; laundry service; dry cleaning; complimentary coffee all day. **In room:** TV/VCR, CD player, fax, high-speed Internet access, dataport, kitchenette, minibar, coffee maker, hair dryer, iron.

6 The Marina & Cow Hollow

These largely residential neighborhoods are teeming with restaurants, cafes, and boutique shops. The high concentration of families makes for great local playgrounds, and the lovely Marina Green, with its view of the Golden Gate Bridge, is an attraction on its own. The downside is that most hotels here are on Lombard Street, a busy thoroughfare lined with chain restaurants and gas stations.

MODERATE

Cow Hollow Motor Inn & Suites ★★ *Finds* The motel side of this popular, nonsmoking establishment has spacious guest rooms in mostly king bed and double/double combinations. (There are three double queen rooms). All have good-sized bathrooms with plenty of counter space. The decor is plain, but clean and new—it was redecorated in 2003. With free indoor parking to boot, it's a great deal. Just make sure your room doesn't overlook Lombard Street, as even the double-paned windows don't block out the noise. Just in case, the front desk provides free earplugs.

The real treasures are the 12 suites located in the adjacent building on Chestnut Street. These are brightly decorated one- or two-bedroom apartments that are true homes-away-from-home, with living rooms, fully equipped kitchens, and dining rooms with wood flooring. The two-bedroom suites have two bathrooms and one of the one-bedroom rentals contains two double beds. There are even coin-operated washers and dryers on every floor. The trick is to reserve far in advance—up to a year for visits over holidays. The Inn also discounts the suites an extra \$25 per day for stays over 5 days.

2190 Lombard St. (at Steiner St.), San Francisco, CA 94123. ☎ 415/921-5800. Fax 415/922-8515. www.cowhollowsuites.com. 129 units. \$86–\$135 double; \$225–\$275 suite. Kids under 12 stay free in parent's room. Additional person \$15. Rollaways \$10, cribs free. AE, DC, MC, V. Free parking (1 car per room). **In room:** A/C, TV, high-speed Internet access, fridge (on request, \$5 extra), coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron (on request).

Hotel Del Sol Once upon a time, the Del Sol was a modest motel with the good fortune to be located in Cow Hollow, away from noisy Lombard Street. One day, a clever hospitality company, Joie de Vivre, came along. Many gallons of bright yellow, green, and blue paint later, a star was born. She's even got the swimming pool, hammocks, and palm trees to prove it. Most of the all-non-smoking guest rooms and suites surround a tiled, color-washed interior courtyard that triples as a parking complex, pool area, and complimentary breakfast bar.

Double/doubles are fine for small families, but if you can, take advantage of the one-bedroom suites with pullout sofas in the living rooms, or the sole "Family Suite" complete with bunk beds, small-scale furniture, toys, and board games. The three so-called kitchenette units are actually bedrooms with a galley containing a counter, sink, fridge, and microwave (no stove). This was once an inexpensive 1960s motel, and the square footage hasn't changed along with the new paint. Rooms are smallish, bathrooms miniscule, ceilings low, and walls thin. If you like the free parking, swimming pool, and Marina location, this place is for you. If you want lots of space, think again.

3100 Webster St. (at Greenwich St.), San Francisco, CA 94123. ☎ 877/433-5765 or 415/921-5520. Fax 415/931-4137. www.thehoteldelsol.com. 57 units. \$149–\$169 double; \$169–\$189 suite. Kids under 12 stay free in parent's room. Futon, rollaway, or crib \$10. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. **Amenities:** Continental breakfast; heated outdoor pool; passes to nearby health club (\$15); laundry service; dry cleaning. *In room:* TV/VCR, high-speed wireless Internet access, fridge (on request, \$10), coffeemaker (on request), hairdryer, iron, safe.

INEXPENSIVE

The Marina Inn ★ *Value* This inexpensive but tidy inn is most suitable for small families with one or possibly two young children. All guest rooms have queen beds, and a few have an additional twin bed. Depending on floor space, the very accommodating staff can provide a rollaway, crib, or foam mattress. Larger families would require taking multiple rooms, but you'll still spend very little for comfortable accommodations that include a continental breakfast of coffee, juice, pastries, and toasted bagels in a pleasant breakfast nook. The pine beds, armoires, and tables in every guest room are simple and lovely. Inside rooms obtain natural light from light wells but are very quiet; the bright outside rooms pick up noise from ever-busy Lombard Street. Moscone Playground, a popular destination for young families, is just 2 blocks away. Also close by are Chestnut Street, a great walking street with some of my favorite family-friendly restaurants, and the famously crooked part of Lombard Street. Compared to the generic motels along Lombard, the Marina Inn is a Victorian oasis in a safer section of the neighborhood.

3110 Octavia St.(at Lombard St.), San Francisco, CA 94123. ☎ 800/274-1420 or 415/928-1000. Fax 415/928-5909. www.marinainn.com. 40 units. \$65–\$135 double. Kids under 5 stay free in parent's room. Additional guests \$10. Rollaways, foam mattresses, and cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Self-parking \$16 in a public lot 3 blocks away. **Amenities:** Continental breakfast. *In room:* TV, hair dryer (on request), iron (on request).

Marina Motel ★ The flower-bedecked Marina Motel blends into the surrounding stucco and concrete structures, so be on the lookout for the courtyard entrance between Broderick and Divisadero streets. This is a good option if you have a car, because the parking is off street in little garages and it's free. The guest rooms, all of which face the courtyard, are easily the most charming in the neighborhood. They've recently been redecorated with pine furniture, Italian tiles in the bathrooms, and attractive quilts, and every room has a refrigerator and coffeemaker. In addition to double/doubles and family suites (two bedrooms with a

shared bathroom), there are two units with fully stocked kitchens. Management's preference is to rent the kitchen units by the week, so discuss your options with the reservations desk if you'll be staying for a shorter period.

Chestnut Street shopping and dining is a short walk away. The Presidio's Lombard Gate entrance is also within walking distance, and you can take advantage of the free Presidio shuttle buses to get around inside (see "Getting Around," in chapter 3). The 30-Stockton Muni bus from Chestnut Street brings Marina visitors through North Beach, Chinatown, and Union Square. You may spend more time traveling to other neighborhoods, but at the Marina Motel you'll spend a lot less on accommodations.

2576 Lombard St. (between Broderick and Divisadero sts.), San Francisco, CA 94123. ☎ 800/346-6118 or 415/921-9406. Fax 415/921-0364. www.marinamotel.com. 38 units. \$89–\$109 double; \$129–\$155 suite. Kitchens \$10 extra. Kids under 18 stay free in parent's room. Rollaways and cribs \$10. Dogs welcome (\$10 per night). AE, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. *In room:* TV, fridge, coffeemaker, hair dryer, iron.

7 Laurel Heights

This solidly residential neighborhood is a good choice for young families or anyone who wants respite from the urban jungle. Sacramento Street shopping has something for everyone, kids included, and Laurel Village, almost an old-fashioned strip mall, draws crowds of locals.

MODERATE

The Laurel Inn ★★ *Value* One of the few hotels in the area, the Laurel Inn is terrific and a good value. It's ideal for large families—18 units have complete kitchens. Don't be dismayed by the motor lodge exterior. Inside, it's polished and sleek. Configured with either two double beds or a king and a sofa bed, many of the warm and inviting guest rooms interconnect as well. All the rooms are spacious enough to accommodate a crib and some have panoramic city views.

The hotel caters to kids with cookies and lemonade in the afternoons, and a complimentary continental breakfast with fresh juices and an array of muffins and pastries helps jump-start the mornings. Moreover, the neighborhood is safe and quiet. Despite the location away from the tourist zone, convenient bus lines are just outside the front door, including the 3-Jackson to Union Square and the 1-California to Chinatown and the financial district.

444 Presidio Ave. (at California St.), San Francisco, CA 94115. ☎ 800/552-8735 or 415/567-8467. Fax 415/928-1866. www.thelaurelinn.com. 49 units. \$165–\$190 double. Kids under 12 stay free in parent's room. Additional guests \$10. Rollaways \$10, cribs free. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Free parking. Pets welcome with some restrictions; call for details. **Amenities:** Laundry service; dry cleaning; CD and video lending library. *In room:* TV/VCR, CD player, dataport, iron.

Family-Friendly Dining

San Francisco is a food-lover's city. Even before renowned local chef Alice Waters gave birth to California cuisine, San Francisco took advantage of its access to fresh seafood, local produce, and ethnic influences to foster a thriving dining scene. To the north, east, and south are dozens of small family farms, many organic, which supply city restaurants. In addition, the melting pot of immigrants has added serious depth to the epicurean offerings. Great Mexican food abounds in the Mission, and you'll find Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Thai restaurants everywhere. Although North Beach has its share of Italian restaurants, you can also find Spanish, Indian, and Greek cuisine very close by.

With so many tantalizing options, it would be a shame to stick to pizza simply because you have the kids in tow—although San Francisco does have some excellent pizzerias, which are listed in this chapter. Experiencing the city's fabulous food needn't deplete your wallet—ethnic restaurants are often inexpensive, and many moderately-priced restaurants are home to capable, aspiring young chefs. But it may mean you'll be taking young kids out of their culinary comfort zone and that you'll be eating in restaurants not populated exclusively by families. You'll soon discover, though, that San Franciscans are a friendly bunch and that most chefs will be happy to accommodate tiny palates should the need arise. My husband and I have dragged our kids to any number of local restaurants and found that, by

following the guidelines I list below (see the "Dining Out in Peace" box), we've been able to enjoy many wonderful dinners and, at the same time, introduce our girls to new and interesting foods.

With that spirit of discovery in mind, I've listed several dining options in this chapter that are not specifically designed for families but to which kids will certainly feel welcome. I have, however, passed over those restaurants that are simply not suitable for kids under 12. The exceptions are restaurants I suggest for when you have a babysitter.

Of course, you may hit moments in the sightseeing frenzy when you just want a place where everyone can sit, find something they like on the menu, and eat—without worrying about keeping the kids quiet or persuading them to think beyond buttered noodles. For those moments, I've included plenty of restaurants that are tailor-made for big, messy, family meals.

A NOTE ABOUT PRICES The restaurants in the reviews that follow are categorized as Very Expensive, Expensive, Moderate, and Inexpensive, based on an approximation of what a family of four would spend for nonalcoholic drinks and four main courses. If this family would have to pay \$120 or more for a meal, I consider that restaurant **Very Expensive**; from \$75 to \$120 **Expensive**; between \$40 and \$75, **Moderate**; under \$40, **Inexpensive**. I've included cafes, pizzerias, and casual, order-at-the-counter places under the Inexpensive

Tips Dining Out in Peace

- **Set the ground rules.** Before entering a restaurant, remind kids that you are going to a special place and that a few key rules apply, such as inside voices and good manners.
- **Bring entertainment.** Crayons, markers, paper, stickers, and so on, will give your children something to do while awaiting their food. If the kids are old enough, bring postcards for them to write.
- **Try word games.** “I Spy” is a good one. Another word game involves one person naming something in a category, such as food. The next person names a word in the same category that starts with the last letter of the previous word. (For example: orange, eggplant, tomato, onion . . .)
- **Remember the value of conversation.** Talk with your kids about what you did during the day or what you have planned for the next one. That will help pass the time and encourage restaurant-appropriate behavior.
- **Decide who’s “on duty.”** Decide ahead of time which adult will have to interrupt his or her meal, should a child act up. Take turns at each meal.
- **Use time-outs.** If your normally polite child acts up, immediately and quietly take him or her outside. This will avoid embarrassment, and will be a lesson to the child. You shouldn’t have to do this more than a few times before your child gets the message.
- **Make exceptions.** Your child may normally drink milk with dinner. Permit him or her to have a Shirley Temple (7Up and grenadine with a cherry). This will make dinner out seem special.
- **Use rewards and bribery.** Tell kids that if they behave well and eat their dinner, they’ll get a bowl of vanilla ice cream for desert.
- **Be flexible.** If the kids are tired, skip the appetizers or order food that is quick to prepare. If they’ve reached their limit, have one parent take them outside to stretch their legs or hunt down a dessert spot while the other parent pays the bill.
- **Slow down.** Before dinner, take them back to the hotel for a nap to rest up or to a playground to let loose some pent-up energy.
- **Eat early.** If you plan to eat at a more elegant restaurant or if it’s the weekend, arrive early, before the restaurant gets full. (Plan a post-dinner walk or activity, such as seeing the sea lions at Fisherman’s Wharf in summer or the Union Square Christmas tree in winter.)
- **Do lunch.** Some of the city’s finer restaurants are open for lunch. Why not make lunch your special meal of the day? The ambience may be more kid-friendly, the prices lower, and your children better behaved. Then you can all have pizza for dinner, and you won’t feel you’ve missed out.
- **Relax.** San Franciscans are very friendly, and most restaurants are delighted to have children come dine with them.

header, and restaurants that have positioned themselves as combining high-quality ingredients and value in the Moderate column. The Expensive category includes afternoon tea in hotels, usually costly, but delightful if you like that sort of thing. Very Expensive restaurants are for the evenings you've hired a babysitter, unless you're rearing a future Julia Child or Jacques Pepin and wish to inspire her or him. Tax in San Francisco is 8.5%. Tip 15% for good service; more for exemplary service; and at your discretion for poor service.

CHAINS, CHAINS, CHAINS & FAST FOOD You don't find a lot of national chains or even fast-food

restaurants in any but the most touristed neighborhoods, such as Fisherman's Wharf and Union Square. For the most part you'll find San Franciscans, with or without kids, prefer chef-driven restaurants with unique identities. As for fast food, you can't do much better than a burrito, but I do understand that kids crave pizzas or burgers once in a while. Instead of pointing you to the nearest McDonald's however, I have done my best to offer alternatives including locally owned diners and regional chains of Italian restaurants, noodle bars, and pizza parlors.

1 Restaurants by Cuisine

AFTERNOON TEA

- Laurel Court (Nob Hill, \$\$\$, p. 115)
- Lovejoy's Tea Room (The Castro/Noe Valley, \$\$, p. 144)
- Palace Hotel ★ (SoMa, \$\$\$, p. 110)

AMERICAN

- Blue Front Cafe (The Haight, \$, p. 137)
- Blue Mermaid Chowder House (Fisherman's Wharf, \$\$, p. 128)
- Chow ★ (The Castro/Noe Valley, \$, p. 144)
- Cliff House Bistro (The Richmond/Sunset, \$\$\$, p. 145)
- Dolores Park Cafe ★ (Mission, \$, p. 142)
- Dottie's True Blue Cafe ★ (Union Square/Financial District, \$, p. 110)
- Ella's ★ (Japantown/Pacific Heights/Presidio Heights, \$, p. 134)
- Firefly ★★ (The Castro/Noe Valley, \$\$, p. 144)

- Fog City Diner (The Embarcadero/South Beach, \$\$, p. 120)
- The Grove ★ (Marina/Cow Hollow, \$, p. 132)
- Japantown/Pacific Heights/Presidio Heights, p. 135)
- McCormick & Kuleto's ★ (Fisherman's Wharf, \$\$\$, p. 127)
- Park Chalet ★ (The Richmond/Sunset, \$, p. 146)
- Park Chow ★ (The Richmond/Sunset, \$, p. 147)
- Polker's Gourmet Burgers (Russian Hill, \$, p. 136)
- Rainforest Cafe (Fisherman's Wharf, \$\$\$, p. 127)
- Sears Fine Foods (Union Square/Financial District, \$, p. 110)
- Tadich Grill (Union Square/Financial District, \$\$, p. 108)
- Taylor's Refresher ★ (Embarcadero/South Beach, \$, p. 122)
- Town Hall ★★ (SoMa, \$\$\$, p. 111)

ASIAN

- The Citrus Club (The Haight, \$, p. 138)
 Long Life Noodle Company & Jook Joint (Embarcadero/South Beach, \$, p. 121)
 Zao Noodle Bar (Marina/Cow Hollow, \$, p. 133;
 Japantown/Pacific Heights/Presidio Heights, p. 135)

ASIAN-FUSION

- Café Kati ★★ (Japantown/Pacific Heights/Presidio Heights, \$\$\$, p. 133)

BAKERY

- Boulange de Polk ★ (Russian Hill, \$, p. 136)
 Citizen Cake (Civic Center/Hayes Valley, \$\$, p. 130)
 Tartine ★ (Mission, \$, p. 143)

BARBECUE

- Memphis Minnie's ★ (The Haight, \$, p. 138)

BELGIAN FRIES

- Frijt (Civic Center/Hayes Valley, \$, p. 128; Fisherman's Wharf, p. 130)

BREAKFAST/BRUNCH

- Blue Front Cafe (The Haight, \$, p. 137)
 The Canvas Cafe/Gallery (The Richmond/Sunset, \$, p. 146)
 Dolores Park Cafe ★ (Mission, \$, p. 142)
 Dottie's True Blue Cafe ★ (Union Square/Financial District, \$, p. 110)
 The Grove ★ (Marina/Cow Hollow, \$, p. 132; Japantown/Pacific Heights/Presidio Heights, p. 135)
 Ella's ★ (Japantown/Pacific Heights/Presidio Heights, \$, p. 134)
 Polker's Gourmet Burgers (Russian Hill, \$, p. 136)
 Sears Fine Foods (Union Square/Financial District, \$, p. 110)
 Town's End ★ (Embarcadero/South Beach, \$\$, p. 121)

CALIFORNIA

- Citizen Cake (Civic Center/Hayes Valley, \$\$, p. 130)
 Crossroads Café ★ (The Embarcadero/South Beach, \$, p. 121)
 Foreign Cinema ★★ (The Mission, \$\$\$, p. 140)
 Franciscan (Fisherman's Wharf, \$\$\$, p. 127)
 Gary Danko ★★ (Fisherman's Wharf, \$\$\$\$, p. 126)
 Hayes Street Grill ★ (Civic Center/Hayes Valley, \$\$\$, p. 129)
 Isa ★★ (Marina/Cow Hollow, \$, p. 131)
 Moose's ★★ (North Beach, \$\$\$, p. 122)
 Restaurant Lulu ★ (SoMa, \$\$\$, p. 111)
 Town's End ★ (Embarcadero/South Beach, \$, p. 121)
 Zuni Cafe ★★ (Civic Center/Hayes Valley, \$\$\$, p. 129)

CARIBBEAN

- Cha Cha Cha's ★ (Haight, \$, p. 137)

CHICKEN

- Il Pollaio ★ (North Beach, \$, p. 124)

CHINESE

- Eliza's (Japantown/Pacific Heights/Presidio Heights, \$, p. 134)
 Dragon Well ★ (Marina/Cow Hollow, \$, p. 132)
 Great Eastern Restaurant (Chinatown, \$\$, p. 116)
 Hunan's Home Restaurant (Chinatown, \$, p. 116)
 Lichee Garden (Chinatown, \$, p. 118)
 R & G Lounge ★ (Chinatown, \$, p. 119)
 Ton Kiang ★★ (The Richmond/Sunset, \$, p. 148)

CREPES

- Crepe Express (The Haight, \$, p. 138)
 Frijt (Civic Center/Hayes Valley, \$, p. 128; Fisherman's Wharf, p. 130)

- San Francisco Crepe Cart (Fisherman's Wharf, \$, p. 129)
 Ti Couz ★ (The Mission, \$, p. 143)

DELICATESSEN

- East Coast West Delicatessen
 (Russian Hill, \$, p. 136)

ECLECTIC

- The Canvas Cafe/Gallery (The Richmond/Sunset, \$, p. 146)

FRENCH

- Fleur de Lys ★★ (Union Square/Financial District, \$\$\$\$, p. 104)
 Grand Café ★ (Union Square/Financial District, \$\$\$, p. 105)
 Isa ★★ (Marina/Cow Hollow, \$, p. 131)
 Restaurant Lulu ★ (SoMa, \$\$\$, p. 111)

GREEK

- Kokkari Estiatorio ★★
 (Embarcadero/South Beach \$\$\$, p. 119)

HAMBURGERS

- Burger Joint (The Haight, \$, p. 138; The Mission, p. 142)
 IN-N-OUT Burger (Fisherman's Wharf, \$, p. 128)
 Polker's Gourmet Burgers (Russian Hill, \$, p. 136)
 Mel's Drive-in (Marina/Cow Hollow, \$, p. 115; SoMa, p. 132; The Richmond/Sunset, p. 147)
 Taylor's Refresher ★
 (Embarcadero/South Beach, \$, p. 122)

ICE CREAM

- Ben & Jerry's (The Haight, \$, p. 137)
 Gelato Classico ★ (North Beach, \$, p. 124)
 Ghirardelli Soda Fountain & Chocolate Shop (Fisherman's Wharf, \$, p. 128)
 Mitchell's Ice Cream ★ (The Mission, \$, p. 143)

- Swensen's Creamery (Russian Hill, \$, p. 136)
 Toy Boat Dessert Cafe ★ (The Richmond/Sunset, \$, p. 148)

INDIAN/PAKISTANI

- Naan-N-Curry (North Beach \$, p. 126)

ITALIAN

- A16 ★★ (Marina/Cow Hollow, \$\$, p. 131)
 Antica Trattoria ★★ (Russian Hill, \$\$\$, p. 135)
 Café Pescatore (Fisherman's Wharf, \$\$, p. 128)
 Caffé Macaroni (North Beach, \$\$, p. 123)
 Delfina ★★ (The Mission, \$\$, p. 140)
 L'Osterio del Forno ★★ (North Beach, \$\$, p. 123)
 Mario's Bohemian Cigar Store (North Beach, \$, p. 124)
 Pasta Pomodoro (Marina/Cow Hollow, \$, p. 126; North Beach, p. 133; Japantown/Pacific Heights/Presidio Heights, p. 135; The Castro/Noe Valley, p. 145; The Richmond/Sunset, p. 147)
 Pazzia ★ (SoMa, \$\$, p. 115)
 Puccini and Pinetti (Union Square/Financial District, \$, p. 108)
 Rose Pistola ★ (North Beach, \$\$\$, p. 123)
 Tommaso's Restaurant (North Beach, \$\$, p. 123)
 Trattoria Contadina ★★ (North Beach, \$\$, p. 124)

JAPANESE

- Isobune (Japantown/Pacific Heights/Presidio Heights, \$\$, p. 134)
 Juban Yakiniku House (Japantown/Pacific Heights/Presidio Heights, \$\$, p. 134)
 Sanraku ★ (Union Square/Financial District, \$\$, p. 108)

MEDITERRANEAN

- Blue Front Cafe (The Haight, \$, p. 137)
 Foreign Cinema ★★ (The Mission, \$\$\$, p. 140)
 Zuni Cafe ★★ (Civic Center/Hayes Valley, \$\$\$, p. 129)

MOROCCAN

- Aziza ★★ (The Richmond/Sunset, \$\$, p. 145)

MEXICAN

- Café Marimba ★ (Marina/Cow Hollow, \$\$, p. 131)
 La Corneta Taqueria ★ (The Mission, \$, p. 142)
 La Rondalla (The Mission, \$, p. 142)
 Pancho Villa Taqueria ★ (The Mission, \$, p. 143)

PIZZA

- Amici's East Coast Pizzeria (Embarcadero/South Beach, \$, p. 121; Marina/Cow Hollow, p. 132)
 A16 ★★ (Marina/Cow Hollow, \$\$, p. 131)
 Blondie's Pizza (Union Square/Financial District, \$, p. 110)
 Giorgio's Pizzeria ★ (The Richmond/Sunset, \$, p. 147)
 Pizzetta 211 ★ (The Richmond/Sunset, \$\$, p. 146)
 Tommaso's Restaurant (North Beach, \$\$, p. 123)
 Vicolo Pizzeria ★ (Civic Center/Hayes Valley, \$, p. 130)
 ZA Pizza ★ (Russian Hill, \$, p. 137)

SPANISH

- Bocadillos ★ (Embarcadero/South Beach, \$\$, p. 119)

SEAFOOD

- Blue Mermaid Chowder House (Fisherman's Wharf, \$\$, p. 128)
 Hayes Street Grill ★ (Civic Center/Hayes Valley, \$\$\$, p. 129)
 McCormick & Kuleto's ★ (Fisherman's Wharf, \$\$\$, p. 127)
 Tadich Grill (Union Square/Financial District, \$\$, p. 108)

SUSHI

- Isobune (Japantown/Pacific Heights/Presidio Heights, \$\$, p. 134)
 Sanraku ★ (Union Square/Financial District, \$\$, p. 108)

THAI

- Khan Toke ★ (The Richmond/Sunset, \$\$, p. 146)
 Koh Samui & The Monkey (SoMa, \$\$, p. 115)
 Marnee Thai ★ (The Richmond/Sunset, \$, p. 147)

VEGETARIAN

- Greens ★★ (Marina/Cow Hollow, \$\$\$, p. 130)
 Millennium (Union Square/Financial District, \$\$\$, p. 105)

VIETNAMESE

- Ana Mandara ★ (Fisherman's Wharf, \$\$\$, p. 126)
 Slanted Door ★★ (The Embarcadero/South Beach, \$\$, p. 120)

2 Union Square/The Financial District**VERY EXPENSIVE**

Fleur de Lys ★★ FRENCH Ironically, the first entry in a chapter called "Family Friendly Dining" doesn't really fit that description. It is one of two exceptions I've listed for a night when you have a babysitter and want to experience one of the top restaurants in the country. It's clear from the moment you walk in the door and see the regal, intimate dining room, tented in 900 yards of richly-patterned red and gold fabric, that Fleur de Lys is the epitome of ultra-luxurious dining. In keeping with the warm, inviting decor, the impeccable service is comfortably unpretentious.

As for the awe-inspiring food, the man behind the mastery is award-winning chef Hubert Keller, a native of the Alsace region of France who has trained with some of the top chefs in the world. Keller's kitchen is firmly rooted in classic French cooking, but includes some playful touches inspired by his new country, such as truffle-infused popcorn and an amazing mini foie gras hamburger. Choose from a menu of three, four, or five courses and expect to be blown away by such offerings as seared Moroccan spiced sea scallops with pomegranate *jus*, cauliflower flan, and Osetra caviar or veal *tournedos* scented with foamy lobster bisque and veal essence. A vegetarian tasting menu, with options like truffled white bean soup with green garlic fondue and wild mushrooms, is also available. The desserts and cheese selection are obscenely delicious, and the wine list includes several hundred selections. (Although I've noted this isn't a place for kids, I did once spot two pre-teen boys dining with their parents; they were well behaved and seemed to enjoy the experience.)

777 Sutter St. (between Jones and Taylor sts.). ☎ 415/673-7779. www.fleurdeleyss.com. Reservations essential. 3-course menu \$68, 4-course \$76, 5-course \$88. Mon–Thurs 6–9:30pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:30pm. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Muni: 2-Clement, 3-Jackson, 4-Sutter, or 27-Bryant to Jones St.

EXPENSIVE

Grand Café ★ FRENCH The restaurant certainly lives up to its name in terms of decor and style: from the soaring ceilings, massive columns, and wall-sized murals that depict turn-of-the-20th-century Paris to the fine food, this brasserie is abuzz with energy and activity. Located next to the Hotel Monaco and close to the theaters around Union Square, tourists and locals gravitate to the stunning dining room for California-inspired French dishes prepared in an open kitchen with a theatrical flair. Appetizers may include herb-encrusted soft shell crab, to be followed by braised rabbit or sautéed skate, and, for dessert, a very tasty banana cream pie. Although the food has improved since the arrival of seasoned chef Paul Arenstam, it is not quite as majestic as the room that houses it.

For a taste of grandeur without the grand prices, check out the adjacent, more casual Petit Café for pizzas, salads, sandwiches, and desserts. Even in the main room, children may order off the Petit Café menu.

501 Geary St. (at Taylor St.). ☎ 415/292-0101. www.grandcafe-sf.com. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$12–\$17 lunch, \$19–\$25 dinner; Petit Café \$7–\$16. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Breakfast Mon–Fri 7–10:30am, Sat 8–10:30am, Sun brunch 9am–2:30pm; lunch Mon–Sat 11:30am–2:30pm; dinner Sun–Thurs 5:30–10pm, Fri–Sat 5:30–11pm. Petite Café, Sun–Thurs 11:30am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–midnight. Muni: Powell-Hyde or Powell-Mason cable car to Union Sq.; walk 2 blocks west.

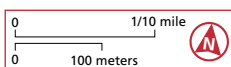
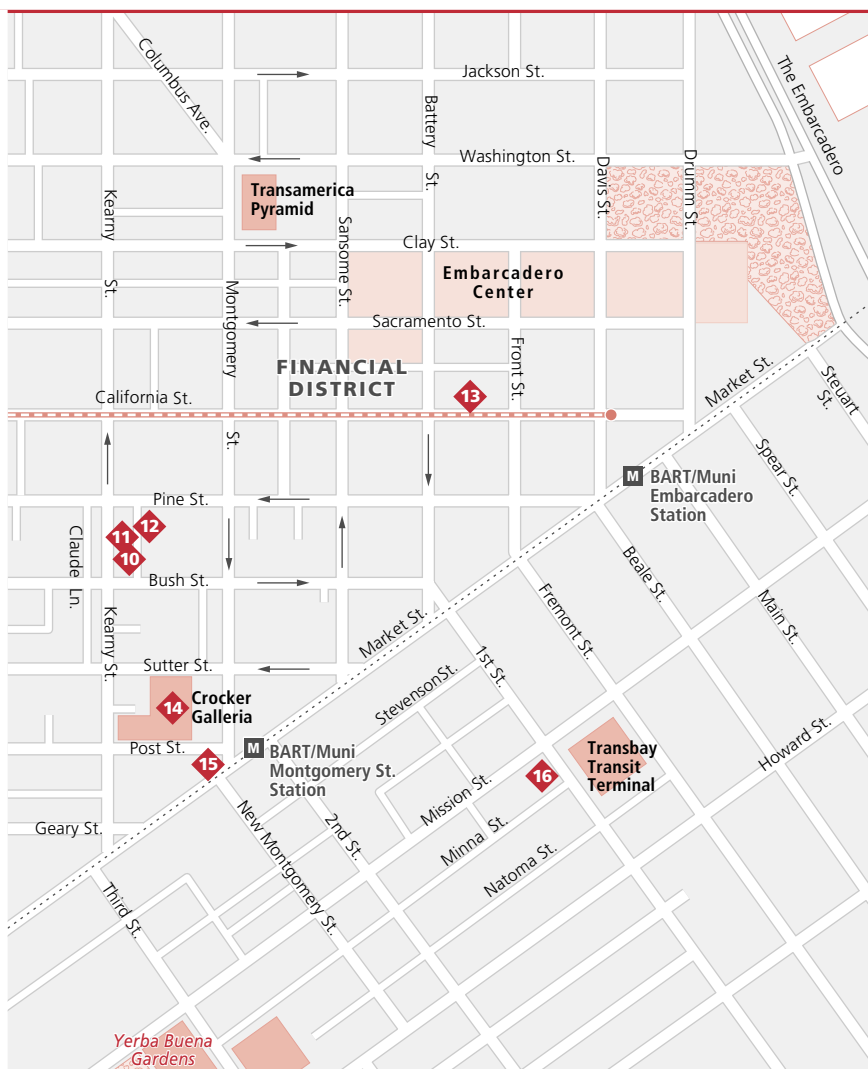
Millennium VEGETARIAN/VEGAN Admittedly, Millennium is not for everyone. Some vegetarian eateries are so good even the most avowed carnivores will find something to love. One such place is Greens in the Marina (p. 130). But Millennium is not just vegetarian. It's vegan, meaning you won't find any animal products on the premises. Even honey is a no-no (although I'm told there's a bottle of the stuff hidden in the back). Without eggs or dairy, concocting a meal meat-eaters can sink their teeth into becomes more challenging.

But I list this place precisely because so many young adults are opting out on meat these days, and at least here teens won't be groaning at the menu and then ordering little more than plain lettuce leaves. They can choose instead from various meatless concoctions that are rich in flavors and protein. One note of advice: stick to dishes that don't try to mimic ones traditionally made with animal products. If you find fried green tomatoes or Indian samosa pastries with roasted eggplant and zucchini on the seasonally changing menu, you won't be disappointed. But the warm spinach salad with tofu tempura left me wishing for

Dining in Union Square & the Financial District



- | | | | |
|-------------------------|----|-----------------------------|----|
| Belden Place | 12 | Lee's Sandwiches | 11 |
| Blondie's Pizza | 9 | Millenium | 3 |
| The Cellar at Macy's | 7 | Puccini and Pinetti | 8 |
| Crocker Galleria | 14 | Sam's Grill | 10 |
| Delta Tower | 16 | Sanraku | 1 |
| Dottie's True Blue Cafe | 4 | Sears Fine Foods | 6 |
| Fleur de Lys | 2 | Specialty's Café and Bakery | 15 |
| Grand Cafe | 5 | Tadich Grill | 13 |



-  BART/Muni
-  Cable Car
-  One Way

real goat cheese, and the truffled vegetable gratin with garlic chive polenta cried out for real cream. One plus is that the restaurant can accommodate any food aversion or allergy. Call ahead and let them know your kid is allergic to eggs, dairy, soy, wheat, and nuts, and they'll happily put something together.

580 Geary St. (at Jones St.). ☎ **415/345-3900**. www.millenniumrestaurant.com. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$18–\$21. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 5:30–9:30pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:30pm. Muni: 27-Bryant or 38-Geary to Jones St., or Powell-Hyde or Powell-Mason cable car to Union Sq. and walk 2 blocks west.

MODERATE

Puccini and Pinetti ITALIAN This is one Union Square restaurant the kids will definitely enjoy. Children are awfully pleased with the restaurant's activity pack, which includes crayons, and the make-your-own pizza option, where servers bring the pizza dough and fixings to the table so young chefs can create exactly what they want. For adults, the menu offers plenty of hearty pasta dishes and well-known Italian favorites like eggplant parmigiana and veal piccata. Service is considerate, and the colorful decor welcoming. You can treat Puccini and Pinetti as a casual dinner stop or make an evening of it.

129 Ellis St. (at Cyril Magnin St.). ☎ **415/392-5500**. www.pucciniandpinetti.com. Kids' menu, highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$12–\$16 lunch, \$14–\$20 dinner; kid's menu \$3–\$6. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–3:30pm; Mon–Thurs 4–10pm; Fri–Sat 4–11pm; Sun 5–10pm. Muni: Powell-Hyde or Powell-Mason cable car to Union Sq.; walk 2 blocks south on Powell to Ellis and turn right.

Sanraku ★ *Finds* JAPANESE/SUSHI Every neighborhood in San Francisco has a smattering of restaurants boasting “artistic,” “exciting,” or just plain cheap sushi. That is all well and good, but raw fish is raw fish. It should be fresh and prepared by sushi chefs who know what they're doing. Although it's tough to mess up a California roll, it's equally hard to serve a truly delicious slice of *maguro* (tuna) sashimi, but Sanraku succeeds in doing just that. The Spartan decor and casual atmosphere belie the truly fresh and well-prepared sushi. Some people may wonder what a sushi joint is doing in a family guide, but at least in these parts kids are well acquainted with sushi. My family and I are regulars here. While Dad and I sip sake, the girls enjoy steamed *edamame* (soybeans), avocado rolls, and tempura. Sanraku is moderately priced, but ordering a la carte could edge the bill into the expensive category. For more dollar-conscious options, consider the combination dinners, such as sushi and sashimi, sushi and tempura, or sushi and teriyaki beef, which come with steamed rice, a house salad, and fresh fruit.

704 Sutter St. (at Taylor St.). ☎ **415/771-0803**. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$8.50–\$25. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm. Muni: 2-Clement, 3-Jackson, 4-Sutter, or 27-Bryant to Taylor St.

Tadich Grill AMERICAN/SEAFOOD People come to the Tadich Grill as much for the history as for the food. Businesspeople and tourists alike appreciate the clubby, traditional feel of San Francisco's oldest restaurant, which started life in a different location over 150 years ago. The long bar, dark wood interior and gruff waiters may seem intimidating to little ones, so settle the family into one of the many cozy booths to better enjoy the old-time feel. Stick to uncomplicated and traditional dishes, such as shrimp louie, grilled fish of the day, clam chowder or creamed spinach, and you will eat well. The Tadich doesn't take reservations, so be prepared to stand in line.

240 California St. (between Front and Battery sts.). ☎ **415/391-2373**. Boosters. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$15–\$34. MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–9:30pm; Sat 11:30am–9:30pm. Muni: F-Market streetcar to Front St. or 1-California or 41-Union bus to California St.

Belden Place—A Slice of Europe in SF

If you want to eat downtown without slumming it at a diner or breaking the bank at a posh, pricey restaurant, come to Belden Place. This alley in the Financial District, bordered by Kearny, Montgomery, Pine, and Bush streets, is lined with moderately priced restaurants cooking up French, Italian, Catalan, and other Mediterranean fare. The lane is patronized by plenty of business people, but the outdoor tables and colorful banners lend an informal feeling, so don't hesitate to bring the kids. Stroll on over and take your pick from the following:

Starting at the Pine Street side of Belden Place is **Brindisi Cucina di Mare** (88 Belden Place; ☎ 415/593-8000), one of the newest restaurants in the alley, specializing in Italian seafood. From stuffed calamari and seafood risotto to plenty of kid-friendly pasta, most main courses are under \$20. Named for its address at 52 Belden Place, **Café 52** (☎ 415/433-5200) serves California-inspired Mediterranean food with a Greek accent, such as lamb or chicken shish kabobs, stuffed grape leaves, and pilaf dishes. The menu of small plates, none over \$11, is great for sharing.

With a name that is also a play on the address, **B44** (44 Belden Place; ☎ 415/986-6287) is a Catalan-style bistro, serving nine kinds of paella, including meat, seafood, and vegetarian at \$17 to \$21 each. Salads, small plates, and dishes such as roasted salt cod or roasted rabbit are also on the menu. The tasty food could be too challenging for less adventurous kids. Just next door, **Plouf** (40 Belden Place; ☎ 415/986-6491) offers mussels prepared seven different ways, as well as French-accented salads, sandwiches, fish, and meats. All lunch items are under \$20, but there aren't many kid-friendly choices on the menu other than fish and chips.

A better choice for families is at 28 Belden Place: **Café Tiramisu** (☎ 415/421-7044; www.cafetiramisu.com). Kids will appreciate the Italian fare, including pasta dishes from \$12 to \$19 that those with smaller appetites can easily share. Main courses like *cioppino*, Italian seafood stew, or veal scaloppini range from \$16 to \$29 (up to \$32 at dinner). The most moderately priced pick of the bunch is Parisian-Bistro inspired **Café Bastille** (22 Belden Place; ☎ 415/986-5673). While parents savor French onion soup, quiche, or grilled steak and fries, kids can share a French hot dog on a baguette with cheese and fries. Most lunch choices are \$9 to \$13, and dinner is just a tad more.

But perhaps you want something more traditional, and you've reached the end of the alley. You're in luck. On the corner at 374 Bush Street you'll find **Sam's Grill** (☎ 415/421-0594), one of the oldest restaurants in San Francisco. Grab a cozy wooden booth and order charcoal-broiled fish, roasted chicken, or a simple pasta dish. Entrees range from \$10 to \$27.

INEXPENSIVE

Blondie's Pizza PIZZA The staff here cuts and sells huge wedges of thick-crust pizzas slathered with tomato sauce, cheese, and various toppings at a constant pace. At \$2.75 a slice, you can feed an army and still have change left over for a cable car ticket. You can order pepperoni, but if you ask for carrots and broccoli, you've even got yourself a healthy meal. You won't find tables here, but the benches at Union Square are just 2 blocks away.

63 Powell St. (between Ellis and Market sts.). ☎ 415/982-6168. Pizza \$2.75–\$3 per slice. No credit cards. (AE, MC, V accepted on orders over \$30.) Mon–Sat 10am–10pm; Sun 10am–9:30pm. Muni: Powell-Hyde or Powell-Mason cable car to Ellis St.

Dottie's True Blue Cafe ★ AMERICAN/BREAKFAST The best meal to have here is breakfast (many locals and tourists claim it's the best in town), but the place is so small that you'll have to wait—unless you have a family of early risers. The big portions of house-made breads, cornmeal pancakes, French toast, eggs, gourmet sausages, fresh orange juice, and cheery trim make the wait well worth it. The lunch menu features hearty salads, sandwiches, and burgers. Among the chintz and souvenir snow globes is a poster of Josephine Baker with bared breasts, just so you know.

522 Jones St. (between Geary and O'Farrell sts.). ☎ 415/885-2767. Highchairs. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$5–\$10. DISC, MC, V. Wed–Sun 7:30am–3pm. Muni: Powell-Hyde or Powell-Mason cable car to Union Sq.; walk 3 blocks west on Geary to Jones and turn left.

Sears Fine Foods AMERICAN/BREAKFAST A one-time Union Square institution famous for its stack of 18 silver dollar–sized Swedish pancakes, Sears was turned over to new management in 2004. The first step was a face-lift that included lifting the old carpet to show off the original hexagonal tile flooring and, overall, returning a sense of polish and pride to the old-time decor. The new manager retained the old menu, including the famous Swedish pancakes and the reasonable prices. In addition to the pancakes, the waffles and Canadian bacon are very tasty. The lunch menu includes hamburgers, a tuna melt on rye, and a BLT Sears says it will only serve when the tomatoes are good. All lunch options are under \$10, making this place a good bargain. The newly-added dinner menu, with entrees like New York strip steak or linguini with red seafood sauce, puts this restaurant into the moderate category price-wise. Because I'd just as soon go elsewhere for dinner, I've left Sears categorized as inexpensive.

439 Powell St. (between Post and Sutter sts.). ☎ 415/986-1160. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$7–\$13 breakfast/lunch, \$14–\$22 dinner. AE, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 6:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 6:30am–11pm. Muni: Powell-Hyde or Powell-Mason cable car to Union Sq.

3 South of Market

EXPENSIVE

Palace Hotel ★ AFTERNOON TEA Tea under the stained-glass dome of the Garden Court at the Palace Hotel, which is every bit as grand as the poshest hotels in London, is a celebratory affair even if your feet hurt from sightseeing. Linen and silver grace the elegant tables, and the menu consists of the customary dainty sandwiches, scones, and sweets, served with tea of your choice. The Palace cleverly offers a special “Princess” and “Prince” tea for children 12 and under. Along with the sandwiches and pastries, children receive a crown and scepter, and are treated royally as well.

Fun Fact High Tea

The British tradition of high tea is quite different from afternoon tea. High tea was a hearty meal eaten by the working class around the kitchen table, which often featured high-back chairs—hence the name. Afternoon tea is a more delicate affair with guests perched on the end of cushioned chairs and settees, with the lady of the house playing “Mother,” a term of endearment bestowed on the person in charge of pouring the tea.

2 New Montgomery St. (at Market St.). ☎ 415/512-1111. www.sfpalace.com. Kids’ menu, high chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Tea service \$30–\$40; children’s tea \$25. AE, DC, MC, V. Sat 2–4pm. Muni: Any streetcar to Montgomery St. station.

Restaurant LuLu ★ CALIFORNIA/FRENCH There’s seldom less than a roaring multitude packing the bar and taking up every seat at Restaurant LuLu, one of the more popular and enduring SoMa restaurants. Seasonally changing dishes like leek, goat cheese, and bacon tart; stuffed pumpkin blossoms; and grilled prawn risotto are meant to be shared and are apportioned accordingly. Rotisserie specials alternate during the week—Wednesday may be leg of lamb day, while Saturday is reserved for roast duck—but the mouth-watering rosemary-scented chicken is a staple. (Just make sure you’re not seated too close to the rotisserie, lest you come out smelling like smoked meat.) With its upscale clientele and sophisticated menu, Lulu’s feels quite grown-up, but the recently-added children’s menu, offering linguini, cheese pizza, or a grilled cheese sandwich, means kids will find something they can enjoy as well. Moreover, the large, multi-level space and constant buzz of diners means you won’t have to worry about noisy children making a scene; no one will hear them. In its price category, Lulu’s is the most family-friendly option in the neighborhood.

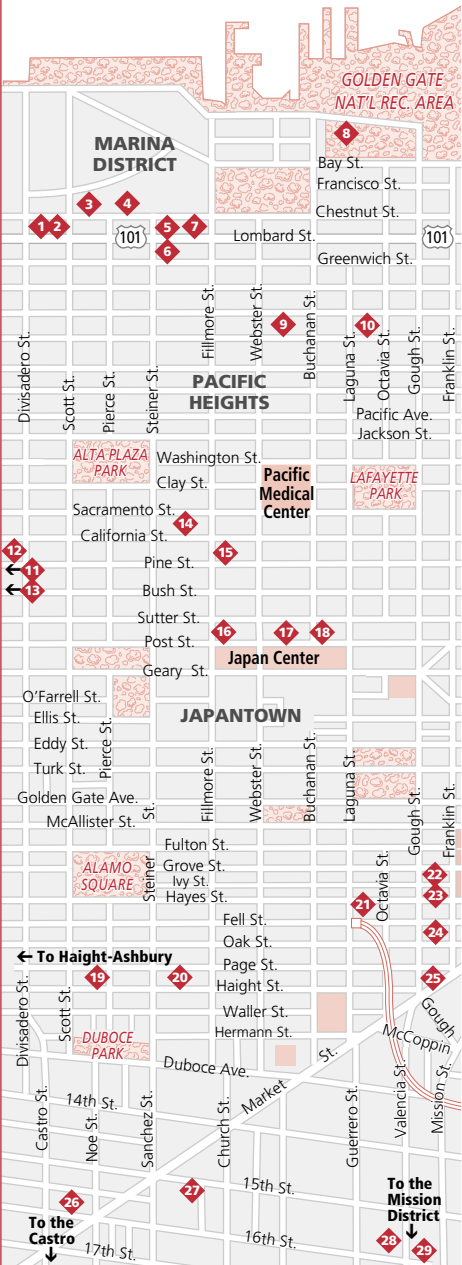
816 Folsom St. (between 4th and 5th sts.). ☎ 415/495-5775. www.restaurantlulu.com. Kids’ menu, high chairs, boosters. Main courses \$15–\$30; kids’ menu \$4.25–\$11. AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–10:30pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–11:30pm. Muni: 30-Stockton or 45-Union-Stockton bus to Folsom St.

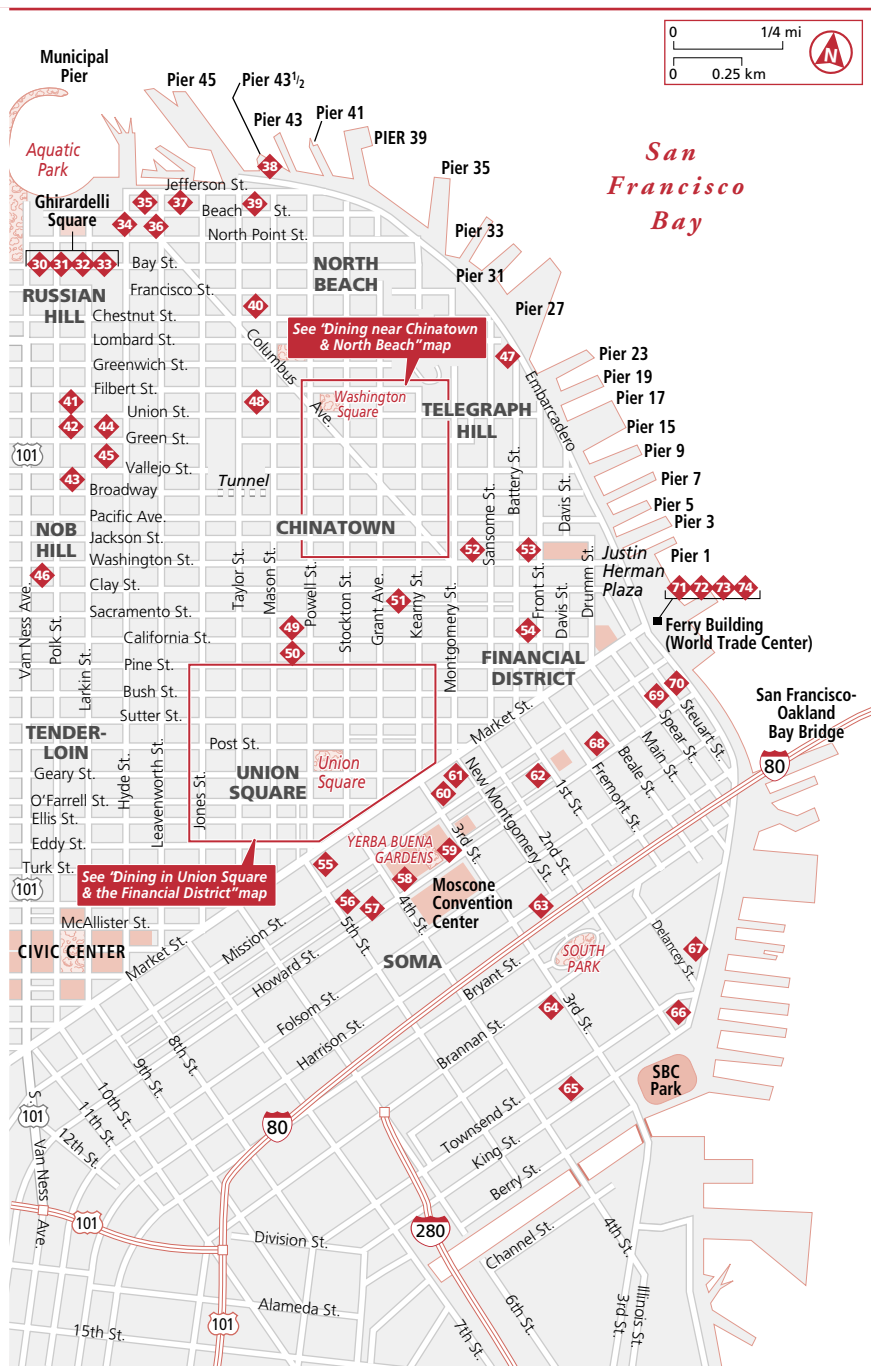
Town Hall ★★ AMERICAN This outstanding tribute to New American cuisine opened to great fanfare in early 2004, and the hype is well deserved. The co-owning brothers Mitchell and Steven Rosenthal earned their fame as chefs at one of San Francisco’s more upscale, glitzy restaurants, Postrio, but the mood at Town Hall is much more low-key. Housed in a hundred-year-old former electric warehouse, Town Hall’s decor evokes early American architecture and sensibilities, with exposed brick walls, crisp white ribbed wainscoting, and Craftsman style tables and chairs. The food echoes the American feel, drawing on traditions from around the country, with a special nod to New Orleans. Starters may include cornmeal-fried oysters on baby spinach with creamy bacon dressing or warm biscuits with local ham and pepper jam. Two stellar dishes we’ve enjoyed include wild king salmon with corn and shrimp hash, cherry tomatoes, and hush puppies and a naturally raised pork chop with smashed potatoes, English peas, and fava beans in garlic parsley butter. For dessert, don’t miss the butterscotch and chocolate *pot de crème*. I’ve spotted pre-teens here at dinnertime, but you may prefer bringing the kids here for lunch. Dinner is still quite a scene.

342 Howard St. (at Fremont St.). ☎ 415/908-3900. www.townhallsf.com. High chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$10–\$17 lunch, \$19–\$26 dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–2:30pm and 5:30–10pm (until 11pm Fri–Sat), Sun 5:30–10pm. Muni: Any streetcar on Market to Fremont St.; walk 2 blocks south.

Dining Around Town

A16 1	Memphis Minnie's 20
A G Ferrari Foods 60	The Metreon 58
Amici's East Coast Pizzeria 9, 65	Palace Hotel 61
Ana Mandara 33	Pancho Villa Taqueria 29
Antica Trattoria 41	Pasta Pomodoro 10, 13, 26
Blue Mermaid Chowder House 35	Pazzia 63
Bocadillos 52	Polker's Gourmet Burgers 43
Boulange de Polk 42	R & G Lounge 51
Burger Joint 19	Rainforest Cafe 39
CaféKati 16	Restaurant LuLu 57
CaféMarimba 2	Rincon Center 69
CaféPescatore 40	San Francisco Crepe Cart 36
Chow 27	San Francisco Shopping Centre 55
Citizen Cake 22	Slanted Door 72
Crossroads Café 67	Swensen's Creamery 44
Delta Tower 62	Tadich Grill 54
Dragon Well 4	Taylor's Refresher 73
East Coast West Delicatessen 46	Ti Couz 28
Eliza's 12	Tonga Room at the Fairmont Hotel 50
Ella's 11	Town Hall 68
Ferry Building 71	Town's End 66
Fog City Diner 47	Trattoria Contadina 48
Friscan 38	Vicolo Pizzeria 24
Fritz 21, 31	Yerba Buena Gardens 59
Gary Danko 34	ZA Pizza 45
Ghirardelli Soda Fountain & Chocolate Shop 30	Zao Noodle Bar 7, 14
Greens & Greens to Go 8	Zuni Cafe 25
The Grove 3, 15	
Hayes Street Grill 23	
IN-N-OUT Burger 37	
Isa 5	
Isobune 17	
Juban Yakiniku House 18	
Koh Samui & The Monkey 64	
Kokkari Estatorio 53	
Laurel Court 49	
Long Life Noodle Company & Jook Joint 70	
Mastrelli's Delicatessen 74	
McCormick & Kuleto's 32	
Mel's Drive-in 6, 56	





Food Courts

What could be more democratic than a food court? Having a wide variety of options reduces strife for families with different tastes, which is just about every family I know. Also, kids have fun waiting in the line of their choice and exercising a bit of independence. In the Union Square area, the **Crocker Galleria** at 50 Post St., at Sutter Street, has a terrific food court on the third level, open Monday through Friday until 6pm and Saturdays until 5pm. It's always packed at lunch with office workers seeking a quick, inexpensive bite. At the Fountain Café you'll find breakfast bagels, eggs, and baked goods in the morning and sandwiches and burgers at lunch. Get a chili fix at Chili Up; the different versions come with tortillas or corn bread. In addition to American food, you'll find counters for Leila Mediterranean Cuisine, 360 Degree Gourmet Burritos, New Asia Restaurant, and Niji Japanese Grill, among other international options. To avoid the rush, arrive before 11:30am or after 1pm and grab a table in the light-filled atrium.

The Cellar in Macy's on Geary and Stockton Streets, is not technically a food court, but it does have a Jamba Juice, a Wolfgang Puck Express Café, a Boudin bakery, a Ben & Jerry's, and a cookie counter. If you're in SoMa, don't bother with the unimpressive concourse food court at the **San Francisco Shopping Centre** at 5th and Mission. It's filled with low-end Chinese, Mexican, Italian, and American food that may fill your stomach but will leave you cold. If you're hungry and in the vicinity, the **Metreon's** food court at 4th and Mission streets is a much better bet. The restaurants, all part of small, locally owned chains, are higher quality and dressier than the mall standard. Firewood Cafe provides pizzas and excellent salads, and Luna Azul makes generously-sized burritos. You'll also find tasty Asian specialties and first-class Japanese fare at these branches of the Long Life Noodle Co. and Sanraku, which are described on p. 121 and 108, respectively.

The most beautiful food court is **Rincon Center**, at 101 Spear St., between Mission and Howard streets. The 1930s Moderne/Art Deco building is on the National Register of Historic Places and contains an 85-foot waterfall inside the dramatic atrium and murals in the former post office lobby. For a truly cosmopolitan experience, you can send emissaries to Arabi for top-notch Middle Eastern salads, to Sorabol for Korean grilled meats and soup, to Thai to Go for pad Thai, to Wazwan for Indian dishes and naan bread, and to Taqueria Pepe's for burritos. Burgers, pizzas, sandwiches, and soups are also to be had. Yank Sing, the preeminent dim sum restaurant, has a lovely dining room here, which I highly recommend if you have time for a more leisurely lunch. With the exception of Yank Sing, which is open daily, the restaurants in Rincon Center are open weekdays from 11am to 3pm.

MODERATE

Koh Samui & The Monkey THAI Thai seems to be the new Chinese, with spring rolls and pad Thai having taken the place of broccoli beef and cashew chicken as favored take-out fare. But if you want a break from the “typical” Thai food you find most places these days, come to Koh Samui. The chic decor featuring rare antiques, unusual menu items, and servers clad in traditional Thai attire all make clear this restaurant seeks to elevate Thai cuisine to a more memorable dining experience. Combinations sure to whet your appetite include crushed sesame scallops in yellow curry sauce or pumpkin curry chicken. Certainly, you’ll find plenty of familiar menu items, from green papaya salad to green curry chicken, but the presentation has a refined California sensibility about it (which also means smaller portions—perhaps an inconvenience when feeding a family of hungry diners).

Despite the restaurant’s refined touches, the atmosphere is still relaxed and family-friendly. Order the kids the wok-tossed noodles with peanut sauce or even some of the satays. As long as you steer clear of anything marked with an asterisk (for spicy), the kids will be fine. Be sure to order the fried bananas for dessert. “The Monkey” part of the restaurant name refers to the attractive shop next door, which sells Thai antiques.

415 Brannan St. (at 3rd St.). ☎ 415/369-0007. www.kohsamuiandthemonkey.com. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations accepted. Main courses \$8–\$13. MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm and 5–10pm. Muni: 30-Stockton or 45-Union to Brannan St.

Pazzia ★ Finds ITALIAN This restaurant, a quick walk from the Yerba Buena Center and the Museum of Modern Art, serves simple and satisfying dishes like excellent pizza, delicious pasta, and roasted meats and chicken. The uncomplicated menu is a delightful California twist on traditional Italian fare. The staff is warm and friendly to kids, and it’s definitely a family-oriented little place. If you’re in the area and want a real, sit-down meal, there’s no better pick for the price.

337 3rd St. (between Folsom and Harrison sts.). ☎ 415/512-1693. Highchairs. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$8.75–\$25. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri lunch 11:30am–2:30pm; Mon–Thurs dinner 5:30–10pm, Fri–Sat dinner 5:30–10:30pm. Muni: Any streetcar to Montgomery St. station; 15-3rd, 30-Stockton, or 45-Union to Folsom St.

INEXPENSIVE

Mel’s Drive-in HAMBURGERS This popular diner/burger chain has a few locations throughout the city. See p. 132 for a full review.

801 Mission St. (at 4th St.; 3 blocks south of Union Sq.). ☎ 415/227-4477. www.melsdrive-in.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$5–\$15. MC, V. Daily 6am–2pm. Muni: 30-Stockton or 45-Union-Stockton bus to Mission St.

4 Nob Hill

EXPENSIVE

Laurel Court AFTERNOON TEA The Fairmont Hotel’s lovely Laurel Court restaurant, with ivory pillars surrounding lighted domes, and a low ceiling that actually makes the space feel more intimate, is open for meals almost all day long. Taking the California Street cable car from the foot of Market up to Nob Hill for breakfast sounds like fun to me, but you’ll spend a small fortune on your waffles or eggs. Afternoon tea is dear as well, but seems more fitting given the surroundings, and will be especially appreciated by any girls in the

Value Bargain Alert!

For a measly \$7 and a one-drink minimum each, you can feed the kids at the Fairmont Hotel's Tonga Room during happy hour from 5 to 7pm on weekdays. Polynesian appetizers, including pot stickers, chicken drummettes, Shanghai noodles, fruit, and crudités will fill 'em up, and the tropical storm cued to thunder on the half-hour will provide entertainment. There's nothing else like it.

family. The kid's tea menu isn't exactly to code: the crustless sandwiches include peanut butter and jelly and tuna salad, and hot cider and cocoa are non-tea alternatives.

Fairmont Hotel, 950 Mason St. (at California St.). ☎ **415/772-5259**. www.fairmont.com. Kids' menu, high-chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Tea service \$30–\$50, children's tea \$30. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 6–11am, noon–2:30pm, 6–10pm; afternoon tea daily 2:30–4:30pm. Muni: 1-California bus or California St. Cable Car to the Fairmont Hotel.

5 Chinatown

MODERATE

Great Eastern Restaurant CHINESE The specialty here is seafood, which you can observe swimming around in tanks against the back wall. Dinner doesn't come fresher than this, so if you're in the mood for steamed whole rockfish, crab served in a dozen ways, shrimp, lobster, or whatever's in season, Great Eastern is the best choice in the 'hood. Just don't let the waiter steer you away from the fish tanks towards more "typical" Chinese-American fare; you'll get the same food you could have gotten for less at a corner Chinese take-out joint. That's what happened to us some years back when we were tourists in San Francisco—now we know better. Like the vast majority of Chinatown restaurants, this one has big tables for extended families. The basement dining room is comfortable, but we prefer the upstairs. One of the nice things about eating in Chinatown is that you're almost expected to have kids in tow.

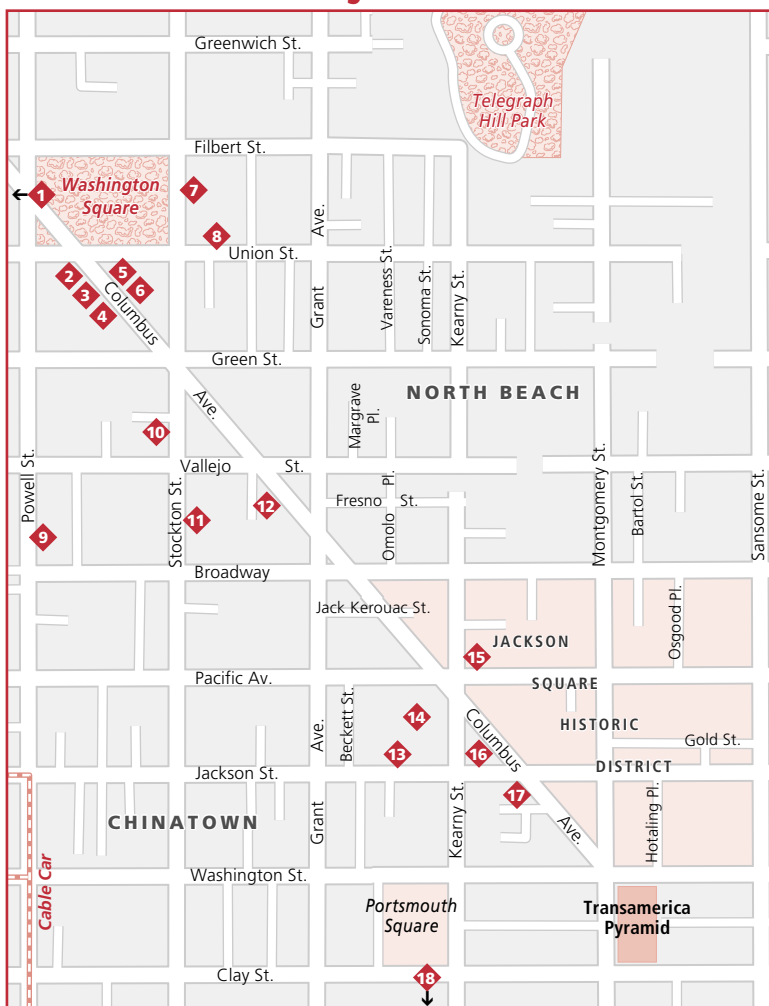
649 Jackson St. (between Grant and Kearny sts.). ☎ **415/986-2500**. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$8–\$30. AE, MC, V. Daily 10am–1am. Muni: 15-3rd St. bus to Jackson St.

INEXPENSIVE

Hunan's Home Restaurant CHINESE I was struck by a recent newspaper article stating that 39% of U.S. kids aged 10 to 13 surveyed said Chinese was their favorite type of food. My guess is these kids were thinking about well-known American-Chinese favorites like cashew nut chicken and sweet and sour pork when they answered the pollster. Well, Hunan Home is made for them. I'm sure your kids will enjoy their meal as much as mine did at this place, which offers all the old favorites in abundance. Tired of Kung Pao chicken? Try Kung Pao squid. Even if you've seen it all before, rest assured that the quality will be high and the portions generous. The family dinner option includes egg rolls and wonton soup for \$13 per person. There's also a fish tank the kids will enjoy—just don't tell them it's dinner.

622 Jackson St. (at Kearny St.). ☎ **415/982-2844**. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$6–\$13. AE, DISC, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–9:30pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–10pm. Muni: 15-3rd St. bus to Jackson St.

Dining Near North Beach & Chinatown



CafféMacaroni **16**
 Gelato Classico **8**
 Great Eastern Restaurant **13**
 Hunan's Home Restaurant **14**
 Il Pollaio **4**
 L'Osteria del Forno **3**
 Lichee Garden **9**
 Mario's Bohemian Cigar Store **5**
 Molinari **12**
 Moose's **7**
 Naan-N-Curry **17**
 Panelli Bros. **10**

Pasta Pomodoro **2**
 R & G Lounge **18**
 Rose Pistola **6**
 Tommaso's Restaurant **15**
 Trattoria Contadina **1**
 Victoria Pastry Co. **11**

Cable Car 

0 1/10 mile
 0 100 meters



Fun Fact How to Tell Your Hakka from Your Hunan

Chinese cuisine comes in many guises. If the menu doesn't state what province the recipes hail from, can you tell your Shanghai from your Szechuan? Here's a little cheat sheet you can use to impress your kids.

Cantonese Most of the Chinese restaurants in this chapter fall into this category. In the wet, coastal province of Canton, seafood and vegetables grew in abundance. Cantonese food thus relies on fresh ingredients, which are mildly seasoned with flavors like ginger, soy sauce, and spring onions. Specialties include dim sum, noodles, seafood, and vegetable dishes.

Hakka Hakka peoples' ancestors settled in the less fertile, hilly regions of southern China. Their cuisine uses dried and preserved ingredients and little seafood. Specialties include salt-baked chicken, stuffed bean curd, and crispy meatballs.

Hunan Hot weather in the mountainous Hunan region called for strong spices to help preserve food and mask spoilage. Today refrigeration keeps food fresh, but Hunan's fondness for chili peppers, shallots, garlic, and other piquant flavors remains. Familiar dishes include stir-fries, sweet and sour chicken, and Hunan beef.

Mandarin Mandarin, or Northern Chinese, cuisine stems from the nation's capital, Beijing, and neighboring provinces. Specialties include Peking duck and hot and sour soup.

Shanghai Hailing from the eastern coast of China, Shanghai cuisine is noted for using a lot of alcohol and sugar, in addition to soy sauce. Specialties include drunken chicken and crispy shrimp balls.

Szechuan This western Chinese fare is well known for its spicy, flavorful seasonings. Chile pepper pastes and oils are liberally used as cooks strive to combine hot, sour, sweet, and salty tastes in dishes. Specialties include twice-cooked pork and tea leaf duck.

Lichee Garden CHINESE This longtime, consistently good Cantonese restaurant is even a favorite among Chinatown residents. Lichee Garden's lengthy menu is filled with familiar items like egg foo young, sweet-and-sour pork, delicious wonton soup, and every other dish you remember from your own childhood, assuming you weren't raised in China. The kitchen caters to those who can't make the leap from American broccoli to Chinese broccoli by offering both, but the menu includes more adventurous fare as well. The list of seafood showcases many scallop inventions, and live lobster and crab in season—both highly recommended. The excellent dim sum makes a great lunch option. Large and bright, the dining room has seen lots and lots of families over the 25-plus years it's been open. Service is businesslike and you won't have to wait long for your meal. Technically, it's not in Chinatown, but because it's just 1 block west of it, it's best listed here.

1416 Powell St. (between Broadway and Vallejo sts.). ☎ 415/397-2290. www.licheegarden.citysearch.com. Highchairs. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$5.50–\$14. MC, V. Daily 7am–9:15pm. Muni: 30-Stockton or 45-Union-Stockton bus to Broadway.

R & G Lounge ★ *Finds* CHINESE When you walk into this favored joint at the edge of Chinatown, you've got two options: proceeding upstairs to the fancier dining room, or descending into the basement. If you have little ones with you, it's likely the host will send you downstairs. This troubled my husband greatly; the linoleum flooring, fluorescent lighting, and omnipresent mirrors of the downstairs dining room offended his aesthetic sensibilities. But the decor doesn't seem to bother most diners, who return time and again to R&G for authentically prepared Cantonese fare featuring lots of fresh seafood and plenty of meat dishes as well. Salt and pepper crab is a big hit, as is the smoky barbecued pork. Something about putting all the dishes on a big lazy Susan seems to encourage adventuresome dining, at least with my kids, who happily munched on all kinds of crab, pork, and noodle dishes. For a real conversation-stopper, call 24 hours in advance and order the sweet-rice-stuffed chicken.

631 Kearny St. (at Commercial St.). ☎ 415/982-7877. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$7–\$25 lunch, \$10–\$50 dinner. AE, DISC, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–9:30pm; Fri 11am–10pm; Sat 11:30am–10pm; Sun 11:30am–9:30pm. Muni: 30-Stockton bus.

6 The Embarcadero/South Beach

EXPENSIVE

Kokkari Estiatorio ★★ GREEK This modern Greek restaurant provides a memorable and upscale dining experience that you can comfortably enjoy with kids. Although the subtle lighting, crowded bar and roaring fire in the first room suggest a more adult establishment, don't be concerned. The expansive back room, made to feel warmer with the inclusion of heavy wood furniture and richly-hued tapestries, is an ideal place for families and large parties. The cozy booths along the hall connecting the two rooms are also very suitable for diners with kids. The delectable menu is based on traditional Greek cuisine, but is inspired by the Bay Area's bounty of fresh, local ingredients and, as such, changes seasonally. At any time of the year, however, look for such house specialties as moussaka (eggplant and lamb casserole) and delectable lamb chops made with naturally-raised Niman Ranch meat. The plate of traditional Greek spreads and pita bread is great for sharing, but is less inspired than some of the more exotic appetizers, such as fried zucchini cakes with yogurt-mint dressing, or crispy smelts with lemon and parsley. For finicky eaters, the kitchen can fix up a plate of buttered orzo pasta. The staff also insists the traditional spinach and cheese pastry spanakopita is a hit with little ones . . . Sounds like a great, sneaky way to get them to eat their spinach!

200 Jackson St. (at Front St.). ☎ 415/981-0983. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$9.50–\$23 lunch, \$15–\$34 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2:30pm; Mon–Thurs 5:30–10pm; Fri 5:30–11pm; Sat 5–11pm. Muni: 10-Townsend to Jackson St.; walk 2 blocks east.

MODERATE

Bocadillos ★ SPANISH/TAPAS Bocadillos had just opened when we visited, and new places sometimes have a knack for folding up and going away just as quickly as they appeared. But there's good reason to believe that Bocadillos is here to stay—not just until this guidebook hits store shelves but well beyond then—and so I took the plunge and decided to include it. For one, even though the wait staff was still green, the collection of Spanish *tapas* on the menu was clearly well thought out and prepared by experienced hands. Second, the location between the Embarcadero and the Financial District, just below North Beach, has seen quite a few dining options emerge lately—meaning more

people will be trekking to these parts for a good meal. Moreover, Bocadillos is already gathering up rave reviews in the local dining scene. Finally, it's in good hands with talented chef Gerald Hirigoyen, whose Basque restaurant Piperade my husband and I are very keen on.

While Piperade may be too refined and pricy for a family meal (which is why I didn't list it here), Bocadillos is moderately priced and has a low-key attitude enhanced by the long communal table in the center of its small dining room. As for the food, every one of the clever and unusual *tapas* is delightful—from the roasted peppers to the lamb chops with mango and peach chutney.

710 Montgomery St. (at Washington St.). ☎ 415/982-2622. No reservations. *Tapas* \$3–\$12. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 7am–10pm; Fri 7am–10:30pm; Sat 5–10pm. Muni: 12-Folsom to Pacific and walk 2 blocks south or 15-3rd St. to Jackson St and walk 1 block south.

Fog City Diner AMERICAN A San Francisco institution immortalized in a Visa commercial, the Fog City Diner has quite a few things going for it: terrific location, a fun metallic exterior, sleek wood interior, festive atmosphere, and great outdoor area. Because it's located near Levi's Plaza, kids can climb around the fountain on the opposite side of Battery Street (next to Il Fornaio) or run around in the minipark next door. In fair weather, the outdoor seating lets you enjoy the bay views and green space. As for the food, the children are sure to be satisfied. The kids' menu features all the usual fare (hot dogs, grilled cheese, buttered noodles, kids' sundaes) and comes complete with a pack of crayons as well. The grown-up menu, on the other hand, tries a little too hard. Although it's nice that they've branched out from more common diner fare, some of the more inventive creations—like mu shu pork burritos filled with stir-fried veggies—are not always as tasty as they look on the menu. You're best off sticking to the more basic items like the burgers or the “Cobb” sandwich. Last time I checked, the cayenne-peppered onion rings were good, too.

1300 Battery St. (at Embarcadero). ☎ 415/982-2000. www.fogcitydiner.com. Kids' menu, highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$11–\$19; kids' menu all items \$5.95. DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri 11am–11pm; Sat 10:30am–11pm; Sun 10:30am–9pm. Muni: 10-Townsend bus or F-Market streetcar to Battery St.

Slanted Door ★★☆☆ VIETNAMESE This may well be the most popular restaurant in San Francisco. No matter that it has twice relocated to bigger spaces—moving from its original site in the Mission to a larger space in the Embarcadero to its current location in an enormous corner of the Ferry Building—the huge space, overlooking the water and framed by walls of glass, is still nearly impossible to get into without reservations. Even the expansive bar area has an hour-long wait on weekend evenings. But fame has not made Charles Phan, the owner behind this success story, rest on his laurels. The restaurant continues to produce mouth-watering delicacies based on traditional Vietnamese dishes like claypot beef and lemongrass tofu, and the rave reviews keep pouring in. Children will have enough to choose from in the appetizer section—the fresh spring rolls don't include any icky mushrooms, by the way—and no one can go wrong with a bowl of *phô bó*, Vietnamese beef soup with noodles. This isn't particularly a kid-centered restaurant, although Bill Clinton did once eat at the Valencia St. location with Chelsea. Nonetheless, the food is such a treat for adults that you might want to ask your kids to rise to the occasion.

1 Market St. (at Embarcadero). ☎ 415/861-8032. www.slanteddoor.com. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$7.50–19 lunch, \$10–\$29 dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–3pm; Sun–Thurs 5:30–10pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:30pm. Muni: F-Market streetcar.

Town's End ★ *Finds* CALIFORNIA/BRUNCH Named after the street it's on, this low-key spot is in a part of town that really was once the "town's end," with little beyond it except warehouses and other industrial buildings. Now the little neighborhood of South Beach has a lot going for it, including the cleaned-up waterfront, SBC stadium, new condominiums, and wonderful restaurants like this one. In addition to tasty, reasonably priced food, Town's End has one of the best outdoor dining areas in the city. The kids can run around on the grass while you await your meal, but they may just want to stay put because the first thing that comes to the table is a basket full of house-baked goodies: muffins and scones at brunch, fresh breads and rolls at dinnertime. After that, feast on thick blueberry pancakes, creative omelettes and frittatas, or organic salads. If you come for dinner, check out the \$23 *prix fixe* option, which includes an appetizer, main course, and dessert. (On Tues, the *prix fixe* price is just \$14, but beware the crowd.) Depending on the season, dinner offerings may include a New Mexico Caesar salad; ravioli with spinach, ricotta, and caramelized onions; or a naturally raised beef hamburger, served on a homemade roll, of course.

2 Townsend St. (at Embarcadero). ☎ 415/512-0749. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$6.50–\$11 brunch, \$9–\$17 dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Thurs 7:30–11am, 11:30am–2pm, and 5:30–9pm; Fri 7:30–11am and 5:30–10pm; Sat 8am–2:30pm and 5:30–10pm; Sun 8am–2:30pm. Muni: N-Judah streetcar to the Brannan Station; walk south towards Townsend St.

INEXPENSIVE

Amici's East Coast Pizzeria PIZZA Located across the street from SBC Park, this is the second San Francisco location of this regional pizza joint specializing in East Coast style pizzas baked in wood-fired brick ovens. Although it's not my very favorite pizza in the city, it is pretty good, and the menu features several other items as well, including an assortment of pastas, hearty sandwiches such as Italian sausage or eggplant parmigiana, and salads (the Caesar salad is quite tasty). With friendly waiters, crayons, and speedy service, what more could you need? Kid's can get a mini cheese pizza for \$6.35, or a small plate of plain noodles for just \$1.95.

216 King St. (at 3rd St.). ☎ 415/546-6666. www.amicis.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$8–\$13. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri 11am–11pm; Sat 11:30am–11pm; Sun 11:30am–10pm. Muni: N-Judah streetcar to the 4th and King Station; walk ½ block east on King St.

Crossroads Café ★ CALIFORNIA Just a block off the Embarcadero, this cafe/bookshop with a fenced-in outdoor patio is a comfy haven for a snack, lunch, and a rest. Order turkey sandwiches, salads, smoked salmon plates, fountain treats, coffee drinks, and hot chocolate from the counter, and find a seat while you wait for your name to be called. The shop stocks a nice selection of children's books and gifts, and there are a few couches and overstuffed chairs to enjoy them in.

699 Delancey St. (½ block south of Embarcadero). ☎ 415/836-5624. Main courses \$5–\$8. MC, V. Mon–Fri 7am–10pm; Sat 8am–10pm; Sun 8am–5pm. Muni: N-Judah streetcar to the Brannan Station; walk south towards Townsend St.

Long Life Noodle Company & Jook Joint ASIAN If you want good, cheap noodles, this is the place. Although nothing here will wow you, you will get a better-than-average meal for little money. The theme is noodles from all over Asia prepared in a variety of ways. Egg, rice, and wheat noodles are served with soup, stir-fried, cold, or over salad in dishes with names like Buddha's Bliss (ramen noodles in miso broth with smoked trout, tofu, and enoki mushrooms)

or the Dragon's Breath (garlicky lo mein noodles wok-tossed with button mushrooms and parsley). You'll also find dishes made with rice or jook (rice porridge) and other pan-Asian favorites like pot stickers, spring rolls, and fried wontons. The decor at this location of the small, regional chain is hyper-modern with too much neon. But with all entrees under \$9, who's complaining? (You can also slurp Long Life noodles at their Sony Metreon food court branch.)

139 Steuart St. (at Mission St.). ☎ **415/281-3818**. Main courses \$5.50–\$8.75. MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–9pm. Muni: F-Market streetcar to Steuart St.; walk 1½ blocks south.

Taylor's Refresher ★ *Finds* AMERICAN/HAMBURGERS This must be what diner food tasted like half a century ago, when cows still roamed pastures and a tomato still tasted like a tomato. Eating here made me understand how diners got to be so popular in the first place. The hamburgers, made with local, naturally raised beef, are mouth-watering, and the sweet potato fries were a hit with my kids (I ordered them without the chile powder). Even the cherry tomatoes on the garden salad were sweet and delicate, not the tasteless, hard-skinned variety one expects at a typical diner. Then again, this diner isn't exactly typical. The first, and still existing, Taylor's Refresher was established in 1949 in the heart of the Napa Valley, with plenty of nearby family farms to draw on for fresh, local ingredients. This site, housed in the San Francisco Ferry Building, takes advantage of the neighboring Farmer's Market for its raw materials. Despite the gourmet touch, the food still comes on trays, the music is loud, and the price is right. On a sunny day, choose an outdoor table and order one of the awesome milk shakes or a root beer float—all made with San Francisco's luscious Double Rainbow ice cream.

1 Market St. (at Embarcadero). ☎ **415/328-3663**. www.taylorsrefresher.com. Highchairs. Main courses \$3.60–\$13. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 10:30am–9pm. Muni: F-Market streetcar.

7 North Beach

EXPENSIVE

Moose's ★★☆☆ CALIFORNIA Although the name evokes thoughts of a dark and smoky joint with heavy, unimaginative food, Moose's is just the opposite. The appellation actually derives from its owner, longtime restaurateur Ed Moose. Overlooking Washington Park, Moose's serves innovative California cuisine using local, organic ingredients in a light and spacious setting. Despite the lack of real antlers (you'll see drawings of them everywhere), the restaurant does maintain a classic, old-fashioned feel—with a live pianist, professional waiters, and well-dressed clientele of all ages. It's easy to see how it has become a veritable San Francisco institution since its creation in 1992. The ever-changing menu may include such inventive offerings as a strawberry salad with locally grown cress and herb-infused Sonoma goat cheese, or wild king salmon with grilled Japanese eggplant and Thai basil puree. Dishes based on more traditional fare include grilled pork porterhouse chop with cranberry beans and maple-glazed cipollini onions. The restaurant has a verbal kids' menu with burgers, chicken fingers, or pasta with veggies for \$6 apiece. If you don't mind foregoing the Italian fare that abounds in North Beach, you will eat well here.

1652 Stockton St. (at Union St.). ☎ **415/989-7800**. Kids' menu, highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$8–\$13 brunch, \$11–\$16 lunch, \$11–\$36 dinner; kids' menu \$6. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Thurs–Sat 11:30am–2:30pm; Mon–Thurs 5:30–10:30pm, Fri–Sat 5:30–11pm, Sun 5–10pm; Sun brunch 10am–2:30pm. Muni: Powell-Mason cable car to Union St and walk 2 blocks east; or 30-Stockton bus to Union St. and walk 1 block east.

Rose Pistola ★ ITALIAN Rose Pistola didn't originally start out as a family-friendly restaurant, but perhaps its location in North Beach meant it had to get better at accommodating tourists who may have their kids in tow. That's good news for you, as it means you can enjoy the delightful offerings at this upscale Northern Italian establishment without feeling stressed about how the staff will react to the little ones. Your bigger worry will be getting a table at this ever-crowded hot spot, so make reservations or arrive early. The hot and cold antipasti may be the best thing on the menu: zucchini chips, roasted chili and garlic shrimp, and shaved artichoke salad are among the choices. Main courses highlight fish, pastas, and pizzas, and rotisserie grilled meats are also on offer.

532 Columbus Ave. (between Union and Green sts.). ☎ 415/399-0499. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$19–\$36. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–4pm and 5:30pm–midnight. Muni: Powell-Mason cable car to Union St and walk 2 blocks east; or 30-Stockton bus to Union St. and walk 1 block east.

MODERATE

Caffé Macaroni *Value* ITALIAN This place is so small, it's hard to believe they can cook food here, let alone serve it. But cook it up they do, in hearty portions. Then flirtatious waiters who make mom feel young again serve it up with a Mediterranean flair. The gnocchi with gorgonzola cheese are delicious, but so rich that if you eat a whole serving you may feel the need to sleep for the rest of the day. In fact, most of the Neapolitan plates are so generous you may want to share a main course or two. Given the already reasonable prices, Caffé Macaroni is a value proposition, but I recommend sitting outside (sitting a family inside the cramped dining room seems a recipe for an expensive accident).

59 Columbus Ave. (at Jackson St.). ☎ 415/956-9737. Highchairs. Main courses \$9.50–\$15. No credit cards. Mon–Sat 5:30–10pm. Muni: 15 bus to Jackson St.

L'Osteria del Forno ★★ ITALIAN A perennial favorite among in-the-know locals, L'Osteria seems to have as many people lining up outside as are actually seated inside. Once you have gotten a table, you'll appreciate the authentic, rustic feel in the cozy dining room. The terrific Italian dishes, which rank among the best in North Beach, include such delightful dishes as crepes filled with sautéed porcini mushrooms, ham, and béchamel sauce and succulent skewered lamb marinated in ginger, rosemary, and garlic. If the kids are apt to be noisy, this tiny place may not be the best choice.

519 Columbus Ave. (between Union and Green sts.). ☎ 415/982-1124. Reservations not accepted. Highchairs. Main courses \$11–\$13. No credit cards. Mon, Wed, Thurs, Sun 11:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–10:30pm. Closed Tues. Muni: Powell-Mason cable car to Union St. and walk 1 block east or 30-Stockton bus to Union St.

Tommaso's Restaurant ITALIAN/PIZZA You'll have to pass some XXX-rated storefronts on Broadway to get to Tommaso's, and then you may have to wait to get a table in one of the best family Italian pizza parlors in North Beach. Thin-crust pizzas with all kinds of toppings are baked in a wood-fired brick oven, the first in San Francisco. (Order one with spinach on top; there's a good chance your kids will actually like it.) They feed two or three people, but don't just limit yourself to pizza here; the Italian specialties—the lasagna, spaghetti with meatballs, parmigianas, fried calamari—are too yummy to pass up completely. The tables are all lined up together in one big communal row that provides an opportunity to meet the neighbors. If you want more privacy, ask for a booth along one side of this basement restaurant.

1042 Kearny St. (between Broadway St. and Pacific Ave.). ☎ 415/398-9696. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$9–\$17. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sat 5–10:45pm; Sun 4–9:45pm. Muni: 15-3rd St. bus to Broadway and walk 2 blocks east.

Trattoria Contadina ★★ *Finds* ITALIAN So you brought the kids to North Beach and you just want a nice Italian restaurant where you can have a tasty, reasonably priced meal? And each tiny restaurant is already full and the street is jammed with other hungry-looking tourists? Here's a hint: get away from the crowds and start heading up Union Street (and I do mean "up"—the hill is quite steep) 2 blocks to this quaint, family-owned eatery. Trattoria Contadina isn't exactly spacious and you may still wait if you don't have reservations, but the restaurant does have more tables and a more welcoming feel than many of its counterparts on Columbus Street. In keeping with the ma-and-pa atmosphere, the food is hearty and no nonsense. The linguini with co-owner Anna Maria's homemade Italian meatballs will take you back to your own childhood, and the spinach, meat- and cheese-filled ravioli, served in a porcini mushroom cream sauce, is rich and delicious. There's no kids' menu, but the kitchen will happily serve up half orders at this very family-friendly trattoria.

1800 Mason St. (at Union St.). ☎ 415/982-5728. www.trattcontadina.citysearch.com. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$12–\$24. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 5:30–9:30pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:30pm. Muni: Powell-Mason cable car to Union St.; or 30-Stockton bus to Union St. and walk west (up) 2 blocks.

INEXPENSIVE

Gelato Classico ★ ICE CREAM These tiny stores make gelato that's nearly as delicious as what you might have in Rome. The gelato is so rich and creamy, it's best had neat. But if you can't resist going all out, how about the "Coppa Carmelita," dark chocolate and hazelnut gelato covered in a luscious caramel sauce?

576 Union St. (between Stockton and Grant sts.). ☎ 415/391-6667. No credit cards. Cups \$2.85–\$4.25. Daily noon–9pm. Muni: Powell-Mason cable car to Union St. and walk 2 blocks east; or 30-Stockton bus to Union St. and walk 1 block east.

Il Pollaio ★ CHICKEN At Il Pollaio, located across the street from Washington Square Park, a table by an open window, a fragrant roast chicken, and a mixed salad speak of a gentle end to a good day. In addition to the signature chicken, you'll also see steak, pork chops, lamb chops, rabbit, and sausages on the grill. Beyond that, Il Pollaio offers a few salads, soup, and just two sides: French fries and marinated eggplant. Daily specials, consisting of roasted meat with fries and a salad, are the way to go.

555 Columbus Ave. (between Union and Green sts.). ☎ 415/362-7727. Highchairs. Main courses \$6.50–\$9. MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–9pm. Muni: Powell-Mason cable car or 30-Stockton bus to Union St.

Mario's Bohemian Cigar Store ITALIAN This corner storefront could truthfully be called Mario's Bohemian Shoebox, it's so small. Gone are the days when you could find a cigar on the premises, much less smoke one; instead, Mario's has been serving big, warm focaccia sandwiches filled with meatballs or breaded chicken cutlets, pizzas, salad, and drinks for about 20 years. Grab a seat on the funky wooden counter and watch the waitress efficiently fill the drink orders while the cook prepares the food in a miniature oven. Kids will love the Torani Italian syrups used to make sodas. You can also ask the sandwiches to be wrapped up, so you can enjoy them in Washington Park across the street.

566 Columbus Ave. (at Union St.). ☎ 415/362-0536. Main courses \$7–\$9. MC, V. Daily 10am–midnight (until 11pm Sun). Muni: Powell-Mason cable car or 30-Stockton bus to Union St.

Sandwich Bars & Picnic Spots

An urban picnic could be an adventure, or at least a novelty. To start, hunt for sandwiches at **Specialty's Café and Bakery** (☎ 877/502-2837; 1 Post St. at Market St.) or **Lee's Sandwiches**, 322 Kearny St. at Bush Street (☎ 415/986-1052), and other Financial District locations. Specialty's bakes its own bread and offers deli-style sandwiches with some more inventive options like Thai chicken and turkey curry. Lee's is fast, inexpensive, and basic: tuna on white or thickly sliced real turkey. Once you've packed your bag with lunch, you're ready to head to 100 1st Street. There you'll find the award-winning second-floor garden in the **Delta Tower**, a lush respite from busy Mission Street. The black granite and green glass fountain sculpture provides a soothing counterpoint to the street traffic. If you're in SoMa, stop by **A G Ferrari Foods** on 688 Mission St. (☎ 415/344-0644) to pick up delectable Italian sandwiches on fresh focaccia bread. Then head to **Yerba Buena Gardens** (p. 162) for an urban retreat.

Picnicking by the water may be an even better idea. Go to the **Ferry Building** (p. 160) on the Embarcadero and purchase sandwiches from **Mastrelli's Delicatessen** (☎ 415/397-3354). Then head out behind the building, grab a bench, and enjoy your picnic as you watch the ferries head out across the bay. At Fort Mason, pick up delicious vegetarian sandwiches like egg salad at **Greens to Go** (Building A, Fort Mason Center, ☎ 415/771-6330) and then sit yourselves under a palm tree on the expansive lawn. If you're at **Crissy Field** (p. 158) grab a soup or sandwich at the Warming Hut. You'll find plenty of picnic spots outside.

North Beach provides more sources for filling your hamper. **Molinari**, located at 373 Columbus Ave. at Vallejo Street (☎ 415/421-2337), and **Panelli Bros.**, located at 1419 Stockton St. near Vallejo (☎ 415/421-2541), are two Italian delicatessens with a fantastic assortment of imported foodstuffs and friendly staffs who will create delicious, everything-on-'em sandwiches to go. Both are open Monday through Saturday. Also consider getting takeout from **Mario's Bohemian Cigar Store** (reviewed below). You can't pass on dessert if you're anywhere near **Victoria Pastry Co.**, at 1362 Stockton St. at Vallejo (☎ 415/781-2015). The chewy almond cookies are divine, as are the cakes, which are all sold by the slice or whole. You may be able to find a bench in Washington Square Park if you can't wait to dig into your lunch. Otherwise, head to **North Beach Playground** at Lombard and Mason streets, where you'll find picnic facilities and a playground.

If you're headed out to Lincoln Park in the Richmond District, a must-stop is **Angelina's Bakery** at 6000 California St., at 22nd Ave. (☎ 415/221-7801). Pick up delectable sandwiches, salads, or quiches and hop back on the 1-California bus to 32nd Street. Then walk north 2 blocks to Eagle's Point at the end of the Land's End trail. Enjoy your picnic with a priceless view of the Marin Headlands and western side of the Golden Gate Bridge.

Naan-N-Curry  **INDIAN/PAKISTANI** When San Franciscans want good, inexpensive Indian/Pakistani food, they come to Naan-N-Curry. Flavorful tandoori-oven-baked meats, delightful curries, a great selection of vegetarian options, and plenty of naan breads are on offer here. Although some dishes from this part of the world can be too spicy for younger kids, we've found a few items that even our young daughters love, including chicken tikka masala, which is cooked in a mild yogurt sauce, and vegetable biryani, or vegetables with rice. With a casual atmosphere and hearty portions for just pennies, it's worth branching out from pizza, noodles, and the other usual suspects. (There's also a Naan-N-Curry at 474 O'Farrell St., at Jones Street, but it's on an unsavory block of the Tenderloin, so I don't recommend eating at that location.)

533 Jackson St. (at Columbus Ave.).  **415/693-0499.** www.geocities.com/nncsf. Main courses \$5–\$10. MC, V. Mon–Fri 10am–11:30pm; Sat–Sun noon–11:30pm. Muni: 15 bus to Jackson St.

Pasta Pomodoro **ITALIAN** This chain has branches at several locations throughout the city. See p. 133 for a full review.

655 Union St. (at Columbus Ave.).  **415/399-0300.** www.pastapomodoro.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$7.50–\$11. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–11pm; Sun noon–11pm. Muni: Powell-Mason cable car or 30-Stockton bus to Union St.

8 Fisherman's Wharf

VERY EXPENSIVE

Gary Danko  **CALIFORNIA** Opened in 1999 by an award-winning chef of the same name, Gary Danko quickly earned the reputation as one of the best restaurants in San Francisco, if not the world. Although I would be remiss to omit it in a guidebook about the city, it is best visited without the little ones, unless they are older kids well accustomed to eating at exclusive restaurants. Novelist and San Francisco local Danielle Steele does bring her own children to dine here but reserves the private dining room at the back on such occasions. Richly decorated in blond oak and black granite, the atmosphere at Gary Danko is elegant and subdued. Diners can choose three, four, or five courses for \$58, \$68, or \$78 respectively. The menu changes seasonally and may include such delicacies as lobster salad with melon and Thai mango dressing, roasted quail stuffed with wild mushrooms and roasted apricots, and, for desert, flambéed nectarines and berries with vanilla crepes and lemon ice cream. The service is impeccable. Reservations are advised 4 weeks in advance, although walk-ins are sometimes seated at the bar.

800 North Point St. (at Hyde St.).  **415/749-2060.** www.garydanko.com. Reservations strongly recommended. *Prix-fixe* menu \$58–\$78. AE, DC, D, MC, V. Sun–Wed 5:30–9:30pm; Thurs–Sat 5:30–10pm. Muni: Powell-Hyde cable car to North Point St.

EXPENSIVE

Ana Mandara  **VIETNAMESE** The moment you walk through the doors of this serene restaurant, you are transported to Vietnam—or at least a movie set of it. The interior includes façades of a Vietnamese-style home and a French colonial building, palm trees, and other Indochinese artifacts. Yet the 18-foot-high black ceiling is dotted with spotlights, as if to remind you that this is not Vietnam, but a replica of it. The food seems to follow suit. Appetizers such as crispy rolls with crab, shrimp, and shiitake mushrooms and entrees like *tourne-dos* of beef tenderloin with onions and peppergrass are very tasty, but seem firmly grounded on this continent—which may be just as well for the little ones among

you. Although there is no children's menu, kids do enjoy the beef *tournedos*, as well as the side of garlic noodles. There are a few truly exotic options, like the luscious mango soup with durian sorbet, which is a must-have for dessert. The dinner menu edges this restaurant into the expensive category, but lunch prices are more moderate, with main courses starting at \$10.

891 Beach St. (at Polk St.). ☎ 415/771-6800. High chairs, boosters. Weekend reservations recommended. Main courses \$15–\$29. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2pm; Sun–Thurs 5:30–9:45pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:45pm. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Polk St. and walk 1 block north; or Powell-Hyde cable car to Beach St and walk 2 blocks west.

Franciscan CALIFORNIA It's all about the view here, which explains the upside-down nature of this oddly shaped, peach-colored structure. Stairs lead you from the crowded wharf below into a welcoming dining room, which offers bay views from practically every table. Given the Franciscan's location in the most heavily touristed part of town, you'll pay more than you should for a crab cake appetizer (\$14) or rare *ahi* tuna (\$25), but you do get a fabulous vista, friendly service, and better fare than at most restaurants in the vicinity. A few main courses do come in at under \$20, and the kids' menu is reasonably priced. A generous portion of kids' fish and chips is \$5.95, and it comes with crayons and drawing materials. I wouldn't go out of my way to eat here, but if you want a nice lunch without having to leave the neighborhood, the Franciscan may be worth the higher prices.

Pier 43½ (at Embarcadero). ☎ 415/362-7733. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations accepted. Main courses \$13–\$26; kids' menu \$4.95–\$5.95. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–4:30pm; Sat–Sun 11am–4:30pm; Sun–Thurs 4:30–10pm; Fri–Sat 4:30–10:30pm. Muni: F-Market streetcar to Mason St.

McCormick & Kuleto's ★ AMERICAN/SEAFOOD I'm not usually into extra-large restaurants with massive menus smack dab in the most touristy parts of town. But this establishment, which brings well-known local restaurateur Pat Kuleto together with the nationally renowned McCormick & Schmick's seafood restaurant chain, keeps high standards. Overlooking the lovely Hyde Street Pier, with Alcatraz in the background, it has one of the best views in all of San Francisco and has become our stand-by for visiting relatives. The options are not especially inventive—cedar plank-smoked Alaskan salmon and griddled Parmesan-coated *petrale* sole are typical dishes—but they are fresh and well prepared. Although the menu is dominated by seafood, it's so long that there are still plenty of choices for the fish-averse. The kids' menu includes a tasty fish and chips plate that you'll want to polish off if your little one doesn't manage to. Be sure to come in daylight to enjoy the view, but don't expect a quick meal—service can be slow.

900 North Point St. (between Larkin and Polk sts.). ☎ 415/929-1730. www.msmsg.com. Kids' menu, high-chairs. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$11–\$31; kids' menu \$5.35–\$7.75. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–11pm; Sun 10:30am–10pm. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Larkin St. and walk 1 block north; or Powell-Hyde cable car to Beach St and walk 1 block west.

Rainforest Cafe ⚡ *Overrated* AMERICAN The phony flowers and plastic rain forest complete with waterfall, aquarium, and African music in the background just cry out for a B ticket (for those of you old enough to remember how things once worked at Disneyland). The food at this merchandised-to-the-hilt restaurant is strictly pedestrian: a little fish, a little chicken, a hamburger, a steak—something for everyone. With 500 seats, however, you're going to get production-line quality. My suggestion is if you want the fun of a tropical storm,

head for the Tonga Room at the Fairmont Hotel. For a lot less money, in civilized surroundings, treat the kids to snacks and an umbrella-bedecked drink with benign rainstorms on the half-hour.

145 Jefferson St. (next to the Wax Museum). ☎ 415/440-5610. www.rainforestcafe.com. Kids' menu, high-chairs, boosters. Main courses \$11–\$29; kids' menu \$6–7. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Wed 11:30am–9pm; Thurs 11:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–11pm. Muni: F-Market streetcar to Mason St.

MODERATE

Blue Mermaid Chowder House AMERICAN/SEAFOOD Amid the plethora of mediocre, overpriced Fisherman's Wharf restaurants, the relatively new Blue Mermaid stands out for offering a no-nonsense menu of chowders, sandwiches, salads, and a few bigger main course options at pretty reasonable prices. The decor plays on the restaurant's location in the Cannery, with boats suspended from the ceiling, heavy wood columns wrapped in shipping rope, and hand-painted posters depicting advertisements of long-gone canned fish and produce exporters. Outdoor seating in the lovely Cannery courtyard is also available. Kids' meals, like fish sticks or hot dogs, are served up with French fries in blue beach buckets. **One note:** stick to the traditional chowders, like the Manhattan or New England, which are tastier than the restaurant's much touted Dungeness corn and crab chowder.

495 Jefferson St. (at Hyde St.). ☎ 415/771-2222. www.argonautahotel.com/argdini. Kids' menu, highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$9–\$22; kids' menu \$6.95. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 7:30am–9pm; Fri–Sat 7:30am–10pm. Muni: Powell-Hyde cable car to Beach St.; walk 1 block north.

Café Pescatore ITALIAN You could probably pay less for Italian fare a few blocks away in North Beach, but this is the wharf, after all. Given the mediocre, over-priced alternatives, this trattoria located on one corner of the Tuscan Inn hotel looks downright appealing. Floor to ceiling windows open onto heated sidewalk seating, but there's no ocean view here (the waterfront is 2 blocks away). Menu highlights include Caesar salad, wood-fired pizza, and plenty of pasta options. Skip the chicken marsala; when I tried it, I thought it could have used less wine in the sauce. The kids' menu includes pasta or pizza, which kids can have plain, with sausage, or with another topping of choice.

2455 Mason St. (at North Point St.). ☎ 415/561-1111. Kids' menu, highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$8–\$16 lunch, \$9–\$22 dinner; kids' menu \$3.25–\$6.95. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7am–10pm. Muni: F-Market streetcar to Mason St.; walk 1 block south.

INEXPENSIVE

Frjtz BELGIAN FRIES/CREPES For a paper-wrapped cone of piping hot fries, crepes, or soups and sandwiches, come to Frjtz. See p. 130 for a full review.

Ghirardelli Sq., 900 North Point St. ☎ 415/928-3886. www.frjtzfries.com. Fries \$3–\$4.50. Main courses \$7–\$8. AE, DISC, DC, MC, V. Open daily, seasonal hours. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Larkin St. and walk 1 block north; or Powell-Hyde cable car to Beach St and walk 1 block west.

Ghirardelli Soda Fountain & Chocolate Shop ICE CREAM There's a reason for the ever-present line here: Ghirardelli makes a good product. If you haven't ever had a Ghirardelli brownie, order one under a scoop of ice cream.

Ghirardelli Sq., 900 North Point St. ☎ 415/771-4903. www.ghirardelli.com. Desserts \$5–\$9. Mon–Thurs 10am–10:30pm; Fri–Sat 10am–midnight; Sun 10am–11pm. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Larkin St. and walk 1 block north; or Powell-Hyde cable car to Beach St and walk 1 block west.

IN-N-OUT Burger HAMBURGERS Having spent my teenage years in California, I can tell you that IN-N-OUT is a statewide phenomenon. Fans, who insist it's the best fast food anywhere, tell me what makes the burgers so good

are the toasted buns, crisp lettuce, and fresh tomatoes. They also swoon over the extra-crisp, extra-thin fries, which are, in addition to a grilled cheese sandwich, the only vegetarian option on the very short menu.

333 Jefferson St. (between Jones and Leavenworth sts.). ☎ 800/786-1000. www.in-n-out.com. Main courses \$1.65–\$2.80. No credit cards. Sun–Thurs 10:30am–1am, Fri–Sat 10:30am–1:30am. Muni: F-Market streetcar to Jefferson and Taylor sts.

San Francisco Crepe Cart ★ *Finds* CREPES A few of these crepe carts are scattered about Fisherman's Wharf, but this one is my favorite due to its location in the charming, brick-lined courtyard of the Cannery, adjacent to a small outdoor stage. Order a ham and cheese or spinach and goat cheese crepe, grab a table under the shade of a tree, and enjoy a quick, inexpensive meal accompanied by live music. Our kids love to listen to the jazz or folk musicians who play there regularly. For desert, share a chocolate and banana or simple powdered sugar crepe.

The Cannery (Jefferson St., between Hyde and Jones sts.). Crepes \$4.50–\$6.75 No credit cards. Daily 10am–6pm Muni: Powell-Hyde cable car to Beach St.; walk 1 block north.

9 Civic Center/Hayes Valley

EXPENSIVE

Hayes Street Grill ★ CALIFORNIA/SEAFOOD Chef-owner Patricia Unterman, the author of the *Food Lover's Guide to San Francisco*, is pretty much the authority on the local culinary scene—so it's no surprise her restaurant serves delicious, uncomplicated dishes that showcase local, in-season ingredients. The specialty here is very fresh fish: whatever's been caught that morning will be prepared simply and with integrity and be accompanied with crisp, thin fries. All sauces are thoughtfully served on the side. The non-fish selections, such as the naturally raised Niman Ranch pork chop with mashed potatoes, are equally flavorful. The atmosphere balances between informal and businesslike, with a clientele of politicians and professionals at lunch and artists and audiences eating a pre-show dinner. At lunch, kids might enjoy eating at the bar; it's situated in the front and commands a view of many tables and the door, so they can keep tabs on what's going on.

320 Hayes St. (between Gough and Franklin sts.). ☎ 415/863-5545. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$13–\$22 lunch; \$18–\$23 dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2pm; Mon–Thurs 5–9:30pm; Fri–Sat 5–10:30pm; Sun 5–8:30pm Muni: 21-Hayes bus to Franklin St. or any streetcar to Franklin St.; walk north 3 blocks.

Zuni Cafe ★★ CALIFORNIA/MEDITERRANEAN For over 2 decades, Zuni Cafe has been serving Mediterranean-infused California cuisine in this spacious, sunny, Market Street location. The whitewashed walls and two-story-high south-facing windows combine with odd angles, heavy wood, and exposed brick to give a casual, airy feel to the place. The eclectic, inventive, and always delicious cuisine from famed chef-owner Judy Rodgers (which can also be found in her fabulous 500-plus page cookbook) changes regularly, but her signature roast chicken with bread salad is always on the menu. It's no wonder this place still draws a crowd after all these years. Although there is no children's menu, the kitchen is always happy to whip up a special concoction. Whatever you do get for the kids, make sure it comes with the shoestring potatoes.

1685 Market St. (between Gough and Franklin sts.). ☎ 415/552-2522. Highchairs and boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$10–\$19 lunch, \$15–\$26 dinner. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sat 11:30am–midnight; Sun 11am–11pm. Muni: F-Market streetcar to Gough St.

MODERATE

Citizen Cake BAKERY/CALIFORNIA When you walk into this cafe, you are immediately faced with such a fetching array of cakes, tarts, cookies, pastries, and ice creams that all thought of the food pyramid dissipates as you grapple with the mind-bending question: *What do I choose?* You can take time to figure that out while drooling at the counter or sitting at one of the tables in the austere room, where ample windows keep you in touch with the street action. Brunch is a good time to eat here, as it will give you an excuse to order their homemade donuts. But you're best off making it a teatime treat. The lunch and dinner menus may be too esoteric and pricy for a family meal.

399 Grove St. (at Gough St.). ☎ 415/861-2228. www.citizencake.com. Highchairs. Reservations for brunch recommended. Main courses \$10–\$13 lunch, \$16–\$19 dinner. AE, MC, V. Tues–Fri 8am–10pm; Sat 10am–10pm; Sun 10am–9pm. Muni: 21-Hayes bus to Gough St. and walk 1 block north to Grove St.; or any streetcar to Van Ness St. station and walk 3 blocks north to Grove St. and 2 blocks west to Gough St.

INEXPENSIVE

Frjtz BELGIAN FRIES/CREPES Among the hip boutiques and antique shops of Hayes Valley is this very narrow, very funky teahouse specializing in fries. Thick and crispy, and wrapped in a paper cone just like you get on the streets of Brussels, the starchy wedges are best eaten when they're as hot as your fingers can handle. If you feel guilty just feeding your kids fries for lunch, you can order them salads, sandwiches, or crepes, all of which are named after artists.

579 Hayes St. (at Laguna St.). ☎ 415/864-7654. www.frjtzfries.com. Fries \$3–\$4.50. Main courses \$7–\$8. AE, DISC, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 9am–10pm; Fri–Sat 9am–midnight; Sun 10am–9pm. Muni: 21-Hayes bus to Laguna St.; or any streetcar to Van Ness St. station and walk 2 blocks north to Hayes and 4 blocks east to Laguna St.

Vicolo Pizzeria ★ *(Finds)* PIZZA Vicolo's delicious cornmeal-crust pizzas have developed such a following that you can now find them at the local Whole Foods market—or stocked in my freezer (they're very handy when a writing deadline means mom's not cooking). But if you're traveling here on vacation, it's unlikely you've got access to an oven, so you're better off ordering one at the restaurant. And there are a couple of good reasons to come to the restaurant even if you do have an oven. For one, the atmosphere in this odd, alley-side corrugated metal building is cozy and comfortable; it makes you feel like you've discovered something special. Second, you can partake of their yummy salads (the beets, blue cheese, and walnut salad is a winner). There's also house-made lasagna with all-natural beef, which is almost as good as the pizza.

150 Ivy Alley (between Hayes and Grove sts., off Franklin St.). ☎ 415/863-2382. Highchairs. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$8–\$8.50. MC, V. Sun–Thurs 5–8pm; Fri–Sat 5–9pm; Lunch 11:30am–2pm (only open for lunch during Davies Symphony and Opera House matinees). Muni: 21-Hayes bus to Franklin St. and walk ½ block north to Ivy Alley.

10 Marina/Cow Hollow**EXPENSIVE**

Greens ★★☆☆ VEGETARIAN The setting is so lovely and the food so good at this vegetarian spot, even dedicated carnivores will enjoy it. Built by the San Francisco Zen Center in a converted warehouse, the restaurant boasts very high ceilings and a wall of windows that frames a stunning view of a marina, the bay, and the Golden Gate Bridge. Come in the early evening, and you'll be rewarded with a glorious sunset as well.

One taste of the delectable offerings, and you may decide meat is overrated. Start with baked goat cheese with grilled bread and golden beets, and follow it with risotto with snap, snow, and English peas, or yellow vegetable curry with cashew jasmine rice. For dessert, how about a warm fruit cobbler with buttermilk ice cream? Vegan appetizers, entrees, and desserts—like egg-free, dairy-free chocolate mousse—are also available. Most nights are a la carte, but on Saturday night a \$46 four-course *prix fixe* dinner is served. Some folks gripe that meatless fare should be less expensive, but I feel Greens' prices are in line with vegetarian options at any upscale restaurant. If you can't get a table at lunchtime, pick up sandwiches from the Greens to Go take-out counter and have a picnic overlooking the bay.

Building A, Fort Mason (at Bay St.). ☎ 415/771-6222. greensrest.citysearch.com. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$8.50–\$13 lunch, \$15–\$19 dinner; *prix fixe* (Sat night only) \$46. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon 5:30–9pm, Tues–Fri noon–4pm and 5:30–9pm; Sat noon–2:30pm and 5:30–9pm. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Laguna St. and transfer to the 28 bus to Fort Mason.

MODERATE

A16 ★★ ITALIAN/PIZZA This hopping new addition to Chestnut Street is named after the motorway that transverses the Italian region of Campania, home to Naples. As one might expect, A16's most acclaimed specialty is its wood-oven-fired Neapolitan pizza, which could blow away your youngsters' preconceptions of what pizza is all about. Order a "pizza marinara," with just tomato, oregano, garlic, and olive oil, and they'll be amazed that something without melted cheese could taste so good. Of course, there are mozzarella-topped pizzas as well. The rest of the menu is also impressive (and changes seasonally). Dishes like house-made fennel sausage with grilled bread or wild salmon with basil, almonds, and lemon are deliciously inspired by southern Italian cuisine. For dessert, your options might include ricotta almond mousse or warm chocolate hazelnut cake. Although the menu is more limited at lunch, it may be the best time to bring younger children. They'll enjoy watching the pizzas being made or drawing on the paper-covered tables. The dinner scene is usually too noisy and grown-up for all but the hippest teenagers.

2355 Chestnut St (between Scott and Divisadero sts.). ☎ 415/771-2216. www.a16sf.com. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$8–\$13 lunch, \$8–\$20 dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Tues 5–10pm; Wed–Fri 11:30am–2:30pm and 5–10pm (until 11pm Fri); Sat 5–11pm.

Café Marimba ★ MEXICAN Disregard any preconceived notions of Mexican cuisine that those Tex-Mex chain restaurants have impressed on your psyche. When you visit this colorful, festive eatery, you're in for a treat. The Oaxacan offerings here bring together the flavors of southern Mexico with a California freshness and lightness. Flavorful fish and grilled meats arrive at your table with homemade tortillas and tasty salsas. The dishes with traditional Mexican mole (*mo-lay*) sauces are also quite good. Kids will love the decor, which includes huge mythical characters on the ceiling and walls. The freshly made chips and guacamole are so good, you could make a meal of them alone—but it would be a shame to miss the better offerings to come.

2317 Chestnut St. (between Scott and Divisadero sts.). ☎ 415/776-1506. Reservations accepted. Main courses \$8–\$14. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–10pm; Sun 11:30am–9pm. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Scott St.

Isa ★★ CALIFORNIA/FRENCH Chef Luke Sung put his training with some of the San Francisco's best French chefs to creative use at this unique, family-run restaurant. He calls his creations French *tapas*, displaying his epicurean mastery in delicious small plates that you order from a number of categories. The

potato-wrapped sea bass was so good I wished there were more of it. But that's just the point: with small plates, you've got room to try other wonderful creations, like the roast chicken or truffled risotto. The front room gets quite cramped, especially when other diners waiting to be seated start filing in, so sit on the lovely heated patio if at all possible. Sung runs Isa with his wife Kitty, and the restaurant was named for the younger of their two children. The owners, who also live upstairs, make a point of being kid-friendly and are happy to welcome families. Nonetheless, the menu is pretty sophisticated and the crowd quite hip, so I wouldn't take very young children here. Also, come early because once the place fills up service can really slow down.

3324 Steiner St. (between Chestnut and Lombard sts.). ☎ **415/567-9588**. Highchairs. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$9–\$17. MC, V. Mon–Thurs 5:30–10pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:30pm. Muni: 22-Fillmore, 28-19th Ave., or 30-Stockton to Steiner St.

INEXPENSIVE

Amici's East Coast Pizzeria PIZZA Amici's specializes in East Coast style pizzas and other Italian specialties. See p. 121 for a full review.

2033 Union St. (between Webster and Buchanan sts.). ☎ **415/885-4500**. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$8–\$13. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri 11am–11pm; Sat 11:30am–11pm; Sun 11:30am–10pm. Muni: 41-Union or 45-Union-Stockton bus to Webster St.

Dragon Well ★ *Finds* CHINESE Dragon Well was established with the idea of serving light, fresh, flavorful, and reliably good Chinese food. It has succeeded. Traditional favorites like pork-filled potstickers (a big hit with my kids) and cashew chicken do not disappoint, and the tea-smoked duck, served in a bun with plum sauce, is not to be missed. Even kids can enjoy it, provided you leave out the fresh cilantro. The spacious and airy decor matches the light and healthful food.

2142 Chestnut St. (between Steiner and Pierce sts.). ☎ **415/474-6888**. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$7–\$11. MC, V. Daily 11:30am–10pm. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Steiner St.

The Grove ★ AMERICAN/BREAKFAST The Grove is one of my favorite hangouts in San Francisco. I confess to having written large portions of this book while sipping a latte alongside other over-caffeinated, laptop-bearing Grove denizens. On weekends, our whole family regularly hits the Grove for lunch. With a wooded interior, an eclectic assortment of tables and chairs, windows that open up like terrace doors, lots of plants, and plenty of outdoor seating, it's simply one of the most agreeable places to hang out on a sunny day. The menu is equally pleasing, with breakfast options like hot oatmeal with brown sugar and fruit or a breakfast burrito with guacamole and sour cream. Lunch options include fresh salads and unique sandwiches, like the Cuban pork or the turkey with chipotle mayo. Kids will enjoy the cheese quesadilla or the homemade macaroni and cheese.

2250 Chestnut St. (at Alma St., between Scott and Pierce sts.). ☎ **415/474-4843**. Highchairs. Main courses \$7–\$10. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7am–11pm; Sat–Sun 8am–11pm. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Scott St.

Mel's Drive-in HAMBURGERS The original Mel's was opened in 1947 on Van Ness Avenue by Mel Weiss. It was demolished 25 years later, but not before George Lucas filmed *American Graffiti* there. In 1985 Mel's son Steven opened a new Mel's on Lombard Street but kept the old 1950s theme, complete with booths, chrome, and tabletop jukeboxes. He eventually opened three more San Francisco locations and a smattering elsewhere in the state. The food is nothing to write home about, but under 10s love this place—uniformed waitresses deliver their meals

in cardboard Cadillacs, they can select '50s tunes on the jukebox, and they get balloons just for stopping by. The menu includes all the typical diner options: blue-plate specials, chicken potpie, salads, humongous desserts, and all-day breakfast.

2165 Lombard St. (at Steiner St.). ☎ 415/921-2867. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$5–\$15. MC, V. Sun–Wed 6am–2am; Thurs 6am–3am; Fri–Sat 24 hr. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Steiner St.; walk 1 block south on Steiner St.

Pasta Pomodoro ITALIAN Families, and the good fresh food, are responsible for making this locally-owned chain so successful. The fare isn't going to have you phoning home in a rapture, but it's cheap, healthy, and you can make everyone happy here with a plate of lasagna for meat-eaters, a nice linguine primavera for the vegetarian, plain capellini for the refusnik, and some sautéed broccoli because you need your veggies. The best news is that Pasta Pomodoro, which has locations all over the city, also delivers. Should you be in a hotel without room service, don't stress about taking exhausted kids out once again: those buttered noodles are just a phone call away.

1875 Union St. (between Hyde and Larkin sts.). ☎ 415/771-7900. www.pastapomodoro.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$7.50–\$11. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–11pm; Sun noon–11pm. Muni: 41-Union or 45-Union-Stockton bus to Laguna St.

Zao Noodle Bar ASIAN What kid doesn't love a good plate of noodles? This small chain of Asian-style restaurants, with just two San Francisco locations, is sure to satisfy even the pickiest eater. The kids' menu is basically a choice of noodles served four ways: with chicken, with chicken and veggies, with peanut sauce, or just plain. You won't spend more than \$5, and plain noodles or rice will cost you a mere 99¢. Grown-ups can order more interesting options like coconut-lemongrass soup or yellow curry salmon and prawns. The food isn't going to win any awards for Asian cooking, but the inexpensive kids' menu—complemented by plastic kids' cups, special kids' "chop sticks," and a tolerant staff—makes this a popular option for local families with young children.

2031 Chestnut St. (at Fillmore St.). ☎ 415/928.3088. www.zaonoodle.com. Highchairs, boosters, kids' menu. Main courses \$8–\$10; kids' menu 99¢–\$4.99. AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Fillmore St.

11 Japantown/Pacific Heights/Presidio Heights

EXPENSIVE

Café Kati ★★ ASIAN FUSION Even though it's been around for years, this is still one of my favorite restaurants in town. It somehow manages to marry a sophisticated, inventive menu with a very relaxed, neighborhood atmosphere. The eclectic decor looks cozy and homemade, and the already-small space is divided into two even smaller dining areas in front and back rooms. As in all the best spots, the menu changes depending on what's available locally. It always reflects the unique influence of chef Kirk Webber, who likes to include a little something Eastern and a little something Western. Thus, you might find seafood steamed in red Thai curry and a marinated skirt steak with Vidalia onion rings sharing the table and giving patrons great pleasure. If you're lucky, the towering Caesar salad with Cajun cornmeal catfish will be on the menu as well. Be prepared to wait on the weekends, unless you have an early reservation. The staff is very kid-friendly, but the dim lighting and exotic menu may be too much for younger diners.

1963 Sutter St. (between Fillmore and Webster sts.). ☎ 415/775-7313. www.cafekati.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$21–\$27. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 5:30–10pm. 2-Clement, 3-Jackson, 4-Sutter, 22-Fillmore, or 38-Geary bus to Fillmore St.; walk ½ block east on Sutter St.

MODERATE

Isobune JAPANESE/SUSHI If you want to introduce the kids to sushi, this could be a fun place to start. The spicy tuna rolls, *maguro* tuna, and a few vegetarian options cruise by on little boats in front of diners. See something that looks enticing? Go ahead and take it. The chefs are constantly at work, refilling the little boats on their aquatic conveyor belt. You won't find the greatest selection here, but you're best off sticking to the mainstream stuff like California rolls anyway. **Warning:** This is one place that's actually better when it's crowded. If you come at odd hours, you'll see limp fish that's been around the loop a few too many times.

1737 Post St. (in the Japan Center). ☎ 415/563-1030. Highchairs. 2 pieces of sushi \$1.80–\$3.75. MC, V. Daily 11:30am–10pm. Muni: 38-Geary bus to the Japan Center at Webster St.

Juban Yakiniku House JAPANESE Although the grill-your-own concept may not have the dramatic appeal of a Benihana's, where the chef comes to your table and sautés while you watch, it's really more fun to take responsibility for your own dinner. At Juban, a gas grill embedded in the center of your table quickly cooks thin slices of tender beef, chicken, short ribs, shrimp, and other items while you and yours handle the cooking implements. The wait staff makes sure the temperature is just so, but in any event, it's pretty difficult to ruin your dinner. Smoke is relieved by special downdraft grills. Juban is big and modern, with wide tables to hold the various plates of raw and cooked food, and an accommodating staff. *Yakiniku*, or grilling, works well for children, who can pick and choose what they like and in reasonable quantities.

1581 Webster St. (in the Japan Center). ☎ 415/776-5822. www.jubanrestaurant.com. Highchairs. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$7.50–\$20. AE, MC, V. Mon and Wed–Thurs 11:30am–2pm and 5:30–9:30pm; Fri 11:30am–2pm and 5–9:30pm; Sat–Sun 11:30am–4:30pm and 5–9:30pm. Closed Tues. Muni: 38-Geary bus to the Japan Center at Webster St.

INEXPENSIVE

Eliza's CHINESE Despite the presence of nearby Chinatown, many San Francisco locals choose to come here to get their fix of good old Hunan food. This is the kind of Chinese food most people have in mind when they think Chinese: Kung Pao chicken, broccoli beef, and sweet and sour pork. My guess is the only dish you won't have seen before is the shrimp with chantrelle mushrooms. The difference is that, this being health-conscious California, Eliza's uses no MSG and dishes are generally not too greasy. Ask them to adjust the spiciness and you can all eat family-style.

2877 California St. (at Divisadero St.). ☎ 415/621-4819. Highchairs, boosters. Lunch items \$5–\$7.50. Dinner main courses \$6.50–\$13. Daily 11am–3pm and 5–10pm. MC, V. Muni: 1-California bus to Divisadero St.

Ella's ★ *(Finds)* AMERICAN/BREAKFAST I haven't met a family who doesn't agree this is the best place for brunch in San Francisco. Maybe that explains why the line at Ella's usually goes well out the door. The menu changes frequently, but expect fresh baked breads, exceptional pancakes, and omelets with appetizing fillings like sausage, mushroom, roasted red pepper, and Gruyère. To skip the weekend wait, come for a regular weekday breakfast. If you just can't come by in the morning, lunch (think cashew egg salad on cornmeal molasses bread) and dinner (curried lamb stew, perhaps) are also fine times to try Ella's neoclassical American cuisine.

500 Presidio Ave. (at California St.). ☎ 415/441-5669. www.ellassanfrancisco.com. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations accepted for lunch. Brunch main courses \$7.50–\$11. Lunch/dinner main courses \$7–\$13. MC, V. Mon–Fri 7am–9pm; Sat–Sun 8:30am–2pm. Muni: 1-California bus to Presidio Ave.

Tips Sushi for the Whole Family

San Francisco kids have grown up with sushi, and it's not unusual to see sushi served at lunchtime in some of the city's middle and upper schools. Even very young children in the city are used to accompanying their parents on sushi outings. For a fun Japanese dining experience, arrive early when the restaurant is less busy and sit your family down at the sushi bar. Your kids will love watching the sushi chef expertly patting the rice into oblong shapes and placing raw fish on top, or making artistic rolls and slicing them ever so precisely with a very big knife. Finicky eaters may prefer leaving the *hamachi* (yellowtail) or spicy tuna rolls to their parents and sticking to cooked shrimp or vegetarian rolls. Many sushi restaurants also serve other Japanese dishes like tempura, teriyaki chicken, or *udon* noodles. Don't forget to order *edamame* (soybeans in the shell) to start. They're fun to eat and very healthy.

The Grove ★  *Finds* AMERICAN/BREAKFAST A delightful place for breakfast, lunch, or just a cup of coffee. See p. 132 for a full review.

2016 Fillmore St. (between California and Pine sts.) ☎ 415/474-1419. Highchairs. Main courses \$7–\$10. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7am–11pm; Sat–Sun 8am–11pm. Muni: 1-California bus to Fillmore, walk ½ block south.

Pasta Pomodoro ITALIAN This chain, with locations around the city, serves good, basic Italian food at reasonable prices. See p. 133 for a full review.

3611 California St. (at Spruce St.) ☎ 415/831-0900. www.pastapomodoro.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$7.50–\$11. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–11pm; Sun noon–11pm. Muni: 1-California bus to Spruce St. Also in the Kabuki Theater, 1865 Post St. (at Fillmore St.) ☎ 415/674-1826. Muni: 38-Geary bus to Fillmore St. and walk 1 block north to Post St.

Zao Noodle Bar ASIAN This kid-friendly chain serves hearty, flavorful noodles and other Asian fare. See p. 133 for a full review.

2406 California St. (at Fillmore St.) ☎ 415/345-8088. www.zaonoodle.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$8–\$10. AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm. Muni: 1-California bus to Fillmore St.

12 Russian Hill

EXPENSIVE

Antica Trattoria ★★ ★ *Finds* ITALIAN This neighborhood favorite is no ordinary Italian restaurant. Considered one of the best trattorias in San Francisco, its homemade pasta dishes are elegant and uncomplicated, accentuating high-quality, fresh ingredients over busy, heavy sauces. The menu also varies with the time of year. Although you can't go wrong with any of the pasta dishes, including such possibilities as fettuccine with porcini mushrooms, oven-dried olives and brown-butter sage, if you consider a fish or meat dish for a change you will not be disappointed. Options like Alaskan halibut and clams in white wine and tomatoes, or thinly sliced sirloin steak with arugula and roasted potatoes, are delectable. If you have room for dessert, the rich chocolate cake and airy tiramisu are transcendent. With white walls and not much adornment, the crisp, simple decor matches the food perfectly. Antica has no kids' menu, but the kitchen is happy to serve a kids' portion of hot buttered penne with veggies, and the friendly hostess keeps a supply of

crayons on hand. Whenever we eat at Antica, which is frequently, we wonder why we don't come even more often.

2400 Polk St. (at Union St.). ☎ 415/928-5797. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$9.50–\$20. DC, MC, V. Thurs–Sun 5:30–9:30pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:30pm. Muni: 19-Polk to Union St., 41-Union, or 45-Union-Stockton bus to Polk St.

INEXPENSIVE

Boulange de Polk ★ BAKERY If you can claim one of the outdoor tables here on a sunny day, consider yourself very lucky. These are prime people-watching spots and exactly where you'd want to eat absolutely anything from this always busy, very French bakery. In the mornings, cappuccino and an almond croissant, or a chewy baguette with sweet butter and jam, will transport you to the Marais in Paris. Lunch items include smoked salmon quiche and *tartines* (savory tarts) served with salad. Kids will enjoy the chocolate croissants for breakfast or the ham and cheese baguette for lunch.

2310 Polk St. (at Green St.). ☎ 415/345-1107. Lunch items \$3.25–\$9. No credit cards. Tues–Sat 7am–6:30pm; Sun 7am–6pm. Muni: 19-Polk to Green St., 41-Union, or 45-Union-Stockton bus to Van Ness Ave. and Union St. and walk 1 block south and 1 block east.

East Coast West Delicatessen DELICATESSEN There's actually been one Jewish deli in town forever, but it's out in the Richmond District and people forget that it's there, preferring to complain of the lack of a real deli like in New York City. That was until two enterprising and thoughtful chefs with Jewish mothers jumped into the breach and opened what looks, feels, and tastes like the genuine article. Among the offerings are chicken soup with matzo balls, corned beef and chicken liver sandwiches, and blintzes.

1725 Polk St. (at Washington St.). ☎ 415/563-3542. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$3.50–\$13. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 8am–9pm. Muni: 19-Polk to Washington St. or 27-Brannan bus to Polk St.

Polker's Gourmet Burgers AMERICAN/BREAKFAST/HAMBURGERS

Despite the carnivorous name, Polker's is probably best known as a terrific place for brunch, featuring an array of delicious omelets, French toast, and the best butter-milk pancakes you may ever taste. Of course, several burger options, including turkey and garden burgers in addition to juicy red meat, also grace the menu, as do entrée-sized salads. The booth seats are perfect for families of four, and the round tables by the window can seat up to six. Don't come if you're in a rush—service can be a slow. On weekends, arrive early and write your name on the list by the door.

2226 Polk St. (between Vallejo and Broadway sts.). ☎ 415/885-1000. Highchairs. Main courses \$6–\$11. MC, V. Daily 8am–11pm. Muni: 19-Polk to Broadway.

Swensen's Creamery ICE CREAM As is proudly advertised on its sign at the corner of Union and Hyde Streets, this is the original Swensen's creamery, established in 1948. You won't find the exotic flavors you get at Mitchell's Ice Cream, but they do offer three kinds of vanilla, which may be your little one's

Moments Picnic with a View

The Powell-Hyde cable car stops a half block from ZA Pizza. Grab some slices to go and re-board the cable car for the ride to Aquatic Park. Munching on tasty slices of crisp-crust pizza with a view of both bridges sounds like a special moment to me.

favorite flavor anyway. The location along the Powell-Hyde cable car route is pretty convenient, too. Stop here for a scoop, perhaps after you've lunched at nearby ZA Pizza (see the next review), and before walking 2 blocks to crooked Lombard Street.

1999 Hyde St. (at Union St.). ☎ 415/775-6818. Cones \$2.45–\$3.95. AE, MC, V. Sun and Tues–Thurs noon–10pm; Fri–Sat noon–11pm. Muni: Powell-Hyde cable car to Union St.

ZA Pizza ★ *Finds* PIZZA On a tree-lined section of Hyde Street along the cable car route, this is a favorite neighborhood gathering spot. Families can hang out at the counter of this tiny establishment and watch a game on TV or take a seat at one of the few indoor and outdoor tables. The thin-crust pizzas, named after painters and other luminary characters, include the Pesto Picasso, with roasted chicken, sun-dried tomatoes, and fresh pesto, and the Popeye the Greek, with spinach and feta cheese. Two salads are also on the menu, but the house salad wins out over the plain-tasting Caesar.

1919 Hyde St. (between Green and Union sts.). ☎ 415/771-3100. Highchairs. Slices \$3.30–\$4.35. AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Wed Noon–10pm; Thurs–Sat Noon–11pm. Muni: Powell-Hyde cable car to Green St.

13 The Haight

MODERATE

Cha Cha Cha's ★ CARIBBEAN If you have high-energy kids who enjoy busy settings with lots of colors, bring them to this Caribbean *tapas* joint. You'll see funky tropical decor, palm trees, even a Caribbean "Santos" altar, and you'll hear plenty of salsa and meringue. What you'll taste are little morsels of Jamaican jerk chicken, crispy new potatoes, or fried plantains served with black beans and sour cream. Slide the kids into a booth for lunch and order them a chicken quesadilla, with salsa on the side for the spice-averse, while you feast on a Cajun fish sandwich. Dinnertime features large plate meals as well, but the place could be a bit too boisterous for children then.

1801 Haight St. (at Shrader St.). ☎ 415/386-7670. www.cha3.com. *Tapas* \$4–\$9; Sandwiches \$7.50–\$8; Main courses \$13–\$16. MC, V. Daily 11:30am–4pm; Sun–Thurs 5–11pm; Fri–Sat 5–11:30pm. Muni: 6-Parnassus, 7-Haight, or 71-Haight-Noreiga bus to Shrader St.

INEXPENSIVE

Ben & Jerry's ICE CREAM I can't think of a more appropriate place to indulge in this politically correct frozen delight. Ben & Jerry's is all about social responsibility, which is clear enough from the unbleached recycled paper napkins and the pictures of hormone-free cows grazing happily in Vermont. But it's also about a counter-culture that once had its epicenter right in the neighborhood. How great is it to enjoy a scoop of Cherry Garcia just around the corner from where Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead lived during the '67 Summer of Love? And, with all those pure, natural ingredients, it's delicious as well.

1480 Haight St. (between Masonic Ave. and Ashbury St.). ☎ 415/626-4143. www.benjerry.com. Cones from \$2.75. No credit cards. Daily noon–10pm (until 11pm Fri–Sat). Muni: 6-Parnassus, 7-Haight, or 71-Haight-Noreiga bus to Ashbury St.

Blue Front Cafe AMERICAN/BREAKFAST/MEDITERRANEAN The Blue Front's menu is as eclectic as the upbringing of its friendly owners, three Greek Orthodox Christian brothers who were raised in the Old City of Jerusalem. The specialties are Middle Eastern/Mediterranean—spit-roasted lamb gyros in pita bread and falafel wraps are among the choices—but you'll

find all-American turkey, club, and Reuben sandwiches on the menu as well. The Blue Front is also a good breakfast spot, serving up three-egg omelets, toasted bagels, and breakfast wraps in Mediterranean *lavash* bread. The room is nothing fancy—wooden tables are close together with plenty of people reading their papers and nursing their coffees—but the huge Genie hanging out front blends in well with the colorful neighborhood.

1430 Haight St. (between Masonic Ave. and Ashbury St.). ☎ 415/252-5917. www.bluefrontcafe.com. High-chairs. Main courses \$5.25–\$9.75. MC, V. Sun–Thurs 7:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 7:30am–11pm. Muni: 6-Parnassus, 7-Haight, or 71-Haight-Noreiga bus to Masonic Ave.

Burger Joint ★ HAMBURGERS In a setting reminiscent of a '50s-era TV sitcom, with vinyl-covered chairs and vintage Formica patterns on the tables, you can enjoy a really good burger. They're made with naturally raised, hormone-free Niman Ranch beef and served on a bun that has enough personality to handle a juicy hand-formed patty. The only alternatives to a hamburger or cheeseburger are a hot dog, free-range chicken breast sandwich, or veggie burger, all served with crispy fries. Yummy milkshakes and root beer floats are made with San Francisco's Double Rainbow ice cream.

700 Haight St. (at Pierce St.). ☎ 415/864-3833. www.burgerjointsfcitysearch.com. Boosters, highchairs. Main courses \$5.45–\$6.95. MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm. Muni: 6-Parnassus, 7-Haight, or 71-Haight-Noreiga bus to Pierce St.

The Citrus Club Value ASIAN You'll find tasty, nourishing noodle dishes in this extremely casual eatery furnished with plain laminated tables, a tile floor, and a counter lit by lamps cleverly covered in Vietnamese straw hats. Huge bowls of soup and Asian noodle salads are almost too big for one regular-size person and overwhelm those with smaller appetites, so consider sharing. Lunch here before a Golden Gate Park visit makes sense, as the restaurant isn't far from the Children's Playground entrance on Stanyan Street. In the evening, neighborhood folk queue up to order such delicacies as *pho-ga*, a Vietnamese soup full of thin rice noodles, chicken, cilantro, and chopped vegetables, or vegetarian offerings like buckwheat noodles and veggies in a spicy coconut-lime sauce. The surroundings are funky and suit the block just fine.

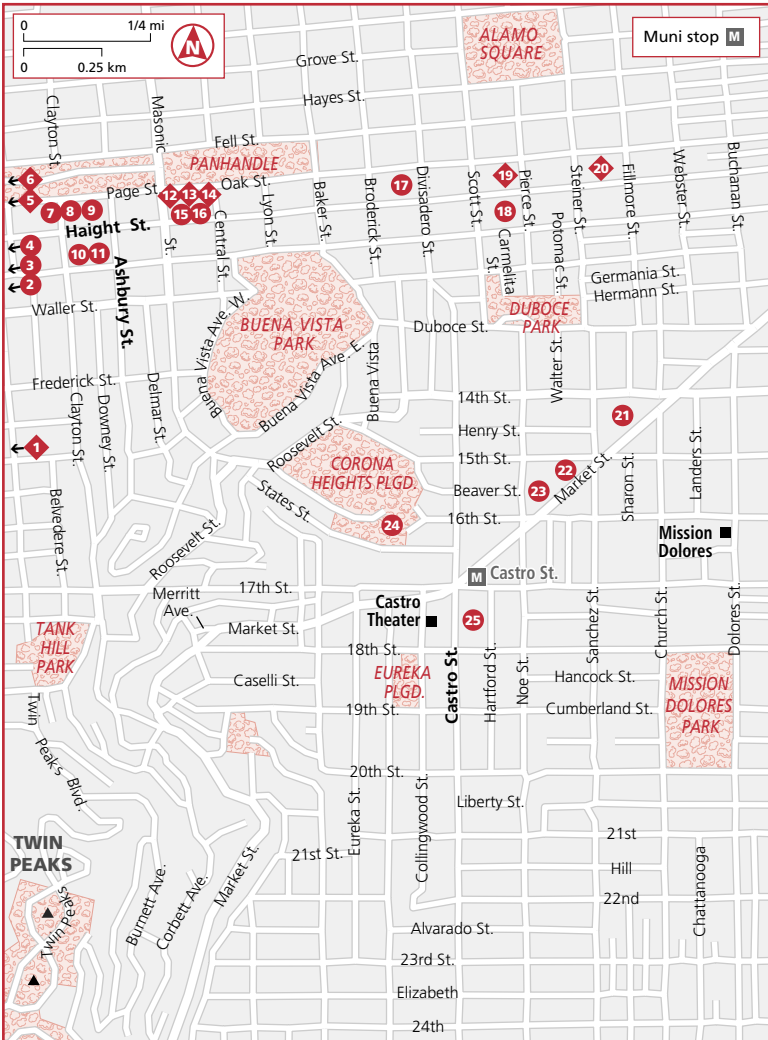
1790 Haight St. (at Shrader St.). ☎ 415/387-6366. Boosters. Main courses \$5–\$8. MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–11pm; Sun 11:30am–10pm. Muni: 6-Parnassus, 7-Haight, or 71-Haight-Noreiga bus to Shrader St.

Crepes Express CREPES For an afternoon snack, you can't do better by the kidlets than a thin crepe filled with Nutella and bananas and topped with whipped cream. That's living. This very casual cafe also serves savory crepes, baguette sandwiches, and salads. The food is good, but the crepes are the reason to stop here.

1476 Haight St. (at Ashbury St.). ☎ 415/865-0264. Main courses \$3–\$5. AE, MC, V. Daily 9:30am–10pm. Muni: 6-Parnassus, 7-Haight, or 71-Haight-Noreiga bus to Ashbury St.

Memphis Minnie's ★ BARBECUE If you've got a hankering for a tender piece of slow-cooked meat, head straight to Memphis Minnie's. The owner smokes his brisket for 12 hours and adds his own spice rub for kick and flavor. Other options are finger-licking-good ribs and succulent pulled pork. The protocol is simple: stand in line and choose your meat and two sides, such as sweet potato or corn muffin, and have a seat at one of the tables lined up against the bright yellow and red wall. Look around at the playful decor, which includes

Haight-Ashbury & the Castro



DINING ◆

- Ben & Jerry's 12
- Blue Front Cafe 14
- Burger Joint 19
- Cha Cha Cha's 5
- The Citrus Club 6
- Crepe Express 13
- Gelato Classico 1
- Memphis Minnie's 20

ENTERTAINMENT ●

- Cafe du Nord 21
- Randall Museum 24

SHOPPING ●

- Amoeba Music 4
- Book's Inc. 23
- Buffalo Exchange 10
- Cliff's Variety 25
- Costumes on Haight 18
- Crossroads Trading 11, 22

- Discount Fabrics 15
- FTC Skateboarding 3
- Gamescape 17
- Kids Only 8
- Mendel's Art Supplies & Far Out Fabrics 9
- Shoe Biz 16
- Skates on Haight 2
- The Wasteland 7

plastic pigs, black and white cow-print ceiling fans, pinned up trucker hats, and pithy sayings like “Never Trust a Skinny Cook.” You can also read the favorable newspaper clippings about Minnie’s under glass at each table. Once your meal is ready, choose from one of the three sauces at your table: red Texan, North Carolina vinegar, and South Carolina yellow mustard. Fortunately, each table has a full roll of paper towels on it as well. All the meat is delicious, and most of the sides, with the exception of the overly-dry corn muffins, are tasty too.

576 Haight St. (at Steiner St.). ☎ 415/864-8461. www.memphisminnies.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$6.25–\$13. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 11am–10pm. Muni: 6-Parnassus, 7-Haight, or 71-Haight-Noreiga bus to Steiner St.

14 The Mission

If you’re headed to or from any of these restaurants at night and you’re not driving, I’d recommend taking a cab.

EXPENSIVE

Foreign Cinema ★★ *Finds* CALIFORNIA/MEDITERRANEAN What sets this establishment apart from any other place in the city is its outdoor courtyard with a large exposed-cement wall onto which are projected foreign films, many of them Oscar winners. Heat lamps keep the place cozy, and, well, it’s just an incredibly fun way to have a meal. The overall tone of the place is quite grown-up, with an adjoining, very hip bar next door. Fortunately, the chefs have a young boy of their own, who can be seen running around the courtyard in the early part of the evening. They’ve even added a kids’ menu, so arrive early and bring the children. Or try the weekend brunch, which is the family-friendliest meal here.

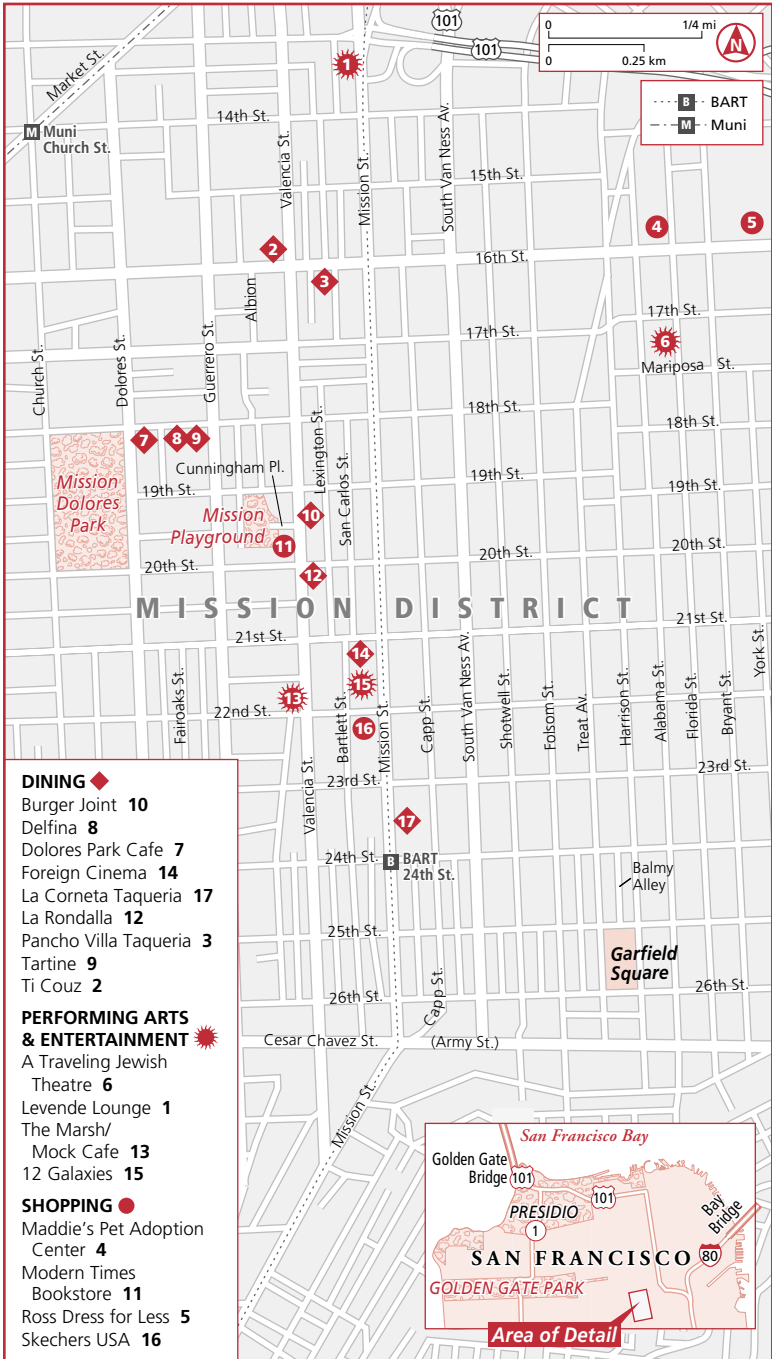
The best part of the whole experience is that the food is very good—even though this place is so cool it doesn’t need to be. Chefs/parents Gayle Pirie and John Clark are both veterans of two of the best kitchens in the Bay Area, Zuni Cafe and Berkeley’s Chez Panisse. In addition to 20 different choices from the oyster bar, their seasonally changing menu may include such appetizers (“premieres”) as beef carpaccio with fried herbs, Manchego cheese, and horseradish sauce. Main courses (“features”) could include seared sea scallops with heirloom tomatoes, bacon aioli, and basil sauce. Their naturally raised beef hails from Montana and most of the produce is local and organic.

2534 Mission St. (between 21st and 22nd sts.). ☎ 415/648-7600. www.foreigncinema.com. Reservations recommended. Kids’ menu, high chairs, boosters. Main courses \$22–\$30; brunch \$8.50–\$18; kids’ menu \$7. AE, MC, V. Sun and Tues–Wed 5:30–10pm; Thurs–Sat 6–11pm; Sat–Sun brunch 11am–5pm. Muni: BART to 24th St.; walk 2 blocks north. If it’s dark, take a cab there. After dinner, cab it home.

MODERATE

Delfina ★★ ITALIAN This renowned Tuscan-Italian restaurant defines what’s incredible about the city’s neighborhood eats. Every day chef/co-owner Craig Stoll, who was one of *Food & Wine*’s Best New Chefs in 2001, whips up a new menu of delectable, ultra-fresh fare. Diners trek in from all over the city for it, even though there’s absolutely nowhere to park. (Take a cab.) The Niman Ranch flat-iron steak with French fries is a standard, but a more seasonal option might be winter gnocchi with squash and chestnuts or lamb with polenta and sweet peas. Don’t fail to order the buttermilk *panna cotta* for dessert. The yellow walls, close-together tables, and hip young clientele give this place an adult energy—but the staff is friendly and relaxed. Moreover, chef Stoll and his wife Annie, who works in front, are parents themselves and sure to be accommodating.

The Mission District



The food here is so memorable, I wouldn't hesitate to bring the kids in order to enjoy a fabulous and well-priced meal.

3621 18th St. (between Dolores and Guerrero sts.). ☎ 415/552-4055. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$12–\$18. MC, V. Nightly 5:30–10pm (until 11pm Fri–Sat). Muni: J-Church streetcar to 18th; walk 2 blocks east.

INEXPENSIVE

Burger Joint ★ HAMBURGERS Come to either of Burger Joint's two locations to get yummy, satisfying burgers for the whole family. See full review on p. 138.

807 Valencia St. (between 19th and 20th sts.). ☎ 415/824-3494. Main courses \$4.95–\$6.95. No credit cards. Daily 11am–11pm. BART to 16th and Mission; walk west to Valencia St. and walk 3 blocks south.

Dolores Park Cafe ★ Finds AMERICAN/BREAKFAST The setting alone, across the street from Dolores Park with a spacious front deck, would probably be enough to guarantee this cafe's popularity. But it also happens to serve a terrific café latte, and plenty of other tasty items, like albacore tuna melts on whole grain bread and Niman Ranch honey glazed ham sandwiches. Breakfast items, soups, and salads are all worth stopping by for as well. Enjoy your meal in the sunshine, alongside other diners rocking strollers or perusing the newspaper. An all-ages music show Friday nights from 7:30 to 9:30pm is a big hit with kids, but it's also packed, so make sure to eat your dinner before the crowds stream in.

501 Dolores St. (at 18th St.). ☎ 415/621-2936. www.doloresparkcafe.org. Highchairs. Sandwiches/salads \$5–\$6.25. No credit cards. Daily 7am–8pm. Fri music nights until 9:30pm. Muni: J-Church streetcar to 18th; walk 1 block east.

La Corneta Taqueria ★ MEXICAN *Taquerias* abound in the Mission, so it may be useful to clarify what they actually sell, especially if you are not from the Southwest. They do not sell the crunchy, uniformly shaped “tacos” that break into a million pieces when you bite them, such as you find at the fast food chains Del Taco or Taco Bell. Mission *taquerias* sell flavorful tacos on soft corn or flour tortillas, in addition to tostadas, enchiladas, and even plated dinners. But the biggest reason most San Franciscans come to a *taqueria* is for the burritos. And at La Corneta, in addition to a more colorful, spacious, and clean-feeling dining room than you find at many neighborhood *taquerias*, you'll get a darn good burrito. Stand in line to choose beans (black, pinto, refried), a filling (beef, beef tongue, chicken, pork, shrimp, vegetarian), and your salsa preference (mild or hot). Make sure to ask for guacamole and sour cream as well. After that, you won't need to eat until tomorrow.

2731 Mission St. (between 23rd and 24th sts.). ☎ 415/643-7001. Highchairs. Main courses \$1.25–\$12. MC, V. Daily 10am–10pm. BART to 24th and Mission.

La Rondalla MEXICAN A Mexican friend of mine, who left Mexico for the woodsy hills Marin County 2 decades ago, can't resist crossing the Golden Gate Bridge every few weeks to bring her kids here for a fiesta-like evening. The place is strung up in colorful Christmas lights all year-round, and mariachi music is sure to accompany every meal. Huge burritos, enchiladas, and tacos are served with the traditional rice and beans, and more interesting Mexican dishes like *carne asada* and chicken with mole sauce are also on the menu. The festive atmosphere is fueled by tasty, and potent, margaritas.

901-903 Valencia St. (at 20th St.). ☎ 415/647-7474. Highchairs. Main courses \$5–\$12. No credit cards. Sun–Thurs 5pm–midnight; Fri–Sat 5pm–3am. Muni: BART to 24th St.; walk up to Valencia St. and walk 3 blocks north.

Mitchell's Ice Cream ★ *Finds* ICE CREAM Getting to Mitchell's is going to require commitment on the part of anyone without a car because it's located in the outer Mission a few blocks from the nearest streetcar line. For true ice cream lovers, however, it's a schlep worth your time. Beyond the ice cream's incredible creaminess, Mitchell's is best loved for its lengthy menu featuring seasonal fresh fruit and such unusual ice cream flavors as *matz/queso* (corn/cheese) and lychee fruit. I love the avocado, but *buko* (baby coconut) is hands-down the most popular flavor, with the cinnamon Mexican chocolate coming in second. Even plain old vanilla is delicious. Be sure to elbow your way inside this small store if you arrive after dinner or in the afternoon and take a number from the dispenser by the door. If you just can't make it out this way, a more limited selection of Mitchell's flavors can be found at the Santa Barbara Ice Creamery on 2240 Chestnut St. in the Marina (☎ 415/922-6417).

688 San Jose Ave. (at 29th St.). ☎ 415/648-2300. www.mitchellsicecream.com. 1 scoop \$2.10, 2 scoops \$4.10. No credit cards. Daily 11am–11pm. Muni: J-Church streetcar to 28th St.; walk east to Guerrero and turn right; Guerrero St. will turn in San Jose Ave.

Pancho Villa Taqueria ★ MEXICAN This is an old standby and one of the best *taquerias* in the city. The ever-present line testifies to the quality and consistency of the burritos, tacos, quesadillas, and enormous combination plates of prawns, *carne asada*, and chicken. The dining room isn't much to look at—utilitarian comes to mind—but who cares? With a choice of meats, beans, tortillas, salsas, and extras like sour cream or avocado, your eyes will be on your plate. Portions are substantial, and a late lunch will easily serve for dinner. Baby burritos are available for smaller appetites.

3071 16th St. (between Mission and Valencia sts.). ☎ 415/864-8840. www.panchovillasf.com. Highchairs. Main courses \$1.35–\$16. AE, MC, V. Daily 10am–midnight. Muni: BART to 16th and Mission sts.; walk 1 block west.

Tartine ★ *Finds* BAKERY Crowds from far and near are drawn by the smell of freshly baked bread at Tartine, considered by many to be the best bakery in San Francisco. You could be forgiven for forgoing dinner and simply dining on a loaf of oven-fresh walnut bread, which comes out of the oven after 4pm and sells out quickly. If the walnut bread is gone, all is not lost: Tartine also has some wonderful toasted sandwiches and plenty of other mouth-watering baked goods to choose from. **Note:** Only breakfast items are served Mondays.

600 Guerrero St. (at 18th St.). ☎ 415/487-2600. No reservations. Sandwiches \$6–\$10. AE, MC, V. Mon 8am–2pm; Tues–Wed 7:30am–7pm; Thurs–Fri 7:30am–8pm; Sat 8am–8pm; Sun 9am–8pm. Muni: BART to 16th St.; walk west to Guerrero Street and walk 2 blocks south.

Ti Couz ★ *Finds* CREPES This stylish stand-out started as a tiny creperie featuring Norman buckwheat crepes, which come served in folded squares. Combinations of fillings are suggested, but diners are also free to choose from such options as sausage, smoked salmon, mushrooms, or goat cheese. For dessert, fillings include fruit, chocolate, and ice cream. The soups and salads are also top-notch. The place got so popular that it soon expanded to include the neighboring storefront. On sunny days, put your name down and wait for an outside table.

3108 16th St. (between Guerrero and Valencia sts.). ☎ 415/252-7373. Highchairs. Reservations not accepted. Crepes \$2–\$10. MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri 11am–11pm; Sat 10am–11pm; Sun 10am–10pm. Muni: BART to 16th and Mission sts.; walk 1½ blocks west.

15 The Castro & Noe Valley

MODERATE

Firefly ★★ *Finds* AMERICAN If you happen to find yourself in this neck of the woods, I highly recommend dining at this charming neighborhood alcove. Located at the residential end of 24th Street, Firefly is a bright and welcoming oasis of calm after a busy day of sightseeing. It's one of those places you sense is going to be good as soon as you walk in the door. The decor is subtle and welcoming; the space cozy but not crowded. A look at the menu confirms that you will eat well here. It combines classic comfort foods—think fried chicken with mashed potatoes, Niman Ranch ribeye steak, and vegetarian lasagna—with more novel concoctions like grilled wild king salmon with lobster-mushroom sauce or roasted vegetable *tagine* (a Moroccan style of cooking). Make sure to start with a sharing plate of their signature shrimp and scallop potstickers, and end with the flourless chocolate cake if you have room. Everything is delicious. The dining room is teeny-tiny, so please come early if you're toting young kids. Sunday through Thursday you can order a \$29 *prix fixe* option, including appetizer, main course, dessert, and coffee.

4288 24th St. (at Douglass St.). ☎ 415/821-7652. www.fireflyrestaurant.com. Highchairs. Main courses \$15–\$19. AE, D, MC, V. Daily 5:30–10pm. Muni: J-Church streetcar to 24th St. and transfer to the 48 bus west to Douglass St.

Lovejoy's Tea Room AFTERNOON TEA Crowded with settees, chairs, lace-covered tables, and breakfronts holding teapots and china cups, Lovejoy's has successfully brought a bit of old England across the pond. Tea here is much less formal than hotel teas, and cheaper, so plenty of moms and children celebrate quality time over a cuppa without waiting for a special occasion. Crustless tea sandwiches come with cream cheese and apple, roast beef with horseradish, Stilton cheese with pear, and other very British combinations. Raisin scones are served with clotted cream and jam, and there's always a selection of sweets. The tea selection is bountiful, but children have the option of drinking cocoa, and jelly sandwiches are served with the Wee Tea. If you like the chair you're sitting on or the teacup from which you're sipping, go ahead and buy it. Lovejoy's doubles as an antiques store, and everything is for sale.

1351 Church St. (at Clipper St.). ☎ 415/648-5895. www.lovejoystearoom.com. Reservations recommended. Light tea \$12; high tea \$15; Queen's Tea \$19; Wee Tea \$9. MC, V. Wed–Sun 11am–6pm (kitchen closes at 5:30pm). Muni: J-Church streetcar to 26th St to Clipper St.

INEXPENSIVE

Chow ★ AMERICAN The raw ingredients in the kitchen include organic and local produce and naturally-raised meats. The end product on your table is flavorful, appealing comfort food. From chicken potpie to spaghetti and meatballs, the food here resembles something grandma might cook up . . . if she lived on an organic farm and had a high-tech kitchen. If you're in the mood for something a bit more exciting, wood-fired pizzas, delicious grilled meats, and a more inventive ethnic-inspired entrée or two are also on offer. With wooden floors and wainscoting, dark green walls, and close-together tables, the overall ambience is as comfortable as the food. With desserts like ginger cake with pumpkin ice cream and caramel sauce, and comfortable prices to boot, it's easy to see how this place stays so popular.

215 Church St. (at Market St.). ☎ 415/552-2469. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$6–\$11. MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11am–midnight. Muni: F-Market or J-Church streetcar to Church St. Station; walk ½ block south on Church St.

Pasta Pomodoro ITALIAN This chain, with locations around the city, serves good, basic Italian food at reasonable prices. See p. 133 for a full review.

2304 Market St. (at 16th St.). ☎ 415/558-8123. www.pastapomodoro.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$7.50–\$11. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–11pm; from noon on Sun. Muni: F-Market to Castro St. station and walk 1 block northeast to Noe St. Also at 4000 24th St. (at Noe St.). ☎ 415/920-9904. Muni: J-Church streetcar to 24th St. and walk 2 blocks west to Noe St.

16 The Richmond & Sunset

EXPENSIVE

Cliff House Bistro AMERICAN We squeezed in a meal here just before press time. The newly opened restaurant has a lot going for it, and our expectations were high. The building sits on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, with views to the north, west, and south. Moreover, it boasts a rich history. Three U.S. presidents visited the first 1863 Cliff House before it was destroyed by fire. In 1886 local millionaire Adolph Sutro built the second Cliff House, but eleven years later it, too, burned down. In 1909 Sutro's daughter built the third Cliff House, which was eventually acquired by the National Park Service.

In January 2003, the Cliff House closed for a \$19 million renovation and reopened in late 2004. A stylish modern wing features an expensive new restaurant, Sutro's. I opted to take my family to the more casual Cliff House Bistro. The breathtaking view does not disappoint. The decor, with old-fashioned tile flooring and over 200 photographs of bygone movie stars, is charming. Unfortunately, the menu was a letdown. Perhaps people are expected to pay for the vistas, because in my book \$26 is a lot for a crab Louie. I was, in fact, told not to order it because another customer had complained that the crab was too salty. I opted for the \$18 fish and chips, which were decent. My green salad was tasty, as was my husband's halibut. Of course the girls liked their buttered pasta. Because the view is so terrific, and the old-time feel delightful, I would actually try this place again, and I think you can too. Just come for breakfast or lunch, when prices will be a bit more reasonable—and don't order the crab Louie.

1090 Point Lobos Ave. (Geary Blvd. turns into Point Lobos Ave. west of 48th Ave.). ☎ 415/386-3330. Highchairs. Main courses \$9.50–\$18 breakfast; \$10–\$23 lunch; \$13–\$28 dinner. AE, DC, D, MC, V. Daily 9am–9:30pm. Muni: 38-Geary bus to 48th Ave., then walk 1 block or transfer to 18–46th Ave. bus.

MODERATE

Aziza ★★ MOROCCAN Attention to detail is the watchword at this North African oasis nestled in the city's most multicultural neighborhood. The arched ceilings, Moroccan lamps, hand-painted Arabesque plateware, and traditional Moroccan dishes will transport you to a distant continent. The food is lovingly prepared using local, organic ingredients. The *bastilla*, saffron-braised chicken and almonds baked in phyllo dough and dusted with powdered sugar and cinnamon, is out of this world. It takes 25 minutes to prepare, though, which may be too much of a wait for tired, hungry kids. Everyone will be pleased with the classic "couscous Aziza": vegetables, grilled chicken, prawns, and spicy lamb sausage on a bed of steamed couscous. Grown-ups may opt for the Moroccan spiced prawn *tagine*, and kids will enjoy the chicken brochettes—made with naturally raised poultry, of course. The lighting is muted and the mood gets more adult as the evening wears on, so plan on arriving early if you have younger kids. That said, families dining on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday nights always stay past 7pm, when the belly dancer arrives.

5800 Geary Blvd. (at 22nd Ave.). ☎ 415/752-2222. www.aziza-sf.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$10–\$20. MC, V. Wed–Mon 5:30–10:30pm. Muni: 38-Geary bus to 22nd Ave.

Khan Toke 🌟 THAI The first thing you do upon entering this pretty restaurant, one of the oldest Thai establishments in the city, is relinquish your shoes. Then, you follow the host down the hallway to a large room trimmed in teak, with low tables surrounded by cushions. As far as the children are concerned, dinner is already an adventure; the actual food may be irrelevant. Happily, the dishes on the rather lengthy menu are terrific, marked for levels of spiciness (although nothing seemed that incendiary), and familiar if you've ever eaten Thai food. For picky eaters, and nonpicky alike, skewers of marinated beef and chicken never fail to disappear, and the green curries, fragrant rice, pad Thai, papaya salad, and fried bananas with coconut ice cream are all kid-tested, although we had to order seconds on the fried bananas to keep the peace. Service is lovely and serene.

5937 Geary Blvd. (at 24th Ave.). ☎ 415/668-6654. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$7.95–\$13. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5–10pm. Muni: 38-Geary bus to 24th Ave.

Park Chalet 🌟 AMERICAN Opened in April 2004 by the owners of the Beach Chalet, the Park Chalet has the best outdoor dining area in the city. Located on the ground floor behind the Golden Gate Park Visitor's Center, it opens onto a lovely garden framed by the park's tall trees. With a glass ceiling, retractable glass walls, a stone fireplace, and more upscale furnishings than the Beach Chalet, it feels like a European countryside restaurant. The menu is essentially American, though, featuring classic salads, sandwiches, and meat dishes like barbeque pork ribs or shepherd's pie. The most inventive options are the individual pizzas, such as one with wild mushrooms, roasted garlic, goat cheese, truffle oil, and thyme. On weekends, you may even find a "brunch pizza," topped with artichoke, pancetta, mushrooms, and poached egg. If the Dungeness crab benedict is on offer, you're in luck. Kids get their own menus and crayons. Once your little ones have polished off their cheese pizzas or corndogs, let them run around on the well-tended lawn while you finish your meals in peace. There'll be lots of other kids out there as well.

1000 Great Hwy (between Fulton St. and Lincoln Way). ☎ 415/386-8439. Highchairs, boosters, kids' menu. Reservations recommended weekends. Lunch main courses \$10–\$17; Dinner main course \$10–\$24; Kids menu \$5.25. AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 9am–10pm, Fri–Sat 9am–11pm. Muni: 5-Fulton, 31-Balboa, or 38-Geary buses, or N-Judah streetcar and transfer to 18–46th Ave. bus.

Pizzetta 211 🌟 Finds PIZZA When you arrive at this miniscule storefront on an otherwise residential street far from downtown you'll feel like you've come upon a hidden gem. You have. The cozy pizzeria, with but a handful of indoor and outdoor tables, serves up thin-crust, wood-oven-fired *pizzettas* from a weekly-changing menu. Whenever possible, organic produce, dairy, and grains are used to make delectable, crispy pizzas with inspired toppings like oven-dried San Marzano tomatoes, prosciutto, and local goat cheese, or roasted cauliflower, garlic, and bread crumbs. Salads and Italian desserts are also available. This is gourmet stuff, and the staff takes itself seriously, so at dinnertime remind the kids that normal pizzeria behavior does not apply—especially if you're seated indoors. A better option is to come for lunch after a morning hike at Land's End and sit outside.

211 23rd Ave. (at California St.). ☎ 415/379-9880. Individual pizzas \$9–\$13. No credit cards. Wed–Fri noon–2:30pm and 5–9pm; Sat–Sun noon–9pm. Muni: 1-California bus to 23rd Ave.

INEXPENSIVE

The Canvas Cafe/Gallery BREAKFAST/ECLECTIC This loft-like space across the street from Golden Gate Park triples as an art gallery, lounge, and cafe. For local families, the operative word is cafe. Get there during daylight hours, and it's an optimal place to grab a bite before heading off to the Strybing Arboretum,

the Japanese Tea Garden, or other park attractions within close walking distance. After munching on oatmeal or toasted bagels for breakfast, kids can run around the large area as you sip your coffee. For lunch, choose from an assortment of salads, several cold or grilled sandwiches, focaccia pizzas, and even a few pasta entrees like macaroni and cheese and meat or veggie lasagna. While you await your meal, look around at the paintings and sculptures for sale. Another bonus: this is one of the few San Francisco cafes with its own parking lot.

1200 9th Ave. (at Lincoln Way). ☎ 415/504-0060. www.thecanvasgallery.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$6.35–\$8.70. AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 8am–midnight; Fri–Sat 8am–2am. Live music Thurs–Sun evenings. Muni: N-Judah streetcar to 9th Ave.; walk 2 blocks north towards the park.

Giorgio's Pizzeria ★ *Finds* PIZZA If you were to ask San Francisco parents to name the most family-friendly restaurant in town, most would probably say Giorgio's. This festive, boisterous pizzeria serves consistently good thin-crust pizza with traditional toppings like pepperoni or mushrooms and sausage, as well as a few pastas. Every Wednesday from 4 to 6pm is "Kids' Happy Hour": kids can order any mini pizza and make it themselves. Giorgio's also has deals for lunchtime children's parties, and there always seems to be one taking place.

151 Clement St. (at 3rd Ave.). ☎ 415/668-1266. www.giorgiospizza.com. Highchairs, boosters. Mini pizza \$7–\$10, large pizza \$13–\$19. MC, V. Daily 11:30am–11pm. Muni: 2-Clement, 3-Jackson, or 4-Sutter bus to 3rd Ave.; or 1-California bus to 3rd Ave. and walk 1 block south to Clement St.

Marnee Thai ★ *Finds* THAI Fortunately for out-of-town visitors, it's now no longer necessary to trek to the outer Sunset to try the best Thai food in San Francisco. Marnee Thai's new location is just steps away from Golden Gate Park, so you can easily come in for an early dinner after spending the afternoon visiting the Strybing Arboretum or Japanese Tea Garden. The spicy Angel wings (deep-fried chicken wings topped with chile, garlic, and sweet basil) are hugely popular and not too spicy for most kids. All the soups, curries, and noodle dishes are also fabulous. Be adventurous and skip the pad Thai; there are too many other wonderful dishes to try. If you're lucky, the wife's owner will pop by this new location when you're there. In addition to being very opinionated about what you should order, she'll gladly tell you your fortune, free of charge.

1243 9th Ave. (between Irving St. and Lincoln Way). ☎ 415/731-9999. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$8–\$14. AE, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–10pm. Muni: N-Judah streetcar to 9th Ave.; walk 2 blocks north towards the park.

Mel's Drive-In HAMBURGERS This popular diner/burger chain has a few locations throughout the city. See p. 132 for a full review.

3355 Geary Blvd. (between Parker Ave. and Stanyan St.). ☎ 415/387-2255. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$5–\$15. MC, V. Daily 6am–2am. Muni: 38-Geary bus to Parker Ave.

Park Chow ★ AMERICAN Just like Chow, its sister restaurant in the Castro, Park Chow balances good ingredients, a lively atmosphere, and amazing value to deliver a truly happy meal. Please see the Chow review on p. 144.

1240 9th Ave. (between Irving St. and Lincoln Way). ☎ 415/665-9912. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$5.95–\$11. MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri 11am–11pm; Sat 10am–11pm; Sun 10am–10pm. Muni: N-Judah streetcar to 9th Ave.; walk 2 blocks north towards the park.

Pasta Pomodoro ITALIAN This chain, with locations around the city, serves good, basic Italian food at reasonable prices. See p. 133 for a full review.

816 Irving St. (at 9th Ave.). ☎ 415/566-0900. www.pastapomodoro.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$7.50–\$11. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–11pm, from noon on Sun. Muni: N-Judah streetcar to 9th Ave.

Ton Kiang ★★ *(Finds)* CHINESE Hands down the best place for dim sum in San Francisco, Ton Kiang starts getting crowded about half an hour after the doors open on weekend mornings. So come during the week, arrive early, or, better yet, try to round up enough people—eight or more—to make a reservation. We're always calling up friends at the last minute to join us because dim sum at Ton Kiang is best enjoyed with lots of people at a large, round table. Servers come by with freshly made batches of shrimp dumplings, pork buns, crisp-steamed vegetables, and other tiny treats, which they place on a big lazy Susan in the middle of the table. Save room for dessert—the walnut cookies, custard pancakes, and mango pudding are all divine. Something about the communal dining experience makes my kids more adventurous than usual, and there really isn't an item our normally choosy eaters don't like. That may explain why the upstairs dining room, where you'll probably end up, is always packed with families. If you can think of any reason to head out this way—perhaps you're off to the Legion of Honor or plan to walk on Ocean Beach—do so. **Tip:** They don't have booster seats, so try stacking one chair on top of another.

5821 Geary Blvd (between 22nd and 23rd aves.). ☎ **415/387-8273**. Highchairs. Reservations for parties of 8 or more. Dim sum \$2–\$5.50. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 10:30am–10pm; Sun 9am–10pm. Muni: 38-Geary bus to 22nd Ave.

Toy Boat Dessert Cafe ★ ICE CREAM This corner cafe is a treat for the eyes and tummy. High shelves are filled with the owner's own collectibles—among them tin wind-up toys, Pez dispensers, and the Pillsbury Doughboy—and some for-sale reproductions. Bagels and sandwiches are available to enjoy at one of the few booths and tables, but it's the ice cream sundaes with all the trimmings that'll rock your boat.

401 Clement St. (at 5th Ave.). ☎ **415/751-7505**. Highchairs. Main courses from \$4.75. MC, V. Mon–Thurs 7:30am–11pm; Fri 7:30am–midnight; Sat 8:30am–midnight; Sun 8:30am–11pm. Muni: 2-Clement or 38-Geary to 5th Ave.; walk 1 block north to Clement St.

Exploring San Francisco with Your Kids

San Francisco attractions fall into three categories. First are those that are specifically designed for kids, such as the Exploratorium and the Bay Area Discovery Museum. Most of the ones I've listed in this chapter are of such high quality, or in such a scenic setting, that parents will take pleasure in them as well. Second are attractions not specifically geared to kids, but that children would surely enjoy. Quite a few fall into this category, including riding the cable cars or strolling through bustling, colorful Chinatown.

Third are those attractions that may fascinate parents, but that younger kids will probably find a yawn. Fortunately, there aren't too many of these. Only a few indoor attractions will require a level of restraint beyond some kids' abilities. Fortunately, places like the Asian Art Museum have made allowances for that, offering a free drop-off area for children. In other instances, you may be able to strike a deal with the little ones, where an hour (or less) of their patience can be immediately rewarded

with a kid-friendly activity. The California Palace of the Legion of Honor has nearby hiking trails and a playground, and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is adjacent to Yerba Buena Gardens and its myriad children's activities.

In fact, the biggest challenge you may face on your San Francisco vacation is prioritizing amongst all the options. My best advice is to slow down and not try to do everything, particularly if you're traveling with very young children. Where possible, work in times for the kids to rest or play. Plan the big stuff in the morning, when everyone has more energy, and save afternoons for more leisurely pursuits. Above all, be flexible. If energy levels have suddenly dropped off, be ready to head back to the hotel—or to the nearest playground. As with much in life, less may be more. Fortunately, San Francisco is so lovely that just parking your family by a grassy knoll and having a picnic could be a worthy activity in itself.

SUGGESTED ITINERARIES FOR FIRST-TIME VISITORS

If you have 1 Day Take the Powell-Hyde cable car from the Market Street turnaround to Fisherman's Wharf. Stop at the corner of Hyde and Lombard streets to take in the view of **Coit Tower** and the Bay Bridge to the east and the San Francisco Bay and **Alcatraz Island** to the north. Walk down and back up the Lombard steps, if you'd like a

better look at this famously twisty street. Then jump back on the cable car or walk (up a very steep grade) to **Fisherman's Wharf**. From there, walk two blocks east to the **National Maritime Museum** for a free, quick introduction to San Francisco's seafaring past. You'll see **Ghirardelli Square** next to the museum as well.

Major San Francisco Sight

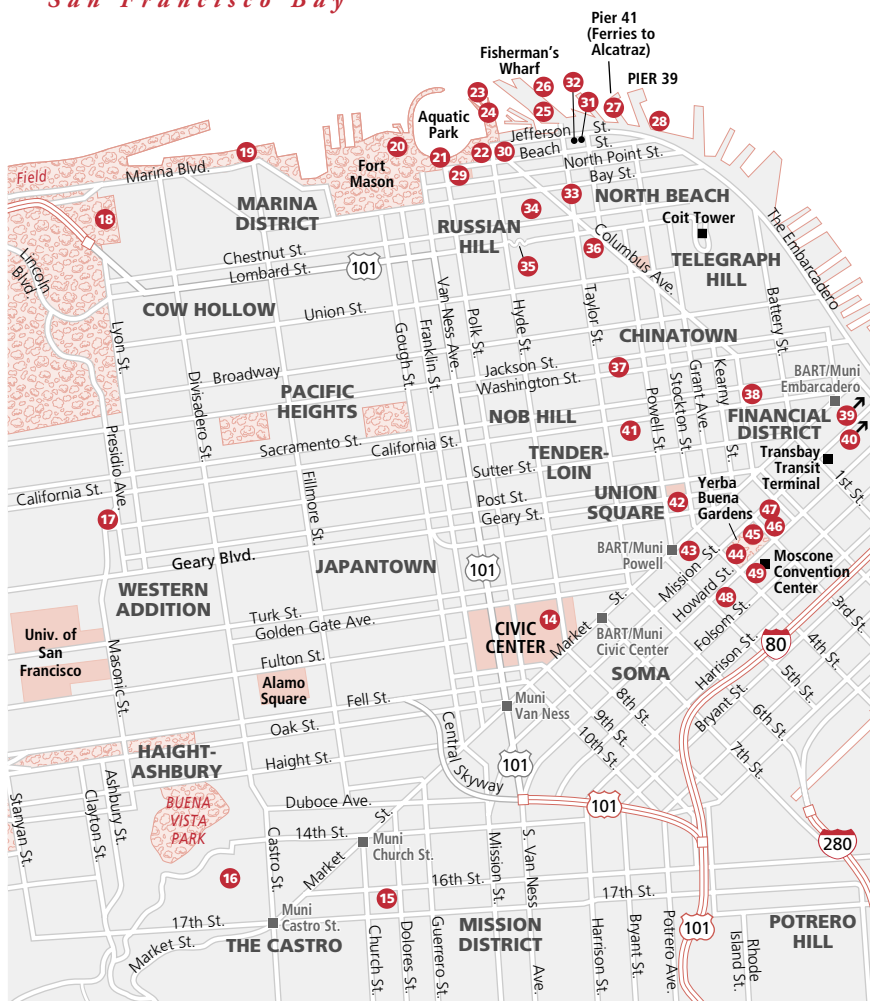


Alcatraz Island &
Angel Island Ferries **27**
Aquarium of the Bay **28**
Asian Art Museum **14**
Balclutha, Eureka & Hercules **23**
Beach Chalet Restaurant **2**
Cable Car Museum **37**
California Academy
of Sciences **48**
California Palace of
the Legion of Honor **3**

The Cannery **30**
Cartoon Art Museum **47**
The Cheesecake Factory **42**
Children's Playground
& Carousel **13**
Conservatory of Flowers **12**
Crissy Field **7**
The Exploratorium/
Palace of Fine Arts **18**
Ferry Building Marketplace **39**
Fort Point **6**

Ghirardelli Square **29**
Golden Gate Bridge **5**
Golden Gate Ferry **40**
Hyde Street Pier **24**
Japanese Tea Garden **10**
Land's End **4**
Lombard Street **35**
Marina Green &
Wave Organ **19**
Metreon / Where The Wild
Things Are **44**

San Francisco Bay



Mission Dolores 15
Musée Mécanique 25
Music Concourse 11
National Maritime Museum 21
Powell-Hyde Cable Car
Turnaround 22
Powell-Mason Cable Car
Turnaround 33
Randall Museum 16
Ripley's Believe It or Not 32
San Francisco Art Institute 34

San Francisco Centre 43
San Francisco Fire Department
Museum 17
San Francisco Maritime
National Historical Park 20
San Francisco Museum
of Modern Art 46
The San Francisco Zoo 1
Stow Lake & Boathouse 8
Strybing Arboretum &
Botanical Gardens 9

Tattoo Art Museum 36
Top of the Mark 41
U.S.S. Pampanito 26
Wax Museum 31
Wells Fargo History
Museum 38
Yerba Buena Gardens &
Center for the Arts 45
Zeum 49

When you leave the museum, cross the lawn in front of Ghirardelli, heading to the corner of Hyde and Jefferson streets. Walk onto the **Hyde Street Pier** and purchase passes to board the ships. Walk to the end of the pier and take in the view of the **Golden Gate Bridge**. Check out the *Balclutha*, the *Eureka*, and the *Hercules*. If your kids want to learn more about ships, step into the **Maritime National Historical Park Visitor's Center**, located inside the **Cannery**. If they need a break, take them to **Aquatic Park** just next to the pier to let off some steam.

If you're all hungry at this point, head to the Cannery courtyard, to the crepe wagon located in the middle. Buy some crepes and find a tree-shaded table; you may even get to listen to a local musician strum her guitar while you eat. After fortifying yourselves, you'll be ready to head east and brave the crowds. Walk to the end of **PIER 39** to gawk at the sea lions. After that, younger kids can enjoy a ride on the carousel; older kids can get in a few rounds at the arcade.

Try to keep your time at PIER 39 to a minimum so you have enough energy left to walk a few blocks towards **North Beach** and let the children play at the playground. You can also buy them some treats at Gelato Classico on Union Street, which they can savor while you sip your cappuccinos at any of the many sidewalk cafes. From there head down Stockton Street into **Chinatown**, or head one block east to catch the Powell-Mason line, if little legs are tired.

Once in Chinatown, gaze at the exotic seafood and vegetables for sale in Stockton Street markets before traversing back to colorful Grant Street, with its myriad shops

selling more inexpensive knickknacks than you ever knew existed. After buying gifts for folks back home, enjoy dinner at the **R & G Lounge** on Kearny Street (p. 119).

If your kids did get trapped in the allure of PIER 39, you may have to forego North Beach and hop on the F-Market Street right at PIER 39. Enjoy the lovely view as it takes you along the Embarcadero to Market Street. Stay on the streetcar until you reach the corner of Market and Mason streets, where you'll be back at Union Square. Have dinner at the **Grand Café** (p. 105) or one of the great restaurants at Belden Place.

If you have 2 Days Spend day 1 as described above. On day 2, catch a northbound 30-Stockton bus on Stockton Street, exiting at Jefferson Street in the Marina. Head one block north, crossing Marina Boulevard to arrive at the **Marina Green**. Walk to the end of the Marina breakwater to listen to the bizarre harmonies of the **Wave Organ** and to admire the view. Then walk back towards the **Palace of Fine Arts** and the **Exploratorium**, a fine science museum where you could spend all morning. After checking out the many fascinating exhibits, walk towards Chestnut Street and grab lunch at **The Grove** (p. 132) or **Dragon Well** (p. 132).

Catch the 30-Stockton bus on Chestnut Street southbound towards SoMa. Get off at 4th Street and Mission, in front of the **Sony Metreon**. Head inside to spend some quarters in the arcade or get spooked at Where the Wild Things Are. Better yet, cross the street to **Yerba Buena Gardens**, where the options are endless: riding the carousel, sliding in the playground, bowling, ice skating, or visiting **Zeum**, a great science museum for

older kids. If you're ready for more cultural pursuits at this point, head one block west to the **San Francisco Museum of Modern Art** (SFMOMA), or one block east to the temporary home of the **California Academy of Sciences**. If teenagers prefer a less edifying endeavor, take them to the **San Francisco Centre**, an upscale mall just around the corner.

For dinner in SoMa, try **LuLu's** (p. 111). The Sony Metreon food court is a more casual option. Depending on your kids' ages and energy level, an IMAX feature or video bowling at the Metreon are after-dinner possibilities.

If you have 3 Days Spend days 1 and 2 as suggested. After breakfast on day 3, take the **F-Market** streetcar to PIER 39, pick up your reserved tickets, and line up for the ferry to **Alcatraz Island**. The ferry trip and tour takes roughly 2½ hours; longer, if you spend a lot of time on the island itself. If you were unable to reserve Alcatraz tickets in advance, buy tickets at the Blue and White Fleet ticket counter for a bay cruise. (An audio tour is included in the trip, and the boat loops around Alcatraz Island.)

After your seaside excursion, take the F-Market back along the Embarcadero to the **San Francisco Ferry Building**. Grab lunch at Taylor's Refresher, Market Bar, or the Slanted Door. Then get on the N-Judah streetcar and head out to **Golden Gate Park**. Exit on 19th Street, where you'll be close to **Stow**

Lake and the boathouse. Other park attractions include the **Japanese Tea Garden**, **Strybing Arboretum**, **Conservatory of Flowers**, **Children's Playground**, and the **Carousel**. If you have teenagers with you, walk from the park to Haight Street to check out Ameoba Records and the vintage clothing shops. Have dinner at **The Citrus Club** (p. 138) or another trendy Haight eatery. If you have little ones who don't get the whole hippie thing, catch the N-Judah back to Union Square.

If you have 4 Days Spend days 1 to 3 as described above. On day 4, if your children are zoo-lovers, take a seat on the L-Taraval streetcar and head to the **San Francisco Zoo**. You'll travel though the outer Sunset to the end of the line near the Great Highway. See the animals, lunch at the zoo's Leaping Lemur Café, and then catch the 18 bus, which will take you to the **California Palace of the Legion of Honor** museum. After contemplating the vast European art collection, step outside to savor the breathtaking vista, including the Golden Gate Bridge's western profile. If the family's feeling outdoorsy, skip the museum altogether and hike on the glorious **Land's End** trail instead.

If your kids have outgrown zoos, consider spending the morning in the Civic Center and Hayes Valley. Visit the exceptional **Asian Art Museum** and walk around the other impressive arts buildings.

Tips Fueling the Troops

Vacationing in a city is hard work, especially with small children. Keep them going with regular feedings, something healthy midmorning and something more fun mid-afternoon. If you end up with dinner reservations past 7:30pm, bolster the kids around 5pm with a little something so they don't collapse in a heap waiting for supper.

Then stroll to **Alamo Square** for city views and a look at the Victorian “Painted Ladies.” Teens may also enjoy perusing the boutiques and thrift shops of Hayes Valley. After lunching at **Vicolo Pizzeria** (p. 130), take the 5 bus out to the Sunset, where you can transfer to the 18 bus to the Legion of Honor.

If the weather’s hot Hot weather is unusual in San Francisco, but if you get lucky, check out the tiny beaches at **Crissy Field**; they’re quite charming. Although the water is frigid, it’s inside the bay and therefore free of the very dangerous currents that plague the open-ocean beaches, which include lovely **Baker Beach**, located in the Presidio, and the expansive **Ocean Beach**, which has more than enough room to run around. Getting out on the bay is another good idea. A ferry cruise to Sausalito will stir up a welcome breeze, and you can eat lunch in any of the bayside restaurants there, then walk around touristy Sausalito and admire the San Francisco views.

If you have a car I highly recommend driving over the Golden Gate Bridge to the **Bay Area Discovery Museum**, a delightful place for kids under 10 in a setting so lovely everyone will enjoy it. From there you can head to Sausalito for lunch or go for a hike in **Muir Woods**. The Discovery Museum is accessible via a city bus but involves a 15-minute walk down (and later back up) a sizable hill, so it’s not ideal if you only have a few days and are relying on public transportation.

If you have a sitter Send everyone to Golden Gate Park or the zoo while you sip an espresso and people-watch on the Russian Hill end of Polk Street, in North Beach, or on Fillmore Street above Pine Street. Then visit any museums you think your little ones wouldn’t tolerate. Should you have a childless evening, have drinks at the Top of the Mark and then splurge on a gourmet meal at a nationally renowned restaurant such as **Gary Danko** (p. 126) or **Fleur de Lys** (p. 104).

1 The Top Attractions

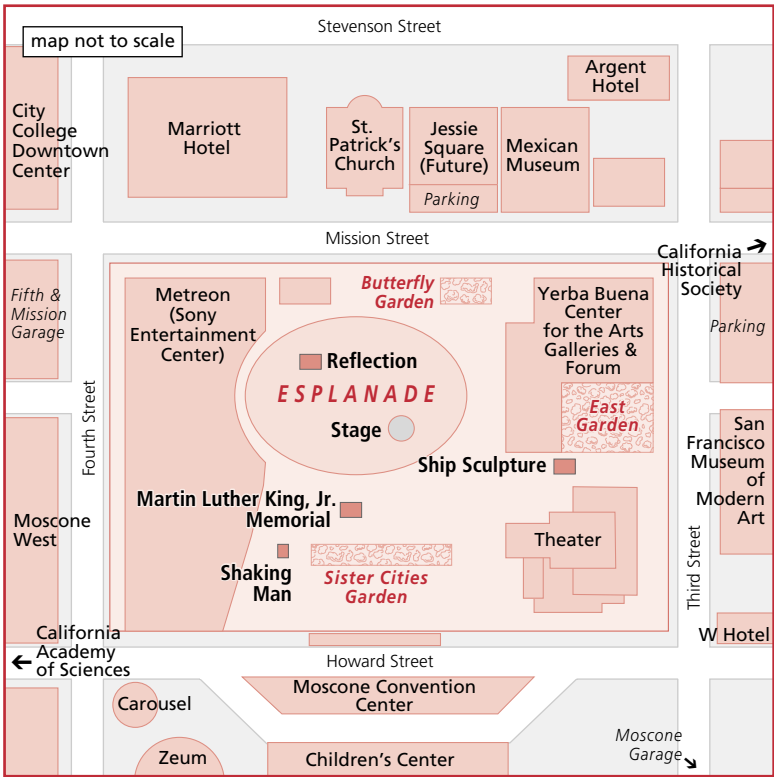
Alcatraz Island ★★ ★ **Ages 10 and up.** Spanish for “pelican,” Alcatraz was so named in 1775 by Juan Manuel Ayala for the birds that nested there. From the 1850s to 1933, the military used Alcatraz as a fort to protect the bay’s shoreline. In 1934, the government converted it into a maximum-security prison to house the country’s most hardened criminals, including Al Capone, “Machine Gun” Kelly, and Robert Stroud (the Birdman). Given the sheer cliffs, frigid waters, and treacherous currents, the Alcatraz prison was considered inescapable.

I first toured Alcatraz when I was 12, and never forgot it. Stories of escape attempts and the harsh conditions on the island fascinated me. Families today will be no less moved by the audio tour, which features narration by former guards and prisoners. One story details how over several weeks three prisoners patiently enlarged the air vents in their cells with spoons and crafted dummy heads that appeared to be sleeping so they could escape overnight undetected.

Tips Planning Ahead

You must reserve Alcatraz tour tickets at least 2 weeks in advance in the summer. Call ☎ **415/705-5555** to purchase them over the phone, or buy them online at www.blueandgoldfleet.com.

Yerba Buena Gardens



You even get to see the dummy heads, a detail my young girls enjoyed. Another story details a gruesome shoot-'em-up escape attempt, which may be the part teenage boys most enjoy. The audio tour gives a wonderfully rich and eerie sense of what it was like to be isolated in the middle of the bay—with unforgiving winds blustering through the barred windows and armed guards pacing the gun galley—yet so achingly close to the beautiful city of San Francisco.

With such a captivating history, it's no wonder Alcatraz has been the subject of so many Hollywood movies, including *Birdman of Alcatraz*, *Escape from Alcatraz*, and *The Rock*. My bet is that most young kids will enjoy the trip, which after all starts out with a fun ferry ride across the bay, although particularly sensitive children could get spooked by some of the audio tour's eerier details. Wear jackets (it's quite brisk out on the bay) and wear comfortable shoes—you'll be doing lots of walking. The ferry sells snacks, but you may want to bring some munchies along because the whole trip could take up to 2½ hours. Also, reserve for Alcatraz well in advance. I recommend booking the earliest ferry possible—the island will be less crowded and your kids more energetic.

In addition to doing the audio tour of the cell block, those visiting during fall and winter can view an orientation video about the island itself and tour the grounds outside the prison on a walking path. (The trail is closed during bird-nesting season from mid-Feb to early Sept.) Older kids who don't frighten easily might enjoy the spooky "Alcatraz After Hours" tour. The ferry departs at 6:15 and 7pm during the summer; at 4:20 and 5:10pm in winter. Tours are

The What-to-Do-While-Waiting-for-the-Ferry-to-Alcatraz Quiz

- In what bay is Alcatraz Island located?**
 - Marin Bay
 - San Francisco Bay
 - The Bay Area
- When was Alcatraz a federal maximum-security prison?**
 - 1934 to 1963
 - 1893 to 1964
 - 1920 to 1973
- Which one of these people was a famous Alcatraz inmate?**
 - Mack the Knife
 - Fred Flintstone
 - Al Capone
- How big was the average cell?**
 - 5 by 9 feet
 - 10 by 12 feet
 - 4 by 6 feet
- How many prisoners were executed at Alcatraz?**
 - 3
 - 0
 - 8
- Which three men managed to escape Alcatraz but were never seen again?**
 - The Ringling Brothers and Marshall Pickford
 - Bobby Carson, Al Capone, and Danny Marsh
 - Frank Morris and the Anglin Brothers

Thursday through Sunday only. (Fares for the evening tour are \$24 for adults, \$21 for seniors 62-plus and kids 12 to 18, \$14 for kids 5 to 11.)

Pier 41, at Fisherman's Wharf, The Embarcadero. ☎ 415/773-1188 for information, or 415/705-5555 to reserve tickets. www.nps.gov/alcatraz. Admission (includes ferry and audio tour): \$16 adults, \$14 seniors 62 and older, \$11 children 5–11. Without audio tour: \$12 adults, \$9.75 seniors, \$8.25 children 5–11. Daily in winter 9:30am–2:15pm; summer daily 9:30am–4:15pm. Ferries run approximately every half hour. Arrive 30 minutes before ferry departure in summer; 45 minutes before in winter. F-Market streetcar; Powell-Mason cable car; or 30-Stockton bus, which stops 1 block south.

Angel Island ★★ **All ages.** Just north of Alcatraz, Angel Island, the Bay's largest island, is a tranquil place for nature-loving families. It was originally a Miwok Indian hunting and fishing ground, then Spanish, British, and Mexican ships used the island as a port at various times beginning in 1775. Before the Civil War, the U.S. government turned the island into a military base, remnants of which are still visible. Between 1910 and 1940, Angel Island was used as a detention center mainly for Asian immigrants, which earned it the nickname "Ellis Island of the West." The immigration station at China Cove is open for tours and provides a poignant glimpse into an era when anti-Asian and

7. How many cells were there?
 - a. 455
 - b. 336
 - c. 90
8. What was the highest number of prisoners held at Alcatraz?
 - a. 325
 - b. 302
 - c. 208
9. What was the lowest number of prisoners held at Alcatraz?
 - a. 222
 - b. 105
 - c. 97
10. How long did the average prisoner stay?
 - a. Life sentence
 - b. 8 years
 - c. 25 years
11. What was the nickname prisoners gave Alcatraz?
 - a. "The Island"
 - b. "The Cage"
 - c. "The Rock"
12. Approximately how many tourists visit Alcatraz each year?
 - a. Over 2 million
 - b. Over 1 million
 - c. About 750,000

Answers:

1) b 2) a 3) c 4) a 5) b 6) c 7) b 8) b 9) a 10) b 11) c 12) b

anti-immigration policies placed hundreds of Chinese into forced detention for weeks, months, and sometimes years. Poems carved into the walls of the barracks by lonely and isolated detainees were rediscovered in 1970 and inspired the preservation effort by the California legislature.

Ideal for hiking and biking—with a picnic, of course—a trip to Angel Island is so removed from city life that a day spent here is like a vacation from your vacation. Hiking trails crisscross the island's 740 acres, but the majority of trekkers head for the top of Mount Livermore. At 788 feet, the views of San Francisco and Marin County are stunning. Bicyclists ride along an easy 5-mile path that circles the island, and you can either rent bikes at Ayala Cove when you dock or rent in town and bring them on the ferry. One-hour motorized **tram tours**, offered between March and November (the schedule varies; phone ☎ 415/897-0715 or 925/426-3058 or check the website www.angelisland.org for details), are another option for getting around. Cars are not allowed on the island.

Angel Island Association, P.O. Box 866. ☎ 415/435-1915 or 925/426-3058. www.angelisland.org. Access to Angel Island is by ferry from Pier 41. Blue and Gold Fleet round-trip tickets, which include state park fees, are \$13 adults, \$7.50 children 6–12. Phone ☎ 415/705-5555 for tickets and schedules.

Cable Cars ★★ **All ages.** These beloved wooden icons, the only moving landmarks in the National Register of Historic Places, are not the most practical mode of transportation in San Francisco, but they are certainly the most fun and a delightful part of any first-time visit to the city.

As the story goes, in 1869 British-born engineer Andrew Hallidie observed a team of overworked horses pulling a heavily laden carriage up a steep, rain-swept San Francisco hill. One horse slipped and the car rolled back, dragging the other horses and everything else down with it. Right then Hallidie resolved to create a mechanical device to replace these beasts of burden, and by 1873 the first cable car traversed Clay Street. The cars have no engines. Instead, a steel cable is housed just under the street in a rail, kind of like an inside-out train rail. Powered by electricity, this cable constantly moves, or runs, through the rail—making a distinctive clickity-clacking sound. Each cable car has a lever that when pulled back, closes a pincerlike grip on the cable. The person who pulls the lever is thus called a “gripper,” not a driver. The cable car is then attached to the cable that runs through the rail under the pavement, and the car begins to move at a constant 9½ mph—the speed at which the cable is set to travel.

As electric streetcars and buses became more economical, San Francisco’s mayor planned in 1947 to do away with the few cable cars still around. Alarmed, a group of private citizens lobbied successfully to save the city’s three remaining cable car lines. Between 1982 and 1984, the city completely refurbished these lines and seismically retrofitted the Cable Car Barn on Mason and Washington streets.

The Powell-Hyde line is the most scenic, passing crooked Lombard Street before heading down Russian Hill towards Ghiradelli Square and offering a breathtaking vista of Alcatraz and the San Francisco Bay. Unfortunately, the wait for this route, and the Powell-Mason line, is seemingly interminable. Solutions are to catch the car early in the morning or after dinner. Another option is to take the California Street line, which runs through Chinatown and over Nob Hill, as the lines are a bit shorter. (For more details, see Chapter 3.)

Powell at Market or California at Market sts. Tickets \$3 one-way; \$1 one-way with a Muni weekly; free with a Muni monthly pass; free with a Muni Passport and for children under 5. Hours of operation are 6:30am–12:30am.

Crissy Field ★★★ **All ages.** A four year effort converted this abandoned U.S. airfield into a lovely national park that is a wonderful retreat for the whole family. My husband and I take our girls here regularly, as well as any visitors who come into town. The kids can climb all over the grassy knolls or play at the beach while the adults savor the spectacular views of the Golden Gate Bridge to the west and the San Francisco skyline to the east. There’s nothing specific to “do” here, so there’s a chance teens will find it boring. For everyone else, the spot is so relaxing and beautiful, it’s well worth a visit. The 100-acre site has a tidal marsh, sheltered picnic area, bike path, walking path, cafe, bookstore, and education center. You can pass through here on a hike to Fort Point, or just come for lunch at the Warming Hut. Located at the park’s western end, the Warming Hut has a great gift shop and a tasty, organic cafe menu developed with input from renowned chef Alice Waters of Berkeley’s Chez Panisse.

Crissy Field Center, Bldg 603 on the corner of Mason and Halleck sts. ☎ 415/561-7690. www.crissyfield.org. Center and cafe Wed–Sun 9am–5pm; Crissy Field and the Warming Hut daily 9am–5pm. Muni: 28-19th Ave., 29-Sunset, or 43-Masonic bus.

The Great San Francisco Cable Car Quiz

1. Approximately how many passengers ride the cable cars daily?
 - a. 66,000
 - b. 41,000
 - c. 23,000
 - d. 12,800
2. In total, how many miles of track is laid?
 - a. 15.6
 - b. 10.2
 - c. 8.5
 - d. 4.4
3. What is the total numbers of cable cars in the system?
 - a. 13
 - b. 28
 - c. 40
 - d. 63
4. How many cable lines are there?
 - a. 3
 - b. 5
 - c. 8
 - d. 20
5. What year did the system begin operating for the first time?
 - a. 1821
 - b. 1856
 - c. 1873
 - d. 1927
6. How fast can the cable cars move?
 - a. 17 mph
 - b. 15.2 mph
 - c. 9.5 mph
 - d. 4.7 mph
7. What are the colors of the cars?
 - a. Blue and orange
 - b. Green and yellow
 - c. Black and white
 - d. Maroon and white
8. How does the cable operator make the cable car move?
 - a. Squeezes the hand grip
 - b. Turns the knob
 - c. Presses a pedal on the floor
 - d. Pedals like a bicycle
9. Who developed San Francisco's original cable car system?
 - a. James Earl Simpson
 - b. Andrew Smith Hallidie
 - c. Marcus D. Federer
 - d. Henry Karl Peterson

Answers:

1) c 2) d 3) c 4) a 5) c 6) c 7) d 8) a 9) b

The Exploratorium ★★☆☆ **All ages.** *Scientific American* magazine described the Exploratorium as “the best science museum in the world,” and most young visitors agree. The cavernous space, a former airplane hanger, is crammed with displays that encourage viewer participation. The exhibits are thematic, with matter examined near the entrance, examples of momentum and inertia by the cafe, light and optics at the rear, and biology and electricity on the mezzanine. Clearly written text describes each exhibit, and several teens volunteer as “explainers” to help out the most science-challenged among us.

Even with the explainers’ help, kids younger than six may not grasp the science behind each of the 650-plus exhibits. But they’ll still love fiddling with a machine that makes sand patterns with sound waves, a camera that photographs your shadow, or a massive soap-bubble maker. In fact, my three and five year olds could easily spend a whole day here—more hours than I can handle. Given the dim lighting and ever-present crowds, this stimulating environment could overwhelm some folks, even as it enthralls others. Because most of the exhibits are hands-on, kids will be pushing, pulling, or doing whatever it takes to have a go at some nifty contraption. If you’ve got little ones who can’t fend for themselves, don’t hesitate to tell big kids their turn is up. They will usually politely step aside.

You can take your toddler to the under-4s play area for a break, but it seems a shame to spend too much time there, since it just has blocks and other items you’d find at any preschool. Better to step outside to the **Palace of Fine Arts** grounds that house the Exploratorium. The only remaining structure left of the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition, the lovely domed Palace and its adjacent grass and pond serve as the backdrop for many a wedding photo. Pick up peanut butter sandwiches, free-range chicken salads, or hot dogs made from naturally-raised beef at the back of the museum and have a picnic outside. (An espresso stand at the entrance also sells coffee, ice cream, and cookies.) The **Tactile Dome**, inside the museum, is an experience older kids really enjoy. Participants crawl, slide, and slowly walk through the dome in complete darkness, feeling their way along a variety of surfaces. Reservations are required in advance, and you must buy a separate, pricey \$15 ticket. Phone ☎ **415/561-0362** for times and tickets.

Palace of Fine Arts, 3601 Lyon St. at Marina Blvd. ☎ **415/397-5673**. www.exploratorium.org. Admission \$12 adults, \$9.50 seniors and students with ID, \$9.50 children 13–17, \$8 children 4–12, free for children under 4. Tactile Dome \$15. Free first Wed of every month. Tues–Sun 10am–5pm. Closed on Mondays except Memorial, Labor, President’s, and Martin Luther King Jr. Days. Closed Thanksgiving and Christmas. Muni: 30-Stockton bus.

Ferry Building Marketplace ★★☆☆ **All ages.** San Franciscans have a thing about food—especially local, organic, and naturally raised food—so it’s no surprise that a building devoted to gourmet fare should be considered a major attraction in its own right. It helps, of course, that the historic 1898 building recently reopened after a four-year, multi-million dollar renovation, and that it is located on the picturesque Embarcadero, with lovely views of the Bay Bridge and East Bay hills.

The best time to visit is early on Saturday morning, before half of San Francisco arrives for its weekly shopping spree at the **Ferry Building Farmer’s Market** ★★☆☆. There you’ll find booths featuring organic fruits and vegetables, artisan cheeses, naturally raised meats, fresh bread, and so on. You could make a meal out of the free samples doled out by proud farmers and cooks, but it’s worth holding back so you can buy breakfast from one of the restaurant trailer

cars in back. Purchase your scrambled eggs with wild mushrooms, fresh tamales and chorizo, or soft shell crab on sourdough, and enjoy it on a bayside bench with a view of the ferries going to and fro. Kids will also enjoy the musicians who come by on Saturday mornings to entertain shoppers and earn some change. A smaller version of the market occurs on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and the Sunday Garden Market has more emphasis on flowers, seeds, and other items for folks with a green thumb.

Even on non-farmer's market days, the building's scenic location, historic architecture (including a 240-foot clock tower), and collection of upscale food shops make it well worth a visit.

One Ferry Building. © 415/291-3276 (Farmer's Market), 415/693-0996 (Ferry Building). www.ferrybuildingmarketplace.com. Free admission. Ferry Building Mon–Fri 10am–6pm; Sat 9am–6pm; Sun 11am–5pm. Farmer's Market Tues, Thurs, and Sun 10am–2pm; Sat 8am–2pm. Closed major holidays. Muni: F-Market streetcar.

The San Francisco Zoo ★★ ★ **All ages.** Little kids will love this fun, educational menagerie. Established in 1929 in its current 125-acre oceanside location, the zoo is continuously adding to its impressive array of exhibits. Count on spending half a day here, although you could easily stay longer. If you've arrived in summer and found the zoo draped in fog, stop by the gift shop to pick up an overpriced logo fleece. Rest assured that proceeds from the purchase, or from any of the unusual gifts you might pick up there, go to a good cause.

In 2004, the zoo opened its 3-acre African Safari exhibit, in which giraffes, zebras, kudus, dik-diks, and other large mammals live together alongside colorful African bird species. The Great Ape exhibit is slated to open in 2005. My personal favorite is the Lipman Family Lemur Forest, which houses five endangered lemur species. You can watch the lemurs leap among the trees and climb special activity towers into which visitors can hoist lemur-appropriate food provided by the zoo. The viewing platforms are also lined with signage describing the zoo's conservation efforts in Madagascar. Among the many other exhibits are an Australian walkabout featuring kangaroos and wallabies, a South American Tropical Forest Building housing a large anaconda and several colorful bird and reptile species, and the Lion House, with its rare Sumatran and Siberian tigers. The daily big cat feeding always draws a crowd.

The Children's Zoo is a destination in itself. Kids can crawl through tunnels underneath the exhibit of meerkats and prairie dogs, who pop up out of their own tunnels. At the Family Farm, kids may feed a Nigerian dwarf goat and various rare and endangered breeds of sheep, horses and ponies. In the Hatchery, your children can observe incubated chick eggs in various stages of development and help feed newly born chicks. And the Insect House will fascinate them with giant walking sticks, tarantulas, and even a massive cockroach display. (I still get the creeps recalling those roaches, but my girls were unfazed.)

Tips Zoo Events

The zoo has special events throughout the year and daily activities for visitors. Most days you can meet the zookeepers during animal feedings (penguins are fed at 2:30pm Thurs and 3pm every other day; lions and tigers are fed in the Lion House at 2pm Tues–Sun), and in the summer you can help feed the farm animals at the Family Farm at 10:45am. For dates of events such as Family Overnights, phone or check the website.

Little ones will also enjoy the playground structure, the Dentzel carousel, and the cute little steam train (which requires a \$2 ticket). The best place to lunch in the zoo is the Leaping Lemur cafe, which serves a mix of healthy and greasy choices including pizza, burgers, California rolls, salads, and sweets. The zoo is free the first Wednesday of the month; in summer, you're better off paying the entrance fee and coming on any other day to avoid the first-Wednesday crowds.

1 Zoo Rd., at the Great Highway. ☎ 415/753-7080. www.sfzoo.org. Admission \$10 adults, \$7 seniors 65-plus and youths 12–17, \$4 children 3–11. Discounts for San Francisco residents. Free the first Wed of the month. Stroller rentals are available. Daily 10am–5pm. Muni: L-Taraval streetcar. Show your transfer for \$1 discount on admission.

Sony Metreon Entertainment Center ★★ **All ages.** A one-of-a-kind four-story, modern cement and glass entertainment center, the Metreon houses restaurants, retail shops, an IMAX theater, 15 movie screens, an arcade, and, for the younger generation, an interactive rendition of Maurice Sendak's book *Where the Wild Things Are* ★ (Located on the 4th floor, this interactive adventure starts and ends at *In the Night Kitchen*. As one might expect from a Sendak-designed exhibit, it's strange and eerie, but fun nonetheless.) A theater on the second floor shows anime and action films on the weekends. Among the choices in the arcade, a favorite is Hyperbowl, a futuristic, big-screen virtual game where players "bowl" through the streets of San Francisco. Noisy and dark, the arcade is highly appealing to kids and young adults. (Children under 18 have to be accompanied by an adult in this area after 8pm.)

The retail angle is as much fun as the attractions, since every store provides customers with a hands-on experience. The PlayStation shop is always crowded with kids of all ages trying the latest in video games, and gadget nuts can audition the latest and greatest in equipment at the Sony Style store. With a food court on the lower level and Yerba Buena Center out the back, this complex has become a meeting ground for teenagers from all over town.

101 4th St. (at Mission). ☎ 800/METREON. www.metreon.com. Free admission. Individual attraction prices range from \$6–\$12. Daily 10am–10pm. Muni: Any streetcar to Powell St. station.

Yerba Buena Gardens and Center for the Arts ★★★ **All ages.** Opened in 1993, this 22-acre complex is an oasis of culture, fun and greenery amidst an extremely urban slice of town. The center's two buildings, which include a 775-seat theatre and three galleries, feature theatre, dance, and contemporary arts, often by local and emerging artists. Dance troupes, including ODC/San Francisco and Smuin Ballets/SF, call this space home. They perform periodic children's events as well.

Older kids will appreciate the art/technology center **Zeum**, which is detailed below. Younger kids will love the 1906 carousel, the playground with its two really, really tall slides, and the **Yerba Buena Ice-Skating Rink and Bowling Center**. Public skating times at the city's only year-round facility vary daily, so

Fun Fact Stump the Tour Guide

Question: Where did Thomas Watson answer the phone when Alexander Graham Bell made the first transcontinental telephone call from New York City? **Answer:** At the now long-gone Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company on Grant Avenue and Bush Street, January 25, 1915.

phone before making the trip over here. The tidy 12-lane bowling alley has bumpers available for novice bowlers, shoes, and a small menu of snacks.

Even if you don't have time for a round of bowling, take a moment to walk through the lovely grounds, which include a 5-acre garden dramatically framed by the city skyline. Among the many fountains is a particularly striking one designed in homage to Martin Luther King, Jr. In summer months, the Yerba Buena Gardens Festival features free classical and jazz concerts, an international music festival, dance and film series, and numerous events specifically for families and children. Check the website for a calendar or call the number below.

701 Mission St. (at 3rd St.). ☎ **415/978-2700** or 415/978-ARTS (box office). www.yerbabuenaarts.org. Yerba Buena Ice Skating and Bowling Center: 750 Folsom St. (between 3rd and 4th). ☎ **415/777-3727**. www.skatebowl.com. Skating admission \$7 adults, \$5.50 seniors and children 12 and under. Skate rental \$3. Bowling Center Sun–Thurs 10am–10pm; 10am–midnight Fri–Sat. Admission for adults starts at \$3.50/game or \$20/hour. Shoe rental \$3. Muni: Any streetcar to Powell St. station.

Zeum ★★ All ages. This wonderful art/technology center with hands-on labs gives kids an opportunity to create animated video shorts with clay figures; experiment with graphics, sound, and video in the production laboratory; and interact with the changing gallery exhibits. Students from the American Conservatory Theater also stage dramas in Zeum's theater. The center is unusual in that it is the only city attraction specifically designed for older kids and teens that encourages individual and group creativity and doesn't rely on shoot-'em-up games to attract an audience. Small children are not neglected, however. With parental help, they can mess around with whatever art projects are on tap.

701 Mission St. (between 3rd and 4th sts.). ☎ **415/777-2800** or 415/978-ARTS (box office). www.zeum.com. Admission \$7 adults, \$6 seniors and students, \$5 kids 4–18. Wed–Sun 11am–5pm. Muni: Any streetcar to Powell St. station.

CHINATOWN ★★★

The first Chinese arrived in California in the 1800s to work as servants. Then in 1848, gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill, and thousands of Chinese immigrants left the Opium Wars and famine in their own country to seek their fortunes in the California "Gold Mountain." Intending to send their riches home, they found life in California didn't quite live up to their expectations. First employed in the gold mines and later working on the railroads, Chinese laborers were essentially indentured servants and faced constant prejudice.

The 1906 earthquake and subsequent fire destroyed much of Chinatown, and Chinese refugees swamped relief camps in San Francisco and Oakland. A group of city officials tried to permanently relocate them outside the city center, but the threat to political relations with China and the potential loss of lucrative Asian trade to other western ports put an end to this plan. So Chinatown continued to grow and thrive, in part because Chinese people were not allowed to buy homes outside of the area until 1950. Today Chinatown remains one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in the country and has become one of the most popular tourist attractions in the area. To the local residents, Chinatown is a complete community—where they shop, socialize, attend school, exercise, worship, and play. The crowds of tourists don't seem to faze anyone—not the grandmas with babies tied to their backs, the groups of schoolchildren, the senior citizens practicing tai chi in the park, or the masses of determined shoppers packing the pavement on Saturdays.

Any cable car will drop you in or near Chinatown. Walking around Chinatown, diving into the shops, sampling pork buns, and eyeing the sidewalk fruit and vegetable displays can be more than enough entertainment for an afternoon.

Rainy-Day Activities

San Francisco is no Seattle, but rainy days can get in the way of enjoying our city. More often the damp, misty fog is what really gets to folks, especially in July when the rest of the country is working on its suntan. But you don't have time to grouse about the weather. You have things to do, places to see . . . oh, you don't like getting wet? Okay. Here are a few rainy/foggy-day options.

Take High Tea High tea at one of the many hotels that offers it is perhaps the most civilized way to keep dry. Try the **King George Hotel**, 334 Mason St. (☎ 415/781-5050); the **Westin St. Francis**, 335 Powell St. (☎ 415/397-7000); the **Sheraton Palace**, 2 New Montgomery St. (☎ 415/512-1111); the **Fairmont Hotel**, 950 Mason St. (☎ 415/772-5000); or the **Ritz-Carlton**, 600 Stockton St. (☎ 415/296-7465). **Neiman Marcus** also has a lovely, reasonably priced tea service in the **Rotunda** restaurant, 150 Stockton St. (☎ 415/362-3900), from 2:30 to 5pm daily.

Rock Climb Rather than having the kids climb the walls of your hotel room, take everyone indoor rock climbing at **Mission Cliffs Rock Climbing Center** at 2295 Harrison St., at 19th Street (☎ 415/550-0515). Open daily, the world-class facility caters to beginners and experts of all ages—teaching belay (rope handling) classes and renting whatever equipment is necessary, including shoes. Those who prefer to keep their feet on the ground will enjoy the on-site gym with locker rooms and sauna.

Read a Book The Fisherman's Wharf branch of **Barnes & Noble Booksellers** at 2552 Taylor Street (☎ 415/292-6762) has a nice cafe downstairs and a spacious children's book section upstairs, complete with kid-sized tables, chairs, and a train set.

Watch the Weather Admire the storm from the confines of the **Cliff House**, 1090 Point Lobos Ave., on the Great Highway (☎ 415/386-3330), open daily. Reopened in October 2004 after a major renovation, the Cliff House Restaurant offers drinks, decent food, and amazing vistas. The nearest museum is the **Palace of the Legion of Honor** (p. 176),

But, just in case, here are some specific stops to make that will enhance your tour. If you want even more guidance, check out the self-guided tour of Chinatown in chapter 7.

Chinese Culture Center **Ages 10 and up.** Cross the pedestrian bridge on the east side of Portsmouth Square that leads directly into the third floor of the Holiday Inn. This is the home of the Chinese Culture Center. Within its small well-lit gallery, ever-changing exhibits may feature photographs of pre-earthquake Chinatown, Chinese brush paintings, or *liu li* (glasswork) by contemporary Chinese artists. Entrance is free and the center is small. Kids won't have a chance to get bored and they'll likely see something beautiful. The center also offers classes and walks. It's a good resource for locals and visitors with an interest in Asian art and culture.

750 Kearny St. ☎ 415/986-1822. www.c-c-c.org. Free admission. Tues–Sun 10am–4pm.

another great place to wait out the rain. The 18 bus will bring you to both locations.

Seek Some Cultural Edification Now you have an excuse to spend more than 15 minutes in a museum. Head to the spectacular **Asian Art Museum** (p. 174) and check the kids into the AsiaAlive children's area. They can make an art project while you examine exhibits spanning six thousand years.

Photograph Your Shadow Try that and other wacky science "experiments" at the **Exploratorium** (p. 160). You could spend a whole day at this incredible science museum; just bear in mind that on rainy days everyone else is here, too.

Head to SoMa The **Sony Metreon** and **Yerba Buena Gardens** make up a one-stop rainy-day haven. Teens can flex their independence at **Zeum**, and kids needing supervision will enjoy the Metreon play areas. Tour the spooky **Where the Wild Things Are**, take everyone bowling and ice-skating, or catch a movie. A block south of Yerba Buena is the **California Academy of Sciences**. Watch the penguin feeding and exotic sea life downstairs, or head upstairs to the educational area and tot spot.

Stay Dry on the F-Market Streetcar Grab an umbrella, then grab a seat for a ride to Ferry Building. Have lunch, buy some sweets at Recchiuti Confections, and jump back on the F-Market towards **The Cannery**. There you can check out a few fun shops for the kids, including Lark in the Morning, with its wacky collection of musical instruments.

Baby Yourself at Nordstrom If you have a sitter (or a really accommodating spouse) see if you can get an appointment for a manicure, pedicure, and/or a facial at Nordstrom in the San Francisco Centre shopping mall at 5th and Market streets (☎ 415/977-5102). Teens may also enjoy shopping at the mall, but little kids won't find much of interest except the Sanrio store downstairs.

The Chinese Historical Society of America **Ages 10 and up.** This is a good place to develop an appreciation of the Chinese experience in California, and also worth a quick drop-in to add a little gravity to your day before digging into that dim sum. A museum and research center, the Historical Society documents the fascinating history of the Chinese in California through photographs, art, and changing exhibits. Its bookstore stocks children's titles as well as fiction and nonfiction on Chinese themes.

965 Clay St. ☎ 415/391-1188. www.chsa.org. Admission \$3 adults, \$2 seniors & college students, \$1 children 6–17. Free first Thurs of the month. Tues–Fri noon–5pm; Sat–Sun noon–4pm.

Golden Gate Fortune Cookie Company ★ **All ages.** You can't miss with a visit to this factory, where golden discs quickly become crispy cookies complete with a fortune. The place is small and you may have to wait your turn to watch the ladies handle the cookie-making machine. Bags of fortune cookies and

Fortune Cookies

Those crispy cookies with wise, prescient, or just plain confusing sayings slipped inside aren't Chinese at all. While the origin of fortune cookies isn't exactly known, they are believed to have been invented in San Francisco by Makoto Hagiwara, who managed the Japanese Tea Garden in Golden Gate Park from 1895 until 1925. You can visit a fortune cookie factory on Ross Alley in Chinatown (see above) and with this recipe you can make the cookies yourself at home, complete with your own fabulous fortunes.

Ingredients

- ¼ cup flour
- 2 tablespoons brown sugar
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 2 tablespoons oil
- 1 egg white, beaten until stiff
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla
- 4 tablespoons water

Combine the flour, sugar, cornstarch, and oil in a bowl. Fold in the beaten egg white. Add the vanilla and water. The batter should have the thin consistency of crepe batter; if it's too thick, add more water.

In a small nonstick or lightly oiled skillet over medium heat, pour one tablespoon batter, tilting the pan so it spreads out into a 3-inch circle. Cook until browned, about 3 minutes. Turn the cookie and cook 1 minute more. Remove from the pan and place a paper fortune in the center. Fold in half, then bend the tips to form the fortune cookie shape. Be careful—the cookie will be hot. Place in an egg carton to hold the shape until cool.

Makes about 12 cookies.

yummy almond cookies to munch while you continue your excursion are available for a few dollars. The locals themselves prefer their cookies flat and round, without the little sayings tucked inside (they've read enough fortunes for a lifetime.) You can also buy cookies in their unfolded form—although they're not nearly as much fun. If you take pictures, it's polite to leave a tip.

56 Ross Alley (between Jackson and Washington sts.). No phone. Free admission. Daily 10am–7pm.

Portsmouth Square 🌟 **All ages.** In this spot, Yerba Buena officially became San Francisco when Captain John Montgomery claimed the settlement for the United States in 1846 on the eve of the Mexican-American War. Chinese immigrants ran businesses close to the square even then. Today, a handy parking garage is underneath, and a section of the park is devoted to a compact playground that entertains the local preschoolers. Benches invite contemplation of the glorious Financial District skyline featuring the Transamerica Pyramid.

Kearny St., between Washington and Clay sts.. No phone.

Tien Hou Temple **Ages 8 and up.** Members of this temple, one of the oldest Chinese temples in America, are used to elementary school students tiptoeing

up the four narrow flights of stairs for a look-see. The sanctuary ceiling is covered in red paper lanterns, and the smell of incense is pervasive. Altars are covered with offerings and one holds a statue of Tien Hou, also known as Tin How, the goddess of heaven and protector of fishermen. Remind the kids that this is a place for meditation and prayer—you'll likely see people doing just that—so they will need to keep the chatter down. Make a small donation or purchase some incense before heading back downstairs.

125 Waverly Place (off Clay St. between Stockton St. and Grant Ave.). No phone. Free admission. Daily 10am–4pm.

FISHERMAN'S WHARF

The days when fishing boats hauled their catches back to the piers along Jefferson Street ended for the most part in the late 1960s. As warehouses were retrofitted into shopping centers and local waters became over-fished, tourism began to supplant maritime industries. Then PIER 39 opened in 1978, completing Fisherman's Wharf's metamorphosis into a major California tourist attraction, second only to Disneyland. Unless you get up very early in the morning and seek out what's left of the fishing fleet, you won't see any picturesque scenes of flapping flounders or salty sailors. Mostly what you see at Fisherman's Wharf are tourists gravely contemplating chocolate bars and sportswear. Of course, there's more—some of it well worth your time, some not—so here's a rundown of what you'll find along the Embarcadero, Jefferson, and Beach streets, from PIER 39 to the Municipal Pier at the end of Van Ness Avenue. The Powell-Hyde cable car line will drop you off at the west end of this stretch, near The Cannery and Aquatic Park.

Aquarium of the Bay **All ages.** Dedicated to the creatures that inhabit the San Francisco Bay ecosystem, this aquarium gives new meaning to the phrase “living life in a fishbowl.” It's not entirely clear who's looking at whom in this attraction. After a brief introduction to the underwater world, facilitated by the Aquarium's loquacious band of naturalists, visitors descend to a moving walkway that slowly leads through two clear tunnels surrounded by 700,000 gallons of filtered bay water. The moving path cleverly keeps people from clustering in front of a window featuring a particularly impressive Pacific electric stingray, so even the little ones get a chance to look in and spy an Angel shark burrowing in the sand. Thousands of fish swim on either side of the walkway and overhead as well; kids find it pretty cool. The last exhibit contains touch pools with starfish and such, always a hit with children. Should a trip to the Monterey Bay Aquarium be in your future, you can skip this smaller cousin altogether. But if you are already on PIER 39, it's a pleasant hour-long respite from the curios and candy shops.

PIER 39 at Fisherman's Wharf.  800/SEA-DIVE. www.aquariumofthebay.com. Admission \$13 adults, \$6.50 seniors and kids 3–11, \$30 family ticket for 2 adults and 2 children. Daily in summer 9am–8pm; otherwise Mon–Fri 10am–6pm, Sat–Sun 10am–7pm. Closed Christmas Day.

Ghirardelli Square **All ages.** Named after the chocolate factory founded by Domingo Ghirardelli (pronounced Gear-a-del-ee), this series of brick buildings was built over 11 years beginning in 1893. When the chocolate factory was moved to a lower-rent location across the bay in the 1960s, prominent San Franciscans moved in to buy and restore the property. Granted landmark status in 1982, Ghirardelli Square is now home to a three-story mall with over 50 shops. It hosts a roster of special events, including an annual chocolate-tasting benefit

Tips Feeling Crabby?

If blood sugar's low, head to the seafood counters at Fisherman's Wharf. Local **Dungeness Crab** season begins in November and ends in May. If you don't see crates of live crabs ready for steaming, you are buying a once-frozen, precooked crab. With a loaf of sourdough and drinks (white wine for the grown-ups, perhaps?) you have the quintessential San Francisco meal. Take the food, some napkins, and your family and look for **Fish Alley**, just to the west of Jones Street and parallel to Jefferson Street. You'll find a peaceful shelter here where you can savor your snack sitting on the dock by the bay.

in September, and street performers entertain regularly in the **West Plaza**. From your kids' point of view, the Square's best feature will certainly be the Ghirardelli Soda Fountain and Chocolate Shop (p. 128).

900 North Point St. (between Beach and Larkin sts.) ☎ **415/775-5500**. www.ghirardellisq.com. Shops open Mon–Thurs 10am–6pm; Fri–Sat 10am–7pm; Sun 11am–6pm. Restaurants are open later.

Hyde Street Pier ★★ All ages. This noteworthy homage to San Francisco's seafaring past houses eight historic, refurbished ships, three of which you can tour. You may walk for free along the lovely pier, with its breathtaking views of the Golden Gate Bridge, however there's a modest but worthwhile fee to tour the boats. At the far end of the pier is the most striking ship, and one of the few remaining square-riggers, the majestic **Balclutha**. She took her maiden voyage from Cardiff, Wales, on January 15, 1887, and over the course of her working life carried coal, wheat, lumber, and finally canned salmon from Alaska. In retirement she appeared in the movie *Mutiny on the Bounty*. Completely restored, the ship hosts events throughout the year, including some just for kids. But no event need be taking place for your kids to enjoy climbing into the crew's bunks, checking out the furnished captain's quarters, and visiting the galley.

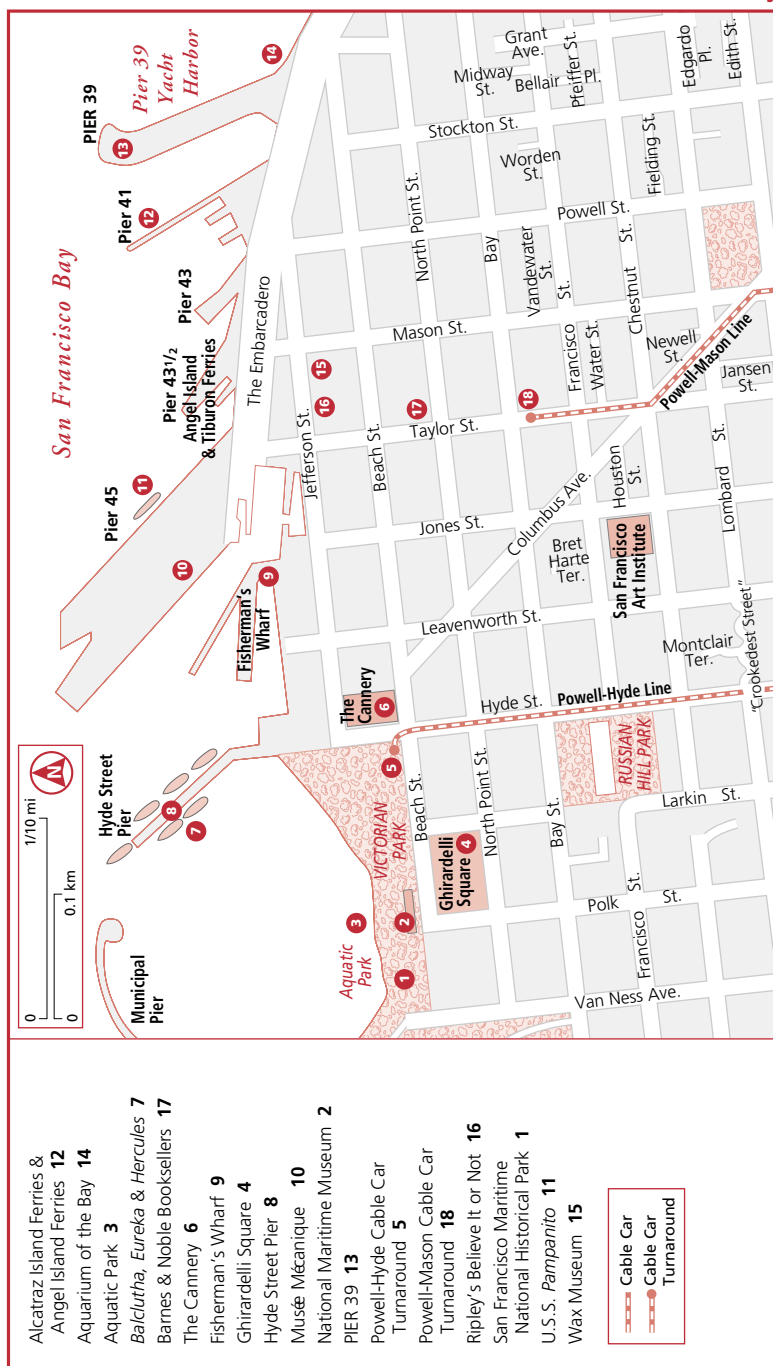
The 1890 steam ferryboat **Eureka** was the last of 50 paddle-wheel ferries that regularly plied the bay and made its final trip in 1957. Restored to its original splendor at the height of the ferryboat era, the 300-foot-long side-wheeler is loaded with deck cargo, including a sizable collection of antique cars and trucks. The third boat currently on display is a 1907 ocean-going tugboat **Hercules**.

The pier is part of the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park. After visiting the pier, step into the park's **Visitor Center** across the street. Young kids will get a kick out of seeing tiny wooden models of the boats they've just toured. Or they may prefer the life-sized replica of a shipwrecked boat, complete with an eerie representation of a sailor being rescued. An hour and a half is enough time to enjoy this delightful outdoor museum and visitor's center.

Jefferson Street (at Hyde St.). ☎ **415/561-6662**. www.maritime.org. Hyde St. Pier: Admission \$5 for adults 17 and older; kids free. Open daily 9:30am–5pm (until 5:30pm May 15–Sept 16). Visitor Center: Free admission. Open daily 9:30am–5pm (until 7pm May 15–Sept 16). Closed major holidays.

Maritime Museum ★ Ages 4 and up. Also part of the San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, this white three-story structure is shaped like an Art Deco ship. Exhibits include several model ships spanning many decades and styles—from sailing ship to aircraft carrier. Old photographs depict San Francisco a century and a half ago, and a particularly memorable one is an 1851

Fisherman's Wharf & Vicinity



Bringing Culture to the Little Ones

Do your kids' eyes glaze over at the mere mention of the word "museum"? Here are some tips for making museum visits more fun for everyone:

Put the Younger Generation in Charge Show kids the list of exhibits and ask them what they want to see.

Tantalize Them Choose the exhibit you think kids will find most interesting and go there first. You're likely to hold their interest longer.

Go on a Hunt Hand an exhibit catalog to each child. Give them one point for every piece of art they can find that's pictured in the catalog. (If desperate, make the points exchangeable for chocolate.)

Prioritize Since chances are slim you'll actually get through an entire museum, decide what's most important to you and head there early on.

Let Kids Surprise You Sometimes kids will actually enjoy a museum more than you think. Don't just assume the expedition will be a bust, or you'll have a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Follow the Old Rules As with any adult excursion you've dragged your kids to, remember to go early, move quickly, and keep snacks on hand.

snapshot of hundreds of abandoned ships, deserted en masse by crews dashing off to participate in the gold rush. If your kids aren't into models and photographs, take them upstairs to the communications room, where they can pretend to radio other ships at sea. Or head to the topmost floor where they can take the helm and survey the bay from the captain's chair. This visit takes less than an hour.

900 Beach St. (at Polk Street). ☎ 415/561-7100. www.maritime.org. Free admission. Open daily 10am–5pm. Closed major holidays.

Musée Mécanique ★ **Ages 3 and up.** This may be the largest collection of antique mechanical and musical arcade games in private hands. The owner has been collecting these forerunners of pinball and video amusements since he was a kid back in the 1940s. Fortune-tellers, an intricate model of a fairground with working parts, an amazing baseball game, and the famous Laughing Sal, whose laugh really is infectious, are among dozens of machines from around the world in pristine condition. The museum space itself has no charm, and the crowds are ceaseless, but kids will be highly entertained here—so bring a roll of quarters with you.

Pier 45 (at Taylor St.). ☎ 415/346-2000. Free admission. Weekdays 11am–7pm; weekends and holidays 10am–8pm.

PIER 39 **All ages.** A two-level Venetian carousel beckons near the back of this ever-crowded wooden pier, its music competing with the footfalls of a herd of out-of-towners and the deafening noise of the video arcade hall on the left. On either side stretching back to the entryway are T-shirt shops, fried food counters, souvenirs vendors, candy stores . . . the commercialism goes on and on. Golden views of Alcatraz are clearly visible from the end of the pier, and huge sea lions

loaf around on K dock to the west (follow the barking) from September through June. The ferries for Alcatraz and bay cruises leave from Pier 41 next door, but the Blue and Gold ticket office is part of this complex. Restaurants galore, including the **Hard Rock Cafe** (☎ 415/885-1699), fill in the cracks. If you arrive by car, park at a meter on adjacent streets or across from the wharf between Taylor and Jones streets. But be advised, the parking garage there is exorbitant. It's cheaper—and more fun—to take the F-Market streetcar down the Embarcadero.

Beach Street and The Embarcadero. ☎ 415/705-5500. www.pier39.com. Hours vary by season; between 10am–10pm for shops and attractions, and 11:30am–11pm for restaurants.

Ripley's Believe It or Not **Ages 8 and up.** What this has to do with Fisherman's Wharf I'll never know, but if it's raining and you're desperate to fill an hour with the kids and you just happen to be out front, what the heck. If you're not familiar with the Ripley's franchise, it's all about weird people and things that are supposed to be too strange to be believed unless you "see" them with your own eyes. Exhibits cover stories such as the World's Tallest Man, the World's Shortest Man (featuring a wax model of Tom Thumb), a giant hairball, and many more esoteric oddities.

175 Jefferson St. ☎ 415/771-6188. www.ripleysf.com. Admission \$13 13 & older, \$7.95 children 5–12. Discounts for seniors and AAA members. Sun–Thurs 10am–10pm; Fri–Sat 10am–midnight.

Fun Fact The Pinnipeds Who Came for Dinner

The attraction that draws the largest crowds at PIER 39 is also the attraction that fails to pay rent, smells up the neighborhood, and refuses to mind its manners. That's right—it's those darned sea lions! Highly social and intelligent, sea lions have long lived in the waters around San Francisco. Traditionally, they "hailed," or hung out, if you will, on Seal Rock, which is in the Pacific Ocean below the Cliff House on the western edge of the city. The first sea lions scouting around for a more hospitable hauling spot dropped by PIER 39 in 1989, not long after K dock had been renovated but before boats had returned to this part of the marina. Herring was plentiful, the docks much more comfortable for sleeping than rocks, and the waters were safe—great white sharks and orcas, both sea lion predators, don't hunt for dinner in the bay. By January 1990, 150 sea lions were counted around K dock, with more coming as the months passed. In the ensuing battle between the sea lions and the boat owners who'd returned to their previous moorings, the pinnipeds won handily. (Question: What do you give an 800-pound sea lion? Answer: Whatever he wants.) The boats were relocated to another part of the marina, and when K dock was eventually destroyed by the weight of all those lazy mammals, new floating docks were brought in to keep the boys happy. At last count (in Sept 2001), 1,139 sea lions were hauling out beside PIER 39—apparently they like it here. Volunteers from the Marine Mammal Center are available to answer all your questions about sea lions at their center on the second floor of PIER 39.

USS Pampanito ★ Ages 6 and up. History buffs and children get a thrill from touring this submarine, which saw active duty during WWII and helped save 73 British and Australian prisoners-of-war. Quarters are cramped, of course, but that's the point, right? A 20-minute self-guided audio tour, narrated by former crewmembers, is included in the admission price.

Pier 45. ☎ 415/775-1943. www.maritime.org. Admission \$9 adults, \$5 seniors, \$3 children 6–12. The \$20 family pass for 2 adults and up to 4 children under 18 includes admission to the ships at the Hyde St. Pier (reviewed above). Sun–Thurs 9am–6pm, Fri–Sat 9am–8pm; Summer Thurs–Tues 9am–8pm, Wed 9am–6pm.

Wax Museum Ages 8 and up. This recently renovated complex is a pale imitation of Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum in London, and that goes for the figures, too. You'll see tackily dressed, wan celebrities and historical figures grouped by type (U.S. presidents, for instance) or by business (athletes). The Chamber of Horrors is horribly uninspired. Discount coupons are available from hotel concierges, inside the free Bay City Guides in street racks on Jefferson Street, and online at the museum's website.

145 Jefferson St. ☎ 800/439-4305. www.waxmuseum.com. Admission \$13 adults, \$11 seniors 55 and up and youths 12–17, \$6.95 children 6–11. Weekdays 10am–9pm; weekends 9am–11pm.

GOLDEN GATE PARK ★★

Once nothing but a sand-covered tract, today's glorious Golden Gate Park features 1,017 acres of greenery and cultural attractions. San Franciscans can be spotted doing just about everything at the park from playing soccer to sailing model yachts to throwing family reunions. On Sundays, when John F. Kennedy Drive is closed to street traffic, bicyclists ride with impunity and in-line skaters converge for dance parties. From April through the middle of October, also on Sundays, the **Golden Gate Park Band** plays from 1 to 4pm, normally in the **Music Concourse**. (In 2005, the band is expected to play at Strybing Arboretum and Botanical Gardens because the Music Concourse will be closed through the fall of 2005 for the construction of an underground parking facility.)

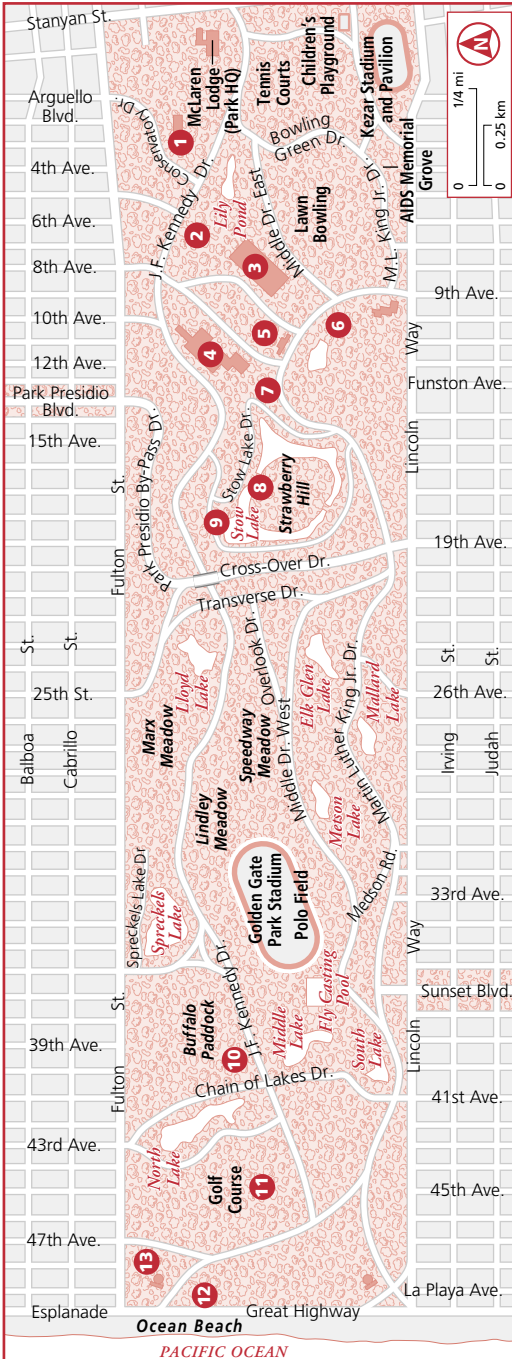
The sizable **Children's Playground**, built in 1887 as the first public children's playground in the United States, and an adjacent beautifully restored carousel sit just past the grand park entrance on Stanyan Street, off Waller Street. Another entrance at 9th Avenue on Lincoln Way brings you to the **Strybing Arboretum** and the **Japanese Tea Garden**.

Joggers and parents pushing baby strollers make regular use of the path around man-made **Stow Lake**. It's the perfect place to enjoy a sunny day by renting a paddleboat and having a picnic. The **Boathouse** (☎ 415/752-0347) also rents bikes and in-line skates by the hour, half day, and full day. If you aren't driving, it's a bit of a walk to the Boathouse, which is west of the Japanese Tea Garden on Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. It's open daily from 10am to 4pm.

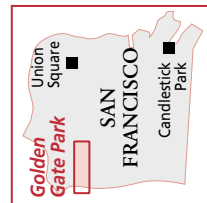
The N-Judah Muni Metro streetcar drops you off on 9th Avenue and Judah Street; from there it is a 3-block walk to the park. Numerous bus lines drive close to or into the park, including the 44-O'Shaughnessy, which you can catch on 9th Avenue, the 21-Hayes, 71-Haight-Noriega, or the 5-Fulton. You can also transfer to the 44-O'Shaughnessy from the 38-Geary bus on 6th Avenue.

The Conservatory of Flowers ★★ Ages 12 and up. This postcard-perfect glass and wood greenhouse is the oldest existing public conservatory in the Western hemisphere. Prefabricated in Ireland in 1875 and erected in the park around 1878, 40 percent of the structure's glass tiles were destroyed in 1995 during a 100-mile-an-hour windstorm that ripped through the park. The conservatory

Golden Gate Park



- 9 Stow Lake Boathouse
- 11 Strybing Arboretum and Botanical Gardens
- 6 Dutch Windmill
- 13 Golden Gate Golf Course
- 7 Japanese Tea Garden
- 2 McLaren Memorial
- 5 Rhododendron Dell
- 8 Music Concourse
- 12 Beach Chalet
- 10 Buffalo Paddock
- 3 California Academy of Sciences (temporarily closed)
- 1 Conservatory of Flowers
- 4 De Young Museum (opening Fall 2005)



News Flash

Scheduled to reopen on October 15, 2005, the **M.H. de Young Memorial Museum**, 75 Tea Garden Dr. (☎ 415/750-3600; www.thinker.org/deyoung), has a superb collection of contemporary American art and extensive art from Africa, Oceania, and the Americas. Its controversial new home, designed by Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron, will include a gleaming copper facade, over 84,000 square feet of gallery space, a 144-foot-tall “education tower,” and a children’s garden.

reopened in 2003 after a multi-year, \$25 million restoration that relied exclusively on private funds. The careful renovation rescued a century-old tropical philodendron from the wreckage. In addition to the philodendron, visitors will find rare orchids, aquatic and carnivorous flora, and tropical plants and trees from five continents. In front of the conservatory is a colorful display of traditional flowers and, to the right, the captivating Dahlia Garden.

Just off John F. Kennedy Dr., near the Stanyan St. entrance. ☎ 415/666-7001. www.conservatoryofflowers.org. \$5 adults; \$3 for youths 12–17, seniors 65 and older, and students with ID; \$1.50 children 5–11. Open Tue–Sun 9am–4:30pm.

Japanese Tea Garden ★★ **All ages.** Japanese landscape architect Makoto Hagiwara designed a small Japanese-style garden for the 1894 World’s Fair, which later expanded to its current 5-acre size. Visitors walk along windy pathways, stepping stones, and bridges framed by koi ponds, Japanese maples, cedars, cherry trees, and bonsai. Highlights include a 1790 bronze Buddha, a Shinto wooden pagoda, and a Zen Garden. Young children find this small, intimate mini-park particularly memorable, in part for the steeply arched Drum Bridge—which doubles as an excellent climbing structure. You’ll need less than an hour to take it all in, but if you want to extend your Japanese experience, visit the teahouse for tea and snacks at \$2.95 per person. Just steer clear of the junky gift shop, lest you lose the sense of serenity gained while strolling through these lovely grounds.

The garden entrance is to the left of the de Young Museum construction site. ☎ 415/752-4227. Admission \$3.50 adults, \$1.25 seniors and children 6–12; free entrance between 8:30–9am. Open 9am–5pm; summer 9am–6pm.

The Strybing Arboretum and Botanical Gardens **All ages.** With over 6,000 species of well-tended plants, flowering trees, and theme gardens, you’ll find this to be a splendid oasis. It is exceptionally lovely in late winter when the rhododendrons blossom and wild iris poke up in corners, and there is no more peaceful a place when the skies are drizzling. Docents give free tours daily at 1:30pm. Children can run at will on the vast lawn not far past the entrance, and at the very end of the arboretum there’s a children’s teaching garden with vegetables, herbs, fruit, and sunflowers in season.

9th Ave. at Lincoln Way, left of the tour bus parking lot by the Music Concourse. ☎ 415/661-1316, ext. 314 for docent tour info. www.strybing.org. Free admission. Mon–Fri 8am–4:30pm; Sat–Sun 10am–5pm.

2 Museums for Everyone

Asian Art Museum ★★ **All ages.** After 35 years in Golden Gate Park, the Asian moved in 2003 to new quarters near City Hall. The museum owns one of the largest collections of Asian art in the Western world, covering 6,000 years and encompassing cultures throughout Asia. It’s hard to say what kids might

find interesting. The textiles are amazing examples of design and handiwork; the Chinese paintings are often more accessible than modern works and are achingly beautiful. My own kids were enthralled with the intricate Indonesian puppets and the model Japanese home. The building itself is another reason to visit: Gae Aulenti, the Milanese architect who renovated the d'Orsay train station in Paris into the intriguing Musée d'Orsay, renovated the interior of the 1917 Beaux Arts former Main Library, creating 37,500 square feet of exhibition space.

If your children would rather make art than admire it, drop them off at AsiaAlive, a free kids' program located on the mezzanine level. Sign them in and let them work on their own art projects, see a live artist demonstration, or watch a video about a particular art theme, while you go off to appreciate the exhibits in peace. The museum also has a nice cafe and elegant gift shop.

200 Larkin St. (at Fulton Street). ☎ 415/581-3500. www.asianart.org. Admission \$10 adults, \$7 seniors, \$6 youths 13–17, free to children 12 and under. Discount for same-day Muni riders. Tues–Sun 10am–5pm, Thurs until 9pm. Muni: Any streetcar to Civic Center.

Bay Area Discovery Museum 🌳🌳🌳 **Kids up to 10.** Ostensibly a museum for children, this indoor/outdoor play and discovery space is fun for grown-ups as well. Tucked into a wooded national park at the foot of the Golden Gate Bridge, with lovely views of the San Francisco skyline, the location alone makes it an excellent place to hang out and have a picnic.

Out-of-towners will appreciate the recently completed Lookout Cove exhibit, a 2½-acre outdoor space dedicated to the Bay Area's history, geography, and ecology. Kids can don pint-sized construction helmets and “build” a smaller scale version of the Golden Gate Bridge, wade through tide pools into a sea cave (real tide pools and caves are found just north of San Francisco), search for treasure inside a sunken ship modeled after an actual 16th Century Manila galleon still at the bottom of nearby Drake's Bay, study artists' sculptures of local animals, and hike along the site's hillside perimeter. While kids play, parents can hang back and take in the view or read the detailed signs and photographs that provide rich detail about the San Francisco Bay's past and present.

In case the weather disappoints, the museum has several indoor play areas—including a tot spot, art area, and the San Francisco Bay Room featuring a life-sized fishing boat—although they're mostly geared to very young kids. The new science area is suitable for kids up to 10 years old. You could easily spend a couple of hours here, so pick up lunch at the on-site cafe and grab a picnic table outside. Even though not strictly in San Francisco, the BADM is too good to leave for the “Side Trips” chapter. And given its location just across the Golden Gate Bridge, it's as close to downtown as some actual San Francisco zip codes. **Note:** If you take the bus, you'll have a 10 to 15 minute walk from the bus stop to the museum.

Fort Baker, 577 McReynolds Rd., Sausalito. ☎ 415/339-3900. www.baykidsmuseum.org. Admission \$8.50 adults, \$7.50 children over 1; children under 1 free. Tues–Fri 9am–4pm; Sat–Sun 10am–5pm. Muni: Weekends only 76 bus to Alexander Road/East Road exit; walk down East Road towards Fort Baker.

Cable Car Museum **All ages.** It won't take long to peer down at the machinery that allows the cable cars to travel up and down the city's hills, but this seemingly simple piece of engineering is very cool. The car barn displays inventor Hallidie's original model from 1873, and there's a short video explaining how the cable cars work, plus a gift shop for those must-have mini cable cars.

1201 Mason St. (at Washington Street). ☎ 415/474-1887. www.cablecarmuseum.com. Free admission. Daily 10am–5pm, until 6pm Apr–Oct. Closed major holidays. Muni: Powell-Mason or Powell-Hyde cable car.

California Academy of Sciences ★★ **All ages.** This wonderful natural history museum—the country’s fourth largest—has temporarily left its Golden Gate Park home to reside in a three-story, industrial SoMa building while a new seismically updated, eco-friendly facility is built for it in the park. (The new facility is slated to open in 2008.) Don’t let the temporary site’s unassuming, concrete façade deter you. Inside is a world-class institution dedicated to developing and disseminating knowledge about the natural world.

The first hall houses temporary exhibits. “Ants: Hidden Worlds Revealed,” which allows viewers to watch six different ant colonies from three continents up-close, will be around through late 2005, to be followed by an exhibit enticingly called “Chocolate.” The Steinhart Aquarium, also on the ground floor, is home to unusual snakes, poison dart frogs, box turtles, and numerous exotic fish. Daily at 11am and 3:30pm, a biologist feeds a pod of penguins, offering surprising details about penguin life and taking audience questions.

Upstairs, the Astrobiology center focuses on the study of life in the universe, which includes researching life in extreme environments. The Naturalist Center offers story time for children ages 3 to 7 and classes for older kids. The Nature Nest features costumes, model animals, and puppets for infants and toddlers. Unfortunately, the Morrison Planetarium is closed during the Academy’s restoration process. Although the museum’s exhibits have been abbreviated to accommodate the smaller, temporary home, this is still an excursion nature- and science-loving kids will enjoy. Breakfast and lunch items, including bagels, fruit, sandwiches, salads, and soups, are available at the Academy’s Grow Café.

875 Howard St. (at 5th St.). ☎ 415/321-8000. www.calacademy.org. Admission \$7 adults; \$4.50 seniors, children 12–17, and students; \$2 children 4–11; free children under 4; free for all the first Wed of the month. Daily 10am–5pm.

California Palace of the Legion of Honor ★★ **All ages.** Constructed as a memorial to California’s soldiers lost in World War I and opened to the public on Armistice Day in 1924, this neoclassical structure is an exact replica of the Legion of Honor Palace in Paris. The exquisite setting inside Lincoln Park alone makes it worth a visit. Take in the expansive lawn, eucalyptus trees, and breathtaking western vista of the Golden Gate Bridge. The museum’s fine collection spans 4,000 years and includes European paintings (by Monet and Rembrandt, among others), drawings, decorative arts, and one of the world’s best collections of Rodin’s sculptures, including an original cast of *The Thinker*. International tapestries, print, and drawings are also on display.

On Saturday mornings from 10:30am to noon, the museum offers free (with paid admission) classes for kids 3½ to 12. Kids view art and then engage in their own creative projects, such as painting or printmaking. (Space is limited. Phone ☎ 415/682-2483 for information.) The cafe, which offers healthy and flavorful snack and lunch items in a delightful indoor/outdoor setting, is only accessible through the museum.

Clement Street and 34th Ave. ☎ 415/863-3330. www.thinker.org. Admission \$15 adults, \$13 seniors 65-plus, \$12 youths 12–17, \$3 children 5–11; free to all every Tues. Tues–Sun 9:30am–5pm. Muni: 38-Geary to 33rd Ave., then transfer to the 18-46th Ave.

Cartoon Art Museum **Ages 6 and up.** Cartoons are taken seriously in these parts. Exhibits in the museum’s five galleries a half block from Yerba Buena Center trace the history of cartoon art from political jabs to underground comics. Temporary shows highlight individual artists, like Bill Watterson and Edward Gorey, and specific forms such as television cartoon animation. Most of the

comic strips are geared to adults. Given the inviting name of the museum, kids may be disappointed. Certainly they'll appreciate the collection of Disney cels and backgrounds that were actually used to make classics like *Fantasia* and *Snow White*, but you could be better off just renting a Disney movie. Contact the museum for information on cartooning classes and 1-day workshops for kids.

655 Mission St. ☎ 415/227-8666. www.cartoonart.org. Admission \$6 adults, \$4 students/seniors, \$2 kids 6–12. Tues–Sun 11am–5pm. Closed on Mondays and major holidays. Muni: Any streetcar to Montgomery St.

Fort Mason Center Museums **Ages 8 and up.** This series of buildings between Fisherman's Wharf and the Marina is a community center providing space for nonprofit organizations. A number of small, specialized museums are located here. **The Mexican Museum** has a collection of more than 12,000 objects highlighting thousands of years of Mexican history and culture (Building D; ☎ 415/202-9700; www.mexicanmuseum.org; admission \$3 adults, \$2 seniors/students, children under 12 free; Wed–Sat 11am–5pm). The **San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society** maintains a resource and cultural center with changing exhibits (Building C-165, ☎ 415/441-0640; admission \$3 adults, \$1 seniors, children under 12 free; Wed–Sun noon–5pm). **Museo Italo Americano** celebrates Italian and Italian-American artists and offers classes for adults and children (Building C; ☎ 415/673-2200; www.museoitaloamericano.org; admission \$3 adults, \$2 seniors/students, children under 12 free; Wed–Sun noon–4pm). The **Museum of Craft and Folk Art** showcases contemporary glasswork, jewelry, clothing, and other exhibits from historical and contemporary cultures (Building A; ☎ 415/775-0991; www.mocfa.org; admission \$4 adults, \$3 seniors, children under 18 free; Tues–Fri and Sun 11am–5pm, Sat 10am–5pm). On the first Wednesday of the month, the museums are free and have extended hours.

Marina Blvd., at Buchanan St. ☎ 415/345-7544 (recorded event info line) or 415/441-3400. www.fortmason.org. Muni: 10 Townsend, 22 Fillmore, 28-19th Ave., 30 Stockton, 47 Van Ness, 49 Van Ness/Mission, or 82x Presidio/Wharves Express.

Mission Dolores Visitors from other parts of California, especially those with middle school kids about to study its history, should not miss touring this small, old mission, the sixth of 21 California missions built by Native Americans under the rule of Franciscan missionaries. Formerly known as Mission San Francisco de Assisi, this 1795 structure has the honor of being the oldest building in San Francisco, having survived earthquakes, fires, and a stint in the 1840s as a gambling den. Of note is the graveyard where Hitchcock filmed scenes for *Vertigo*. The self-guided audio tour takes 40 minutes.

3371 16th St. (at Dolores St.). ☎ 415/621-8203. www.missiondolores.org. Daily 9am–4:30pm. Audio tour \$1. Donations accepted. Muni: J-Church streetcar to 16th St.; walk 1 block east.

Randall Museum **All ages.** A community-oriented center sponsored by San Francisco's Recreation and Park Department, the homely Randall Museum strives to integrate science and the arts through programs for kids and families. You come to the Randall to *do*, rather than to *see*. Locals can register for low-cost classes catering to adults, teens, and families. Woodworking, jewelry-making, and ceramics are among the regular offerings, and the classes fill up quickly. Visiting families can drop by on Saturday mornings to wander around the exhibits, visit the animals, and catch story hour. On Saturday afternoons visitors can participate in art workshops. A model train exhibit by the Golden Gate Model Railroad Club is open to the public on Saturdays as well, from 11am to 4pm. The

Randall theater is used for live productions and a film series for teens—check the website for a schedule of events and classes. The place is teeny-tiny, so I don't recommend a visit unless you're looking for indoor activities on a rainy day or you want to check out the classic downtown views from the grassy lawn out front.

199 Museum Way (off Roosevelt Way). ☎ 415/554-9600. www.randallmuseum.org. Admission free (donations accepted). Sat drop-in art workshops \$3 children or \$5 children with adults. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm. Not easily accessible by public transportation.

San Francisco Fire Department Museum **Ages 4 and up.** This one-room museum next to a firehouse features display cases filled with artifacts tracing the history of San Francisco's fire departments, from volunteer firefighters to the beginnings of the professional squads of today. The floor display of antique equipment, including two steam engines, shows how far we've come.

655 Presidio Ave. (between Bush and Pine sts.). ☎ 415/558-3546 (recorded info) or 415/563-4630 (during open hours). www.sffiremuseum.org. Free admission. Thurs–Sun 1–4pm. Muni: 43-Masonic, 4-Sutter, or 2-Clement bus.

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) ★★ ★ **All ages.** The first museum on the West Coast devoted solely to post-turn-of-the-20th Century art, the SFMOMA took up residence in its current \$62 million home designed by Swiss architect Mario Botta in 1995. The impressive brick facade, accentuated by a black and white tower, opens to a sleek atrium and a set of black and gray stone stairs leading up the museum's four stories. The permanent collection includes more than 15,000 works, including 5,000 paintings by the likes of Henri Matisse, Piet Mondrian, Jackson Pollock, and Robert Rauschenberg. Other artists represented include Diego Rivera, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Paul Klee. Kids may be excited to recognize Jeff Koons's gold and white sculpture of Michael Jackson and his chimp pal, Bubbles. The first museum to recognize photography as a major art form, the SFMOMA also has over 9,000 photographs from such notables as Ansel Adams and Henri Cartier-Bresson. Although not enough of these wonderful art pieces are on view at any one time, the museum also hosts excellent temporary displays. Perhaps because of the colorful and arresting nature of much contemporary art, we've always found something here to hold the attention of even our very young daughters.

On the third Sunday of the month from noon to 3pm, children up to 10 years old are invited to create some artwork of their own in the Family Studio of the **Koret Education Center**. This activity is free with museum admission, and prior registration isn't necessary. Also, for one day in June and October, Family Day offers \$2 admission to the museum and a full day of activities and performances geared towards kids under 10. (The Koret Center closes a half-hour before the rest of the museum.)

The **Caffé Museo**, offering grilled sandwiches, salads, and soups, is a great place to grab lunch, although it's packed on weekends. The **Museum Store** is one of the better gift shops in town, carrying unique educational toys for very young children. Museum admission is not required to enter the cafe or gift shop.

151 3rd St. (2 blocks south of Market Street between Mission and Howard sts.). ☎ 415/357-4000. www.sfmoma.org. Admission \$10 adults, \$7 seniors 62 and up, \$6 students with ID, free for kids 12 and under. Half-priced Thurs 6–9pm. Free to all first Tues of the month. Thurs 11am–9pm; Fri–Tues 11am–6pm. Closed Wed and major holidays. Opens at 10am during the summer. Muni: Take any streetcar to the Montgomery St. Station or the 15-3rd, 30-Stockton, or 45-Union/Stockton bus.

I Spy with My Little Eyes—SFMOMA

This quiz begins as you arrive at the front of the museum. Keep score to see how much you see. (And, remember, don't touch any of the art!)

1. How many striped pillars are there in the front of the museum? (Score 1 point)
2. There are two rainbow-colored paintings in the atrium as you enter the Museum. What is the main difference between them? (Score 1 point)
3. Can you find a painting of a woman with a colorful hat? (Hint: There are at least two. Score 2 points for each painting you find.)
4. Find a painting of a musical instrument. (Hint: There are at least two. Score 1 point for each one you find.)
5. Find paintings with two or more rectangles. (Hint: There are at least three. Score 1 point for each one you find.)
6. Find a shiny sculpture. (Score 3 points.)
7. Find a sculpture with rounded edges and one with rough edges. (Score 2 points for each.)
8. Find a painting with silver in it. (Score 3 points.)
9. Find a painting with circles in it. (Score 2 points.)
10. Go to the outdoor sculpture terrace with an adult. Look out into the city. How many flags can you see on the building tops? (Score 1 point.)
11. On the fifth floor, find the turret bridge and walk across it to the other side. Take an adult! (Score 2 points.)
12. Find a painting or sculpture you really like. Tell your mom or dad what you like about it. See if there's a postcard with it pictured in the gift shop. (Score 5 points if your parent buys you the postcard.)

Answers:

- 1) 4 2) The main difference is the curved versus the straight lines 10) 4.

Add up your points. If your score was:

20 points or more: Your powers of observation are very good.

15 to 20 points: You don't need glasses.

Less than 15 points: Start over (just kidding).

Tattoo Art Museum **Ages 13 and up.** The antique tattooing devices and old-fashioned designs displayed here have been collected over many years by Lyle Tuttle, one of the most recognized tattoo artists in the world. The museum is also the workplace of Lyle Tuttle Tattooing, so tell the kids that you're thinking about brightening up a shoulder blade, just for the look on their faces.

841 Columbus Ave. © 415/775-4991. www.lyletuttle.com. Free admission. Daily. Call for hours. Muni: Powell-Mason cable car.

Wells Fargo History Museum **Ages 7 and up.** Wells Fargo opened one of its first California offices on this site in 1852, ready to handle business generated by the gold rush. If you happen to have a middle-schooler handy who may

be studying California history, a stop by this two-level museum off the bank's lobby will be useful. Among the exhibits is a stunning Concord Coach built in 1867, used to carry express mail and passengers. You can "test drive" a cutaway coach on the second floor. An old-fashioned office display downstairs is complete with telegraph machines that visitors can use to send Morse code messages back and forth between the two desks.

420 Montgomery St. (near California St.). ☎ 415/396-2619. www.wellsfargohistory.com/museums. Free admission. Mon–Fri 9am–5pm. Muni: California St. cable car.

3 The Best Views

People like views. That much is clear from the wrangling that goes on to get a table with a view in restaurants or the extra tariff imposed on a room with a view, not to mention a home with a view. San Francisco is one major view, owing to all those hills. Following are some of the best.

Alamo Square ★ From this vantage point you will see the famous restored Victorian residences of "Postcard Row," with the downtown skyline as a stunning backdrop. The most common house type in many San Francisco neighborhoods, Victorian homes dating from the late 1800s and early 1900s meshed a variety of styles but had in common wooden frames and decorative facades. The most elaborate and colorful of these earned the nickname "Painted Ladies." Since your kids will see these houses in calendars and postcards as long as they live, you may want to show them the real thing. Just note that Alamo Square Park is popular with dog owners, some of whom do not leash their canine companions.

Between Steiner, Scott, Hayes, and Fulton sts. Muni: 21-Hayes bus from Market St. drops passengers off at the crest of the park.

Beach Chalet Restaurant The waves along Ocean Beach, at the end of Golden Gate Park on the Great Highway, are at times soothing, and at times violent enough to discourage beachcombing. In either case, you'll be as comfy as a babe in his crib if you get a table upstairs in the Beach Chalet restaurant, which overlooks the Pacific across the Great Highway. The building was designed by Willis Polk, and the first-floor visitor center is adorned by murals painted in the 1930s by the same artist who painted the frescoes at Coit Tower. The food is decent, but the beer is better, so you could make this a rest stop after visiting the zoo or Golden Gate Park. (Another option is having a drink here before heading downstairs for a meal at the Park Chalet, which has the same owners but serves better fare.) The waves crashing along the coast are mesmerizing any time of day, but come at sunset if you can.

1000 Great Hwy. (between Lincoln Way and Fulton Street). ☎ 415/386-8439. www.beachchalet.com. Sun–Thurs 9am–10pm; Fri–Sat 9am–11pm. Muni: 18-46th Ave. bus, N-Judah streetcar to the end; walk 3 blocks north toward the park.

Bernal Heights Park Look southeast from downtown and you'll spot a prominent hill with a few trees decorating the top. That's Bernal Heights Park, the favored dog-walking and fireworks-viewing area for the Bernal Heights neighborhood. The weather in this part of town is far superior to the weather around Twin Peaks, which can get really foggy, much to the dismay of the camera-toting folk on the tour buses. The views here are equally wonderful in my opinion, partly because Bernal Hill is closer to downtown and the bay.

At the end of Folsom St. Muni: 67-Folsom bus to the end of Folsom at Esmeralda; walk up the hill on any of a number of paths.

The Cheesecake Factory Union Square is a compact, urban hub that is most appealing when it's crowded and bustling. Until recently, there wasn't a handy place to be among, but not in, the madding crowd. Now Macy's has alleviated that problem by installing a branch of the Cheesecake Factory on the eighth floor of the department store. Management shrewdly included a heated patio for diners who favor a city view in all its skyscrapered glory.

251 Geary St. (8th floor, in the Macy's bldg. on Union Sq.). ☎ 415/397-3333. www.cheesecake-factory.net. Mon–Thurs 11am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11am–12:30am; Sun 10am–11pm. Muni: Powell-Hyde or Powell-Mason cable car to Union Sq.

Cliff House This historic building on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean reopened in late 2004 after a \$19 million restoration. Views are awe-inspiring. See the Cliff House Bistro write-up on p. 145 for a full review.

1090 Point Lobos (Geary St., west of 48th Ave.). ☎ 415/386-3330. Daily 9am–10pm. Muni: 38-Geary bus to 48th Ave., then walk 1 block or transfer to 18 bus.

Coit Tower ★ Visible from almost any spot on the Embarcadero, this 210-foot landmark was erected in 1933 through the generosity of local character Lillie Hitchcock Coit—who bequeathed \$125,000 to erect a monument that would add beauty to the city. In addition to the panoramic vista at the top of the tower, the inside also contains a collection of impressive murals. Commissioned in the New Deal era, their pro-worker stance caused quite a stir at the time. Reflecting the style of Diego Rivera, under whom many of the artists had studied, the murals' two-dimensional and cartoon-like qualities may be appealing to your kids. If not, move quickly to the elevator for a ride to the top, which will be sure to spark their interest.

Atop Telegraph Hill. ☎ 415/362-0808. Free viewing of murals; elevator ride \$3. Daily 10am–5pm. Muni: 39-Coit bus from Washington Sq. Park in North Beach, or walk from Lombard St. where it meets Telegraph Hill Blvd. (2 blocks east of Stockton St.).

Dolores Park The city and bay views over this stretch of green on a clear day have been responsible for more than one decision to relocate to the Bay Area. After soaking in the scenery and taking a stroll through the park, walk 2 blocks north on Dolores Street until you reach **Mission Dolores** (reviewed earlier in this chapter) at 16th and Dolores streets.

The park is bounded by 18th, 20th, Church, and Dolores sts. Muni: From any Muni Metro station (the Powell St. Station being the closest to Union Sq.) take the J-Church toward Daly City. Exit on 20th and Church sts., above Dolores Park.

Lincoln Park One of the prettiest golf courses in creation, Lincoln Park is situated around the Palace of the Legion of Honor and above the entrance to the San Francisco Bay at Land's End. Standing in front of the museum, you can see in the distance a snippet of downtown framed within the green branches of fir trees. From here, walk west down the street. You'll be stunned by a postcard-perfect view of the Golden Gate Bridge from a unique perspective, as if you're entering the bay. Take a seat on one of the benches thoughtfully placed along the street so you can survey the vista in comfort.

The park is located at the northwest corner of the city. Muni: 18-46th Ave. bus to the Palace of the Legion of Honor parking lot.

San Francisco Art Institute For views of the bay, a decent latte, and some freshly baked muffins, all at the same time, make yourself at home in this student's cafe. The easiest way to reach the school is on the Powell-Hyde cable car. Exit on Chestnut Street and walk down the block to the entrance. Walk through

Fun Fact Stump the Tour Guide

If you hear that Coit Tower was built as a memorial to the city's firemen, go ahead and set the record straight. Although the Tower was built with funds bequeathed by Lillie Hitchcock Coit, whose lifelong passion for firefighters helped to make her a legend in her own time, her will stipulated only that she wished to beautify the city she loved. The tower is not meant to resemble a fire hose nozzle, by the way. It's just a fluted column.

So, where is the memorial to volunteer firemen paid for by Lillie Hitchcock Coit? It's in Washington Square Park.

the courtyard and you'll see the cafe. Afterward, take a look at the student artwork in the Diego Rivera Gallery.

800 Chestnut St. (between Leavenworth and Jones sts.). ☎ **415/771-7020**. www.sanfranciscoart.edu. Daily 8am–9pm. Muni: Powell-Hyde cable car to Lombard St.; walk 1 block north, then turn east on Chestnut St..

Top of the Mark In 1939, the top floor of the Mark Hopkins Inter-continental hotel was converted into a glass-walled lounge with 360-degree city views. During World War II, wives and girlfriends of Pacific-bound servicemen watched their loved ones' ships sail eastward below the Golden Gate Bridge from the windows of the northwest corner—soon nicknamed Weepers' Corner. Now a restaurant as well as cocktail lounge, the Top sees plenty of visitors just popping up to spy the panoramic view. Please note that the Top requests “smart casual” attire after 5pm (after 4pm on Fridays and Saturdays) and does not permit minors after 8pm.

1 Nob Hill (at California and Mason sts.). ☎ **415/616-6916**. Mon–Thurs 6:30am–midnight; Fri–Sat 6:30am–1am; Sun 10am–midnight. Muni: Any cable car to Powell and California sts., then walk 1 block west to California and Mason sts..

Twin Peaks On a clear day you really can see forever from what's nearly the tallest hill in pretty much the center of town. The trick is to go when the fog has lifted. Otherwise, it's cold, windy, and gray. Outside of the view, there isn't anything else up on Twin Peaks and it's not really near anything, so before you drive or take the bus up here, be sure it's something everyone wants to do. The bus stops near, but not at, the viewpoint, so some walking will be involved.

Crestline Blvd. Muni: 37-Corbett bus (connect to the bus from the Castro St. Muni station).

4 Outings on the Bay

Blue and Gold Fleet **All ages.** This company has a lock on the ferry business to Alcatraz Island (p. 154), so if you have plans to tour the prison, you'll be on one of these large cruisers for at least 20 minutes. That may be enough of a trip for the kids because it's all about the view. One-hour narrated cruises travel to the Golden Gate Bridge, around Alcatraz, and to the Bay Bridge; the soundtrack is prerecorded.

Pier 41, Fisherman's Wharf. ☎ **415/705-5555**. www.blueandgoldfleet.com. Tours run daily year-round. 1-hour rides \$19 adults, \$15 seniors 62-plus and students 12–17, \$11 children 5–11, under 5 free. Discounts available on the Internet.

Fishing Boats **All ages.** For about half the price of a Blue and Gold Fleet cruise, you can take the family on an actual fishing boat for a 1-hour cruise under the Golden Gate Bridge, past Alcatraz and Angel Island, and instead of recorded

commentary, the captain will entertain passengers with his insights into local lore. It's personable and kids can see out the boat better than on the big ferries. The boats along the fishing dock take turns doing the tourist run and none take reservations. The first tour of the day leaves around 10:30am. Just show up on the half hour.

Jefferson St. between Jones and Taylor sts. No phone. Adults \$10, kids \$5. Tours weekdays 10:30am–sunset.

Golden Gate Ferry **All ages.** Part of the Golden Gate Transit District, these commuter ferries run back and forth from Larkspur and Sausalito in Marin County to the Ferry Building at the foot of Market Street. It takes about 30 minutes from start to finish and bikes are allowed on board. Although these boats don't pass under the Golden Gate Bridge, they do travel near Alcatraz and Angel Island. For a low-key, brief, and inexpensive way to get on the water, you can't beat it. If your gang is up to it, you can pedal across the bridge to Sausalito (a 9-mile ride) and then return by ferry.

San Francisco Ferry Building, Market St. at Embarcadero. ☎ 415/923-2000. www.goldengateferry.org. Tickets one-way to Sausalito \$6.15 adults, \$3.05 seniors 65-plus, \$4.60 children 6–12. Up to 2 kids per paying adult ride free on weekends and holidays.

Hawaiian Chieftain **Ages 9 and up.** A magnificent 103-foot, steel-hulled, square-rigged topsail ketch, designed to resemble a late-18th-century European trading vessel, this head-turning ship plies the bay between April and October. There are various trips for the public, including a sunset sail, but my recommendation is the 4-hour Saturday Adventure Sail. Passengers are encouraged to assist the crew at stations around the boat, so it's as much a learning experience as a cruise. Sailing on the bay, versus motoring on a ferry, is exciting and memorable, especially if you've a yen for the wind in your hair and saltwater in your face. Of course, if seasickness is an issue or you're not sure how committed your crew is to spending a good part of the day on the sea, this could be an expensive debacle.

3020 Bridgeway, Sausalito. ☎ 415/331-3214. www.hawaiianchieftain.com. Sat Adventure Sail, adults \$50, kids under 12 \$25. Includes lunch and drinks. Phone for directions to the marina or for information on other sails.

5 Crossing the Golden Gate Bridge

As *the* San Francisco landmark, this glorious feat of engineering never fails to elicit admiration from the millions of people who come to gaze at or cross the bridge year after year. Spanning 1¾ miles and soaring hundreds of feet above the water, the Golden Gate Bridge opened in 1937, after 4 years of construction and eleven lives lost. To experience the bridge, you can walk its length, bike it, drive over it, cruise under it, or appreciate it from afar.

BY FOOT Bundle up against the windy conditions, then set out from the **Roundhouse** on the east side of the bridge. It can get pretty noisy, but the views can't be beat. Keep in mind the walk is round-trip; once you get to the other side there's no way back but to walk. Know your family's limitations before you start out. Strollers are a good idea for anyone small enough to fit. Upon your return, take time to walk underneath the bridge to see the 5-acre garden (open to pedestrians 6am–6pm daily). The 28-19th Avenue or the 29-Sunset bus deposits you

Tips Bridge Tour

Sundays at 11am Friends of the Library conduct a bridge walk. There's no charge. Just meet at the Strauss Statue in the east parking lot.

across from the viewing area, right by a parking lot. If you're driving, take 19th Avenue or Lombard Street and pay attention to the sign that indicates when to exit for the parking lot. Otherwise, enjoy your drive across the bridge: there's a \$5 toll upon your return to the city.

BY BIKE If your kids are old enough, this may be a better way to go than on foot. Just note the restrictions on which sidewalks are open to bikes—on the weekends from 6am to 6pm and weekdays from 3:30 to 6pm, use the west sidewalk. At all other times, you'll be sharing the east sidewalk with pedestrians, who always have the right-of-way. Walk your bike around the towers. For information on bike rentals, see chapter 8.

BY BUS The **76-Marin Headlands** Muni bus picks up from Market and Fremont Street or along Lombard and rumbles all the way to the beach at Fort Cronkite in Marin. This route only operates on Sundays and major holidays (☎ 415/673-6864; www.sfmuni.com).

BY FIRE ENGINE See the “Best Guided Tours for the Family” section below for a unique way to cross the bridge.

6 Taking a Hike

Fort Funston ★★ At this Golden Gate National Recreation Area park, trails lead down to the beach where, in good weather, you may see hang gliders. This is also an extremely popular spot for dogs—just about everyone in town with an ocean-loving pooch comes here for a run. The majority of the trails are suitable for kids, especially the Battery Davis and Sunset trails. The old gun emplacements you may see are left over from the era when this was a military site. There are portable toilets around, but no snack bar. The closest restaurants are by the zoo, and they aren't all that inviting.

Skyline Blvd. (off Great Hwy.). ☎ 415/239-2366. www.nps.gov/goga/fofu/index.htm. Muni: 18-46th Ave. bus (which stops near the Battery Davis trail), or L-Taraval streetcar to the end of the line and walk ½ mile south on Ocean Beach.

Fort Point ★ Kids get a thrill poking around this fort (ca. 1861) that lies underneath the Golden Gate Bridge at the tip of the peninsula. It was armed with cannons over the course of the Civil War, and early era weapons are on display at the fort. Park rangers give interpretive talks. A 3½-mile walk to Fort Point, beginning at the Hyde Street Pier, passes through the Marina Green and Crissy Field (you can decrease the mileage by starting at Crissy Field).

Long Ave. and Marine Dr. ☎ 415/556-1693 or 415/561-4395. www.nps.gov/fofo. Fri–Sun 10am–5pm. Muni: 28-19th Ave. or 29-Sunset bus to the Golden Gate Bridge; climb down from the viewing area to a short trail leading to the fort.

Land's End ★★ The poetic name of this piece of national park becomes easier to comprehend when you stand at the Eagle's Point trailhead and look back at the Golden Gate Bridge. It imposingly guards the entrance to the bay and the cities behind it, with nothing but open ocean and the barren hills of the Marin Headlands in front. There is indeed something end-of-the-earth-like about it. The spectacular views accompany you throughout the entire 1½-mile walk along the northwestern edge of the San Francisco Peninsula. You'll end at Sutro Park, an 18-acre park atop a bluff overlooking Ocean Beach and Seal Rocks. The cliff-side path narrows at times, so tell your kids to walk, not run.

Eagle's Point (at El Camino del Mar near 32nd St.). ☎ 415/561-4395 to verify hours. Muni: 38 Geary to Point Lobos.

Muir Woods ★★ Named in honor of Sierra Club founder and conservationist John Muir, 553-acre Muir Woods is what's left locally of the redwood forests that once dominated the Northern California coastline. Although not as immense as Redwood National Forest farther north, this pocket of old-growth redwoods is magnificent, and a range of trails here will suit hikers of all abilities.

Mill Valley. ☎ 415/388-2595. www.nps.gov/muwv. Daily 8am–sunset. To get there, drive over the Golden Gate Bridge and take the Stinson Beach/Hwy. 1 exit west and follow the signs. Parking is limited so set out early on weekends or go during the week.

The Presidio ★★ On the northern tip of San Francisco lies this former property of the U.S. Army, now part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Numerous trails are contained in the 1,500-acre site, taking you through forests of eucalyptus and pine or along the dramatic coastline. The Ecology Trail starts at the Presidio Officer's Club, where you can pick up trail maps and other information. It takes you along an easy two-mile hike by the park's largest redwood grove to Inspiration Point, where you'll find a stellar Alcatraz view. The Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail can be reached at the Presidio Gate, at Funston and Lake streets. The moderate 3-mile trek passes Mountain Lake and ends at the Golden Gate Bridge. For a shorter route with the kids, head east from Mountain Lake towards Julius Kahn Park. It's an easier walk with a delightful playground at the end as a reward.

Presidio Visitor Center, Presidio Officers' Club, Building 50, Moraga Ave. ☎ 415/561-4323. www.presidio.gov. Visitors' Center open daily 9am–5pm. Closed major holidays. Muni to Officer's Club: 76-Marin Headlands or 43-Masonic bus, transfer at Lombard and Broderick sts. to 29-Sunset. Muni to Presidio Gate: 1-California to Presidio Blvd, walk north on Funston Street.

7 Best Guided Tours for the Family

All About Chinatown! Walking Tours ★ **Ages 8 and up.** Owner Linda Lee has been giving tours in Chinatown for over two decades. Having grown up in Chinatown, she offers an insider's look at this fascinating section of the city. Tours depart from Old St. Mary's Cathedral and last two or three hours, depending on whether you stay for a dim sum meal at the end. Linda Lee's little company has grown up, and you may find someone else guiding you through Chinatown's crowded alleyways, but fortunately all the tours offered are low-key and flexible. If you have young kids with you, guides will be happy to linger longer at the fortune cookie factory and in the neighborhood playgrounds, while keeping stops at temples to a minimum.

P.O. Box 640145, San Francisco, California 94164. ☎ 415/982-8839. www.allaboutchinatown.com. Daily 10am and 1pm. Adults walk only \$25, with lunch \$40; kids 12–17 walk only \$15, with lunch \$30; kids 6–11 walk only \$10, with lunch \$25; kids under 6 free.

City Guides ★ **Ages 10 and up.** There's hardly a section of the city that isn't covered by a City Guides walking tour. Not all are going to be interesting to kids, but log onto their website and see if you and they can agree on one of the 1½- to 2-hour walks scheduled during your trip. This is a superb way to get to know a neighborhood and it's free. Reservations aren't even necessary. Just show up at the designated meeting point.

Starting locations vary. ☎ 415/557-4266. www.sfcityguides.org. Schedules vary.

Explorer's Club ★★ ★ *Finds* **Ages 5 and up.** Susan Edwards, who spent 20-plus years in child development and education before starting this business, provides two programs under the Explorer's Club name: individualized tours for

children and families and a day camp for local kids that runs during the summers and over holiday breaks. Her avid interest in nature and the city's history, combined with gentle enthusiasm and energy, make her an ideal guide/child-care provider. She will plan a one-of-a kind, half- or full-day outing for a family, or you can choose a tour from her website, all of which include door-to-door pickup and delivery. Tours run the gamut from hiking in Muir Woods to taking an in-depth look at the most famous San Francisco sites. Edwards can also design a unique program just for children over 5—either during the day, if no camps are scheduled, or for a “Kids’ Night Out,” a nighttime tour that includes dinner and an activity such as seeing a play or toasting marshmallows over a campfire on the beach. If you will need child-care during your San Francisco trip, check the Explorer’s Club Camp calendar online to see if Edwards will be out and about the day you need help. If she has room (she takes a maximum of 13 kids out, with another adult supervisor), you and your child will both be in luck.

Mailing address: 693 Dartmouth St., San Francisco, CA 94134. ☎ 415/902-7014. www.eckidsclub.com. Kids’ camp \$65 per day. Individual tour prices vary.

Fire Engine Tours ★★☆☆ **All ages.** Suspend your dignity to don a ratty woolen cap, fringed knit scarf, and heavy fireman’s jacket, then check your seat belt and prepare to be amused on a bumpy 75-minute ride in a 1955 Mack Fire Engine. The big red shiny Mack truck drives over the Golden Gate Bridge into Sausalito and back, and it may just be the most delightful way to cross this bridge. Tour guide Marilyn Katzman, a tap dancer and former child actress, only quits talking, singing, and leading cheers when the truck passes through streets that require a modicum of quiet. As you move past various landmarks and sights—the Octagon House, the Presidio pet cemetery, Union Street—Marilyn tosses out historical facts and figures mostly relating to fires and the folks who put them out. The “captain,” her husband, Robert, chimes in on cue but mostly keeps the truck heading forward, sometimes at speeds resembling a roller coaster. The fire engine is so much fun, it’s regularly rented out for birthdays as well; my kids are still singing the “Big Red Shiny Mack Fire Engine” song they learned at the last party.

Outside The Cannery on Beach St. ☎ 415/333-7077. www.fireengineturns.com. Tickets \$35 adults, \$25 teens/seniors, \$20 kids 12 and under. Tours Wed–Mon unless it rains. Phone for a schedule.

Gray Line Tours ★☆☆☆ **All ages.** Orientation tours by bus can be tedious for kids, most of whom would rather be outside experiencing the city instead of stuck on a bus listening to recorded commentary. When you don’t have a lot of time to visit and you want to hit the highlights, however, these tours come in handy. Gray Line is the big kahuna of the industry, with a number of tours around San Francisco and beyond in red double-decker buses, motorized cable cars, and

Fun Fact Stump the Tour Guide

Question: Where’s the most crooked street in San Francisco? **Answer:** No, it’s not Lombard Street, despite being nicknamed “the crookedest street in the world.” Lombard may be the most attractive crooked street anywhere, but the most crooked street in San Francisco is in Potrero Hill. Vermont Street, between 20th and 22nd streets, boasts six turns in 270 feet. Lombard has eight turns in a relatively lengthy 412 feet.

Fun Fact Stump the Tour Guide

Nine out of 10—maybe 99 out of 100—locals wouldn't be able to tell you what the official flower of San Francisco is (the dahlia) or the city's official colors (black and gold). Most San Franciscans don't even know that we have official anything, but we even have an official musical instrument—it's the piano-accordion because the very first one produced in the U.S. was built in San Francisco by the Guerrini Company in 1907.

If you don't have a tour guide to quiz, go ask the hotel concierge.

smaller vans. The deluxe city tour takes you to Twin Peaks, Mission Dolores, the Cliff House, Golden Gate Park, and the Golden Gate Bridge, and there's also an Alcatraz Island option. Gray Line also operates a motorized trolley car that you can board for a 1½-hour drive from Union Square through Nob Hill, Chinatown, North Beach, and Fisherman's Wharf. Passengers may disembark at Union Square, PIER 39, Nob Hill, and Ghirardelli Square and reboard anytime that same day.

Departure points vary by tour. © 415/558-9400. www.graylinesanfrancisco.com. Tours offered daily year-round. Tickets for the deluxe city tour #1 are \$38 adults, \$16 kids 5–11; motorized trolley \$27 adults, \$8 kids 5–11.

Precita Eyes Mural Art Center **Ages 6 and up.** The Mission is filled with exciting and politically charged murals, but why? And who painted them? For the answers to those questions and a tour of the paintings, sign up with this non-profit arts center. The 6-block, 2-hour walk, which passes 75 murals, departs from the center Saturdays and Sundays at 1:30pm. A brief slide show on the history of mural art precedes the walk. On Saturdays at 11am, a slightly shorter walk showing 50 murals departs from Café Venice, 3325 24th St. (near the 24th St. BART station).

2981 24th St. (near Harrison St.). © 415/285-2287. www.precitaeyes.org. \$12 adults, \$8 students with ID, \$5 seniors, \$2 children under 18. Reservations are not necessary unless you have a large group.

Neighborhood Strolls

San Francisco is one of the few cities west of the Mississippi that came to fruition before the advent of the automobile. That pre-car development meant that neighborhoods grew up being pedestrian-friendly. Moreover, the city's quirky geography—at the tip of a peninsula with water on three sides—has prevented the sprawl seen elsewhere. San Francisco is in fact the second most densely populated city in the country.

What this implies for you and yours is that San Francisco is a wonderful place to take in the fresh sea air and savor the neighborhoods on foot. A leisurely stroll in most any quarter is

sure to be full of visual treats, from shop windows to sidewalk cafes, from interesting architectural highlights to unexpected gardens, from enchanting views to the unique and colorful residents themselves.

The hills can be a challenge, of course, but the reward is often another jaw-dropping city vista. A more difficult task may be encouraging your kids to hoof it with you. Strollers will help, except on the staircases of Russian and Telegraph Hills. Fortunately, I've noted playgrounds, coffee shops, and restaurants where you can take frequent rest stops. Just take your time and have fun!

WALKING TOUR 1 CHINATOWN

Start:	Dragon Gate.
Finish:	Portsmouth Square.
Time:	Two hours with shopping breaks; 3 hours with lunch.
Best Time:	Weekday mornings.
Worst Time:	Saturday when everyone is out.

Start your tour at the intersection of Bush Street and Grant Avenue, at:

① The Dragon's Gate

Chinatown's best-known entryway mirrors traditional gateway arches found in many Chinese villages. The stone lions on either side of the arch are meant to protect against evil spirits. The dragons and fishes on the pagoda atop the arch signify prosperity. It's tough to take a bad photo here.

Walk north up:

② Grant Avenue

This bustling street is lined with jewelry stores and tourist shops, whose

overflowing array of eclectic wares will mesmerize your children. To keep the kids moving along, let them know that many more such shops lie ahead.

Continue up Grant Avenue to Pine Street. Turn right on Pine. Half-way down the block you'll find:

③ St. Mary's Square

Here you'll find an imposing 12-foot tall, metal statue of Sun Yat-Sen, the first president of the Republic of China. Younger kids can enjoy a playground with fun, colorful structures.

Walking Tour: Chinatown



Head across the square to Sacramento Street. On the corner with Grant Avenue is:

4 Old St. Mary's Church

Built in 1854 by Chinese laborers with Chinese granite, Old St. Mary's was the first structure in California built as a cathedral. The interior was destroyed by fire following the 1906 earthquake and rebuilt three years later. Today the church has an active congregation and many outreach programs.

Head across the street and a few steps up Grant Avenue, to 616 Grant Ave., to the:

5 Canton Bazaar

This crowded, multilevel bazaar is a fun place to pick up some souvenirs or just explore.

Walk another block to 717 Grant Ave., to the:

6 Chinatown Kite Shop

Kids will be amazed by the plethora of different kites here—some of them designed to do very radical stunts. Buy a kite here and test it out on the Marina Green in the afternoon (when it's usually windy). For kids or parents with a culinary bent, **The Wok Shop** across the street has every utensil needed to create your own Chinese cuisine at home.

Head west on Sacramento Street until you see:

7 Waverly Place

This 2-block alley between Sacramento and Washington streets is also known as the "Street of Painted Balconies." Here you'll find a number of interesting stores, including the **Claron Music Center** on the south corner of Waverly Place and Sacramento Street. A few feet down is a store specializing in ceremonial papers and incense, a Chinese artist's gallery, a trophy-filled herbal shop, and, on the corner of Waverly Place and Clay Street, a gift shop with many bonsai trees.

Make your way to 125 Waverly Place. On the top floor you'll find the:

8 Tin How Temple

Located up three flights of stairs is one of the oldest Chinese temples in America. Established in 1852, the temple has an elaborate altar holding a statue of Tin How, or Tien Hou, "Queen of the Heavens and Goddess of the Seven Seas." Please tell children to keep it down, as people may be meditating and praying. Also, consider giving a donation or buying incense.

Continue down the block to Washington Street, cross, and go to the left to:

9 Ross Alley

Ross Alley is decorated with murals detailing typical Chinatown scenes, like shopping and intergenerational families.

At 56 Ross Alley is a must-stop, the:

10 Golden Gate Fortune Cookie Company

It's hard to believe this little alleyway nook can produce so many cookies. An unusual machine squirts batter onto tiny round plates, which move along a conveyor belt through an oven. An employee then takes the freshly baked cookies, folds a fortune into them, and lays them on a rack to cool and harden. Fortune cookies were actually invented in California less than a century ago.



TAKE A BREAK

Buy a bag of fortune or almond cookies at the fortune cookie factory and munch on them to fortify yourselves before encountering the sights and smells of Stockton Street. Try the unfolded, fortune-less cookies—that's how Chinatown locals prefer them.

The "Only in San Francisco" Checklist of Rare or Unusual Sightings

As you wander around town, look for the people and objects listed below. Some are easier to find than others, but if you check off more than half, you've really gotten around.

Art Cars. Keep your eyes peeled for weird and wonderful autos. You'll know one when you see it. There's a GI Joe-covered station wagon and other cars painted in weird and wacky colors, traveling canvases of public art. The end of September brings the Art Car Fest to the Bay Area (www.artcarfest.com), a gathering of these wildly decorated vehicles and the people who love them.

Critical Mass. On the last Friday of every month at 5:30pm, a huge group of gonzo bicyclists takes over the streets, much to the consternation of any drivers who get caught unawares. The launch pad is usually the Embarcadero BART Station. The path varies.

A Chinatown Funeral Procession. Look for a fancy convertible decorated with pictures of the deceased followed by the Green Street Band playing Western pop tunes. Funeral corteges generally tour North Beach and Chinatown.

The Doorman at the Sir Francis Drake Hotel. For over 25 years Tom Sweeney has greeted guests of the Sir Francis Drake in a traditional beefeater outfit.

Lotta's Fountain. The meeting place every April 18 at 5:13am for the few remaining survivors of the 1906 earthquake and fire. The fountain served as a community bulletin board where people left notes for missing friends and family after the disaster. It's easy to locate, on the corner of Market and Kearny streets.

The Rock Balancer. Bill Dan rides his bike to Crissy Field many afternoons and promptly draws huge crowds by balancing large rocks on top of each other in apparently gravity-defying ways. He uses no glue, yet his towers miraculously withstand the afternoon breezes.

The Twins. Nob Hill residents Vivian and Marian Brown, blond, coiffed, 70-something identical twin sisters, are local celebrities simply for dressing exactly alike and never being seen without one another.

The Wild Parrots of Telegraph Hill. A famous flock of wild green parrots, descendents of escapee pets, roosts in the trees around the Filbert Steps. Listen for the noise of their cawing and then see if you can spot these cherry-headed birds.

Robin Williams. The actor/comedian lives near Baker Beach and is said to jog along Crissy Field. Occasionally he shows up unannounced at local comedy clubs.

Walk north to Jackson Street, take a left and another left onto:

⑪ Stockton Street

Grant Street appeals to tourists, but Stockton Street is where Chinatown locals do their shopping. In grocery stores, pigs hang from hooks and crates overflow with exotic vegetables and fruits. Some kids may be transfixed by the live frogs, turtles, eels, and other sea creatures on offer, but it could be too much for squeamish children. Also on this street, herb shops sell dried plants and animal parts, which are weighed out using old-fashioned balance scales, following prescriptions written by traditional Chinese healers. Other stores sell ceremonial “money” and paper goods to be burnt as offerings to ancestors. Even paper DVD players and washing machines are for sale, as no one knows for sure what’s needed in the afterlife.

Walk down to Clay Street and turn right. Go to 965 Clay St., to the:

⑫ Chinese Historical Society of America

Founded in 1963, the purpose of the society is to record and disseminate information about the history and contributions of Chinese immigrants in America. Here you’ll find artifacts, documents, and photographs, such as clothing from the earliest immigrants,

traditional herbs, and the original Chinatown telephone book. (Open Tues–Fri 11am–4pm and Sat–Sun noon–4pm. Admission \$3 adults, \$2 college students with IDs and seniors, \$1 kids 6–17.)

Now walk east on Clay Street past Grant Avenue. On your left you’ll find:

⑬ Portsmouth Square

Captain John B. Montgomery of the *USS Portsmouth* raised a flag here in 1846 to declare San Francisco part of the United States. A year later California’s first public school was opened on the plaza, and just a year after that Sam Brannan announced the discovery of gold in the state. Today, the square is an important communal center for Chinatown residents, who practice tai chi, gamble over cards, or bring children to frolic here. Grab a seat on a bench and let the kids run around to work up an appetite.

Walk down Clay Street to Kearny Street and make a right. Go to 631 Kearney St., where you can:



TAKE A BREAK

If you’re ready for a substantial meal, try **The R & G Lounge**, which features more authentic menu items than you find in many Chinese restaurants. (p. 119).

WALKING TOUR 2

THE EMBARCADERO & FISHERMAN’S WHARF

Start:	SBC Park.
Finish:	Aquatic Park.
Time:	Half a day.
Best Time:	Any warm weekday.
Worst Time:	Any summer Saturday when PIER 39 is packed with tourists.

This is an easy, flat 3-mile stroll that’s meant to take a good half day with stops to play and eat.

To get to the starting point of this tour, take the closest Muni streetcar. All the underground streetcars, with the exception of cer-

tain N-Judah trains, end at the Embarcadero Station. If you are not already on an N-Judah that goes to the Mission Bay/Cal Train Station,

Walking Tour: The Embarcadero & Fisherman's Wharf



Take a Break



- 1 SBC Park
- 2 Herb Caen Way
- 3 South Beach Park
- 4 Bike Hut
- 5 Firehouse Engine 35
- 6 Ferry Building
- 7 The Embarcadero
- 8 Pier 39 and Fisherman's Wharf
- 9 Aquatic Park



Taylor's Refresher



cross over to the other side of the platform at the Embarcadero Station and board one. As you come out from below ground, look for the large brick Hills Plaza at 2 Harrison St. and 345 Spear St. The Harrison Street building was constructed in 1925 and is a national landmark. Just south of this building is:

1 SBC Park

This home of the San Francisco Giants baseball team, located at 2nd and King streets, was the first privately financed major league baseball park since Dodger Stadium in 1962. There's a fun playground behind the bleachers with an 80-foot wooden Coca-Cola bottle housing some of the best slides in town. There's also an area where kids can practice their own game of baseball and a parked cable car that's a hit with little ones. The play area is free and open to the public unless there's a game going on (see "Parks & Playgrounds," in chapter 8, for more information).

From the stadium, walk north on:

2 Herb Caen Way

This section of the Embarcadero honors the departed newspaper columnist Herb Caen, who reported on the city's movers and shakers and wrote about San Francisco with humor and passion for 50 years.

On the right you'll come to:

3 South Beach Park

This park contains a little playground suitable for preschoolers. The 70-foot-tall, ten-ton sculpture by Mark di Suvero is called "Sea Change."

Continuing along the Embarcadero, the next landmark you come to is the:

4 Bike Hut

The owner of this not-for-profit shop hires and trains at-risk youth to repair bikes, and he's a bit of a character in his own right. If you decide to abandon your walk in favor of a bike ride, you can rent a bike for \$5 an hour or \$20 per day. Fees include a lock and helmet. (Daily 10am–6pm; ☎ 415/543-4335; www.thebikehut.com).

Continue down the Embarcadero toward the Bay Bridge. As you walk underneath the bridge you'll again see the Hills Bros. Building, now on your left at Harrison Street. On your right is Pier 24, the home of:

5 Firehouse Engine 35

Peek through the fence to see Fireboat 1. If you've ever wondered what happens if a ship catches fire, now you know.

The view opens up as you pass the bridge. Sailboats ply the water, bicyclists and skaters whiz by, and coming into view is the:

6 Ferry Building

Newly reopened after a \$70 million renovation, this attractive building houses some of the best gourmet food stores in the city (p. 160). If it's before 2pm on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, or Sunday, you'll find a terrific farmer's market here. On Saturday mornings, musicians in the back area hold kids' interest, as if the free samples of ripe fruits, roasted nuts, and fruit-filled pastries weren't enough.



TAKE A BREAK

On Saturdays, buy breakfast from one of the restaurant carts behind the Ferry Building.

Grab a bench and enjoy a mouth-watering meal as you watch the ferries come and go. At other times, my favorite family destination in the Ferry Building is **Taylor's Refresher** (p. 122). It's a gourmet take on your ordinary diner, using naturally raised beef and produce from the Farmer's Market. Order burgers, sweet potato fries, and shakes at the counter and enjoy your lunch at an outdoor table.

Continue northwest, along:

7 The Embarcadero

The entire stretch of oceanfront walkway between the Ferry Building and Fisherman's Wharf is a magnet for pedestrians, cyclists, and runners. Pier 7 was a celebrated skateboarding destination for youths from diverse backgrounds until barriers were placed to prevent them from getting fresh air and exercise. Well, I'm not sure why

Tips Feet, Don't Fail Me Now

If little legs tire, there are alternatives. The F-Market streetcar makes several stops on its route down Market Street to the Ferry Building and just beyond PIER 39. You'll also see "pedicabs," pedal-powered minicabs, wheeling around the Embarcadero. Two or three people can fit on the single seat, and the driver will whisk you off to a nearby destination for \$4 to \$8 per person, depending on where you're headed.

the barriers were put there, but it's too bad. Anyway, what you will find along this stretch of city, in addition to views of the bay and urban skyline, are several 13-foot-tall metal pylons and bronze plaques embedded in the sidewalk. The pylons and plaques are imprinted with photographs, drawings, poetry, and historical facts about the waterfront.

Continue along the water until you get to:

PIER 39 and Fisherman's Wharf

The distance from Pier 7 to PIER 39 is less than a mile, but as you approach Fisherman's Wharf the activity level rises dramatically. The number of families waiting for ferries to Alcatraz or Sausalito combined with tourists milling around the boardwalk gives a carnival-like feel to the atmosphere. It can overwhelm younger children, so keep an especially close watch on yours. There are plenty of things to see in this area (see the "Fisherman's Wharf" section under "The Top Attractions,"

in chapter 6, for details). You may want to end your tour here, but I'd suggest forging ahead, as the nicest part of the wharf lies beyond all this.

Once you pass the masses on Jefferson Street, the crowd thins and the city begins to feel like it's yours again by the time you reach the end of this stroll at:

Aquatic Park

You have now reached the **Hyde Street Pier** (p. 168), the Municipal Pier, a large grassy park, and a small strip of man-made beach. Every morning, hearty members of the Dolphin Club brave the beach's frigid waters, where temperatures usually linger in the low 50s, rarely cresting 60°F. Kids will enjoy playing in the sand or running around on the grassy park. You can also check out the **Maritime Museum** (p. 168), built in 1939 as a WPA project and resembling a luxury ocean liner. For a good view of the hills, walk out on the Municipal Pier.

WALKING TOUR 3 SOUTH OF MARKET

Start:	Palace Hotel.
Finish:	San Francisco Shopping Centre.
Time:	Two hours to a half day depending on how long you spend at Yerba Buena Gardens and the other attractions.
Best Time:	Weekends when there's entertainment at Yerba Buena Gardens.
Worst Time:	Anytime Zeum is closed.

This stroll doesn't cover much square footage, as the attractions south of Market Street are contained in the blocks between Market and Howard streets from 2nd to 5th streets. There are so many, however, that you could spend most of the day here.

Begin your walk at 2 New Montgomery St. at Market Street, at the:

1 Palace Hotel

The stained-glass-domed Garden Court dining room at this historic landmark was formerly the carriage entrance. With its massive marble columns and ceiling made from 80,000 panes of glass, it is one of the most extraordinary public rooms in the city. Poke your heads into the **Pied Piper Bar** as well to regard the \$2.5 million Maxfield Parrish painting of the same name.

Next, walk east on New Montgomery to Mission Street and turn right. Across the street, at 655 Mission, is the:

2 Cartoon Art Museum

This small gallery contains movie cels, political cartoons, and underground comics. Although younger kids may enjoy seeing scenes from Disney movies and teens may appreciate the more sophisticated political cartoons, I find this place somewhat limited, considering the entrance fee. If the weather is bad, step inside. Otherwise, give yourself more time at Yerba Buena Gardens. See p. 162 for a full review of the museum.

Back across the street, at 678 Mission St., is the:

3 California Historical Society

The collection is aimed at researchers, but a quick look at the surveyor's maps, photographs, Native American artifacts, and exhibit on the California missions and Junipero Serra will take at most 20 minutes and could give your student a heads up in history class. Call ☎ 415/357-1848 for more information.

Continue heading down Mission Street. Make a left on 3rd Street. On your left will be the:

4 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA)

In addition to a spectacular permanent collection of 20th Century art

and equally impressive temporary exhibits, the museum's Learning Lounge offers activities for kids. See p. 178 for a full review of SFMOMA.



TAKE A BREAK

The **Caffé Museo** at the SFMOMA has tasty soups, salads, and sandwiches, as well as indoor and outdoor seating.

A walk up 4th Street and a left onto Market Street brings you to the:

5 Yerba Buena Gardens

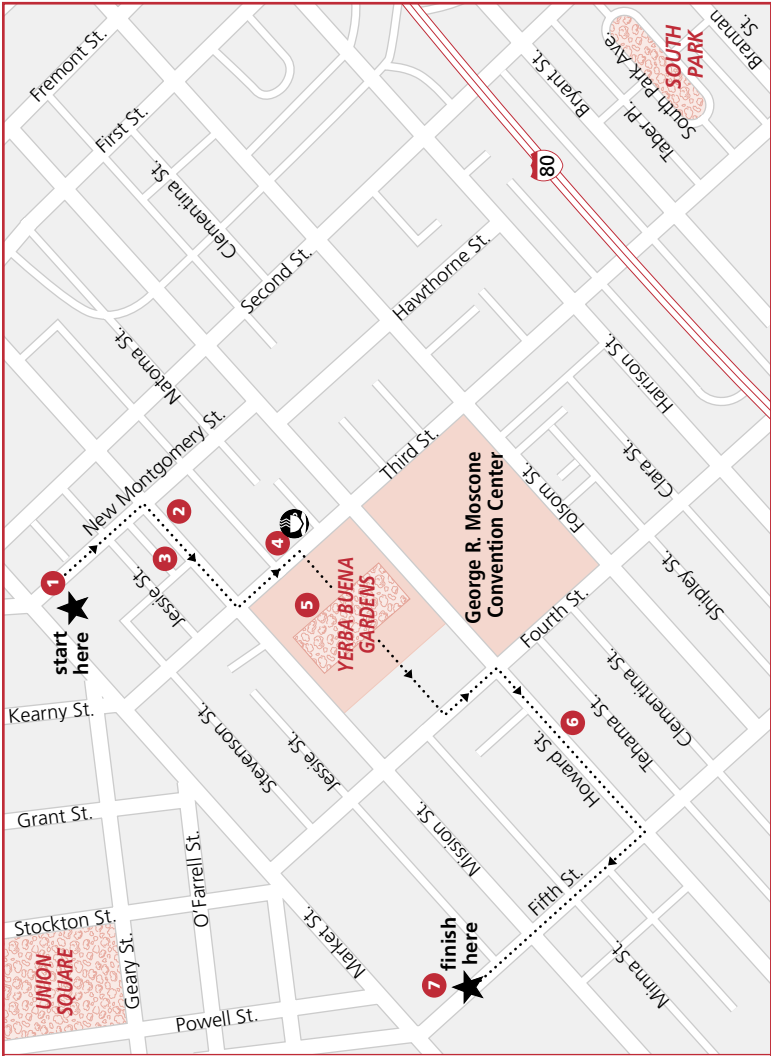
After solemnly viewing modern art, your kids will be glad for the opportunity to run around and stretch their legs. Depending on ages and interests, they can enjoy the play area and slides, carousel, ice skating rink, bowling lanes, or Zeum. (The full list of options are described under "Yerba Buena Gardens" and "Zeum" in chapter 6, "Seeing the Sights.") Or you can just stroll around the gardens that border Mission Street. Here you'll find a waterfall memorial honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and a "Sister Cities" garden. The walkway passing over Howard Street leads to the top floor of the Metreon, another area for children's activities, also described in chapter 6.

If your kids are ready for another educational experience, head southwest to Howard Street and turn right. Cross 4th Street to 875 Howard St., the:

6 California Academy of Sciences

In its temporary location until 2008, this natural history museum and aquarium has an array of fascinating and instructive displays about the natural world. See chapter 6 for more information.

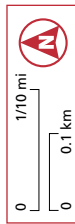
Walking Tour: SoMa



- 1 Palace Hotel
- 2 Cartoon Art Museum
- 3 California Historical Society
- 4 San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA)
- 5 Yerba Buena Gardens
- 6 California Academy of Sciences
- 7 San Francisco Shopping Centre



Take a Break



From the front door, turn left on Howard Street and right on 5th Street. Walk up to the corner of Market Street. Here you'll find the:

7 San Francisco Shopping Centre

If family members still have energy after the edifying excursion throughout SoMa, there's always the mall. You'll find kids' attire at Nordstrom,

Gymboree, and Kids' Foot Locker. Sanrio, with its extensive collection of Hello Kitty items, is next to the food court downstairs. Beyond that, few stores here would interest younger children. If everyone's ready to go home, the Powell Street Muni and BART stations are across the street.

WALKING TOUR 4 RUSSIAN HILL TO TELEGRAPH HILL

Start: Lombard Street.

Finish: Levi Strauss Plaza.

Time: Three hours.

Best Time: Mornings.

Worst Time: Weekend afternoons when Lombard Street fills with cars.

"Stroll" probably isn't the most accurate word to describe this walk. Encompassing some hills and stairways, you'll see many of San Francisco's most well-known sights, but I'd think twice before embarking on this climb if there's a probability that you'll end up having to carry a child. Hills are steep and strollers will make negotiating the stairways difficult.

Start anywhere you can pick up the Powell-Hyde cable car and exit at:

1 Lombard Street

"The Crookedest Street in the World" isn't even the crookedest in San Francisco (p. 186), but it is pretty. Walk down the staircases on either side of the car-clogged road.

At Leavenworth Street turn left and walk 1 block to Chestnut Street. Turn right and look for 800 Chestnut St., where you'll find the:

2 San Francisco Art Institute

Founded in 1871, this is the oldest art school in the West. A fountain in the entrance courtyard has goldfish that tots may want to take a peek at before you enter to admire a 1931 mural by Mexican artist Diego Rivera, as well as a gallery displaying student artwork. The **San Francisco Art Institute Café** is a good place for an inexpensive lunch with a great view. Next to the cafe is a balcony offering an unobstructed bay view. See p. 181 for more information.

Walk downhill 1½ blocks east to Columbus Avenue, which cuts through North Beach. At the junction of Columbus, Mason, and Greenwich streets, you'll find:

3 North Beach Playground

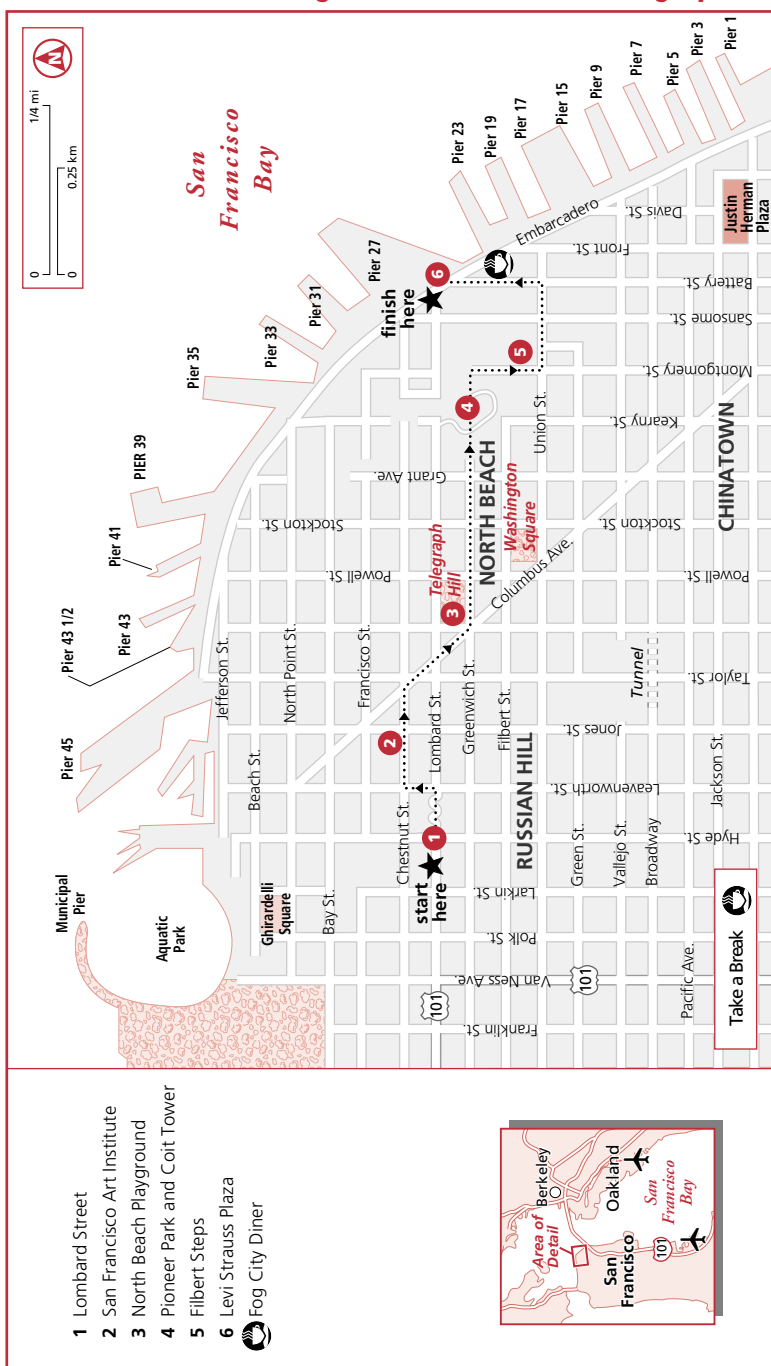
This 2½-acre park includes a pool and soccer, hockey, and lacrosse fields, in addition to a large playground. Buy a cappuccino at one of the many cafes around here and let the kids hang out at the park while you gather strength for the upcoming trek.

From the park, continue east 2½ blocks on this residential part of Greenwich Street. A half block past Grant Avenue are the Greenwich Steps, which lead to:

4 Pioneer Park and Coit Tower

Listen for the wild parrots carrying on. Then get your camera ready to photograph both the birds and the stellar view from Coit Tower, a 210-foot landmark that boasts some of the greatest views in the city. See p. 181 for tower admission information.

Walking Tour: Russian Hill to Telegraph Hill



On either side of Pioneer Park are more stairs; the wooden ones on the south side are the:

5 Filbert Steps

Take the stairs down the hill, stopping to exclaim over the Grace Marchant garden and the Victorian cottages.

The steps will bring you to:

6 Levi Strauss Plaza

Here are the headquarters of Levi Strauss & Co, which was founded in San Francisco. Legend has it that during the gold rush, Levi Strauss had the idea of making trousers out of tent fabric and that he strengthened the pockets with rivets so they could withstand

the work of mining and the weight of gold. History is also found under the plaza, below which lie some of the hundreds of ships abandoned by crews eager to head for the hills during the height of the gold rush. Kids can frolic in the plaza's walk-through fountain, and they won't get wet unless it's on purpose.



TAKE A BREAK

If you're ready for a meal, head across the street to the Fog City Diner (p. 120).

WALKING TOUR 5 THE MARINA

- Start:** Palace of Fine Arts.
Finish: Fort Mason.
Time: At least three hours, depending how long you stay at the Exploratorium.
Best Time: Mornings.
Worst Time: Evenings.

This walk takes you through one of the more scenic neighborhoods of San Francisco. Plan on spending all morning here, or longer, if you want more time for the Exploratorium.

Starting from Union Square, take the 30-Stockton bus to The Marina. Exit at the corner of Broderick and Jefferson streets. Walk one block east to Baker Street and continue across the lawn. On your left you'll see the:

1 Exploratorium

A terrific institution dedicated to interactive education, this science museum will delight kids of all ages and their parents. See p. 160 for details. Plan to spend at least an hour here.

Adjacent to the Exploratorium is:

2 The Palace of Fine Arts

This is the only structure left from the Panama-Pacific Exhibition of 1915. Kids can enjoy running around the

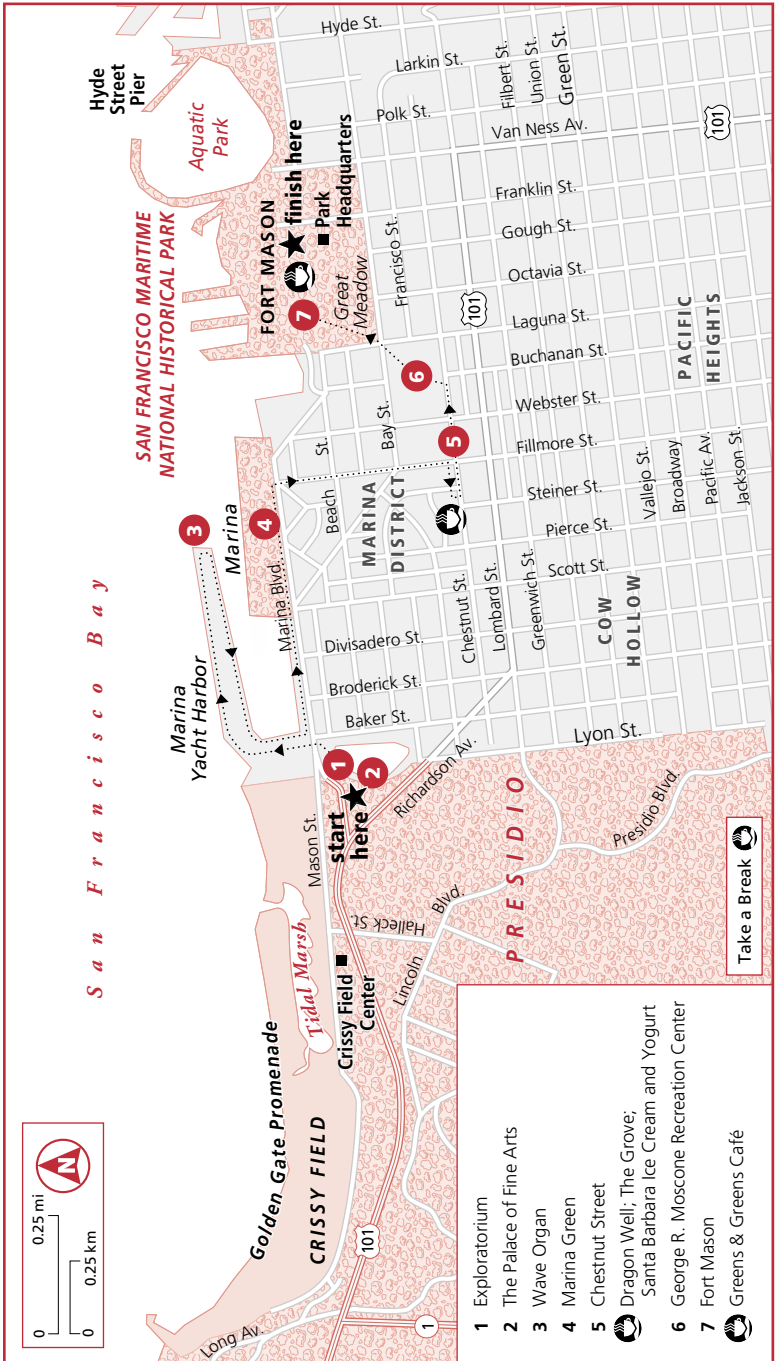
lovely grounds of this neoclassical dome and gazing at the ducks, swans, geese, and seagulls in the pond.

From here walk up Baker Street towards the water. Cross Marina Blvd. and go straight ahead to the Marina breakwater. Walk to the end of the breakwater, where you'll find the:

3 Wave Organ

Designed by scientists from the Exploratorium, this unusual structure is an amazing piece of environmental art. Listening tubes emerge from the water below through the concrete and rock structure, capturing the ebb and flow of the ocean currents in strange gurgling and humming sounds.

Walking Tour: The Marina



From here, walk back to the start of the jetty and head east. You'll be walking along the:

4 Marina Green

This stretch of lawn along the San Francisco Bay is a popular place to run, walk, bike, or rollerblade. On weekends, it's full with kids playing soccer and, especially on windy afternoons, people flying all kinds of colorful and acrobatic kites.

Walk until you reach Fillmore Street and then turn right. Walk down to Chestnut Street and turn right.

5 Chestnut Street

Lined with shops and cafes, this popular street is in one of the most family-oriented neighborhoods of San Francisco. The plethora of strollers is a guarantee that you'll find plenty of family-friendly restaurants here. Your kids may want to stop at **Catnip and Bones** to pick up a gift for your pet back home. If another sibling is on the way, stop by **Dress Maternity** to shop for some of the most stylish maternity attire anywhere.



TAKE A BREAK

Among the many kid-friendly places to eat on this street is **Dragon Well** (p. 132), which serves fresh and healthy Chinese food. If it's sunny, snag an outdoor table at **The Grove** (p. 132), which has great salads and sandwiches. After lunch, buy a cone at Santa Barbara Ice Cream and Yogurt at 2240 Chestnut St., which carries **Mitchell's ice cream** (p. 143), the best in town.

in the afternoons and weekends. Younger kids will love the enclosed playground, which has structures appropriate for toddlers and children up to eight years old, as well as the only two seesaws I've seen in San Francisco. The Marina branch of the public library next to the playground has a nice children's section.

From Chestnut Street you can catch the 30-Stockton bus back to downtown. If you are still raring to go, walk northeast across the park, towards the corner of Laguna and Bay streets. Cross Bay Street. On your right will be:

7 Fort Mason

The collection of piers, buildings, and expansive lawn known as Fort Mason belonged to the US military until 1972. During World War II and the Korean conflict, it was the point of embarkation for well over a million U.S. servicemen. Let kids run around on the grass while you enjoy the view or walk down to the **Fort Mason Center** (p. 177) to check out the many diverse museums there.



TAKE A BREAK

If you're ready to eat again, don't miss **Greens** (p. 130), a great vegetarian restaurant with one of the best views in town. Or stop at Greens Café, where you can pick up a drink and pastry and then walk out to admire the view from the sailboat marina next to Fort Mason.

Walk east on Chestnut Street, continuing across Fillmore Street. On your left you will see the:

6 George R. Moscone Recreation Center

The soccer and baseball fields here fill up with boys and girls at team practice

WALKING TOUR 6 THE VERTICAL TOUR

Start:	Union Square.
Finish:	St. Francis Hotel.
Time:	90 minutes.
Best Time:	Sundays or any day at dusk.
Worst Time:	Check-in and checkout times at the hotels (9–11am and 3–4pm).

This tour takes you up, down, and around downtown as you hunt out the most exciting of the city's glass elevators.

From Union Square, walk east on Post Street toward Market Street. At Kearny Street, turn right and walk to Market Street. See who can find Lotta's Fountain, an important icon of the 1906 earthquake. (Painted gold, it's hard to miss.) Continue walking toward the bay down Market Street. Turn left on Drumm Street to our first stop, the:

① Hyatt Regency Hotel

Inside the atrium lobby, look for the bank of five glass elevators. One was used in the Mel Brooks's movie *High Anxiety*. There may be a line of people waiting to ride the 20 stories up to the Equinox Restaurant, which revolves and provides a fabulous panoramic view but only mediocre food. The mostly interior view from the elevators is grand; the lobby of the Hyatt, with its sculpture, greenery, and terraces, is a spectacular sight.

When you are finished with the Hyatt, stop by the Ferry Building across the Embarcadero to admire the restored atrium and glass skylights. Then board a California Street cable car (½ block from the Hyatt) and get off at Mason Street, which will put you right in front of our next destination, the:

② Fairmont Hotel

You'll find the Fairmont's glass elevator at the east end of the hotel. Running at 500 feet per minute, it won't take long to ascend the 24 stories to the Fairmont Crown. You'll see Coit Tower to the left, Chinatown straight ahead, and SoMa and the South Bay to the right.

Back on the lobby level, walk down the hall on the California Street side of the hotel and out the back to the Fairmont's garden. When you are ready to resume, cross California Street and head downhill (south) on Mason Street. At Post Street, turn right and walk into the:

③ Pan Pacific Hotel

If it looks vaguely familiar, that's because its designer, John C. Portman, also designed the Hyatt Regency. The Pan Pacific's atrium is 17 stories and, again, the brass- and glass-enclosed elevator, moving at a dramatic 750 feet per minute, offers an interior view.

From the Pan Pacific, walk east 1 block to Powell Street and turn right. At the corner of Powell and Geary streets is our final stop, the:

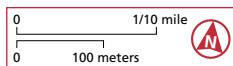
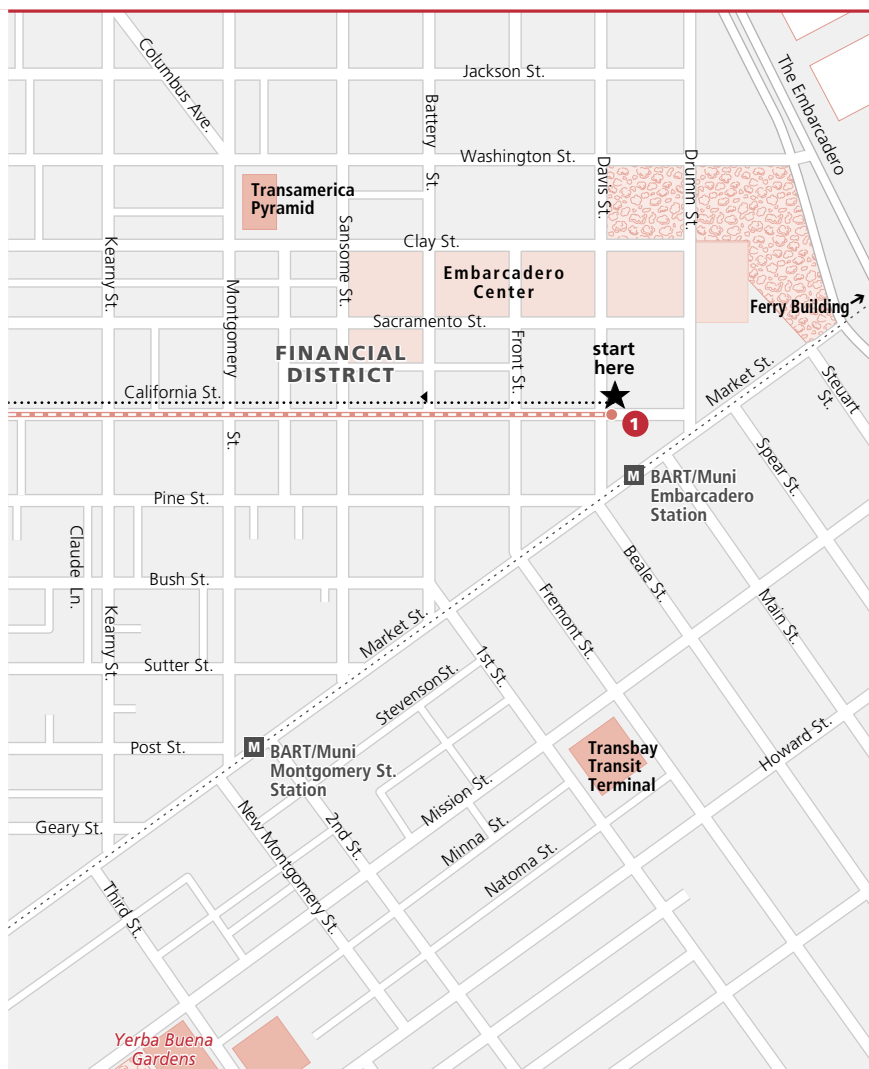
④ Westin St. Francis Hotel

Last but definitely not least, the five outside glass elevators at the Westin St. Francis are so awesome that school groups sometimes come by on field trips. The elevators are located at the 32-story Tower Building. Push "32" and prepare yourself for a 30-second, 1,000-feet-per-minute rush to the top. The view of the bay and downtown is absolutely beautiful on a clear day. You may have to give this ride another go at night for comparison's sake.

Walking Tour: The Vertical Tour



- 1 Hyatt Regency Hotel
- 2 Fairmont Hotel
- 3 Pan Pacific Hotel
- 4 Westin St. Francis Hotel



-  BART/Muni
-  Cable Car
-  Cable Car Turnaround

For the Active Family

Given its location in sunny California, San Francisco draws its fair share of outdoor and sports enthusiasts. Even though the city proper may be fogbound in the summer, the temperate weather means staying indoors is rarely a more attractive option than getting outside. Green space is abundant—almost every neighborhood has a park or playground—and the bay, the ocean, and the woods are all immediately accessible. Even the mountains are just a few hours' drive away.

City residents have a terrific resource at their disposal in the form of the **Recreation and Parks Department** (☎ 415/831-2700; www.parks.sfgov.org). Along with maintaining the parks, playgrounds, tennis courts, and swimming pools, this office runs all kinds of sports programs for kids and adults through the individual recreation centers found at the larger facilities such as Moscone Recreation Center in the Marina, Glen Park, Sunset Recreation Center, Balboa Park, and Potrero Hill. It even sponsors low-cost art classes at Sharon Studio in Golden Gate Park and a teen musical theater group that performs a few times a year. In the summer, basketball fans can attend exciting Pro-Am men's and women's basketball league games at Kezar Pavilion in the Haight for free. And did I mention golf? San

Francisco has five gemlike public courses within the city limits.

The **Golden Gate National Park Association (GGNRA)**, a nonprofit organization dedicated to the preservation of our local open space, works hand in hand with the National Parks Service to make the 75,000 acres of parkland under their jurisdiction as user-friendly and enticing as possible. Docents and rangers regularly lead walks and talks on the flora and fauna, history, and geology of the area. Walkers and hikers have much to explore, from the brick and granite fortifications in Fort Point to the remnants of Fort Funston, to the trails in the Marin Headlands just across the Golden Gate Bridge. The newest addition to the GGNRA is **Crissy Field** (p. 158), recently restored with a recreated tidal marsh, picnic facilities, an educational center, and the all-important Warming Hut, where you can get a hot chocolate.

For many kids, the best part of a vacation involves some active sport or outdoor adventure, be it ice skating, riding horses, swimming, fishing, or just taking a hike together. So although San Francisco's museums, shops, and restaurants may thrill parents, try to mix it up a little. There are plenty wonderful, more active pursuits to consider as well.

1 Parks & Playgrounds

San Francisco supports many more parks in the city limits than those mentioned below. I've not listed playgrounds too far from the more touristed areas to be useful, unless there was a compelling reason to include them. For a more

complete listing, visit the www.gokid.org or www.gocitykids.com websites. (The Recreation and Parks website doesn't really have any helpful information.)

Please note that some of San Francisco's parks are also popular with dogs and their owners. Some parks have designated off-leash areas, but—in keeping with San Francisco's free-spirited attitude—a few owners don't want to constrain their pets' freedom by keeping them on a leash, even in areas where the law dictates they do so. When dogs and kids find themselves occupying the same space, the result can be tension between dog owners and parents. Most dogs are well-trained and accustomed to sharing green space with children, but some could get startled if a child runs at them. Likewise, your children may not be used to seeing dogs run around off leash. This is usually only an issue at a handful of city parks, which I have noted here.

SOUTH OF MARKET

The San Francisco Giants baseball organization was subject to a lot of flack when they allowed the Coca-Cola Company to sponsor a play area behind the bleacher section at SBC Park. The source of all the local indignation was an 80-foot wooden Coca-Cola bottle. Despite the overt commercialism, it's still one nifty playground. The **Coca-Cola Fan Lot** (☎ 415/972-2000; Willie Mays Plaza, 2nd and King streets; N-Judah toward Cal Train Station) is open to the public during the postseason from 11am to 5pm Thursday to Monday and during the season on non-game days. On game days, it's open only to ticket holders. Entrance is free. That commotion-causing wooden bottle contains the most exciting sets of slides in town: two 56-foot-long curving slides and two 20-foot-long twisting slides. A 50-by-50-foot replica of the ballpark gives kids from 3 to 7 an opportunity to play ball just like the big guys. Little sluggers can blast a homer off a batting tee, use the pitching machine, or hit off a pint-sized pitcher if one's available, while parents watch from the sidelines. Another section, a 45-foot base race from home to first, lets kids show off how much faster they run than their parents. There's also a speed pitch that times how fast your future MVPs can throw, a photo booth, and plaques etched with the signatures of past Giants that can be used to make rubbings. In addition to all this fun, the Fan Lot has some of the best views in town.

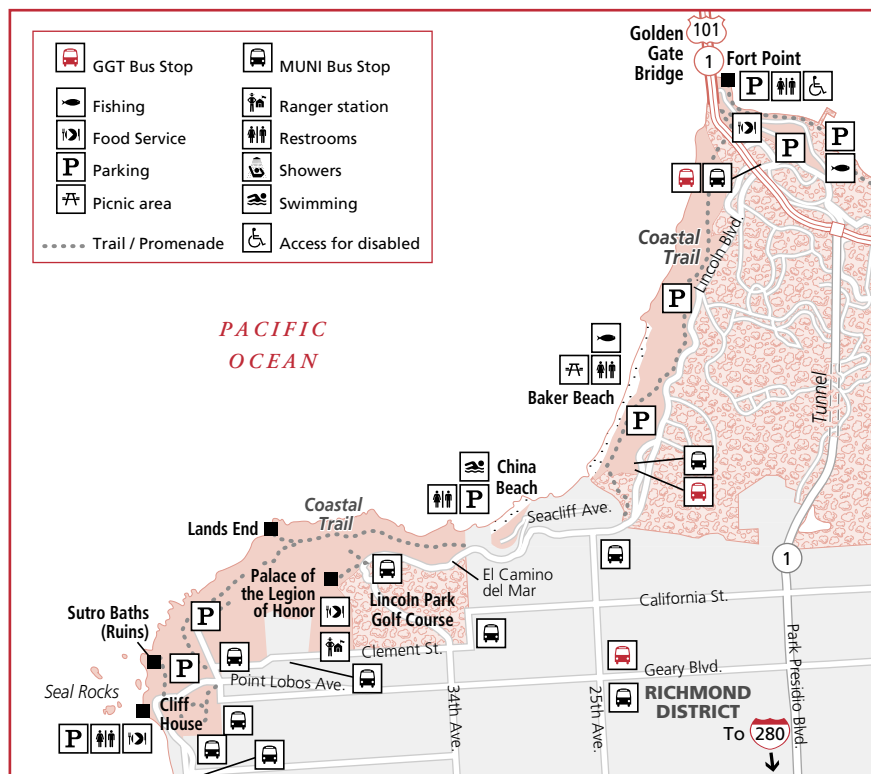
Just a bit down the Embarcadero heading toward the Ferry Building, look for **South Beach Park**. This toddler playground is sunny, compact, and sweet, and on game days you'll have the thrill of listening to the roar of the crowd. **Yerba Buena Gardens** (p. 162) is an exceptional urban park and art center, and, along with its other attractions, there's a rooftop playground in the vicinity of the bowling center/skating rink. This is no ordinary playground. Besides some great slides, there's a bowl-shaped pit with a spongy surface and sloped walls that is great for climbing around, musical pipes, and other unique play items.

CHINATOWN

Winner of a *San Francisco Bay Guardian* "Best of the Bay" award for the best multigenerational park, **The Chinese Playground** on Sacramento Street (between Stockton St. and Grant Ave.; ☎ 415/274-0202) is a bi-level park built on the side of a hill. Although it doesn't have a lawn, it does house two outdoor sandboxes, game and sports fields, an indoor gym, and a recreation center.

Portsmouth Square (p. 166), on top of Portsmouth Garage, is a regular stop on the Chinatown walking tour circuit. The sandy playground, suitable for kids under 7, is compact. There are plenty of benches, lots to look at—including

Golden Gate National Recreation Area

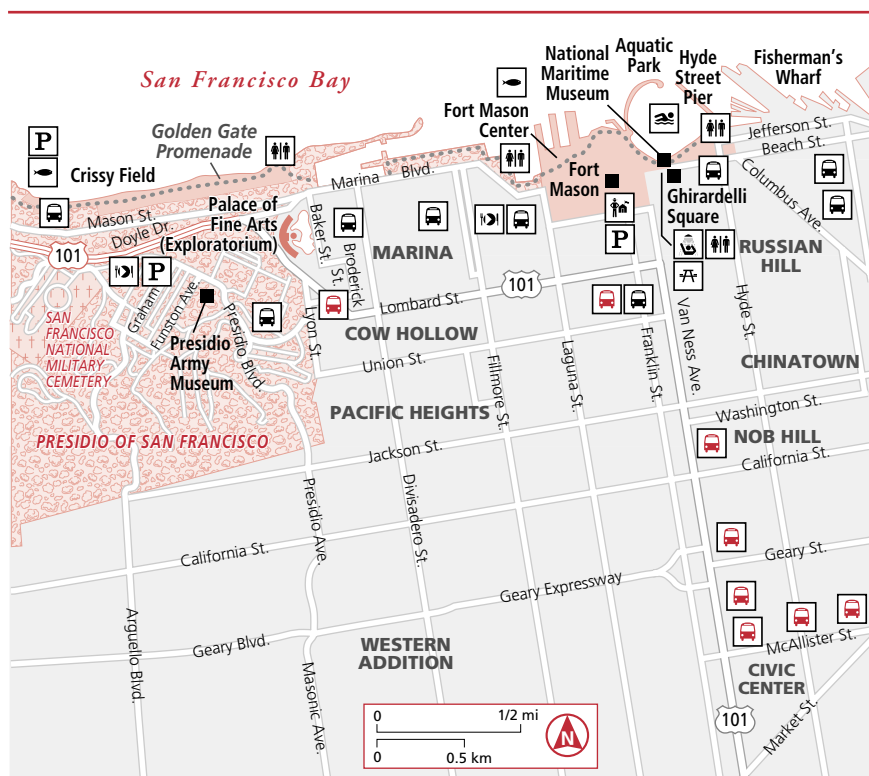


locals practicing their tai chi moves—and larger-than-life views of the Financial District. It's also historic: this was the site of the city's first public school. Not far from there, at Grant Street, between Pine and California streets, **St. Mary's Square** (p. 188) is a pleasant spot with grass, benches, and a colorful play structure for toddlers.

NORTH BEACH

The **Joe DiMaggio North Beach Playground** (651 Lombard St., at Mason St.; ☎ 415/274-0200) is scheduled to reopen after major renovations in the spring of 2005. One large pool has been replaced with two pools, a lap pool and recreation pool, with different water temperatures to accommodate a range of aquatic programs. Swimming rates are expected to remain at \$5 for adults, 50¢ for kids under 17, \$3 for seniors, and \$5 for a family of 2 adults and 2 children. With a new locker facility and clubhouse as well, it promises to be a great place to cool off. In addition, the area has a large playground, picnic tables, tennis courts, a basketball court and baseball diamond, and a huge field for soccer and field hockey.

An old favorite of ours is **Michelangelo Park** (Greenwich St., between Leavenworth and Jones sts.). Well-protected and almost hidden from view, it's well worth the walk up a steep hill. Although it's got a lovely lawn, I have never seen an off-leash dog here.



CIVIC CENTER & HAYES VALLEY

Famous for the Victorian row houses known as the “Painted Ladies” on Steiner Street, **Alamo Square Park** (between Steiner, Scott, Hayes, and Fulton sts.; see p. 180) also features great views of downtown San Francisco. The park itself is small, only 4 square blocks, with a simple playground and a single tennis court. It’s a meeting ground for neighborhood doggies.

After a trip to the Main Library, you could drop by the playground in **Civic Center Plaza** on McAllister Street and let the appropriate parties try out the new climbing structure. Unfortunately, you’ll want to check for vagrants first.

THE MARINA & COW HOLLOW

For toddlers and younger children, the tiny **Cow Hollow Playground** on Baker Street, between Greenwich and Union streets, is a lovely protected and enclosed area. A kids’ art studio is also open most weekdays, except from 1 to 2pm.

The spacious, enclosed playground at the **Moscone Recreation Center** ★★ (Chestnut and Laguna sts.; 415/292-2006) was fully renovated in 2001, with creative climbing structures, slides, swings, and old-style seesaws. In addition, there are basketball and tennis courts, baseball diamonds, putting greens, soccer fields, and a gym. On school-year afternoons and weekends, the fields are busy with games. With all the kids here, dog owners do generally keep their furry companions leashed. If the weather turns sour, you can seek cover next door at the San Francisco Public Library’s Marina Branch, which has a quaint children’s section.

PACIFIC HEIGHTS

In the heart of the city's most expensive neighborhood you'll find two lovely, well-tended parks with city views and expansive lawns. With so much grass, both parks are popular with dogs and their human companions. Fortunately, the play areas are fenced in, so everyone gets along.

Alta Plaza Park (between Steiner, Scott, Clay, and Jackson sts.; ☎ 415/292-2002) is worth checking out for the view alone, although the grass and trees are also delightful. Facilities include tennis and basketball courts. Although the wooden playground structures appear dated, they have everything a kid would want, including climbing areas, swings, and slides. When the breeze is blowing, this hilltop playground gets very windy.

Lafayette Park, between Gough, Sacramento, Laguna, and Washington streets, has walking paths, a fenced-in playground, nice views, picnic tables, and tennis courts. It is also dog friendly, with an unfenced dog run available.

THE PRESIDIO

The oldest continuously-operated military garrison in the nation until its decommissioning in 1989, the Presidio of San Francisco was transferred to the National Parks Service in 1994. Because it must become financially self-sustaining by 2013, the 800 buildings on the site, which include historic residences, military barracks, and the 23-acre former Letterman Hospital, are undergoing careful redevelopment. At the same time, the Presidio Trust, the body planning and overseeing the transformation, is mindful of the role these 1,491 acres may play in the future of the community at large. The Presidio is filled with recreational resources. Start with a stop at the **Visitor's Center** (☎ 415/561-4323; daily 9am–5pm), currently located in the Presidio Officers' Club, Building 50, at the Main Post. You can obtain a map of the Presidio and browse the books and GGNRA souvenirs. Rangers are often on hand to answer questions and they regularly lead 1-hour walks. You can find a schedule of events on the Presidio Trust website, www.presidiotrust.gov. The grounds include 14 miles of bike paths, 11 miles of walking trails, a boardsailing area at **Crissy Field** (p. 158), beaches, picnicking facilities, a national cemetery, a pet cemetery, and a free shuttle service, **PresidiGo**, to help get you from here to there. **PresidiGo** operates weekdays from 7am to 7pm and weekends from 10am to 6pm on a 30-minute schedule, with two routes and connecting service with Muni buses. You can eat pretty well here during the day: the **Acre Cafe** at the Thoreau Center (☎ 415/561-2273; near the Letterman Complex where George Lucas of *Star Wars* fame is building the Letterman Digital Arts Center) uses organic produce and free-range meats in its soups, salads, sandwiches, quesadillas, and specials. You can purchase artfully made breakfast, lunch, and picnic boxes at **Desiree Cafe** inside the San Francisco Film Centre near the Main Post (☎ 415/561-2336), open Monday through Friday from 8am to 4pm. **Crissy Field Center** (☎ 415/561-7756), open Wednesday through Sunday from 9am to 5pm, has a cafe and operates the **Warming Hut** (☎ 415/561-3042) on the west end of Crissy Field, open daily from 9am to 5pm.

Fun Fact A Little Park History

The Presidio was established by Spanish soldiers in 1776, the same year the United States of America became an official independent entity on the other side of the continent. Mexico took over the area in 1822, and in 1846 the U.S. army assumed control of the post.

Tips Fun for a Crowd

If you have a group of 10 or more people at your disposal, you can schedule a program or docent-led expedition, such as a bike tour of historical places, by phoning the Presidio's **Community Outreach Coordinator** at ☎ 415/561-4317.

On the southern side of the Presidio, not terribly far from Sacramento Street, is the recently redone **Julius Kahn Park**. The lovely playground sits next to the trees and features state-of-the-art playground equipment you probably haven't seen anywhere else: round swings, oddly shaped seesaws, and so on. There are picnic facilities, restrooms, tennis and basketball courts, playing fields, and hiking paths into the Presidio. The most convenient bus, the 43-Masonic, takes you close, but not to, this spot. Muni buses 28, 29, or 82 X also stop inside the Presidio.

THE CASTRO & NOE VALLEY

Dolores Park, an easy commute on the J-Church streetcar, commands the sort of view that on a sunny day convinces out-of-towners that they ought to move to the city. Its grassy slopes lure sunbathers and picnicking couples, and the rolling lawn attracts children's birthday parties and local doggies. With a mediocre playground and many off-leash dogs, this isn't the best play area for toddlers—but it is a good place for kids to stretch their legs after visiting Mission Dolores (p. 177).

Duboce Park, between Scott and Steiner streets, has undergone a complete face-lift. Two substantial grants provided funds to renovate the playground with state-of-the-art equipment, a climbing wall, slides—the whole bit. The N-Judah streetcar passes right by. At the southwest corner is the **Harvey Milk Recreation Center** (☎ 415/554-9523), specializing in the arts. Classes in dance, music, photography, and drama are offered here at very low cost for adults and children as young as 6.

Douglass Playground, at Douglass and 27th streets in Noe Valley, has a large lawn, picnic tables, a sandy play structure, decent bathrooms, and a great big slide tucked into the hillsides that borders the park.

THE MISSION

Mission Playground, on 19th Street between Valencia and Linda streets (look for the mural), could be a handy park to know of if you find yourself needing a play break while touring this neighborhood. The equipment is tops and an unlocked gate ensures that off-leash dogs are not a problem. Other facilities include a recreation center and tennis courts.

THE RICHMOND & SUNSET

Golden Gate Park, San Francisco's most famous public grounds, attracts over 75,000 people on the weekends alone. The park is about 3 miles long (bigger than Manhattan's Central Park) and is best appreciated on foot or two wheels. With kids, this can be challenging, so you'll either want to limit your touring to the Conservatory and Children's Playground areas or drive. On weekends and holidays in the summer from 10am to 6pm, you can get around much more efficiently by using the free park shuttle that runs at 20-minute intervals and makes 15 different stops from McLaren Lodge all the way to the Beach Chalet. See p. 172 for more information on the park.

Tips Getting the Scoop on Special Events

The Golden Gate National Parks Association (GGNRA) partners with the National Parks Service to help maintain much of the public land on San Francisco's coastline. The GGNRA sponsors educational programs at various sites—including Crissy Fields, the Presidio, Fort Point, China Beach, and Fort Funston—on a quarterly basis. You can plan ahead to join ranger-led walks, talks, and other programs, some specifically for families, by logging onto www.nps.gov/goga/parknews and downloading the latest Park News and Events calendar.

The lake in **Mountain Lake Park** refers to a 4-acre reservoir that provided San Francisco with water during the gold rush. Located on the edge of the Presidio Golf Course off Lake Street between 8th Avenue and Park Presidio Boulevard, this exceptional park is a great location for families with kids of all ages. There are two playgrounds, one more suitable for under-5s. Be sure to check out the extra wide built-in slide that provides quite a thrill, especially if you happen to bring some heavy cardboard to use as a “sled.” Other facilities include basketball and tennis courts, playing fields, hiking trails, a small beach surrounding the lake, and picnic tables. The 28L-19th Avenue bus drives by the park on its way into the Presidio.

In the inner Richmond, not far from Laurel Village, is **Rossi Pool and Playground** (Arguello Blvd. at Anza St.; ☎ 415/666-7014). It's one of the nicest pools in the city and the playground is big and well-equipped. The park has tennis courts as well, making it a good destination for a variety of activities.

2 The Great Indoors

Gymboree **Ages infant to 4.** If you've had children in the last 20 years, you probably already know about Gymboree, a directed 45-minute play group that also developed into a retailing success. But in case you aren't familiar with the company, Gymboree offers weekly music and movement classes for babies and parents to do together that are designed to follow the appropriate developmental sequence. Organized and divided up by age groups, the Gymboree space contains colorful play equipment that promotes motor and sensory skills and emotional bonding. Music classes introduce rhythms and teach songs. It's also a pleasant way to meet other moms and babies. Drop-in sessions are \$18 per class. 1525 Sloat Blvd., near the San Francisco Zoo. ☎ 415/242-5637. Class times vary based on the age of your child; call for details.

Mission Cliffs  **Ages 6 and up.** This indoor climbing center provides 14,000 feet of wall to conquer for those days when just getting up in the morning doesn't cut it. Instructors are available to teach the basics including belay at \$35 per child or \$60 for two. Because the kids will eventually need a partner on the ground, for a modest sum they'll teach you to belay as well. Phone first to check on how busy the center is if you're arriving on a weekend. Kids love holding birthday parties here.

2295 Harrison St. (at 19th St.). ☎ 415/550-0515. Day pass \$10 kids 14 and under, \$10 adults before 3pm on weekdays, \$18 after 3pm and on weekends. Mon–Fri 6:30am–10pm; Sat–Sun 10am–6pm.

3 Beachcombing

Warm, sunny days along San Francisco's coastline are rarities because the outer Richmond and Sunset neighborhoods are often the last to escape the fog. But when the sun does come out, the beaches are wonderful.

Be aware that the ocean is neither warm nor safe enough for swimming, and signs note that waders and swimmers have died at San Francisco beaches. For one, unpredictable "sneaker" waves, giant waves that form when two or three normal-sized waves merge, can suddenly sweep onto the shore. Also, having surfed at Ocean Beach a few times (and wondered what I've gotten myself into), I can attest to the incredible strength of the rip current. In fact, the last thing you should do is enter the water where you see surfers going in, since surfers usually look for a rip current that can carry them out with minimal paddling. That current could sweep out even a strong swimmer, who, without a wetsuit, would be quickly numbed by the extremely cold water.

Most of San Francisco's beaches don't have the facilities you'd find further south in the state, such as snack shacks, showers, or even restrooms. But the dramatic pounding of the waves and the beauty of the jagged edges of the continent nonetheless lure walkers, bicyclists, skaters, and families armed with buckets and shovels to the beach—bundled up if necessary, but still managing to enjoy the sand and the scene.

The lengthiest stretch of sand is 4-mile-long **Ocean Beach** on the Great Highway. At one end is **Fort Funston** (p. 184), a former U.S. military reserve where explorers can still find the remains of a cannon. Fort Funston is also the premier hang glider launch and landing site, and there's a viewing platform above the beach that provides the perfect spot to watch the action. Around the end of Wawona Street, on the north side of the zoo, a bike/skate path extends parallel to Ocean Beach to Golden Gate Park. Ocean Beach ends near the Cliff House, which completed a multi-million dollar remodel in late 2004.

Heading north along the coastline, past Lincoln Park, is sheltered **China Beach**. Again, this is no place to swim, but the small beach has an observation deck overlooking the Pacific, grills for barbecuing, a grassy picnic area, and bathrooms. North of China Beach, and part of the Presidio, is mile-long **Baker Beach**, probably the most popular beach for families. Picnic tables are scattered among the cypress trees, the sand is inviting, and the bridge and Marin Headland views are inspiring. Look for **Battery Chamberlin**, built in 1904, which holds the last "disappearing gun" on the West Coast. Demonstrations on how it operates are given on the first full weekend of the month between 11am and 3pm. Be aware that the northern tip of Baker Beach is clothing optional—yes, there's a nude beach in San Francisco, which is only surprising because it gets so cold down there.

Inside the bay, the tiny beaches of **Crissy Field** are the best option for families with younger children, since they have almost no waves, and wading is possible on warm days. Just note that the bay currents are still fierce, and the water is very chilly. At the eastern end of Crissy Field, you'll find bathrooms and showers, while the western end has lovely picnic benches, restrooms, and the nearby Warming Hut, where you can purchase a tasty lunch to enjoy at the beach.

4 Sports & Games

ARCHERY

Golden Gate Park has an archery field with nine hay bales off Fulton Street, just to the east of the tulip garden, above the golf course. (Two of the bales are wheelchair accessible.) Conveniently enough, you can rent archery equipment at the nearby **San Francisco Archery Shop** (3795 Balboa St., at 39th Ave.; ☎ 415/751-2776). Equipment rental, which includes a bow, six arrows, arm guard, targets, and pin, is \$25 for the day and includes a lesson if you like. The owner is amenable to giving discounts to families. The bows are lightweight enough for kids 8 and up.

BASEBALL

In the spring, teams are organized and coached through the **Recreation and Parks Department** (contact the individual rec centers), the **Police Activities League** (☎ 415/401-4666; www.sfpal.org), the **Jewish Community Center** (☎ 415/346-6040; www.jccsf.org), and **Little League Baseball** (www.little-league.org).

BASKETBALL

The **Nate Thurmond Courts** on the Panhandle, a narrow stretch of green between Oak and Fell streets on the eastern edge of Golden Gate Park, are the site of some regular and lively pickup games. If you want to shoot some hoops to keep your game up, check the park listings above for centers with basketball courts. You can also phone the **Embarcadero YMCA** (☎ 415/957-9622) about open-court play.

BOATING

It's an absolute joy for kids to steer a boat on Stow Lake in Golden Gate Park. **Stow Lake Boat and Bike Rentals** (☎ 415/752-0347) provides the basics in watercraft. Rowboats are \$11 per hour, pedal boats are \$15 per hour, and those vintage electric motor boats are \$18 per hour. It's first come, first serve and the best boats are snapped up early. Prepare the kids to get a bit damp.

BOWLING

Yerba Buena Bowling Center (p. 162) may have the most convenient location, but **Presidio Bowl** near the Main Post inside the Presidio (corner of Moraga Ave. and Montgomery St.; ☎ 415/561-2695) is an especially quaint bowling alley. The site of some memorable birthday bowling parties, it's a clean-enough little 12-alley pin palace with a snack bar selling hot dogs, pizza, beer, and sodas. Bumper bowling, with frustration-proof guardrails to cover the gutters, is an option. Open daily from 9am until midnight weeknights and 9am to 2am on weekends, this is such a popular hangout for dates and parties that you can't always get a lane on a walk-in basis. Especially on weekends, it's a good idea to phone ahead. The 29-Sunset-Letterman bus will get you there.

BIKING

On Sundays, **Golden Gate Park** is closed to automobile traffic. As one might imagine, bikes and bicyclists of all sizes arrive in force, ready to pedal around the park's seven miles of paved bike paths or take to the streets. On other days, two-wheelers need to pay some attention to the automobile traffic, but in general, drivers behave somewhat reasonably inside the park. Another popular route for bikes is the **Embarcadero**, which is flat and as scenic as can be. You can ride

from Pac Bell Park all the way to the Golden Gate Bridge, with side trips in the Presidio (discussed earlier in this chapter). The bike path along Ocean Beach is also a pleasure. Politically active bicyclists can join a Critical Mass ride (a group of cycling advocates) on the last Friday of the month at the Embarcadero BART station at 5:30pm.

BIKE RENTALS

Bike Hut ★★ The laid-back staff here are experts at bike and wheelchair repair and can discuss the best bike routes. Bike and in-line skate rentals are \$5 per hour and \$20 per day. Styles include basic mountain bikes and seven-speed cruisers. Child seats and trailers are available. The equipment is used and looks it, but everything is serviceable. A decent public bathroom is nearby. Pier 40 (end of Townsend St. at Embarcadero). ☎ 415/543-4335. Phone first in the winter to see if anyone's around.

Blazing Saddles If you're wavering about a bike trip across the bay, the folks at either the Fisherman's Wharf or North Beach locations of this experienced rental company will provide you with all the information and encouragement you need to tackle this route. The bikes, for kids and adults, are shiny and well maintained. Rental prices (\$7 per hour, \$28 per day) include helmets, locks, front packs, rear racks, maps, and advice. Tandems, kids' trailers, and baby seats are available. 1095 Columbus Ave. and Pier 41, Fisherman's Wharf. ☎ 415/202-8888.

Avenue Cyclery Bike sales and rentals, convenient to Golden Gate Park. Rental rates are \$7 per hour or \$28 per day and they do stock children's bikes and tandems. 756 Stanyan St. ☎ 415/387-3155. www.avenuecyclery.com.

DANCING

Swing and ballroom dancers, and those who've never completely given up on their Ginger Rogers/Fred Astaire fantasies, will be delighted to find the **Metronome Ballroom**, 1830 17th St. (☎ 415/252-9000; www.metronomeballroom.com). A variety of dance classes are offered from Fridays through Sundays between 7:30 and 9pm, followed by dance parties. Call to check on the type of dance for the evening. It's strictly a social dancing venue, with only snacks and nonalcoholic drinks available. Kids and teens are welcome to join any of the dance parties and classes, with a wide array for them to choose from. (You might want to brief them on proper behavior on the dance floor first. Log onto the website for an article on social dance etiquette.)

The **Embarcadero YMCA** (169 Steuart St.; ☎ 415/957-9622; www.ymcasf.org/Embarcadero) holds a teen break-dancing class Friday nights for ages 13 to 19 called Friday Night Jams.

FISHING

You'll find fly-casting pools at Golden Gate Park, on the western side of the Polo Fields, but you need to bring your own equipment unless you're content just to watch the regulars. **Hi's Tackle Box** at 3141 Clement St. (between 32nd and 33rd avenues; ☎ 415/221-3825) is considered the best store in the Bay Area for any equipment fresh- and salt-water fishing enthusiasts may need.

Sportsfishing boats leave from Pier 41 (between Jones and Taylor sts.) every morning around 6am on half- and full-day trips for salmon, shark, or whatever happens to be running. Each boat captain works independently, but you can get pricing and an overview of the fleet at www.sfsportfishing.com. Of note is the *Lovely Martha* (☎ 650/871-1691), run by three generations of the same family.

GOLFING

The Monterey Peninsula is the true mecca for golfers, but with five excellent public courses, duffers won't lack for choices. The **Golden Gate Park Municipal Golf Course**, built in 1950, is the best choice for beginners. It's a nine-hole course with a narrow, tree-lined fairway. The clubhouse is located between JFK Drive and Fulton Street near 47th Avenue (☎ 415/751-8987). Greens fees are \$13 for 9 holes, \$26 for 18 holes Monday through Thursday; \$18 for 9 holes, \$36 for 18 holes Friday through Sunday; and club rental is available. Advance tee times are not accepted.

Built in 1895 for the exclusive use of the military, **Presidio Golf Course**, off the Park Presidio Boulevard entrance on 300 Finley Rd. (☎ 415/561-4663), is currently the most popular public course in the city. Golfers were especially ecstatic when the army turned over that part of the Presidio to civilian use. Lined by eucalyptus and Monterey pine trees, its challenging 18 holes are played much of the year in foggy and windy conditions. Tee times may be reserved 30 days in advance by phoning ☎ 415/561-4653. Greens fees are \$40 to \$60 Monday through Thursday, \$60 to \$80 Friday, and \$70 to \$100 weekends. Club rental is available and there's a driving range and restaurant.

Farther west is the most beautiful of the public courses, **Lincoln Park** (300 34th Ave.; ☎ 415/221-9911), which boasts exceptional views of the Golden Gate from its perch on the edge of the coast. Built in 1908, it has 18 holes (3 with water hazards) that sit amidst oak trees and sand bunkers. Facilities include club rental and a restaurant. Tee times may be arranged by calling ☎ 415/750-4653 6 days in advance; greens fees are \$31 Monday through Thursday and \$35 Friday through Sunday.

Just minutes away from the San Francisco Zoo is Lake Merced and the **Harding Park** golf course (99 Harding Rd., on Lake Merced Blvd. behind San Francisco State University; ☎ 415/664-4690). Originally constructed in 1925, the park has a regulation 18-hole course of flat, tree-line fairways, plus a 9-hole executive course, a driving range, and a restaurant. The course underwent a \$16 million restoration in 2003 and is hosting the 2005 PGA World Golf Championships. Green fees are \$78 Monday through Thursday and \$90 Friday through Sunday. Call ☎ 415/750-4653 to reserve a tee time.

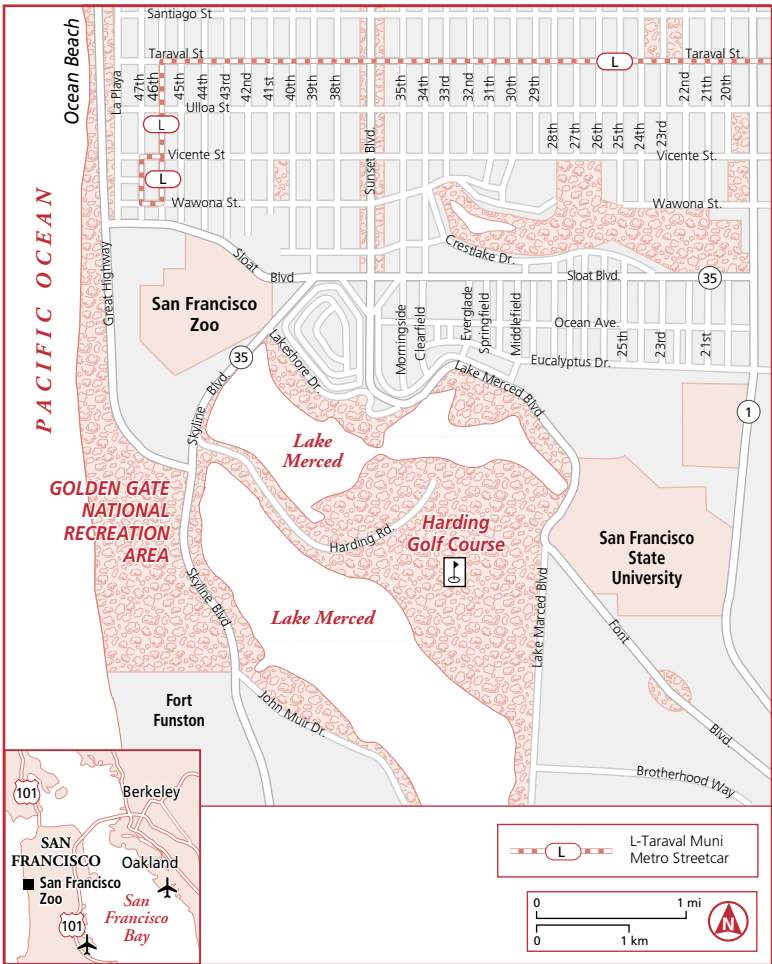
Hidden away south of downtown is **John McLaren Park** (2100 Sunnydale Ave.), home of Gleneagles International Golf Course. The well-maintained, challenging 9-hole course features hilly fairways and has a reputation for being windy. Weekend tee times may be reserved 7 days in advance at ☎ 415/587-2425. Greens fees: 9 holes \$13 to \$16 and 18 holes \$20 to \$27. McLaren Park is on the border of San Francisco and San Mateo county, in a less-than-stellar neighborhood.

South of Market, a healthy walk from the Cal Train Depot, is **Mission Bay Golf Center** (☎ 415/431-7888), a driving range with a snack bar and pro shop. A bucket of balls is \$8; there are loaner clubs for adults, but they don't have them for kids. However, they do offer half-hour private lessons for children 16 and under, which includes clubs, for \$35. The center is located at 6th and Channel streets; from downtown drive east on 4th Street to Channel Street and turn right.

GYMNASTICS

There are three gymnastics studios in town, all with classes for young kids and a rigorous training program. Out in the Sunset, **American Gymnastics** (2520 Judah St.; ☎ 415/731-1400) offers an open gym night, *Kids Night Out*, on the

The Zoo & Lake Merced Area



last Saturday of the month from 6 to 9pm. The cost for nonmembers is \$18; kids age 5 and up are welcome.

The staff at **Acrosports** (639 Frederick St.; ☎ 415/665-2276; www.acrosports.org), which is close to Kezar Pavilion in the Haight, teaches classes in circus arts, dance, physical performance skills, and gymnastics, with programs for kids as young as 18 months. Former and current visiting gymnasts with an urge to swing on the uneven parallel bars can attend classes as drop-ins. You must call in advance to attend a class within the age group and skill level. The fee is \$13 per class, and parents must accompany kids in order to sign the waiver form.

If you know locals who are members at **San Francisco Gymnastics** (920 Mason St.; ☎ 415/561-6260; www.sanfranciscogymnastics.com), you can be guests at their monthly *Parents Night Out* program. Parents drop off their kids aged 4 and up from 6 to 6:30pm and return by 10:30pm. SF Gymnastics provides a pizza dinner, coloring, an obstacle course, gymnastics events, and an animated movie.

Parent's Night Out is scheduled once a month, usually the third Friday, and registration is required by the Wednesday prior to the event. The fee is \$25 for the first child and \$20 for each additional sibling.

HANDBALL

Golden Gate Park has two indoor and two outdoor handballs courts, and none require reservations. The trick is finding them. The courts are located on Middle Drive East between Martin Luther King Jr. and Bowling Green drives. You must bring your own equipment.

HIKING

In the city, hikers can commune with nature in the Presidio and to a lesser extent in Golden Gate Park. The really good trails are in Marin on Mount Tamalpais, around the Marin Headlands, and in Muir Woods. Hiking on **Angel Island** (p. 156) is also a treat. www.bahiker.com is a good website for planning hikes in the city.

HORSEBACK RIDING

With the closure of the stables in Golden Gate Park, horseback riding in the city has become a memory. (There is a new organization dedicated to reopening the stables, so stay tuned.) Determined riders must now leave the city. One option is to cross the bridge to **Miwok Livery and Stables** (☎ 415/383-8048) in Mill Valley. Trail rides (\$40 per hr.) through the Tennessee Valley hills are offered by appointment daily for riders at every level.

Another option is to head one mile south from San Francisco Zoo. The **Mar Vista Stable** (2152 Skyline Blvd., Daly City; ☎ 650/991-4224; <http://marvista.stable.tripod.com>) offers guided rides on Ocean Beach. It is open from 9am to 5pm on weekdays and from 9am to 6pm on weekends, and no reservations are required. One-hour rides are \$30, 1½-hour rides are \$40, and 2-hour rides for \$50 are available only until noon. A 10-minute pony ride on a carousel is \$10.

ICE SKATING

Year-round ice skating is available at the 32,000-square-foot **Yerba Buena Ice Skating Rink** at Yerba Buena Gardens (p. 162). During the holiday season, a goodly portion of Justin Herman Plaza, across the Embarcadero from the Ferry Building, turns into the **Kristi Yamaguchi Holiday Ice Rink** (☎ 415/956-2688). Skating sessions are 90 minutes long and cost \$7 for adults and \$3.50 for kids 8 and under. Skate rental is an additional \$3.50. The quality of the skates is what you'd expect for a temporary setup, but small sizes are available. Bring extra socks and have some gloves if possible—it can get chilly out there. Expect crowds as well, which makes skating on the smallish rink a little intense at times if you're unsteady on your blades. The outdoor setting is really lovely, especially in the evening when the tall Embarcadero Center buildings are lit. Public skating begins at 10am daily.

IN-LINE SKATING/ROLLER SKATING

On Sundays in Golden Gate Park at 6th Avenue and Fulton Street, skaters congregate for a hugely entertaining dance party from around noon to 5pm. The music is hip-shaking and the participants amazing in their skill on wheels. If you and the kids want to skate in the park, **Golden Gate Park Skate & Bike** on Fulton Street between 6th and 7th avenues (☎ 415/668-1117) rents skates as small as kids' size 10 for \$5 an hour or \$15 per day. Inline skates are \$6 an hour or \$24 per day. Safety equipment is included in the rental.

JUGGLING & FLYING TRAPEZE

San Francisco is home to the **Circus Center** (☎ 415/759-8123; www.circuscenter.org), the premier training ground for circus arts in the U.S. Classes in such disciplines as Chinese acrobatics, hand-balancing, clowning, and flying trapeze are available for students age 5 and up. The school has two drop-in opportunities: Sundays from 7:30 to 10pm is open juggling night for any age and every level (\$2 fee); Friday evenings from 7:15 to 8:30pm and Saturday and Sunday from 10 to 11:30am you can test your courage and your flexibility on the trapeze. It's an experience you'll not forget. The class fee is \$47; participants must be 12 and over. The center is located at 755 Frederick St. across from Kezar Pavilion near Golden Gate Park.

KAYAKING

A memorable way to get as close to the bay as possible without actually getting in is by skimming the surface in a kayak. It's fabulous. You have to make your way to Marin however, either by car or by ferry. **Sea Trek**, on Schoonmaker Point near the Bay Model in Sausalito (☎ 415/488-1000 or 415/332-4465; www.seatrekkayak.com), is the leading kayak rental and tour company. Kids as young as 6 can join their parents in a two- or three-person kayak and Sea Trek personnel will join you on Sunday family tours around Sausalito, Angel Island, or in Tomales Bay. The cost runs from \$65 to \$75 for adults and \$35 to \$45 for kids 12 and under. Phone for details.

KITE FLYING

The Marina Green is one of the best places to fly a kite anywhere. On most windy afternoons, you'll see an impressive array of multi-colored stunt kites, completed by the breathtaking bay and bridge views. Unfortunately, there is no place to rent kites, but you should be able to find one to buy that will fit in your suitcase when it's time to head home. The Warming Hut in Crissy Field sells kites, or you could pick one up at the Kite Shop (p. 190) during a visit to Chinatown. (Although the Safeway supermarket across the street from the Marina Green ought to sell kites, don't waste your time asking. They don't.)

LAWN BOWLING

The **San Francisco Lawn Bowling Greens** (☎ 415/487-8787) is located in Golden Gate Park, near Sharon Meadow and the Carousel. Free lessons are available every Wednesday at noon or at any specific time by appointment with a club instructor. In the late spring and summer, additional lessons are given in the evenings.

SKATEBOARDING

San Francisco is a very popular skateboarding destination. It's considered one big skate park. The city, in an attempt to rid the streets of menacing boarders, created a 150-square-foot skate park in Crocker Amazon Park, which is practically in San Mateo County. No self-respecting skateboarder uses it. There's also a new city skateboarding task force, for what purpose, I don't know. Two favorite places to ply this sport in the company of like-minded fellows, generally in the wee hours of the night, are Union Square, and 3rd and Army streets. The hot skateboarding equipment centers are DLXSF, FTC, Purple Skunk, and Skates on Haight (see "Sports Stuff" in chapter 9).

SKIING & SNOWBOARDING

With world-class skiing just a few hours' drive away, it's no wonder so many Bay Area residents are avid skiers. The biggest resorts are Squaw Valley (☎ 530/583-6985; www.squaw.com) on Lake Tahoe's north shore and Heavenly (☎ 775/586-7000; www.skiheavenly.com) on the south side. Other good, medium-sized ski resorts include Northstar-at-Tahoe (☎ 800/466-6784; www.skinorthstar.com), east of Tahoe City, and Sugarbowl (☎ 530/426-9000; www.sugarbowl.com), off Highway 80 a good half-hour closer to San Francisco than most Tahoe resorts.

If you are traveling with kids who don't need to ski double black-diamond slopes, consider some of the smaller, truly family-oriented ski areas. Lift tickets are cheaper, and the overall feel is more personal. Tahoe Donner (☎ 530/587-9400; www.tahoeonner.com) is a quaint, family-oriented resort northwest of Lake Tahoe, and, on the Nevada side, petite Mt. Rose is one of our favorite mountains—combining a laid-back attitude and kid-friendly slopes with a few steep runs for mom and dad.

Most of the resorts offer ski school for children 4 and up, as well as day care for kids 3 and up, and many will give baby-sitting referrals for under 3s. Just note that every Friday evening between the months of November and April (sometimes until June) Highway 80 is clogged with skiers and snowboarders itching to hit the snow. If at all possible, drive up mid-week.

SURFING

Fifteen minutes south of San Francisco on Highway 1 is the tiny burg of Pacifica, where most of the beaches are safe for swimming and surfing. **Surf Camp Pacifica** (☎ 650/738-5757) at Linda Mar Beach runs weeklong summer camps for kids from 6 to 18 and 3-day spring minicamps. After Labor Day, families can schedule 1½-hour lessons (\$50 per person including boards; \$5 for wet suit) that emphasize water safety and awareness and teach the basics of surfing, body boarding, and body surfing. As of this writing, Linda Mar was undergoing a significant upgrade; the expansion of its parking lot and new restrooms and showers. (Hopefully, the beach itself will also get cleaned up, since it's usually full of barbecue embers and other debris.)

On most days, you are likely to see several surfers at Ocean Beach as well. However, with its strong current, powerful waves, and ever-shifting sand bottom, Ocean Beach is suitable only for advanced surfers. I've only seen kids surfing there on days when the waves were very, very small—and even then they were over 12 years old.

SWIMMING

The city's Recreation and Parks Department maintains swimming pools in a handful of recreation centers. The cost to swim is modest—\$3 for adults and 50¢ for children, or \$5 for a family of four. Public swim times vary from pool to pool and are limited; call or drop by the centers to note times and days. Two of the best swimming pools are at the **Joe DiMaggio North Beach Playground** at Lombard and Mason streets (☎ 415/274-0200) and **Rossi Pool and Playground** (Arguello Blvd. at Anza St.; ☎ 415/666-7014). The **Embarcadero YMCA** (169 Steuart St.; ☎ 415/957-9622; www.ymcasf.org/Embarcadero) has a beautiful indoor pool, and if you are a Y member in your hometown, you can use the facility for \$3. Nonmembers are charged \$15 for the day. Children under 14 may use the pool if supervised by a parent. Community swim hours are Monday to Thursday from 9 to 11am and from 1:30 to 5pm; Friday from 9 to

11am and from 1:30 to 9:45pm; Saturday from 8am to 7:45pm; and Sunday from 9am to 5:45pm. Over at the University of San Francisco campus on Turk and Parker streets near Laurel Heights is the **Koret Health and Recreation Center** (☎ 415/422-6821). It's primarily for students and locals, but non-members may use the Olympic-size indoor swimming pool on a drop-in basis for \$15 for adults and \$10 for youth 17 and under. Swim teams regularly practice in the pool Monday to Thursday afternoons; weekends and mornings are the best times for casual use.

TENNIS

Nearly all city parks have tennis courts, available to players on a first-come, first-served basis. The one exception is the **Golden Gate Park Tennis Complex**; reservations to use any of its 21 courts may be made by phoning ☎ 415/831-6301. The center offers free drop-in clinics for adults on Saturdays from 3 to 4:30pm and for kids on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3 to 5pm. Some of the most popular courts are those at Dolores Park, which are lighted at night, and the three lighted courts at the Joe DiMaggio North Beach Playground. City residents (kids and grown-ups) have the pleasure of signing up for free tennis classes offered through the Recreation and Parks Department at courts throughout San Francisco.

WINDSURFING/SAILBOARDING

Before Crissy Field was converted into a national park, windsurfers from around the Bay Area would descend on the abandoned military airstrip and begin setting up their equipment. Now that it's a lovely recreation area, the eastern end of Crissy Field is even more popular as an access point to some of the best windsurfing in northern California. Most afternoons, you'll see at least a dozen windsurfers in the water, and on the windiest of days you'll see hundreds. This challenging spot is for experts only; there are no equipment rental or lessons available.

5 Classes & Workshops

Perfect for a rainy day or a time when you want a low-key activity, hands-on craft shops provide space and equipment for customers to create something useful to take home or wrap up for Grandma. Finding half-day or 1-day workshops, on the other hand, is more challenging. Most of the many music, dance, art, and sports classes in the city require time commitments from 4 weeks to the rest of your life. Below are a few options that are available on a one-time basis. For more information, visit www.gocitykids.com and www.gokids.org.

DROP-IN CRAFTS

Basic Brown Bear Factory **Ages 3 and up.** Here at the original make-your-own-bear store, drop-in tours are available on the hour unless you have a large party. Your child can choose a bear color and style, let the sewers put him together, then watch while he takes shape at the stuffing machine. The next task is to groom the new addition and pick out a new wardrobe to finish him off. Tours are free but the bears cost \$12 and up. The Cannery, 2801 Leavenworth St. ☎ 415/409-2806.

Color Me Mine **Ages 4 and up.** Pick out a bisque form from the hundreds available—a plate, mug, picture frame, planter—take a seat at one of the tables, and as inspiration hits, start drawing and painting. If inspiration doesn't hit, the staff will be glad to assist with ideas and even stencils. When you finish, the store will fire the piece and it's ready to pick up in a week. (Shipping is also available.)

You pay for studio time and the cost of the clay form. It's a popular birthday party venue, so phone if you hope to go on a weekend day to make sure there's space. On Thursdays, kids 10 and under paint for free. 2030 Union St. ☎ 415/474-7076. www.colormemine-sf.com.

Terra Mia **Ages 4 and up.** One of the original pottery painting studios in Northern California, this store was so successful it moved from its original quarters on 24th Street in Noe Valley to a larger space around the corner. Now, parties have their own room with a patio, and drop-in artists have no problem snagging a table. The concept is exactly the same as above. Pick your pottery, pick your paints, and see what comes of it. 1314 Castro St., near 24th Street. ☎ 415/642-9911. www.terramia.net.

COOKING

Apron Strings **Ages 10 and up.** Conceived and run by Roberta Des Bouillons, an alumnus of the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, Apron Strings offers weekly cooking sessions for children. You can also reserve a spot in the 3-hour Saturday morning workshops, which run from 9am to noon and cost \$65. Classes cover everything from Italian cooking, cake baking, and pie making to seasonal soups and ethnic delights. The morning ends with students (and parents) sharing the fruits of the labors. 1187 Franklin St. (at Geary St.) in the First Unitarian Universalist Church. ☎ 415/550-7976. www.apronstringsf.com.

ART CLASSES

Over at Fort Mason Center in the Marina is the **Children's Art Center** (Bldg. C; ☎ 415/771-0292; www.childrensartcenter.org), with a full schedule of classes for kids from 2 to 10 years old. The center is open every day and for \$20 to \$28 kids are allowed to join classes on a drop-in basis. Phone for a schedule or check the website.

Every Saturday afternoon between 1 and 4pm at the **Randall Museum** (p. 177), some sort of art project is on hand for kids. Past crafts have included mask making, decorating paper lanterns, creating a Zen rock garden, and making a snow globe. Cost is minimal; \$3 for kids or \$5 for an adult/child combo.

The **Palace of the Legion of Honor** (p. 176) also has activities for kids on Saturday mornings from 10:30am to noon, free with museum admission. Doing and Viewing Art is a gallery tour and art class for kids 7 to 12 years old. At the Big Kids/Little Kids program parents and their 3½- to 6-year-old children do a gallery tour and art class together. Pre-registration is not required but space is limited.

Shopping with Your Kids

Shopping and kids don't always go together. Some kids get hives at the mere mention of the word. In our family, the problem is reversed. My daughters love to explore all kinds of stores, but I can think of better things to do than chase giggling girls out from behind clothes racks while being glared at by a 20-year-old sales attendant.

But we all need to buy stuff and sometimes it's inevitable that we'll have the kids in tow when we do so. Successful shopping with children calls for teamwork, moderation, give-and-take, and a flexible attitude. If there's something you really need to buy—like a present for the neighbor who's watering your plants while you're away—let the kids in on it and have them help you with the project.

Also, keep shopping trips short and strike a bargain with the little ones. For my children, a trip to the boutiques on Fillmore or Union streets means they get to stop at Jamba Juice, and a Union Square shopping trip comes with a (quick) visit to the Disney Store. If there's something small you can buy for your children, they'll feel the shopping excursion was intended for them as well. Lastly, be prepared to take a break if the kids have run out of steam.

Fortunately, San Francisco has plenty of stores that kids will enjoy checking out as much as their parents. And for those moments when everyone's had enough, there are always nearby parks or cafes where you can have a rest or a snack.

1 The Shopping Scene

San Francisco is a terrific place to shop. Those who enjoy leisurely perusing boutiques to find unique treasures can enjoy the city's amazing collection of locally-owned stores selling everything from distinctive clothes, toys, and gifts, to one-of-a-kind books, art, and housewares. For others who prefer convenience and known brands, the Union Square area is a shopper's paradise.

Most independent stores in neighborhood shopping districts like Chestnut, Fillmore, and 24th streets are open from 10am to 6 or 7pm Monday through Saturday and from noon to 5 or 6pm on Sundays, although larger chain stores may stay open later. Downtown, department stores and major retailers are open longer hours, with Macy's and Nordstrom open until 8 and 9pm weekdays, respectively. If you plan to visit a particular store in the evening or on a Sunday, phone ahead to make sure it will be open.

California has a **sales tax** of 8.5% that's added at the register. Purchases shipped out of state by the store are not taxable, but the shipping charges may come to more than the taxes unless you're buying a very expensive item.

THE NEIGHBORHOODS

Union Square/Financial District Stand in the center of Union Square and take a slow 360° turn. You are surrounded by some of the biggest names in retailing: Neiman Marcus, Macy's, Saks Fifth Avenue, Levi's, Niketown, and

high-end brands like Louis Vitton and Tiffany's. Fan out just a little and you'll find the Gap, Banana Republic, Old Navy, and myriad designer boutiques on Post Street and Maiden Lane, which is off the Stockton Street side of Union Square. If your interest lies in home products or art, you'll enjoy shopping at William Sonoma's flagship store on the square, a Crate & Barrel nearby, and numerous galleries on Post and Geary streets.

Children may enjoy the **Disney Store** on the northwest corner of Union Square. Beyond that, there aren't too many kid-oriented stores in this part of town. Nordstrom has good kids' and teens' sections, and Neiman Marcus carries children's attire as well. Sak's has no non-adult clothes, and Macy's seems to be shrinking its kids' department. Plenty of children's apparel can be found at the Gap and Old Navy, as well as Gymboree and Children's Place. Teens may prefer the stores of the San Francisco Shopping Centre mall, which is being expanded and which, by fall 2006, will house the country's second-largest Bloomingdales.

SoMa There are plenty of things to do in SoMa, but shopping is not one of them. Beyond the tech-oriented stores of the **Sony Metreon** (p. 162), the SFMOMA's terrific **Museum Store** (p. 178), and gifts shop at Zeum and the California Academy of Sciences, few stores grace this part of town.

Chinatown The stores on Grant Street are clearly geared towards tourists, and you'll see plenty of cheesy plastic cable cars and "I ♥ SF" t-shirts here. But odds are you'll also come across interesting trinkets that make fun gifts for friends back home. Lacquered chopsticks, sake glasses, satin slippers, and silk robes are just a few of the pan-Asian goods you can find here. With shops like the **Chinatown Kite Shop** (p. 190) and a plethora of knick-knacks in a dizzying array of colors, this is likely to be your kids' favorite shopping ground.

Fisherman's Wharf Most shops here are strictly tourist bait, some more tasteful than others. One exception is the **Barnes & Noble** bookstore (p. 230), which has a great children's section that makes a good rainy day escape. Also, stores in **The Cannery** and **Ghirardelli Square** are mostly owned by locals and are worth your while. Artists sometimes display their wares on the pavement in front of Victorian Park. The Powell-Hyde cable car drops you off right next to these places; the F-Market streetcar is another possibility.

North Beach Much North Beach shopping is food-related. Delis are packed with Italian imports—sausages, cheeses, pastas, wine, and so on—at reasonable prices. A couple of stores specialize in Italian pottery, with **Biordi Art Imports** (p. 233) the undisputed king of hand-painted Tuscan plates and bowls. You'll also find the occasional bookstore and antiques dealer here as well. Don't miss **Grant Avenue** between Green and Greenwich streets if you have a fashion-conscious teen in tow. The stores along this row are amazing and the entire neighborhood is filled with cafes for when you need to recharge. From Union Square, it's an enjoyable walk through Chinatown to get here. If that's going to be too much, take the Powell-Mason cable car line.

The Embarcadero Most retailers in this neighborhood are located on the first two levels of the four buildings that make up the Embarcadero Center. This office/entertainment/retail complex between Clay, Sacramento, Battery, and Market streets is like an open-air mall with name-brand chains and a Giants baseball store. The other shopping spot in these parts is inside the **Ferry Building**, located on the Embarcadero at the end of Market Street. There you'll find an assortment of gourmet food shops, with those dedicated to chocolate, sweets, and ice cream probably of greatest interest to the younger generation. Outside the

Ferry Building, the **Farmer's Market** (p. 235) is a four-times-weekly treat. The F-Market streetcar will take you here, as well as to the Embarcadero Center.

Civic Center/Hayes Valley The cool shops along Hayes Street will appeal to grownups, but with the exception of **Manifesto** (p. 227), don't offer much for kids. If you're solo for a few hours, come here for trendy and expensive fashions for home and body. Take any streetcar to the Van Ness Station to get within walking distance, or hop on the 21-Hayes bus from Market Street to ride down Hayes. But please watch your valuables in this neck of the woods.

Marina/Cow Hollow The best-known neighborhood shopping streets in San Francisco are **Union Street** in Cow Hollow and its counterpart **Chestnut Street** in the Marina. Take the 41-Union/Stockton bus for Union Street and the 30-Stockton for Chestnut Street. On both streets, you'll find a combination of restaurants, cafes, and shops, including national chains and locally-owned stores, specializing in home decor, fashion, cosmetics, accessories, and more. You can't go wrong coming for a stroll on either of these lovely lanes, which are as packed with hip 20-somethings as with families pushing strollers. There's going to be something of interest here to everyone in your group, including the baby.

Pacific Heights The well-to-do living in this neck of the woods do their shopping on Fillmore Street, between Jackson and Sutter streets. One of the rare **Kiehls** cosmetic and body products stores is located on the corner of Fillmore and Clay streets (☎ 415/359-9260). You'll find plenty of clothing boutiques for women, but not as many for men and children. Unenthusiastic shoppers can park themselves in one of the many coffee houses or patisseries, or even head over with a parent to Alta Plaza park. The 22-Fillmore bus travels the entire length.

Presidio Heights This family oriented, high-income neighborhood has two main shopping areas. **Sacramento Street** between Spruce and Divisadero streets is leafy and intimate, with many of its exclusive stores tucked inside old Victorians. You'll find children's furniture, shoes, clothing, and accessories as well as antiques, women's fashion, and housewares. At Spruce and California streets, 1 block south, you'll spot **Laurel Village**, a 3-block-long strip of markets and stores, a fair number of which cater to children. Free 90-minute parking is located behind Laurel Village and is often easier to manage than on Sacramento Street. The 1-California and 4-Sutter buses stop directly across the street.

Russian Hill The stores in this fairly small shopping area centered on Polk Street north of Pacific Street include fascinating antique vendors, furniture stores, and some Frenchified gift shops. There's not much for kids except for the terrific patisserie **Boulangre de Polk** (p. 136). The California Street cable car stops at Polk Street.

The Haight This grungy, colorful piece of San Francisco real estate is a mecca for teens, who will love the rich selection of vintage clothing stores, alternative music stores like **Amoeba Music**, and fashion that can set them apart from the herd. The city's best costume shop, which has a line out the door in the days before Halloween, is also here. Prices are reasonable, and inexpensive cafes dot every block. It's simple to get to Haight Street on either the N-Judah streetcar or the 6-Parnassus, 7-Haight, or 71-Haight-Noreiga buses from Market Street.

The Castro/Noe Valley The Castro, with few exceptions, pampers male shoppers with excellent or interesting taste. The one store that's fun for kids is Cliff's Variety (see below). Just over the hill is Noe Valley's retail corridor, 24th Street.

The J-Church streetcar stops at Church and 24th streets, an easy trip from downtown. If you want to know where the city's kids are growing up, come on over for bagels and coffee and just try not to trip over a stroller. The children's stores take care of kids until they turn 10 or so, and then there's a dearth of product for pre-teens. You'll find lots of cafes, restaurants, a juice bar, and stores galore.

The Mission The best Mission shopping for non-food items is on Valencia Street. The blocks from 16th to 21st streets contain a mix of hipster shops, storefront churches, and used-appliance and furniture dens. If you have an adventurous streak or want to see what's up and coming, talk a walk here. BART is the fastest and easiest way to reach the Mission, but please don't linger at the unsavory 16th and Mission streets station. The 24th and Mission streets station is only slightly better. Valencia Street is 1 block to the west.

The Richmond/Sunset Much of the shopping in these largely residential enclaves is concentrated around 9th Avenue and Irving Street. The N-Judah streetcar travels right to this corner, which is also close to the 9th Avenue entrance of Golden Gate Park. For kids, check out the magic shop **Misdirections** and the terrifically silly **Tutti Frutti** for gifts. If you head to the SF Zoo, you could follow your visit with a stop by some West Portal shops, which are listed in this chapter. The L-Taraval, M-Oceanview, or K-Ingleside streetcars all stop at the West Portal station, and the M or K cars continue on to the Stonestown Galleria mall. On the Richmond side of the park, Clement Street is the prime retail area, starting at Arguello Street and heading south. This area is similar to Chinatown, only less crowded and more eclectic. The mix of stores includes French designer children's fashions, a terrific used bookstore in town, and a baby furniture store. Parking is metered and easiest to find before 10:30am. The 38-Geary bus stops 1 block to the south.

2 Shopping A to Z

ART & CRAFT SUPPLIES

Angray Fantastico Lots of dried and silk flowers, florist supplies, ribbons, baskets, and decorations. 559 6th St. ☎ 415/982-0680.

Artsake Fine art supplies and classes for all ages in the heart of Noe Valley. 3961 24th St.. ☎ 415/695-0506.

Arts & Craft Supplies Outlet See the "Discount Shopping" section, below, for a review of this store.

Cliff's Variety ★ This store is loaded with amusing, useful, necessary, or just plain fun items, among them art supplies. The store is half a block from the Castro Street Muni Station. 479 Castro St. ☎ 415/431-5365.

Discount Fabrics In addition to pretty good deals on dressmaking and upholstery fabric, these stores stock notions and craft supplies. 525 4th St. ☎ 415/495-4201; 1432 Haight St. ☎ 415/621-5584; 2315 Irving St. ☎ 415/564-7333; 4458 Mission St. ☎ 415/586-1040.

Flax Art & Design ★ Everything for the artist is available at Flax. You could lose yourself here just looking at all the pens, not to mention the papers, bound blank books, and ribbons. There's a special section just for kids and a sale basement. 1699 Market St. ☎ 415/552-2355.

Hobby Co. of San Francisco Serious hobbyists find their way to the city's largest purveyor of model planes, jewelry-making supplies, art supplies, and kits. 5150 Geary Blvd. at 16th Ave. ☎ 415/386-2802.

Mendel's Art Supplies & Far Out Fabrics ★ Providing exactly what the name says, this is a fun place to shop because it's packed with cool merchandise. 1556 Haight St. ☎ 415/621-1287.

Pearl Art & Craft Supplies This store sells just about everything an artist needs except talent. 969 Market St. ☎ 415/357-1400.

SCRAP A beloved resource for teachers, artists, and locals, SCRAP (Scroungers' Center for Reusable Art Parts) is a center for recycled fabric, wood, paper, and other bits and bobs usable for various creations. Prices are very low. Closed Monday, Friday, and Sunday. 801 Toland St. ☎ 415/647-1746.

Utrecht Art Supplies This comprehensive store frequented by art students from the Academy of Art is close to Union Square, SoMa, and the Financial District. 149 New Montgomery St. ☎ 415/777-6920.

BABY & PRESCHOOLER CLOTHING

Baby Gap If you've lived on this planet for any length of time, you already know about Baby Gap. 890 Market St. ☎ 415/788.5909; 2169 Chestnut St. ☎ 415/771-9316; 3491 California St. ☎ 415/386-7517; Stonestown Galleria, 3251 20th Ave., Ste 113-17. ☎ 415/564-7137.

Beleza This store has its own independent line of beautiful hand-embroidered children's clothing made in Brazil. The rest of the precious items are European brands. 1947 Union St. ☎ 415/345-8900.

The Children's Place Inoffensive basics in cottons and blends for girls and boys that are cheap and cheerful. 200 Kearny St. ☎ 415/434-4737; Stonestown Galleria, 3251 20th Ave., Ste. 120. ☎ 415/682-9404.

Citikids Baby News Store This is primarily a baby furniture store, but you can stock up on sleepers, socks, newborn clothing, and baby toys, too. 152 Clement St. ☎ 415/752-3837.

Gymboree Gymboree carries cute styles and coordinated, well-made clothing. 865 Market St., Ste 106. ☎ 415/543-9488; 3407 California St. ☎ 415/668-1387; Stonestown Galleria, 3251 20th Ave., Ste. 152. ☎ 415/564-4859.

Jean et Marie Here you'll find precious little French outfits that look remarkable and are probably designed for child models. 100 Clement St. ☎ 415/379-1111.

Kidiniki Shop at Kidiniki for upscale designer togs for kids who don't get dirty. 2 Embarcadero Center. ☎ 415/986-5437.

Lavish Baby clothing and gifts made by artists and designers based in the Bay Area or elsewhere in California. 540 Hayes St. ☎ 415/565-0540.

Li's Trading Co. We're going a little down-market here, but this funky Chinatown shop stocks flannel pi's. 111 Grant Ave. ☎ 415/565-0540.

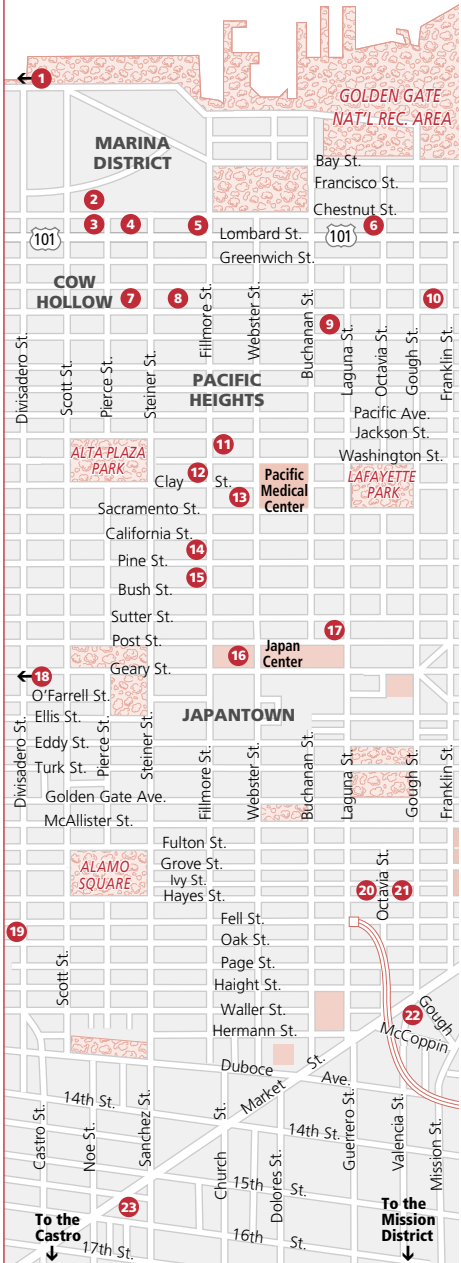
Maison de Belles Choses The *très chère* kiddie clothes here are imported from France to save you the trouble of flying there yourself. 3263 Sacramento St. ☎ 415/345-1797.

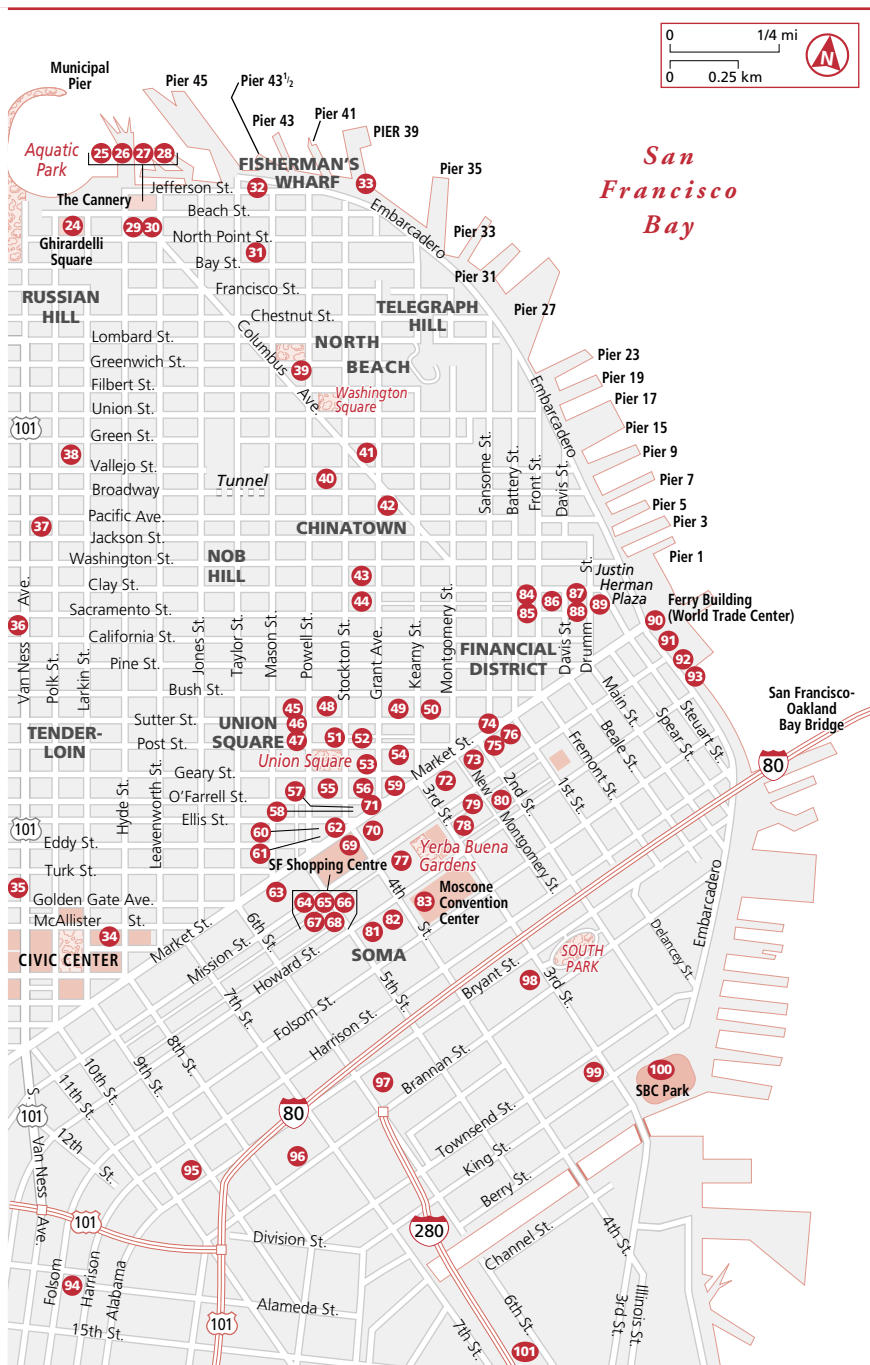
Manifesto Two locals design the attire and accessories here, including vintage-inspired clothing for children and whimsical ties for boys. 514 Octavia St. ☎ 415/431-4778.

Mudpie Expensive is the watchword at this refined store stocking elegant baby and kids' clothes, accessories, and children's furniture. Visit the basement for sale items. 1694 Union St. ☎ 415/771-9262.

San Francisco Shopping

- A Clean Well-Lighted Place for Books **35**
Alexander Book Co. **73**
Ambassador Toys **88**
Angray Fantastico **97**
Arts & Craft Supplies Outlet **94**
Asian Art Museum Store **34**
Baby Gap **4, 61**
Basic Brown Bear Store **25**
Barnes & Noble **31**
B. Dalton Bookseller **89**
Beleza **9**
Biordi Art Imports **41**
Books Inc. **3, 23**
Book Passage **93**
Borders Books and Music **46, 99**
Burlington Coat Factory **81**
California Academy of Sciences **82**
Cartoon Art Museum **79**
Catnip & Bones **2**
The Children's Place **50**
Chinatown Kite Shop **43**
Christine Foley **95**
Chronicle Books **77**
City Cycle **7**
City Lights Bookstore **42**
Clarion Music Center **44**
Crossroads Trading **15**
Discount Fabrics **98**
Disney Store **47**
Exploratorium **1**
Ferry Plaza Farmer's Market **90**
Flax Art & Design **22**
Gamescape **19**
Gap Kids **4, 59**
George **14**
Ghirardelli Soda Fountain & Chocolate Shop **24, 57**
Giants Baseball Dugout Stores **85, 100**
Guitar Center **36**
Gump's **54**
Gymboree **65**
House of Magic **5**
Japanese Weekend **45**
Jeffrey's Toys **72**
Kar'ikter **48**
Kidiniki **87**
Kid's Foot Locker **68**
Kiehl's **13**
Kinokuniya Bookstore **16**
Lark in the Morning Musique Shoppe **26**
Lavish **20**
Levi's **51**
Li's Trading Co. **53**
Lombardi Sports **37**
Macy's **55**
Manifesto **21**
Mervyn's **18**
Mudpie **10**
Murik Children's Store **59**
Neiman Marcus **56**
New World Sports **30**
Niketown **52**
Nordstrom **67**
Old Navy **69**
Patagonia **29**
Pea in the Pod **49**
Pearl Art & Craft Supplies **63**
Peppermint Cuts **6**
Pet's Unlimited **12**
Puppets on the Pier **33**
REI **96**
Rand McNally **75**
Rechiutti Confections **91**
Ross Dress for Less **70**
Russian Hill Books **38**
San Francisco Chocolate Store **32**
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art Museum Store **78**
San Francisco Shopping Centre **64**
Sanrio **66**
Scharffen Berger Chocolates **92**
See's Candies **62, 74, 86**
Skechers USA **71**
Sock Heaven **27**
Soko Hardware **17**
Sports Basement **101**
Stacey's Bookstore **76**
Tai Yick Trading Co. **40**
Toy Symphony **28**
Urban Outfitters **60**
Utrecht Art Supplies **80**
Virgin Megastore **58**
Waldenbooks **84**
Wee Scotty **8**
XOX Truffles **39**
Yountville **11**
Zeum **83**





Murik Children's Store European children's clothing boutique in Union Square. 73 Geary St. ☎ 415/395-9200.

Pumpkin, Hip Clothes for Cool Babes Contemporary, fashionable, and groovy children's clothing and accessories. 3366 Sacramento St. ☎ 415/567-6780.

Small Frys This is where Noe Valley parents pick up leggings, sweaters, and leopard-print coats for their little ones. 4066 24th St. ☎ 415/648-3954.

Yountville ★ Yountville sells beautifully made clothing and knitwear better left for Grandma to buy. 2416 Fillmore St. ☎ 415/922-5050.

BOOKS (INCLUDING COMICS & SPORTS CARDS)

Alexander Book Co. Huge selection of books and a commitment to the community make this a fine resource. 50 2nd St. ☎ 415/495-2992.

Barnes & Noble This well-known chain has a children's department and seating. 2550 Taylor St. ☎ 415/292-6762.

B. Dalton Bookseller This store carries a thin selection of literature, but all the best sellers. 1 Embarcadero Center, 2nd Floor. ☎ 415/982-4278.

Book Passage This new branch of the popular Marin County booksellers has a nice selection of hardbound kids' books and hosts bi-monthly readings by authors of children's literature. Marketplace Shop #42, One Ferry Building. ☎ 415/835-1020.

Books Inc. The oldest independent bookseller in town, Books Inc. has excellent children's and young adult sections and spot-on customer service. 3515 California St. ☎ 415/221-3666; 2251 Chestnut St. ☎ 415/931-3633; 2275 Market St. ☎ 415/864-6777.

Booksmith This terrific independent bookseller sponsors readings and book signings featuring contemporary authors. The kids' section is in the back. 1644 Haight St. ☎ 415/863-8688.

Borders Books and Music These three spacious branches of the national chain are conveniently located 1) on the corner of Union Square, 2) across the street from SBC Park, and 3) somewhat near the zoo. 400 Post St. ☎ 415/399-1633; 200 King St. ☎ 415/357-9931; 233 Winston Dr. (Stonestown). ☎ 415/731-0665.

Cartoon Art Museum The small, specialized gift store in the museum has a sophisticated selection of comic books that aren't exclusively for kids. 655 Mission St. ☎ 415/227-8666.

Christopher's Books This fine neighborhood bookstore will order anything you want. It stocks children's books and displays photos of the local dogs. 1400 18th St. ☎ 415/255-8802.

Chronicle Books San Francisco's best known publisher shows off its most interesting titles, many of which are for kids, at the Metreon. 101 4th St., Ground Floor. ☎ 415/369-6271.

City Lights Bookstore ★ The most famous bookstore in the Bay Area, Lawrence Ferlinghetti's landmark shop is the touchstone for the literati. Bring your kids in to get a feel for an authentic book-lover's den and to absorb a bit of history. 261 Columbus Ave. ☎ 415/362-8193.

A Clean Well-Lighted Place for Books This local favorite hosts readings and events, and has a comfortable children's section. 601 Van Ness Ave. ☎ 415/441-6670.

Comic Outpost Comic books, sports and fantasy cards, and models are the draw to get you out into this Sunset District shop. 2381 Ocean Ave. ☎ 415/337-6754.

Cover to Cover Booksellers ★ This little bookstore sold so many copies of the first two Harry Potter books that J. K. Rowling did a book signing and reading here, much to the delight of every child in Noe Valley. 1307 Castro St. ☎ 415/282-8080.

Educational Exchange Mostly teachers shop here, but parents can also stop by to pick up workbooks, puzzles, and educational toys, many of which are great for car and airplane trips. 600 35th Ave. ☎ 415/752-3302.

Green Apple Books and Music Possibly the best used bookstore in town, with an especially enticing cookbook selection and lots of interesting picks for everyone in the family. 506 Clement St. ☎ 415/387-2272.

Isotope Comics Popular with collectors of Silver-Age comics, the store also carries Japanese Manga and animation video, action figures, and accessories. 1653 Noriega St. ☎ 415/753-3037.

Kinokuniya Bookstore An interesting Japantown shop specializing in Japanese comics and Japanese-language books. 1581 Webster St. ☎ 415/567-7625.

Modern Times Bookstore This collectively-owned progressive bookstore in the Mission stocks fiction and non-fiction for adults and children, plus a comprehensive collection of books in Spanish. 888 Valencia St. ☎ 415/282-9246.

Natural Resources This is a clearinghouse for classes and information on pregnancy, childbirth, and child-care, with books, toys, and other items for mothers and mothers-to-be. 816 Diamond St. ☎ 415/550-2611.

Rand McNally Beyond travel-related books, you'll find a large selection of toys and puzzles with geographical and educational themes. 595 Market St. ☎ 415/777-3131.

Russian Hill Books This used bookstore has a section devoted to children's literature. 2234 Polk St. ☎ 415/929-0997.

Stacey's Bookstore Founded as a medical bookstore and popular with the Financial District set, Stacey's also has a well-stocked children's section and is convenient to downtown hotels. 581 Market St. ☎ 415/421-4687.

Waldenbooks Here you'll find bestsellers and celebrity bios, plus a few shelves for children and Archie comics. 4 Embarcadero Center. ☎ 415/397-8181; 255 West Portal Ave. ☎ 415/664-7596.

COSTUMES

Costumes on Haight ★ This is a must-stop for theatrical families or anyone who is always caught short without a funny hat or fright wig. With over 1,000 costumes and accessories galore, it's plain fun to look around. 735 Haight St. ☎ 415/621-1356.

CRAFTS

See the "Art & Craft Supplies" section, above.

DEPARTMENT STORES

Macy's It can be tough to actually find what you're looking for at this thickly-stocked behemoth, but the kids' clothing department occasionally has good deals. Both the Union Square and Stonestown locations no longer carry kids' shoes. 170 O'Farrell St. ☎ 415/397-3333; 3251 20th Ave. ☎ 415/753-4000.

Neiman Marcus The baby and children's department carries only the top American brands with prices that will make you laugh—or cry. This is one of

the few places in the city you can find traditional winter wool coats. 150 Stockton St. ☎ 415/362-3900.

Nordstrom Teens tell me “BP,” or the Brass Plum section of Nordstrom, is the go-to place for cool clothes. The children’s clothing and shoe departments are also very good. 865 Market St. ☎ 415/243-8500; Stonestown Galleria, 285 Winston Dr. ☎ 415/753-1344.

DISCOUNT SHOPPING

Arts & Craft Supplies Outlet The place is so chaotically organized you’d be bringing little kids here at your own risk, as they could get into a whole lotta mischief. Inveterate craftspeople, however, will find what they need among the shelves. 41 14th St. ☎ 415/431-7122.

Burlington Coat Factory Come here for outerwear for the entire family and a nice selection of children’s clothing. 899 Howard St. ☎ 415/495-7234.

Christine Foley Christine Foley has been making colorful, hand-loomed cotton sweaters for over two decades. Her little outlet south of Market sells seconds and discontinued styles at wholesale prices—still over \$60 for child’s sizes 2 to 12. 430 Ninth St. ☎ 415/621-5212.

Mervyn’s Much of the kids’ stuff here is chock-full of cartoon characters or other cross-marketing gimmicks, but for basics like jeans, socks, and underwear, the prices are right. 2675 Geary Blvd. ☎ 415/921-0888.

Peek-a-Bootique High-quality new and slightly-used clothes for infants and toddlers, in addition to used toys, strollers, and accessories. 1306 Castro St. ☎ 415/641-6192.

Ross Dress for Less The Market Street store is in constant disarray, but the branches outside downtown have tops and jeans that appeal to teenagers. 799 Market St. ☎ 415/957-9222; 5200 Geary Blvd. ☎ 415/386-7677; 2300 16th St. ☎ 415/554-1901; 1545 Sloat Blvd. ☎ 415/661-0481.

Skechers USA The whole family can update their casual shoe wardrobe at this Mission District outlet and break them in looking for lunch on 24th Street. Skechers also has a regular store downtown. 2600 Mission St. ☎ 415/401-6211; 770 Market St. ☎ 415/781-8703.

DOLLS & DOLLHOUSES

Angray Fantastico A favorite with florists and craftspeople, Fantastico is one of the few places to carry a small stock of dollhouses. 559 6th St. ☎ 415/982-0680.

FASHION & MATERNITY

Dottie Doolittle Young socialites find plenty of dresses, sportswear, and accessories to make it through the season at this bastion of fashion. Sizes go from toddlers to 16 for girls and 12 for boys. 3680 Sacramento St. ☎ 415/563-3244.

Gap Kids There aren’t too many neighborhoods that don’t have some iteration of a Gap Store. You can’t beat them for basics, and the sales are good. The flagship store is at 100 Post St. ☎ 415/989-1266. Other locations include 890 Market St. ☎ 415/788-5909; 2169 Chestnut St. ☎ 415/771-9316; 3491 California St. ☎ 415/386-7517; Stonestown Galleria, 3251 20th Ave., Ste 113-17. ☎ 415/564-7137.

Japanese Weekend Contemporary and comfortable maternity clothing made with quality fabrics. 500 Sutter St. ☎ 415/989-6667.

Kids Only Here you’ll find tie-dyed tees, hats, and locally-designed retro styles for your flower child. 1608 Haight St. ☎ 415/552-5445.

Fun Fact Stump the Tour Guide

Question: Why are Levi's jeans sewn with orange thread? **Answer:** In the 1800s, copper rivets were used to make the jeans stronger. The thread matches the color of the rivets.

Kindersport This store stocks all kinds of serious high-quality sports clothing for toddlers to preteens. 3566 Sacramento St. ☎ 415/563-7778.

Levi's This flagship store contains some interesting pieces, like wildly decorated jean jackets and skirts, and a bathtub so that you can really shrink your jeans to fit. 300 Post St. ☎ 415/501-0100.

Limited Too This store sells fashionable girls' clothing that's only meant to last a season. Stonestown Galleria, 3251 20th Ave. ☎ 415/665-7042.

Minis-Kids and Maternity This shop has you covered before and after the baby arrives. 2278 Union St. ☎ 415/567-9537.

Mom's the Word Part of a national chain with stylish clothes for pregnancy, this shop also provides a play area for kids, stroller parking, and a restroom. 3385 Sacramento St. ☎ 415/441-8261.

Old Navy The less expensive Gap brand, this three-level store has clothes for the entire family, including maternity fashions. 801 Market St. ☎ 415/344-0375.

Patagonia This store is an excellent source for high-quality fleece and outerwear for children's sizes 3 to 14. 770 North Point St. ☎ 415/771-2050.

Pea in the Pod A branch of the national maternity-wear chain. 290 Sutter St. ☎ 415/391-1400.

Sock Heaven As you've already guessed, here you'll find novelty print socks for everyone. The store also sells sunglasses. The Cannery, at Leavenworth and Jefferson sts. ☎ 415/563-7327.

Urban Outfitters Sells trendy attire that looks like it's already been around the block a couple of times, but teens love it. 80 Powell St. ☎ 415/989-1515.

Wee Scotty This funky children's clothing store offers sewing classes for children 7 and up, teens, and parents. 2266 Union St. ☎ 415/345-9200.

GAMES

Gamescape ★ This exceptional store featuring specialty games is run by folks who love their work and like to play. 333 Divisadero St. (at Fell St.). ☎ 415/621-4263.

GIFTS & SOUVENIRS

American Pie From handmade baby accessories to colorful handbags and unique personal care products, every item in this eclectic shop is bright, fun, and makes a great gift. 3101 Sacramento St. ☎ 415/929-8025.

Biordi Art Imports Beautiful examples of hand-painted Majolica dishes and serving pieces nearly too pretty to use. Think twice before letting young children come in to this store, which is jam-packed with fragile wares. 412 Columbus Ave. ☎ 415/392-8096.

Gump's For tasteful, one-of-a-kind home accessories—including fine crystal, elegant tableware, and other artful items—and incredible service, head into this San Francisco institution. 135 Post St. ☎ 415/982-1616.

Just for Fun-Scribbledoodles Stationary, cards, frames, board games, *Mad Lib* books, elegant journals, and other gifts items are what you'll find at this popular Noe Valley store. 3982 24th St. ☎ 415/285-4068.

Kar'ikter This fun Union Square store carries a huge line of merchandise based on licensed European characters—namely Tin Tin, Babar, Asterix, and The Little Prince. Items include books, T-shirts, posters, and miniature characters. 418 Sutter St. ☎ 415/434-1120.

Sanrio Little girls love this Japanese import with all kinds of *Hello Kitty* character-stamped items including stationary, art supplies, carrying cases, coin banks, you name it. San Francisco Shopping Centre, 5th and Market sts.. ☎ 415/495-3056; Stonestown Galleria, 3251 20th Ave. ☎ 415/242-1870.

Soko Hardware *(Finds)* You'd never guess it from the name, but this Japantown store carries a great selection of Japanese housewares, including ceramic plates, tea sets, and sake cups—all of which make terrific gifts. 1698 Post St. ☎ 415/931-5510.

Sue Fisher King ★ This is where the San Francisco society set comes for precious home furnishings, including exquisite table linens, cashmere blankets, china, silver flatware, and more. 3067 Sacramento St. ☎ 415/922-7276.

Tai Yick Trading Company *(Finds)* This is a real find for tiny china tea sets, miniature Chinese bowls, and all kinds of porcelain and pottery. It's a good Chinatown store for household goods. 1400 Powell St. at Broadway St.. ☎ 415/986-0961.

Tutti Frutti ★ When you need a goofy gift for the child who has everything, come to this tiny shop. It's packed with oversized stuffed animals, lava lamps, eye-ball candles, and other silly stuff for kids and infants. 718 Irving St. ☎ 415/661-8504.

HAIRCUTS

Peppermint Cuts Nervous kids calm down when they spy the pony that's used as a seat for the haircuts. 1772 Lombard St. ☎ 415/292-6177.

Snippety Crickets This place makes my girls feel special. With toys to keep them occupied and lollipops after it's all over, a trip to the hairdresser can actually be fun. Drop-ins are welcome, although you may have to wait. 3562 Sacramento St. ☎ 415/441-9363.

MAGIC SHOPS

House of Magic Plenty of gag gifts and sleight-of-hand tricks are on hand to wow your friends and impress Mom and Dad. Rubber masks and wigs are stocked as well. 2025 Chestnut St. ☎ 415/346-2218.

Misdirections ★ Come here for all the rubber masks, tasteless jokes, novelties, and magic books your young magician needs. Closed Mondays. 1236 9th Ave. ☎ 415/566-2180.

MARKETS

Alemany Flea Market Get an early start on Sunday mornings for the one local, regularly-scheduled flea market within city limits. Sellers take up position in a giant parking lot off Highway 280, at the southern edge of Bernal Heights (below the Mission District). There's a hodgepodge of junk including furniture and tools. The same site hosts the Alemany Farmer's Market, a smaller counterpart to the one at the Ferry Building, on Saturdays from 6am to 5pm. 100 Alemany Blvd., at the 101/280 Interchange.

Mall, Rats!

Some folks like the benefits of indoor malls: familiar names, nearby restrooms, and food courts. The San Francisco Bay Area is loaded with malls, but the city itself only supports two indoor centers. The **San Francisco Shopping Centre**, on the corner of 5th and Market streets, is the only indoor mall downtown. Its sizable Nordstrom store may soon be overshadowed by a massive Bloomingdale's, which is set to open in an expanded section of the mall in late 2006. **Stonestown Galleria**, in the Sunset, is a more typical, large indoor mall. Anchored by Nordstrom and Macy's, it has two long floors of stores broken up by a food court upstairs and a circular lobby down. Gap, Limited Too, Gymboree, KB Toys, Howard's Shoes, The Children's Place, and Abercrombie & Fitch are among the brand names for kids. Stonestown is located on 19th Avenue at Winston Drive, close to San Francisco State University, and the M-Oceanview runs right in front. Both the SF Centre and Stonestown are open daily.

Ferry Plaza Farmer's Market ★ Saturday morning excursions to this big, beautiful outdoor market are a ritual for many families around the city. The mostly organic produce and fruit are the best quality anywhere, brought to market and sold by the growers. Vendors also sell olive oils, honey, flowers, and sausages; local restaurants, including the Hayes Street Grill, have booths set up to provide breakfast. One Ferry Building, on Embarcadero at the end of Market St.

MUSEUM STORES

Asian Art Museum Store You'll find a small selection of stuff for kids here, from books and puppets to occasional origami kits or other exhibition-related items. 200 Larkin St. ☎ 415/863-3330.

Legion of Honor Museum Store Unique merchandise for children is updated to reflect both current and permanent exhibitions. Legion of Honor, 34th Ave. and Clement St. ☎ 415/863-3330.

San Francisco Museum of Modern Art ★ This is a great shop for gifts, with an intelligent selection of books and toys for children. 151 3rd St. ☎ 415/357-4000.

Zeum This delightful shop is full of creative toys that may be as much for adults as for kids. Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, Mission and 3rd sts. ☎ 415/777-2800.

MUSIC

Amoeba Music ★ You've found it: the holy grail of CDs, records, and cassettes, with in-store concerts and an intelligent staff. 1855 Haight St. ☎ 415/831-1200.

Clarion Music Center ★ This interesting Chinatown store stocks several unusual instruments, including drums, flutes, and shakers from every culture. Clarion's weekend concert series is worth investigating, as the owner's own eclectic good taste attracts artists from around the world. It's also a great shop for CDs and gifts. 816 Sacramento St. ☎ 415/391-1317.

Guitar Center Come here for the best prices and service on guitars and amps for your child's garage band. 1645 Van Ness Ave. ☎ 415/409-0350.

Guitar Solo This store caters to beginners as well as more advanced guitar players. 1411 Clement St. ☎ 415/386-0395.

Lark In The Morning Musique Shoppe Beyond an incredible selection of musical instruments, books, recordings, videos, and musical artwork from over 50 cultures, the Lark stocks plenty of charming instruments suitable for young children. The Cannery, 2801 Leavenworth St. ☎ 415/922-4277.

The Music Store This small CD, cassette, LP, video, and DVD shop in a residential neighborhood hosts Sunday afternoon American Roots music shows. 66 West Portal Ave. in the Sunset. ☎ 415/664-2044.

Virgin Megastore Park your adolescents here if you have more boring shopping to take care of around Union Square. They'll know what to do. 2 Stockton St. ☎ 415/397-4525.

PARTY SUPPLIES

Angray Fantastico Lots of dried and silk flowers, florist supplies, ribbons, baskets, and decorations. 559 6th St. ☎ 415/982-0680.

One Stop Party Shop This small store at the southern end of Noe Valley has a thorough stock of themed accessories for your next fete. You can also order balloon bouquets here. 1600 Church St. ☎ 415/824-0414.

PET SHOPS & PET SUPPLIES

Catnip & Bones Dogs, cats, and their devoted owners will be delighted with the offerings at this cheery shop. From all-natural dog treats to catnip-infused playthings, everything is high quality and well priced. 2220 Chestnut St. ☎ 415/350-9100.

George The discerning pet owner will find hip dog and cat accessories like stylish bowls and decorative ID tags here. George carries cool clothing for pets' human companions as well. 2411 California St. ☎ 415/441-0564.

Noe Valley Pet Co. In addition to plenty of dog and cat products, this cute Noe Valley shop also offers dog walking services. 1451 Church St. ☎ 415/282-7385.

6th Avenue Aquarium Featuring 13,000 gallons of water in tanks around the store filled with a wide selection of fresh- and salt-water fish. 425 Clement St. ☎ 415/668-7190.

Pet Heaven

Dog and cat lovers looking for a rainy-day activity, or parents wavering on the edge of giving into those pleas for a pet, should take a gander at **Maddie's Pet Adoption Center** (250 Florida St. at 16th St.; ☎ 415/554-3000; www.sfspca.org). An adjunct of the local SPCA, this clean and bright building is filled with doggie dorms and kitty condos furnished as if they were the guest quarters in a typical San Francisco Edwardian. Dogs loll around on beds and sofas watching TV or playing with toys, while cats perch on ledges watching the action in their aquariums. The idea is to resocialize the animals, so visitors are encouraged to tour the facilities.

Alternatively, if you happen to be strolling on Fillmore Street, stop by **Pets Unlimited** (2343 Fillmore St. at Washington St.; ☎ 415/563-6700; www.petsunlimited.org), a delightful multipurpose pet care center, animal hospital, and pet adoption center nestled amidst all the posh boutiques. Be forewarned that you might meet the dog or cat of your child's dreams.

SCIENCE STORES

California Academy of Sciences The academy's temporary space in SoMa has a small store filled with educational materials, games, toys, and books. 875 Howard St. ☎ 415/321-8000.

Exploratorium ★ The shop inside this science center is stocked and maintained well, with curb appeal for kids of all ages. You'll likely be as tempted by the offerings as your children. 3601 Lyon St., at Marina Blvd. ☎ 415/397-5673.

SHOES

Brook's Shoes for Kids Stylish European and interesting American brands are on offer here, and the staff is knowledgeable and friendly. 3307 Sacramento St. ☎ 415/440-7599.

Howard's Shoes for Children This store is best for preschoolers, with a good-natured staff and small selection of midrange shoes. 3251 20th Ave. (Stonestown Mall). ☎ 415/681-3700.

The Junior Boot Shop An old-fashioned shoe store with patent leather Mary Janes, saddle shoes, and other styles you once owned. It also carries more contemporary designs and sneakers. 3555 California St. ☎ 415/751-5444.

Kid's Foot Locker This national chain store has a good selection of sneakers, with many sizes in stock. San Francisco Centre, 865 Market St. ☎ 415/344-0723.

Niketown If it takes a village to shoe your children, this multilevel giant will fill the bill. 278 Post St. ☎ 415/392-6453.

Shoe Biz Think tennis shoes, skate shoes, and bright red boots with thick rubber soles. This is where SF teens find the latest footwear. 1446 Haight St. ☎ 415/864-0990.

SPORTS STUFF

City Cycle Although mostly for adults, this shop at the corner of Union Street also stocks bikes for the younger set. 3001 Steiner St. ☎ 415/346-2242.

FTC Skateboarding *Finds* You'll find clothing, shoes, and equipment for your avid boarder here. It's a great resource for the parents of teenage boys. 622 Shrader St. ☎ 415/386-6693.

Hi's Tackle Box *Finds* This all-purpose supplier of fishing gear draws enthusiasts from around the Bay Area. 3142 Clement St. ☎ 415/221-3825.

Lombardi Sports This big store stocks clothing and equipment for teens and adults, with a few kids' items as well. The good news is validated parking underground. 1600 Jackson St. ☎ 415/771-0600.

New World Sports This is the in-line skating center and meeting place for Friday night skates. These weekly city skating parties are for experienced teen and adult skaters. 1365 Columbus Ave. ☎ 415/776-7801.

Purple Skunk The hot spot for longboards, skateboards, and snowboards, with a helpful yet hip staff. 5820 Geary Blvd. ☎ 415/668-7905.

REI Nature lovers will be delighted with the San Francisco branch of this preeminent sporting goods/outdoor adventure store. 840 Brannan St. ☎ 415/934-1938.

Skates on Haight ★ A premier site for skates, skateboards, and skate rentals. 1818 Haight St. ☎ 415/752-8375.

Sports Basement ★ Never mind that signs on the walls still read "Frozen Foods" and "Bakery" at this former military PX in the Presidio. This place now

stocks the best-priced selection of sporting goods in town and has a huge parking lot to boot. A second location is near SBC Park. 610 Mason St. ☎ 415/437-0100; 1301 6th St. ☎ 415/437-0100.

Wise Surfboards You'll find the biggest collection of surf stuff here: short boards, long boards, wet suits, and even some cool clothes. 800 Great Hwy. ☎ 415/750-9473.

STROLLERS, CRIBS & FURNITURE

Citikids Baby News Store This place is overflowing with cribs, strollers, changing tables, and other baby items you never knew you needed. 152 Clement St. ☎ 415/752-3837.

Jonathan Kaye Baby A sophisticated selection of unpainted and painted furniture to complete baby's room, including cribs, bedding, changing tables, and bureaus. 3615 Sacramento St. ☎ 415/922-3233.

Jonathan Kaye Children Small tables and chairs, bunk beds, desks, toys and accessories, and a knowledgeable, friendly staff. 3548 Sacramento St. ☎ 415/563-0773.

The Right Start This store is part of a chain that sells high-quality baby gear, games, puzzles, and books. 3435 Sacramento St. ☎ 415/202-1901.

SWEETS FOR THE SWEET

Ghirardelli Soda Fountain & Chocolate Shop Order a sundae or enjoy a delicious chocolate confection at what was once the factory of Ghirardelli Chocolates. Or stop by the Union Square outlet, which just sells chocolate. 900 North Point St. ☎ 415/771-4903; Union Sq., 44 Stockton St. ☎ 415/397-3030.

Rechiuti Confections A gourmet sweet shop in every sense—with sublime locally-made chocolates, handmade marshmallows, and brownies. Ferry Building Marketplace Shop #30, One Ferry Building. ☎ 415/834-9494.

San Francisco Chocolate Store Another Fisherman's Wharf outlet for mass-produced treats. 145 Jefferson St. ☎ 415/614-9440.

See's Candies With locations all over town and kiosks in the airports, it would be difficult to miss out on a bag or box of the company's famous nuts and chews. The nice ladies behind the counter always have a sample for you of the sweet *du jour*. 846 Market St. (between Powell and Stockton sts.). ☎ 415/434-2771; 542 Market St. (at Sansome St.). ☎ 415/362-1593; 3 Embarcadero Center. ☎ 415/391-1622.

Scharffen Berger Chocolates In 1996 a former winemaker and his business partner decided to make the finest chocolates possible. Come judge their success for yourself. Marketplace Shop #14, One Ferry Building. ☎ 415/981-9150.

Shaw's This old-fashioned candy shop offers all kinds of treats, including a long counter filled with chocolates, gummies, licorice, bridge mix, sours, and in the back, Mitchell's ice cream. 122 West Portal Ave. ☎ 415/681-2702.

XOX Truffles The truffles, none much larger than a marble, are made on site and come in many luscious flavors. The white chocolate "Clarissa's favorite" may be your favorite, too. 754 Columbus Ave. ☎ 415/421-4814.

THEME STORES

Disney Store What can be said about these stores that you don't already know? The Union Square location is big and bright and will no doubt sing a siren song to your preschooler. 400 Post St. ☎ 415/391-6866; 3251 20th Ave. (Stonestown Galleria). ☎ 415/564-8710.

Giants Baseball Dugout Stores If you're baseball fans, the official hats, jerseys, and jackets are terrific mementos of an SF vacation. You'll also find cool souvenirs and possibly game tickets. The Pac Bell Park location is the best and is open daily. 24 Willie Mays Plaza. ☎ 415/972-2000; 4 Embarcadero Center. ☎ 415/951-8888; 3251 20th Ave. (Stonestown Galleria). ☎ 415/242-3222.

TOYS

Ambassador Toys Classic European dolls, wonderful wooden toys and puzzles, and clever games and books are among the great playthings at this delightful store. The clerks kindly gift wrap as well. 186 West Portal Ave. ☎ 415/759-8697; 2 Embarcadero Center. ☎ 415/345-8697.

The Ark Toys This small shop is stocked with carefully selected wooden toys, Brio, puzzles, and wee costumes. 3845 24th St. ☎ 415/409-2806.

Basic Brown Bear Store You can find the exact teddy bear you want, or you can choose a style and stuff it yourself. 2801 Leavenworth St. ☎ 415/626-0781.

Chinatown Kite Shop From world-class stunt fliers to more modest models that could fit into your suitcase, an awesome array of kites is on display here. 717 Grant Ave. ☎ 415/989-5182.

Cliff's Variety You'll find classic games and toys here, plus that sparkly windup dinosaur that you've been looking for. 479 Castro St. ☎ 415/431-5365.

Growing Up This little store used to carry children's clothes, but over the years it's moved to accessories and toys and a small selection of baby clothes. 240 West Portal Ave. ☎ 415/661-6304.

Heroes Club Japanese videos, action toys, and odd monsters fill this store. 840 Clement St. ☎ 415/387-4552.

Jeffrey's Toys This big crowded store between Union Square and SoMa carries brand-name toys. 685 Market St. ☎ 415/243-8697.

Puppets on the Pier I would actually go to PIER 39 for this store. From kittens, bunnies, and puppies to whales, dragons, and even cockroaches, the collection of puppets is amazing. PIER 39, Fisherman's Wharf. ☎ 415/781-4435.

Standard 5 & 10 This old-fashioned variety store contains an aisle of games, Barbies, and small toys, all at good prices. 3545 California St. ☎ 415/751-5767.

Toy Symphony On the second level of The Cannery, you'll find toys including Lego and Playmobil, hobbies, games, dolls, and collectibles. 2801 Leavenworth St. ☎ 415/775-7893.

VINTAGE CLOTHING

Buffalo Exchange This Haight shop is crammed with old and new attire from the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. It's a good place for your teens to see the latest street fashions. 1555 Haight St. ☎ 415/431-7733.

Crossroads Trading Unlike other thrift stores, Crossroads gets some of its merchandise from wholesalers, so you'll also find new items in various sizes. 1519 Haight St. ☎ 415/355-0555; 2231 Market St. ☎ 415/626-8989; 1901 Fillmore St. ☎ 415/775-8885.

The Wasteland The staff is choosy about what used clothes it'll take in, so clothing and accessories here are hip and retro at the same time. 1660 Haight St. ☎ 415/863-3150.

Entertainment for the Whole Family

With the exception of movies, finding family entertainment can be a hit-or-miss proposition. On any given night, the offerings vary greatly. There may be something perfect for elementary school children or there may be nothing going on that would interest kids of any age. The small section of Union Square known as “The Theater District” usually has only a handful of productions on at any one time. If any of them are kid-friendly, you’re in luck.

The **American Conservatory Theater (A.C.T.)**, one of the finest theatrical companies and schools in the nation, produces consistently excellent drama, but not every play is suitable family fare. Broadway road companies, on the other hand, drop into town for 2- to 6-week runs of musicals that have been playing New York for at least a year. Most of the shows appear to be chosen to please the widest audience. When *The Lion King* came to the Orpheum Theatre in 2004, you can be sure every child in town saw it at least once.

Vacation periods are the best times for entertainment. During the winter holidays, a wealth of music, dance, and theater productions for kids is available—from the ODC Dance Company’s annual production of *The Velveteen Rabbit* to the San Francisco Ballet’s *Nutcracker* performances. In the summer, concerts and circus performances take place in various parks nearly every weekend.

For teens, a few music clubs are open to under-21s. If you want to take your kids to a rock concert, stay abreast of who’s coming to town and work the phone or the Internet for tickets.

Getting the fledglings motivated to attend any kind of performance after a full day of sightseeing can be a challenge. If it’s possible to return to your hotel for an afternoon rest before an event, do your best. Preplanning will also make a difference. Before you arrive, make a list of what’s playing in town and talk it over with the family. With everyone’s involvement, an evening of theater, a concert, or even a movie can become one of the highlights of your vacation. Also consider giving something new a try. If your family doesn’t generally attend dance recitals, for example, consider seeing one of San Francisco’s modern dance ensembles just to shake things up a little.

Finding out what’s on: Use the Internet to see what’s playing in town during your visit. For entertainment directed at families with kids under 12, sign up for the **GoCityKids.com** weekly e-newsletter. For comprehensive listings, you can’t beat the *San Francisco Chronicle’s* website, www.sfgate.com. If you want more detailed information about specific performances, check out www.SFArts.org. While in town, the “Sunday Datebook” section of the *Chronicle* is the bible for entertainment listings. Otherwise, most hotels will have the

monthly tourist magazine *Where San Francisco*, which has good coverage of events, in the rooms or at the concierge desk. The free *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, available in street racks and in cafes, has a massive selection of listings, but it may be tough to discern what's good for kids. Look instead for a copy of *Bay Area Parent*, a monthly freebie covering San Francisco and the Bay Area. It's available in many children's stores.

How to purchase tickets: Tix Bay Area (www.tixbayarea.com) is a one-stop resource for purchasing tickets online, by mail, or in person at Union Square, Tuesday to Saturday from 11am to 6pm and Sunday from 11am

to 3pm. Tix also sells a limited roster of half-price tickets and is a Ticketmaster outlet. Half-price tickets may be purchased from the office, cash only, for same-day performances. You can check the offerings in person or online. Ticket Web (www.ticketweb.com) is a popular online box office with an easy-to-use interface and relationships with most clubs and entertainment venues. You can also ask your hotel's concierge to help obtain tickets to hot shows. Other resources include **City Box Office** (180 Redwood St., Suite 100, San Francisco, CA 94102; ☎ 415/392-4400; www.cityboxoffice.com) and box offices at the individual theaters and concert halls.

1 The Big Venues

The Cow Palace Completed in 1941 and intended for use as a permanent livestock pavilion, the Cow Palace is a catchall for events requiring a whole lot of space. Regular customers include the Grand National Rodeo, Disney on Ice, Golden Gate Kennel Club, World Wrestling, The Great Dickens Christmas Fair, and Ringling Brothers, Barnum & Bailey Circus. Located near the Brisbane/San Francisco border, it's not the easiest place to find. If you have tickets to an event here, you'll be better off driving. Tickets are sold through Ticketmaster. Geneva Ave. (at Santos St.). ☎ 415/404-4111. www.cowpalace.com.

The Curran Theatre The Curran opened in 1922 with the goal of hosting New York and European productions in San Francisco. Today, its "Best of Broadway" series features popular hits like *Les Misérables*, and 2005 will see *Evita* and *As You Like It* coming into town. Its partner theatres, the Orpheum and Golden Gate Theatres (see below) also hold big name shows, including *The Producers* and Disney's *The Lion King*. Shows run anywhere from 2 to 6 weeks. Your best bet for advance tickets is through Ticketmaster. 445 Geary St. (between Mason and Taylor sts.). ☎ 415/551-2000. www.bestofbroadway-sf.com. Tickets \$30–\$85.

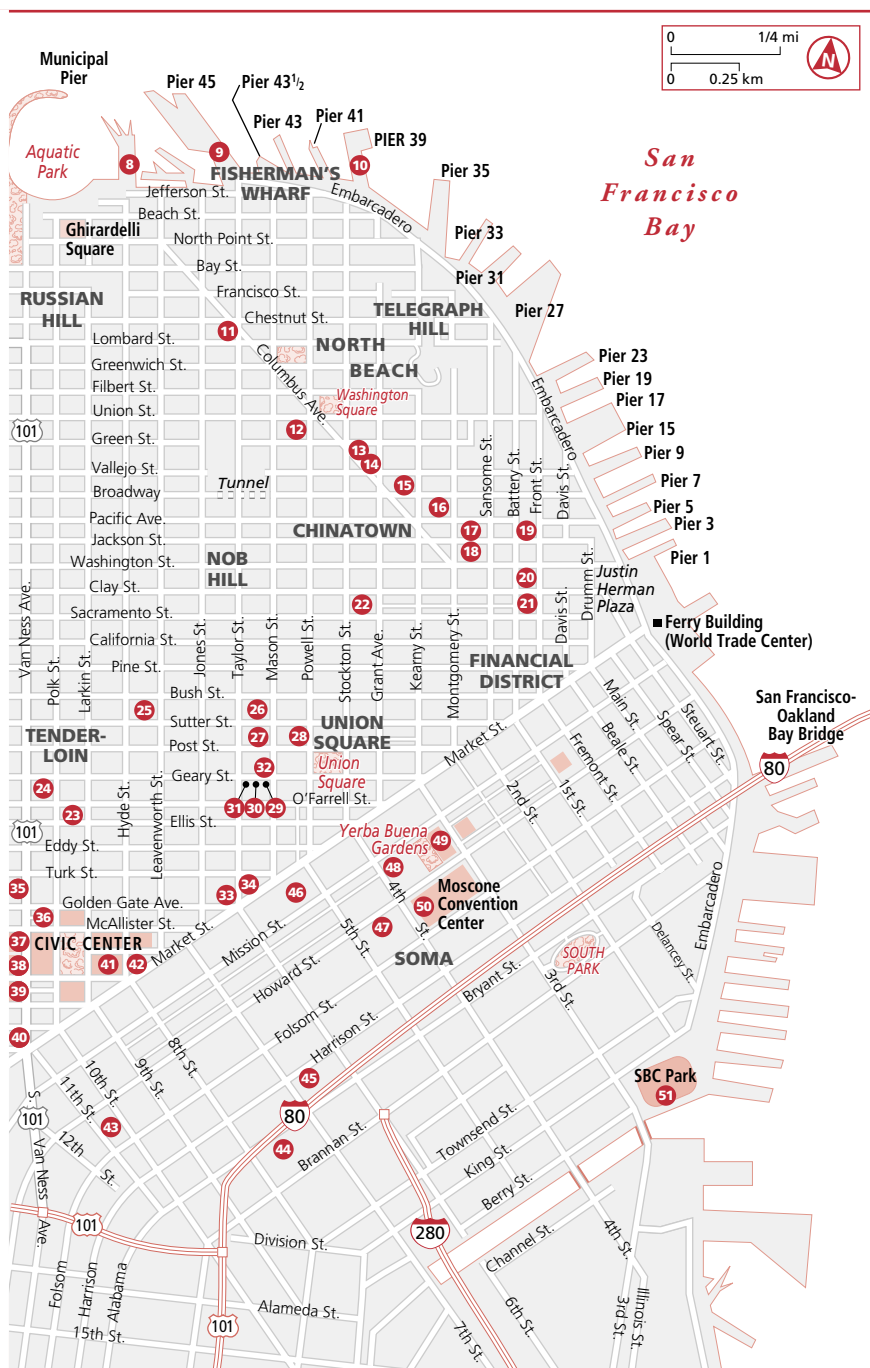
Davis Symphony Hall This stunning auditorium was built in 1980 to house the San Francisco Symphony. The acoustics are amazing and the interior is timelessly elegant. See "Concerts," later in this chapter, for information on the Symphony's offerings. 201 Van Ness Ave. (at Grove St.). ☎ 415/864-6000. www.sfsymphony.org.

The Fillmore Auditorium Anyone who was listening to rock 'n' roll in the 1960s undoubtedly knows of the Fillmore. The late Bill Graham made his reputation here as a concert producer and promoter, and every iconic musician from Janis Joplin to Frank Zappa to Jerry Garcia played the former dance hall. Today, the Fillmore continues to rock with acts such as Los Lobos, Tom Jones, and Wilco. With the exception of babes in arms, you can bring your kids here. Seating is limited, so prepare to stand in a crowded room and be grateful for California's no-smoking laws. Tickets can be purchased through the website's Ticketmaster link or at the box office. 1805 Geary Blvd. (at Fillmore St.). ☎ 415/346-6000. www.thefillmore.com. Tickets \$17–\$55.

San Francisco Entertainment

AMC Kabuki **6**
 AMC 1000 Van Ness **24**
 American Conservatory Theater's
 Geary Theatre **29**
 The Amusement Center **16**
Beach Blanket Babylon **12**
 Biscuits and Blues **32**
 Bix **17**
 Boom Boom Room **5**
 The Bubble Lounge **18**
 Cafe du Nord **1**
 California Academy of Sciences **47**
 City Box Office **36**
 Clarion Music Center **22**
 Cobb's Comedy Club **11**
 The Curran Theatre **30**
 Davies Symphony Hall **39**
 Embarcadero Center Cinema **21**
 Empire Plush Room at the York Hotel **25**
 The Endup **45**
 Enrico's Sidewalk Cafe **15**
 The Fillmore Auditorium **4**
 Fort Mason Center **7**
 Frisson **19**
 Golden Gate Theatre **33**
 Great American Music Hall (GAMH) **23**
 The Great Entertainer **44**
 Herbst Theatre **37**
 Hyde Street Pier **8**
 Jazz at Pearl's **13**
 Levende Lounge **2**
 Loews Theatre at Metreon **48**
 Lorraine Hansberry Thatre **26**
 Marines Memorial Theatre **27**
 Mezzanine **46**
 Musée Mécanique **9**
 New Conservatory Theatre Center **40**
 Opera Plaza Cinema **35**
 The Orpheum Theater **42**
 Post Street Theatre **28**
 Punchline Comedy Club **20**
 Rasselas **3**
 Redwood Room at the Clift Hotel **31**
 Riptide Arcade **10**
 SBC Park **51**
 San Francisco Public Library **41**
 Slim's **43**
 Tosca Café **14**
 The War Memorial Opera House **38**
 The Warfield **34**
 Yerba Buena Center for the Arts /
 Yerba Buena Gardens **49**
 Zeum Theater **50**





Tips Comings & Goings

Cable cars will get you to Union Square theaters if you're coming from North Beach. From the Marina or Union Street, take a 30-Stockton or 45-Union/Stockton bus. If you prefer to take a cab to your lodgings afterward, walk to a big hotel to catch one. You can find a number of parking garages near Union Square with fees beginning at \$10 for the evening.

You can reach the Civic Center, where the opera, ballet, and symphony are located, by any Muni Metro streetcar or any bus along Van Ness Avenue. Don't walk around this area unescorted after dark to get back to the Muni station. If a taxi isn't immediately available, walk to one of the many nearby restaurants and ask the host to call one for you. If you're driving, you can park in the garage on Grove Street between Franklin and Gough streets. The garage is well used by people attending performances, so you won't be alone walking back to your car after a show.

Venues located in SoMa or the Mission have troubles similar to Civic Center. You can usually get to the performance by public transportation, but returning late at night by bus is less interesting (or perhaps more interesting, depending on your perspective). Again, if you're attending a show in this area, don't expect to automatically hail a cab afterwards. Instead, walk to a nearby restaurant or bar and call. These numbers for local cab companies can help:

Desoto Cab: ☎ 415/970-1300

Luxor Cabs: ☎ 415/282-4141

Metro Cab: ☎ 415/920-0715

Veteran's Cab: ☎ 415/552-1300

Yellow Cab: ☎ 415/626-2345

Fort Mason Center At first glance, this complex, a former military base between Aquatic Park and the Marina Green, looks like a large group of abandoned warehouse buildings. In fact, on any given day the activity level inside is impressive. Besides its many small museums and nonprofit organizations (see p. 177 for more information on these), Fort Mason supports the Cowell Theater, the Herbst Pavilion, the Magic Theater, and the Bayfront Theater. The 437-seat Cowell Theater is the site of performances by local artistic companies such as Smuin Ballets/SF and the New Pickle Circus. The Magic Theater produces new works by playwrights such as Sam Shepard, and the Bayfront Theater is the site of Bay Area Theatresports, an improvisational group. The Herbst Pavilion is often used for craft fairs, garden shows, and other such events. You can find out what's happening at Fort Mason on its website, or by calling the information line at ☎ **415/345-7544**. Tickets may be purchased through its box office. Marina Blvd., at Buchanan St. Box office. ☎ **415/345-7575**; www.fortmason.org.

Golden Gate Theatre See the Curran Theatre above for a description of the shows that play at the Golden Gate Theatre. 1 Taylor St. (at Market St.). ☎ **415/551-2000**. www.bestofbroadway-sf.com. Tickets \$25–\$81.

The Civic Center



Great American Music Hall (GAMH) With the exception of dance shows, kids are welcome at most events here. GAMH's concerts feature local acts, singer/songwriters such as Jane Siberry, and bands such as Galactic. Built as an entertainment palace in 1907 (featuring gambling, dancing, and loose women), it's an impressive space with pillars, rococo touches, and a lovely wraparound balcony. The full kitchen serves throughout the shows. Tickets may be purchased through Tickets.com, www.virtuous.com, at the box office, or by faxing the office at ☎ 415/885-5075. GAMH is not in the best neighborhood. Its next-door neighbor is the Mitchell Bros. XXX Theater, so you might want to take a taxi here. If you're driving, there's parking 1 block toward Van Ness Avenue. 859 O'Farrell St. (between Polk and Larkin sts.). ☎ 415/885-0750. www.gamh.com. Tickets start at \$15 and vary according to the show.

The Herbst Theater A historic 928-seat jewel inside the Veteran's Building, the Herbst Theater was the setting for the birth of the United Nations, when Harry Truman signed the charter bringing the U.N. into existence in 1945. The stage is most often used by San Francisco Performances (see below) for classical music concerts and by City Arts and Lectures for conversations between authors and local pundits. Information and tickets to events are available from City Box Office (see the introduction to this chapter). 401 Van Ness Ave. (between Hayes and McAllister sts.). ☎ 415/392-4400. www.sfwmpac.org.

Lorraine Hansberry Theatre Showcasing the work of African-American playwrights, this 300-seat theater near Union Square consistently offers a superb season of drama and musical revues between December and May. Get information on performance dates on the theater's website or by calling the box office. 620 Sutter St. (at Mason St., in the Sheehan Hotel). ☎ 415/474-8800 (box office). www.lorrainehansberrytheatre.com.

Marines Memorial Theatre This 1927 building once featured national radio broadcasts with the likes of Bob Hope and Frank Sinatra and later became the first home of A.C.T. The small stage now hosts many top-quality local and touring productions, including monologues and plays. Tickets can be purchased by phone or through Ticketmaster. 609 Sutter St. (at Mason St.). ☎ 415/771-6900. www.marinesmemorialtheatre.com. Tickets \$25–\$40.

The Orpheum Theater See the Curran Theater, above, for a description of the shows that play at the Orpheum. 1192 Market St. (at Hyde and 8th sts.). ☎ 415/551-2000. www.bestofbroadway-sf.com. Tickets \$26–\$160.

The Warfield If you find that a musician whom you or your teens really love is playing here, the Warfield is actually a manageable space in which to shepherd the kids. For those who are happier sitting down, the theater balcony has reserved seating. Bands who recently played at the Warfield include Cake and Tears for Fears. Look for a schedule of events on the website or phone for information. Tickets may be purchased through Ticketmaster. 982 Market St. (at 6th St.). ☎ 415/775-7722. www.thefillmore.com/warfield.asp. Tickets \$22–\$35.

The War Memorial Opera House Arthur Brown, Jr., the architect who designed two exceptional San Francisco landmarks, City Hall and Coit Tower, also designed the Beaux Arts-style War Memorial Opera House. Opened in 1932, it is now home to both the San Francisco Ballet and San Francisco Opera. The 3,200-seat theater was painstakingly retrofitted and updated after suffering damage from the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989. The result was an intrinsically beautiful theater that is also one of the most technically modern in the world. 301 Van Ness Ave. (at Grove St.). ☎ 415/864-3330 (Opera tickets) and 415/865-2000 (Ballet tickets). www.sfwmpac.org. Tickets \$22–\$135.

Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and Yerba Buena Gardens It's a rare weekend that you can't find something going on at this amazing city cultural center. Better yet, events in the gardens are free. From May through October in the Esplanade, the Yerba Buena Gardens Festival features outdoor classical, jazz, blues, and gospel music; dance recitals; children's festivals; and lunchtime concerts. 701 Mission St. (at 3rd St.). ☎ 415/978-2787 (box office). www.ybae.org.

OUTSIDE SAN FRANCISCO

Greek Theater This Greek-styled outdoor amphitheatre is the loveliest place in the Bay Area to see a musical performance. The tiered concrete seating and immense stage has capacity for 8,000 fans under an open sky. Having once sat in the last row, I can attest that all seats are good, and the acoustics superb. It gets cold at night, though, so bring jackets. Sarah McLachlan, the Gypsy Kings, and Norah Jones were among the performers in 2004. For tickets, contact Ticketmaster or Cal Performances. Off Gayley Road, US Berkeley campus, Berkeley. ☎ 510/642-9988 (Cal Performances). www.calperfs.berkeley.edu.

Julia Morgan Center for the Arts The architect Julia Morgan, best known for the Hearst Castle, originally designed this ethereal redwood building in 1908 as a church. Now this community center, named in her honor, offers interactive

and multicultural dance, music, theater, and educational events for families every Sunday at 2pm. Kaleidoscope Sunday Matinee Series programs vary from week to week so phone or check the website for details. Tickets are sold at the door. 2640 College Ave., Berkeley. ☎ 510/845-8542. www.juliamorgan.org. Tickets \$10 adults, \$5 children.

Shoreline Amphitheater When the biggest names in music hit the Bay Area, they come to this massive outdoor amphitheater, 35 miles south of San Francisco. With room for more than 22,000 people, Shoreline also hosts day-long music festivals. Tickets are sold through Ticketmaster outlets. One Amphitheatre Pkwy., Mountain View. ☎ 650/967-3000. www.shorelineamp.com.

Zellerbach Hall The major performance space on the UC Berkeley campus, Zellerbach plays host to an interesting array of world-class performers, including the Mark Morris Dance Company, Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, and the Bolshoi Ballet, in addition to touring solo artists and theater—all booked by Cal Performances. Although season subscribers take the majority of tickets, you should be able to score seats if you plan in advance. Check the website or phone the box office to find out what's scheduled. Bancroft Way (at Telegraph Ave.). ☎ 510/642-9988. www.calperfs.berkeley.edu. Tickets \$26–\$72.

2 Seasonal Events

Black Nativity **Ages 10 and up.** This stirring annual gospel rendition of the Christmas story, as interpreted by Langston Hughes, is produced at the **Lorraine Hansberry Theatre** (see above). Tickets \$25–\$32.

A Christmas Carol **Ages 5 and up.** The **American Conservatory Theater** can be relied upon every December to stage this adaptation of the well-known tale of Ebenezer Scrooge and the people he hates to love. They always do a fine job of it, too. Geary Theater, 415 Geary St. (at Mason St.). ☎ 415/749-2228. Tickets \$15–\$68.

Cirque du Soleil **Ages 8 and up.** The esteemed Canadian circus featuring high-wire acts, trapeze artists of the highest caliber, contortionists, clowns, original scores, and otherworldly themes sets up its impressive tent in the parking lot at SBC Park (King St. at 4th St.) for shows in November and December. Tickets are quite expensive but go quickly nonetheless. Check the Cirque website for show dates and phone for tickets as far in advance as possible. ☎ 800/678-5440 (box office). www.cirquedusoleil.com. Tickets \$41–\$195.

Dance-Along Nutcracker **Ages 4 and up.** Sure, you've heard of the Sing-Along Messiah, but the Dance-Along Nutcracker? An idea whose time has come, this only-in-San Francisco annual event is the brainchild of the San Francisco Lesbian/Gay Freedom Band, the 50-piece orchestra that provides the music and the tutu rentals. Audience members are cued when to twirl, but if you'd just rather watch, that's okay too. Two afternoon performances are scheduled in early December and take place at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. 701 Mission St. (at 3rd St.). ☎ 415/978-2787. www.sflgfb.org. Tickets \$21–\$40.

Deck the Hall **Ages 3 to 10.** Members of the San Francisco Symphony present *'Twas the Night Before Christmas* with puppetry and narration, followed by post-show parties featuring arts and crafts activities and refreshments. The show only has 2 performances in one December day. Davies Symphony Hall. 201 Van Ness Ave. (at Grove St.). ☎ 415/864-6000. www.sfsymphony.org.

Friends of Recreation and Parks Fall Music Series **All Ages.** A nonprofit group that provides support for parks, open space, and city recreation centers,

the Friends hold free events at parks around the city to encourage residents to get out of the house. Concerts featuring local musicians are held Saturday afternoons throughout the summer and on Friday nights in September and October. Friends also sponsor the Multicultural Kite Festival in early August at Golden Gate Park, giving away kites for kids to decorate and fly and providing refreshments and entertainment. In April, the annual Song of the Earth Festival in honor of Earth Day brings youth music and dance groups together also in Golden Gate Park. All events are free. ☎ 415/750-5110. www.frp.org.

Hansel and Gretel **Ages 5 and up.** A gentle introduction to opera, this annual production by the Golden Gate Opera Company is colorful and easy for kids to digest since they all know the story. Location varies from year to year so phone for information. ☎ 415/392-4400. www.goldengateopera.org. Tickets \$30.

The Nutcracker **Ages 5 and up.** There's no shortage of Sugar Plum Fairies during Christmas, but the San Francisco Ballet's version of this classic is clearly the best-known and most-beloved in town. The company debuted the piece in 1944 and has been dancing it annually since 1949. It usually runs for about 2 to 3 weeks in December. On selected dates there's a party afterward with appearances by cast members. War Memorial Opera House, 301 Van Ness Ave. (at Grove St.). ☎ 415/865-2000. www.sfballet.org. Tickets \$22-\$135. Sugar Plum party \$20 extra.

The Nutcracker by the City Ballet School **Ages 5 and up.** In case the San Francisco Ballet's Nutcracker doesn't fit into your calendar or your budget, a more modest, but delightful, alternative is the City Ballet School's version. Fort Mason (Marina Blvd. at Buchanan St.), Middle Pier. ☎ 415/626-8878. www.cityballetschool.org. Tickets \$24.

Peter and the Wolf **Ages 3 to 11.** You've played the cassette tape. Now it's time to take the kids to watch the San Francisco Youth Symphony Orchestra tune up for its annual holiday rendition of Prokofiev's famous piece, with celebrity narrators that have included Robin Williams, Bobby McFerrin, and Rita Moreno. The December concert features Christmas carols and a singalong to end the show. Davis Symphony Hall, 201 Van Ness Ave. (at Grove St.). ☎ 415/864-6000. www.sfsymphony.org. Tickets \$10-\$43.

Stern Grove Festival **All ages.** On summer Sundays, you can watch families laden with the newspaper, coolers, blankets, and low-rise lawn chairs shuffling into Stern Grove for free concerts in the park. The music begins at 2pm, but savvy locals know to show up early to claim the best spots on the lawn. It's a relaxing and carefree way to spend an afternoon. The lineup usually includes the San Francisco Symphony, San Francisco Ballet, jazz artists, and students from the San Francisco Opera's Merola Program. For a schedule, look on the website or phone the hot line. Stern Grove, Sloat Blvd. (at 19th Ave.). ☎ 415/252-6252. www.sterngrove.org.

The Velveteen Rabbit **Ages 5 and up.** Margery Williams's tale of a stuffed bunny that longs to be real is beautifully staged in this modern dance adaptation by ODC/San Francisco with music by Benjamin Britten and recorded narration by the actor/clown/comedian Geoff Hoyle. Young audience members have been known to bring along their own well-worn stuffies. Tickets are available through the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts box office. Performances take place in the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Theater. 700 Howard St. (between 3rd and 4th sts.) ☎ 415/978-2787. www.odcdance.org.

3 Weekend Shows

Hyde Street Pier **All ages.** The pier holds music-oriented events on alternating Saturdays. The Sea Music Concert Series brings in internationally recognized performers to play instruments and sing historic sailor's songs amidst the antique vessels. Shows are at 8pm and tickets are \$10. Best for kids are such programs like *Chantey Sing*, which invites families to sing traditional working songs aboard historic ships. There's no fee for this event, but reservations are required. Daytime programs include *Music of the Sea for Kids*, which teaches children 6 and up about maritime history through music, and *Chanteying Aboard American Ships*, which explores the African American and Celtic roots of old sea songs. The daytime programs, 2pm on Saturdays, don't require reservations, but vessel admission is charged. Jefferson St. at Hyde St. ☎ **415/556-6435**. www.nps.gov/safr/local. Vessel admission: \$5 adults, children under 17 free.

Noe Valley Ministry Music Series **All ages.** Everyone's favorite neighborhood concert hall is actually a treasured 110-year-old Victorian church. Saturday nights are given over to musicians playing a huge range of acoustic music, and the variety of performers is pretty amazing. Jazz, folk, bluegrass, roots, acoustic rock—the Ministry has hosted it all. Tickets go on sale 3 weeks before the performances, which are almost always at 8:15pm on Saturdays. Tickets may be purchased through tickets.com ☎ **415/478-2277** and at **Streetlight Records**, 3979 24th St. in Noe Valley ☎ **888/682-3550**. 1021 Sanchez St. (at 23rd St.). ☎ **415/454-5238**. www.noevalleyministry.org.

Randall Theater **Ages 4 and up.** Low-cost, high-quality family entertainment is the hallmark at this little theater inside the Randall Museum. At Buddy Club events, you might find magicians and jugglers, singer/songwriters, holiday cabaret, plays, or musicals on Sundays from 11am to noon. Cine Club is a program of classic film screenings for teenagers on Friday nights at 7pm. Tickets may be purchased at the museum on the day of the show. 199 Museum Way (off Roosevelt Way). ☎ **415/554-9600**. www.randallmuseum.org. Tickets \$7–\$10 for most events. Muni: 37-Corbett bus.

West Coast Live ★ **Ages 10 and up.** The audience has a great time interacting with Sedge Thomson, the silken-toned host of this live radio show featuring Bay Area authors, artists, comedians, and musical groups. The show travels around these days but does broadcast one Saturday a month from 10am to noon at the Bayfront Theatre at Fort Mason. The shows are popular, so phone for reservations and a schedule. They take place in different San Francisco and Berkeley venues. Call or check the website for more details. ☎ **510/549-1475**. www.wcl.org. Tickets \$15 adults, \$5 children under 18.

4 Theater

The shows at some of these theaters may or may not be appropriate for kids, depending on what happens to be playing when you're there. For theaters that offer one show or the same type of show consistently, I've suggested an age range. For the others, call the theater to see what's on when you're in town.

American Conservatory Theater (A.C.T.) One of the finest theatrical companies and schools in the United States, the A.C.T. presents classic, new, and experimental work by playwrights from Shakespeare and Anton Chekhov to David Mamet and Tom Stoppard. Each season usually includes something you

can bring the kids to see. The production values, not to mention the acting, are always superb. Tickets are available through the website and the box office, which is open daily noon to curtain time on performance days, and noon to 6pm on non-performance days. Geary Theater, 415 Geary St. (at Mason St.). ☎ 415/749-2228. www.act-sfbay.org. Tickets \$11–\$68.

Bay Area Theatresports (BATS) Ages 13 and up. Improvisational theater as sport is BATS's objective. In addition to offering classes, the group performs Thursday through Sunday nights at 8pm. You never know exactly what you'll be seeing, which makes improvisational theater exciting and a little bit dangerous, at least for the performers. Fort Mason Center, Building B., Marina Blvd. at Buchanan St. ☎ 415/474-8935. www.improv.org. Tickets \$8–\$12.

Beach Blanket Babylon Ages 10 and up. For more than 10,000 performances over 30 years, BBB has spoofed popular culture, politicians, the famous, and the infamous with actor/singers decked out in architecturally astounding hats and sparkly costumes. The story line—something about Snow White seeking true love—has altered little over the years, but the songs are updated regularly or at least after every election. Due to liquor licensing laws, minors are only allowed in the club for Sunday matinee performances. Tickets go on sale 6 weeks ahead of time and may be purchased by phoning Club Fugazi at the number listed here. 678 Green St. (a.k.a. Beach Blanket Babylon Blvd.). ☎ 415/421-4222. www.beachblanketbabylon.com. Sunday matinee \$25–\$70.

42nd Street Moon Ages 12 and up. If you happen to be fond of “lost” musicals and early-20th-century songwriters—Rogers and Hart, Cole Porter, the Gershwins, Oscar Hammerstein II—the staged concert versions of shows from the 1920s on up will delight you and, hopefully, the kids. 42nd Street Moon productions have no sets, minimal staging, and few costume changes, but the music shines brightly. Five shows a season are produced. Your best bet for dates and information is through the website. Most shows take place at the Eureka Theater. 215 Jackson St. ☎ 415/978-2787 (Yerba Buena). www.42ndstmoon.org. Tickets \$17–\$30. Ticket sales are handled through Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.

Lamplighters Music Theatre Ages 8 and up. Since 1952, the Lamplighters have brought the works of Gilbert and Sullivan and other comic operas to stages around the Bay Area. The shows are great fun, and an excellent way to introduce light opera to the family. The season encompasses three productions scattered throughout the year, staged at the theater at Yerba Buena Gardens or Herbst Theatre. ☎ 415/227-4797. www.lamplighters.org. Tickets are sold through Yerba Buena Center for the Arts (☎ 415/978-2787) and cost \$30–\$42 adults, \$25–\$37 ages 16–29 and seniors 65 and up, and \$10–\$17 kids under 16.

New Conservatory Theatre Center Ages 5 and up. The YouthAware Educational Theatre at the New Conservatory offers theater aimed at educating young people about social issues and encouraging them to make healthier life choices. YouthAware programs cover topics such as HIV prevention, addiction, and acceptance of diverse communities and cultures. 25 Van Ness Ave. (at Oak St.). ☎ 415/861-8972. www.nctcsf.org. Performances are either free or low-cost.

Post Street Theatre (formerly Theatre on the Square) Tucked up next to the Kensington Park Hotel, this theater boasts high-caliber, smaller-scale off-Broadway and avant-garde theatrical attractions. This little theater may have something on the boards that you could happily bring your kids to, such as Marcel

Marceau, or not. 450 Post St., 2nd floor (between Powell and Mason sts.). ☎ 415/321-2900. www.poststreettheatre.com. Tickets \$25–\$50.

San Francisco Shakespeare Festival (SFSF) What started out as free Shakespeare in Golden Gate Park in 1983 has blossomed into a full-fledged regional theater company offering school tours and summer camp programs as well as three productions each season. In 2004, Shakespeare in the Park moved to the Presidio, where it now plays at the Parade Ground on Saturday and Sunday evenings at 7:30pm through the month of September. For more information, see the website or phone for a schedule. ☎ 415/422-2222. www.sfshakes.org. Park performances are free.

A Traveling Jewish Theatre (ATJT) Original works with Jewish themes have been the focus of this 26-year-old ensemble company. Plays planned for 2005, including *Blood Relative* (formerly called *The Middle East Project*) seem geared for more sophisticated audiences. Check the website or phone to see if something appropriate for children will be on offer. 470 Florida St. (between 17th and Mariposa sts.). ☎ 415/285-8080. www.atjt.com. Tickets \$12–\$31.

STUDENTS ON STAGE

ACT Young Conservatory A.C.T. uses Zeum's 210-seat theater as a second stage for student and professional productions. Recent shows included *School-girl Figure* and *Once in a Lifetime*. If your kids are interested in acting, see if you can arrange a trip when second-year Conservatory students work on scenes from plays by Shakespeare. Zeum Theater, Yerba Buena Gardens, 221 4th St. (at Howard St.). ☎ 415/749-2228. www.actactortraining.org (ACT Young Conservatory) or www.zeum.org (Zeum). Tickets \$15.

Young People's Teen Musical Theater Company (YPT) **Ages 8 and up.** A project of the Recreation and Parks Department, this company of high school students puts out an impressive product. YPT stages two shows a year, one in August and one in January. They take place around town, sometimes at the Randall Theater, sometimes at the theater at San Francisco State University. ☎ 415/554-9523. www.sinasohn.com/yptmtc. Tickets \$7–\$9.

CHILDREN'S THEATER COMPANIES

Young Performer's Theatre **Ages 3 to 8.** A popular birthday party venue, this is a casual theater experience perfect for tots who wouldn't be expected to sit through a lengthy production. This is also a theater school, so the plays feature youthful actors. Shows are presented Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Fort Mason (Marina Blvd. At Buchanan St.), Landmark Building C, 3rd Floor. ☎ 415/346-5550. www.ypt.org. Tickets \$6–\$9.

OUTSIDE SAN FRANCISCO

Broadway by the Bay **Ages 5 and up.** In case no family-friendly musical is showing in San Francisco during your visit, try your luck at this community theater about a 15-minute drive from San Francisco. Many of the Bay Area's very talented, semi-retired performers gravitate to this theater company, which produces three musicals with professional sets and costumes during its season from April to October. In 2005 the group will stage *My Fair Lady*, *Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat*, and *Ragtime: The Musical*—all excellent choices for kids and adults. San Mateo Performing Arts Center, 600 N. Delaware Ave., San Mateo. ☎ 650/579-5568. www.broadwaybythebay.org. Tickets \$33–\$40.

What to Do If You Have a Sitter

If you've been sightseeing with the kids all day and still have enough energy for a night on the town, I'm impressed. If you just want to dine somewhere special, consider **Gary Danko** (p. 126) or **Fleur de Lys** (p. 104). Dinner at either of these world-class institutions is an event in itself, and you'll probably have no time for any post-meal activities. If you want to eat with the kids and then hit the town, the options are bountiful. Be sure to check the listings in the *SF Weekly* or *Bay Guardian* for specific details. Since most clubs don't get going until after 10pm, plan to take cabs anywhere not within walking distance of your hotel.

Finding Some Cool Jazz A 1930s supper club ambience defines **Jazz at Pearl's**, 256 Columbus Ave. at Broadway Street (☎ 415/291-8255; www.jazzatpearls.com), perhaps the best jazz venue in town. There's no cover, just a two-drink minimum, but the \$10 cocktail package for the 10:30pm show will get you better seating. Local favorite **Rasselas**, 1534 Fillmore St. at O'Farrell Street (☎ 415/ 346-8696; www.rasselasjazzclub.com), is a casual, comfortable lounge to hear jazz, Latin rhythms, blues, and R&B. You can order snacks from the adjacent Ethiopian restaurant. Weekdays have no cover charge, just a two-drink minimum. The weekend \$7 cover charge kicks in after 9pm. For a swank evening of jazz and cabaret, check out the **Empire Plush Room**, 940 Sutter St. between Leavenworth and Hyde streets (☎ 415/885-2800; www.plushroom.com), a former 1920s speakeasy in the York Hotel. Tickets are \$20–\$100. **Enrico's Sidewalk Cafe**, 504 Broadway St. at Kearny Street (☎ 415/982-6223; www.enricosidewalkcafe.com), brings tourists and locals together on the front patio for people-watching, Italian cuisine, and excellent swing, jazz, and blues from around the country.

Blues Bars and other Live Music The **Boom Boom Room**, 1601 Fillmore St., at Geary Street (☎ 415/673-8000; www.boomboomblues.com), is open every night for dancing, cocktails, and jiving. Lines often form on the weekends, so arrive early and sip your drink slowly. Cover charges vary depending on the night and the act. Check the website (www.boomboomblues.com) for more information. For an eclectic music selection, try **Cafe du Nord**, 2170 Market St., at Sanchez Street (☎ 415/861-5016; www.cafedunord.com), a basement-level club and restaurant with Victorian period interiors. Covers for the experimental and swing bands that play nightly run from \$8 to \$25. Some shows are open to under-21s.

Dancing After 30 years, **The Endup**, 401 6th St. at Harrison Street (☎ 415/646-0999; www.theendup.com), remains San Francisco's most enduringly popular dance club. The all-day/all-night club is a non-stop party every weekend until the wee hours of Monday morning. It's in a sketchy part of town and may be too crazy for some people, but if you want to dance, there's no place better suited to the activity. The current dance hotspot is **Mezzanine**, 444 Jesse St. off Harriett Street between 5th and 6th streets (☎ 415/625-8880; www.mezzaninesf.com), a sleek, upscale, industrial-chic nightclub and gallery in SoMa. Admission prices vary. **The Ramp**, 855 China Basin, off 3rd Street at Mariposa Street

(☎ 415/621-2378; www.ramrestaurant.com), is an indoor/outdoor bar/restaurant. It isn't open year-round, but between May and October you can dance to live jazz, salsa, and world music on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings at no cover charge—weather permitting.

Swing and ballroom dancers, and those who've never completely let go of their Ginger Rogers fantasies, will adore the **Metronome Ballroom**, 1830 17th St. (☎ 415/252-9000; www.metronomeballroom.com). You can swoop by at 7:30pm to take a class and then stay for a dance party on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday night or simply arrive at 9pm to trip the light fantastic. This is strictly a social dancing venue; only snacks and nonalcoholic beverages are available. There's an \$8 cover charge for just the party, and a \$15 charge for the lesson and party. One Saturday a month, classes are taught to a live tango band. Those classes are \$16, or \$12 for just the party.

Drinking in the Atmosphere One of the hottest places to have a drink these days is **Levende Lounge**, at 1710 Mission St., near Duboce Avenue (☎ 415/864-5585; www.levendesf.com). Enjoy small plates, fancy cocktails, and DJ-spun tunes at this venue populated by trendy 20- and 30-somethings. A new addition to the lounge scene is **Frisson**, at 244 Jackson St. at Battery Street (☎ 415/956-3004). Drinks are pricey, but the music is good, the décor lovely, and the crowd oh-so hip. A cool Art Deco supper club, **Bix**, 56 Gold St., off Montgomery Street between Pacific and Jackson streets in the Financial District (☎ 415/433-6300; www.bixrestaurant.com), has the best martini in town. Looking to sip a little bubbly instead? Stop by **The Bubble Lounge**, at 714 Montgomery St. at Washington Street (☎ 415/434-4204; www.bubblelounge.com), the San Francisco sister to the cool NYC club, and choose from over 300 champagnes and sparkling wines. The **Redwood Room**, in the uberhip Clift Hotel, 495 Geary St., at Jones Street (☎ 415/775-4700), remains a very popular cocktail lounge. Looking for a mellower place to have a drink? Stop by the classic **Tosca Café**, 242 Columbus Ave. at Pacific Street (☎ 415/986-9651), in North Beach, an understated old-style bar with a long mahogany counter, red-leather-covered stools, and perhaps a local celebrity or two.

Comedy Clubs **Cobb's Comedy Club**, 915 Columbus Ave. (☎ 415/928-4320; www.cobbcomedyclub.com), has two shows nightly Thursday through Sunday for \$15 to \$25 and a marathon of local comics on Wednesday nights for \$10. No one under 16 admitted. Next door to Embarcadero 1 is the **Punchline Comedy Club**, 444 Battery St., between Washington and Clay streets (☎ 415/397-7573; punchlinecomedyclub.com). Locally and nationally known comics play here twice nightly most days of the week. Shows are only open to folks 18 and over, and tickets prices start at \$7.50. **The Marsh**, 1062 Valencia St. near 22nd Street (☎ 415/826-5750; www.themarsh.org), is a complex of theaters devoted to developing performances. On Saturday nights at 9:30pm, the **Mock Café** features local comics for a cover charge of \$7. Although Robin Williams himself makes the occasional appearance, you'll be closer to the cutting edge of comedy here.

All-Ages Music Venues

Here's the lowdown on the handful of places where you can take older children to hear music. The **Great American Music Hall** (p. 245), among the larger clubs, is the most physically comfortable. It has tables and chairs and a full menu. As in every club, the type of crowd drawn depends on the act, but aged Dead-Heads and folkies are the norm here. Shows generally begin at 8pm, so you won't want to bring sleepy-heads with you. The **Warfield** (p. 246) and **The Fillmore** (p. 241) are similar kinds of halls, both in dodgy sections of town. They draw youngish crowds that might intimidate some kids, so I'd think twice before bringing kids under 16 to either place. A smaller club that's both comfortable and cool for kids is **Slim's** (333 11th St.; ☎ 415/255-0333; www.slims-sf.com). Bands tend to be small national acts, locals, and up-and-comers. The best way to enjoy an evening here with kids is to buy dinner tickets, which give your party seating on the upstairs balcony. The food is simple—quesadillas, burgers, potato skins—but it's better than standing (dinner tickets cost \$20, plus the regular show ticket price). Tickets for shows start at only \$13. Two other all-ages clubs won't impress the kids with how hip you've become, but if you like jazz, they are worth checking out. Near Union Square in a basement is **Biscuits and Blues** (401 Mason St.; ☎ 415/292-2583; www.biscuitandblue.citysearch.com). Local jazz and blues musicians are often on tap—look out especially for the Tommy Castro Band or Lavay Smith and her Red Hot Skillet Lickers. The Southern-style food is just okay, but there's a children's menu, and dinner patrons get the best seats. For classier premises and straight-ahead jazz, check into **Jazz at Pearl's**, which I've described in the "What to Do If You Have a Sitter" section, earlier in this chapter. If you're coming with kids (teens, I hope), view the earlier show. The 8pm \$40 dinner package includes admission, priority seating, and a three-course Spanish/French meal. Without dinner, there's no cover charge at Pearl's, just a two-drink minimum.

Clarion Music Center (816 Sacramento St.; ☎ 415/391-1317) isn't a club per se, but on Friday nights at 8pm this Chinatown music store

5 Concerts

Pocket Opera Impresario Donald Pippin has been bringing his own, true-to-the-intentions-of-the-composer versions of opera to appreciative audiences for 27 years. The majority is sung in English by professional opera singers accompanied by the Pocket Philharmonic with minimal costumes and virtually no sets, but Pippin gets the point across and makes opera alive and understandable to everyone. He's done more to nurture new audiences for opera than anyone else around. Productions in San Francisco are held on Sunday afternoons at Temple Emanu-el (Arguello and Lake sts. in the Richmond District) and at the Palace of the Legion of Honor (p. 176). ☎ 415/972-8934 (box office). www.pocketopera.org. Tickets \$32 adults, \$15 children under 18.

hosts really interesting solo and ensemble performers from around the world. Tickets are \$15 to \$20 and available at the store or through Ticket web.com. You can find out who's playing at Clarion on its website, www.clarionmusic.com. **12 Galaxies** (2565 Mission St.; ☎ 415/970-9777; www.12galaxies.com) is a huge new music venue in the Mission. The 12 Galaxies Children's series features local kid-oriented bands who perform on selected Saturdays at 4pm. Tickets are \$5 for kids and \$10 for adults and are available online at www.virtuous.com.

Some of the most family-oriented clubs are across the Bay Bridge. In Berkeley, **Ashkenaz** (1317 San Pablo Ave.; ☎ 510/525-5054; www.ashkenaz.com) is the place for world music and dance. On Sunday afternoons, 1-hour shows for kids are held. These may be live music and dancing, puppet shows, Klezmer, or music with an international flair. Tickets, \$4 for kids and \$6 for adults, may be purchased at the door. **The Freight & Salvage** (1111 Addison St., Berkeley; ☎ 510/548-1761; www.freightandsalvage.com) does not serve alcohol, so there's never any question about under-21s attending shows. A coffeehouse that will take you back to your pre-Starbucks college days, this intimate club is great for folk, Cajun, and blues musicians, some local and some touring. Tickets are \$4.50 to \$26. Children under 12 years of age are admitted at half-price. Over in Oakland, **Yoshi's**, the seminal jazz club and Japanese restaurant, has instituted Sunday family matinees featuring whoever is playing the club that weekend. This means your kids get to see and hear greats such as Gato Barbieri or Charlie Hunter. With tickets at \$5 for kids 2 to 17 years old and \$15 for adults, this is just a tremendous opportunity to introduce the children to jazz legends. Teens may prefer going to hear a regular concert at the club. Ticket prices vary, but on Sundays students with ID pay half price. Yoshi's is at Jack London Square, 510 Embarcadero West, Oakland (☎ 510/238-9200; www.yoshis.com). The best way to reach the club for matinees is on the Alameda/Oakland ferry, which drops you off across the street. For ferry information and schedules, phone ☎ 510/522-3300.

San Francisco Conservatory of Music An often overlooked resource for classical music and opera, the Conservatory has been preparing young musicians for professional careers as teachers and performers since 1917. Recitals by students and faculty are given regularly at the school, often with no admission charge. One weekend in December the opera department gives free performances of *Hansel and Gretel*, seemingly the fave opera for young people. Check the website for concert schedules. Tickets may be purchased over the phone. 1201 Ortega St. (at 19th Ave.). ☎ 415/759-3475. www.sfc.edu. Tickets \$10–\$15; some performances are free.

San Francisco Opera One of the world's finest opera companies, the San Francisco Opera's repertoire is generally adult in nature. Outside of bringing schoolchildren around for short programs, it doesn't target youth. Nevertheless,

should you be bringing along a young opera enthusiast or a kid who is curious about opera, you could hedge your bets by purchasing standing-room tickets, which are \$10 and sold through the box office from 10am on performance days. Student rush tickets, at \$15 if available (phone to inquire), are sold through the box office from 11am on performance days. The season runs September through July. 301 Van Ness Ave. (at Grove St.). ☎ 415/864-3330. www.sanfranciscoopera.com. Tickets \$35–\$195.

San Francisco Performances Along with an October-to-April season of classical music, dance, and ensemble groups like the San Francisco Klezmer Experience, San Francisco Performances offers monthly 2pm matinees specifically for families. They're 1 hour in length, kids of all ages are encouraged to attend, and fidgeting is politely ignored. Concerts are held in various venues around town including the Herbst Theater and Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. ☎ 415/392-2545. www.performances.org. Family matinee tickets \$7–\$15.

San Francisco Symphony Currently headed by the distinguished conductor Michael Tilson Thomas, the world-class San Francisco Symphony played its first concert in December 1911. Located in Davis Symphony Hall, the orchestra performs from October to early May. Programming includes a “Music for Families” series, which consists of Saturday afternoon concerts for kids 7 and older held four times a season, annual holiday concerts, and a Chinese New Year’s matinee concert featuring Asian instruments and music. On select Wednesdays at 10am, you can view featured musicians in open rehearsals, but you must buy tickets for the privilege. Davis Symphony Hall, 201 Van Ness Ave. (at Grove St.). ☎ 415/864-6000. www.sfsymphony.org and www.sfskids.org. Music for Families concert tickets \$10–\$51, half price for children under 13. Open rehearsal tickets \$18 and \$30.

San Francisco Youth Symphony Orchestra If you’ve wondered where the kids who actually practice end up, make every attempt to see this award-winning ensemble of 12- to 21-year-old virtuosos. They play Saturday matinees in November, March, and May; present *Peter and the Wolf* in an annual winter holiday concert; and perform occasional special concerts. Tickets are available through the box office or website. Davis Symphony Hall, 201 Van Ness Ave. (at Grove St.). ☎ 415/864-6000. www.sfsymphony.org. Tickets \$10 and 25.

6 Movies

There’s no shortage of multiscreen theaters in town, all playing the latest Hollywood blockbusters. You can find a complete listing of theaters and films with playing times online at www.sfgate.com. The movie theaters listed below are those that are particularly easy to reach by public transportation or on foot from Union Square.

AMC Kabuki This eight-screen theater is located in Japantown, which makes dinner and a major release very simple. 1881 Post St. at Fillmore St. ☎ 415/922-4262. www.amctheatres.com. Tickets \$6.50 child, \$9.50 adult. Muni: 38-Geary bus.

AMC 1000 Van Ness This 14-screen theater on Van Ness is convenient to downtown but has only a handful of nearby dining options. 1000 Van Ness Ave. at O’Farrell St. ☎ 415/922-4262. Tickets \$7 child, \$10 adult. Muni: 38-Geary bus.

Loews Theatre at Metreon With 9 restaurants, 15 state-of-the-art screens, and an IMAX theater, you’ve got dining and entertainment choices to suit everyone in the family. The “Reel Mom” program on Tuesdays at 11am is a

showtime exclusively for parents with kids. Your infant can cry his or her lungs out, and you won't be asked to leave the theatre. 101 4th St. (at Mission St.). ☎ 415/369-6200. www.loewstheaters.com. Tickets \$7 child, \$10 adult.

ART, FOREIGN & EXPERIMENTAL FILMS

Castro Theatre This 1922 Art Deco structure designed by Timothy Pfleuger is a true movie palace, with its own “Mighty Wurlitzer Organ” that’s played on special occasions. The theater shows classic motion pictures and hosts many film festivals, including “Godzillafest” and an independent cinema festival. The Children’s Classic Film Festival may feature such films as *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* and includes live entertainment, a raffle, and goody bags. Check the website for upcoming special occasions. Tickets may be purchased in advance through Ticketweb.com. 429 Castro St. (between 17th and 18th sts.). ☎ 415/621-6120. www.castrotheatre.com. Tickets \$5.50 child, \$8.50 adult.

Embarcadero Center Cinema This is a great spot for stellar foreign language films like *The Motorcycle Diaries*, first-rate indie films, and award-winning documentaries. The “Rattle and Reel” program welcomes caregivers and their babies Thursdays at noon, with admission at \$7.50 for adults and free for babies. 1 Embarcadero Center (at Battery and Sacramento sts.). ☎ 415/267-4893. www.landmarktheatres.com. Tickets \$10 adults, \$7 children.

Opera Plaza Cinema Belonging to the same theater group as the Embarcadero Center, this small cineplex offers an alternative to Hollywood fare, with such documentaries as *Voices of Iraq* and excellent foreign and independent films. You’ll want to take a cab here in the evenings, but at least it’s close to Union Square. 601 Van Ness Ave. (between Golden Gate and Turk sts.). ☎ 415/267-4893. www.landmarktheatres.com. Tickets \$6.25 child, \$9 adult.

MOVIES FOR KIDS

Randall Museum Cine Club **Ages 13 to 18.** Classic films like *Fanny & Alexander* and *Wings of Desire* are shown in the comfortable Randall Theater on Friday evenings at 7pm. 199 Museum Way (off Roosevelt Way). For more information, phone ☎ 415/864-2026. www.randallmuseum.org. Free admission.

San Francisco Public Library Along with story times, many branch libraries screen films for preschoolers. At the Main Library, films are shown on Saturdays at 11am and on Wednesdays and Thursdays at 10 and 10:45am. For other times, see “Story Hours,” below, or check the library’s website. All events are free. 100 Larkin St. (at Grove St.). ☎ 415/557-4554. www.sfppl.org.

7 Dance

Alonzo King’s LINES Ballet **Ages 5 and up.** Founded by ballet master Alonzo King, LINES blends classical and contemporary ballet accompanied by music from the world’s greatest living composers. This is a touring ballet company based in San Francisco and performs at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. 700 Howard St. (between 3rd and 4th sts.). ☎ 415/978-2787. www.linesballet.org.

San Francisco Ballet **Ages 10 and up.** One of the country’s finest ballet companies, the San Francisco Ballet officially begins its season in February and ends in May. (See “Seasonal Events,” earlier in this chapter, for the ballet’s annual *Nutcracker*.) Productions are geared toward grown-ups, although serious dance lovers of any age will thrill to see these graceful creatures on stage. Tickets may be purchased through the website, by telephone, and at the box office (open on

performance days only). War Memorial Opera House, 301 Van Ness Ave. (at Grove St.). ☎ 415/865-2000. www.sfballet.org. Tickets \$9–\$130.

Smuin Ballet/SF **Ages 10 and up.** Smuin Ballet performances draw less on classical movements and more on theatricality, using music by composers like Elton John and the Beatles that give the pieces a modern spin. Smuin Ballet appears at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and the Cowell Theater at Fort Mason. Tickets may be purchased through either the venue box office or tickets.com. ☎ 415/495-2234. www.smuinballet.org.

8 Circus Shows

Make*A*Circus **All ages.** Summers in San Francisco parks are punctuated by free performances by this nearly 30-year-old one-ring community circus whose credo is audience participation. The first part of the show features the cast juggling, clowning, and performing stunts on the trapeze—backed by a live band. This is followed by circus workshops for the audience, including plenty of face painting. The audience is then invited to participate in making a circus with the help of the Make*A*Circus crew. It's a wonderful opportunity for kids to seriously clown around for an afternoon. The season begins on Father's Day at 1pm in Golden Gate Park. For a schedule, call or check the website. ☎ 415/242-1414. www.acrosports.org.

Pickle Circus and San Francisco Youth Circus **Ages 5 and up.** These two groups encompass the performance division of Circus Center San Francisco (p. 219), a professional training school for circus performers. The Pickle Circus started out in San Francisco in 1974 as The Pickle Family Circus, pioneers in creating intimate, vaudeville-like shows that highlight juggling, trapeze, and clowning, but shun the expected, including animal acts. Not glitzy like Cirque du Soleil but certainly in the same vein, Pickle Circus shows tell stories set to original music. The company performs an annual holiday show at the Palace of Fine Arts Theater (3301 Lyon St.). The San Francisco Youth Circus performs at two yearly fundraisers and occasionally at venues around town. For dates, log onto the website or phone the Circus Center for information. ☎ 415/759-8123. www.circuscenter.org. Tickets \$28–\$32.

9 Spectator Sports

Giants Baseball If you are at all interested in the boys of summer, you really must get tickets for a game in SBC Park, the local pride and joy. The stadium is nearly perfect, with stunning views, great food, a walkway on the bay, a terrific play area for kids, and generally good weather.

Fanatics and businesses snapped up season tickets before the opening of the stadium in 2000, but there are ways to procure seats. On game days, bleacher seats are available at the stadium box office. The club also facilitates ticket sales between season subscribers and ticketless fans through the Double Play Ticket Window on the Giants website. These tickets won't necessarily be sold at face value and you'll be charged an extra 10% of the ticket price for the privilege of using the service, but it's safer than buying from a scalper. Another excellent resource for tickets is www.craigslist.com (see "San Francisco 49ers," below). 24 Willie Mays Plaza, 2nd and King sts. ☎ 415/972-2000. www.giants.mlb.com. Tickets \$6–\$77.

Take Me Out to the Ballpark

Baseball fanatics can take a “backstage” tour of the ballpark, a terrific 75-minute guided walk (covering about 2 miles, including stairs) that takes in the luxury skyboxes, the dugout, the arcade level, and the visiting team clubhouse (locker rooms). The guides are fun and knowledgeable about baseball in general and the Giants in particular. You’ll see great vintage photos from the days when the San Francisco Seals were the hometown team, before the Giants moved to San Francisco from New York. If your kids aren’t passionate about baseball, the tour could drag. Take them instead to play at the **Coca-Cola Fan Lot** (see “Parks & Playgrounds” in chapter 8) any non-game day. Enter from the Seals gate on the plaza facing the bay.

Kids are allowed to run the bases after every Sunday home game. You needn’t have a ticket, but you must be under 13. Line forms to the right of the Giants Dugout store, which is also where tours start.

For more information, call ☎ **415/972-2400**. Tours are at 10:30am and 12:30pm everyday except day games scheduled at SBC. Tickets \$10 adults, \$5 children under 13, \$8 seniors and AAA members. Purchase tickets at any Giants Dugout Store or online at tickets.com.

Golden State Warriors Real basketball fans shake their heads in dismay whenever the Warriors are mentioned. They are a pretty lousy team and they’ve been a bit of a mess for a long time. However, kids into basketball will probably be thrilled to see a professional game no matter how the home team plays. The season runs from October through April and tickets are available through Ticketmaster or at the box office. Family weekend packages, which offer considerable savings, are worth asking about. Oakland Coliseum, 7000 Coliseum Way, Oakland. ☎ **510/986-2200**. www.nba.com/warriors. Tickets \$10–\$660. BART: Fremont/Richmond line to Coliseum/Airport exit.

Oakland Athletics The Bay Area’s American League team plays at the Network Associates Stadium, aka the Oakland Coliseum or Arena. Tickets should be easy to obtain directly through the box office, unless the team becomes a contender for a title. 7000 Coliseum Way, Oakland. ☎ **510/568-5600**. www.oaklandathletics.com. Tickets \$7–\$34 available from tickets.com ☎ **800/352-0212**. BART: Fremont/Richmond line to Coliseum/Airport exit.

Oakland Raiders You should be aware that Raiders football games aren’t regarded as very family-friendly affairs. Non-Raiders fans have had their cars trashed, and excessive swearing and fighting in the stands is standard operating procedure. The team plays at the Oakland Coliseum. 7000 Coliseum Way, Oakland. ☎ **510/569-2121**. www.raiders.com. Single tickets are \$47–\$91 and can be purchased through Ticketmaster by phone ☎ **510/625-8497** or at www.ticketmaster.com. BART: Fremont/Richmond line to Coliseum/Airport exit.

San Francisco Bay Area Pro-Am Summer Basketball From June through early August, current and retired college, high school, and professional basketball players mix it up in this 26-year-old league at Kezar Pavilion, at

Stanyan and Waller streets, near Golden Gate Park. The level of play on the men's and women's teams is mighty. It's also a bargain: games are free. The men's league plays at 8pm on game days; the women shoot at noon, 2, and 4pm. Check the website for a schedule. www.sanfranciscoproam.com.

San Francisco 49ers It's a party whenever the 49ers are playing at what's now called Monster Park. (A November 2004 vote to return the name to Candlestick Park passed by a wide margin, so that may once again be its moniker by the time you read this.) The hard-core tailgate galas start as early as 9am with elaborate barbecues, tents, lots of beer, and camaraderie among fans who have been following the team for years. In fact, season tickets have been passed from parents to kids since this football team played at Kezar Stadium back in the '50s. You can't buy single tickets at the box office—all games are sold out. However, you can go to the stadium a few hours before game time and try your luck buying tickets from people in the parking lot who have extras. A better alternative may be to log onto the website www.craigslist.com. Craigslist is a San Francisco-based community bulletin board that's been hugely successful in connecting people with jobs, housing, and 49ers tickets. San Francisco 49ers, Monster Park. © 415/656-4900. www.sf49ers.com. Single tickets (if available) are \$73 and can be purchased through Ticketmaster by phone or www.ticketmaster.com.

San Jose Earthquakes The Earthquakes were among the first teams participating as members of Major League Soccer. Public transportation to the 26,000-plus seat venue is not convenient, so you're best off arriving by car. Spartan Stadium, 1257 South 10th St., San Jose. © 408/985-4625. www.sjearthquakes.com.

San Jose Sharks Hockey fans will be pleased to know that the "Shark Tank" is less than an hour away from San Francisco. The Sharks have a dedicated fan base and the team has been going up the ranks every season. HP Pavilion, 525 West Santa Clara St., San Jose. © 408/287-7070. www.sjsharks.com. Ticket are \$15–\$125. CALTRAIN: San Francisco to San Jose Diridon station.

10 Story Hours

California Academy of Sciences **Ages 3 to 7.** Story time is held every Saturday at 10:30am and is free with museum admission. 875 Howard St. (at 5th St.). © 415/321-8000.

The Randall Museum **Ages 3 to 7.** There's a lot going on at the Randall on a typical Saturday, including animal story hour at 11:30am. The Randall is a good place for families with kids in different age groups since projects and events for toddlers to 12-year-olds all take place under one roof. 199 Museum Way (off Roosevelt Way). © 415/554-9600. www.randallmuseum.org. Free admission (donations accepted).

San Francisco Public Library **All ages.** The Main Library in the Civic Center includes the Fisher Children's Center, a spacious children's room with exhibits, a space for films and special events, computers, and books for kids up to 13 years old. Saturday mornings at 11am features family story time. The library's website publishes a list of events for all branches, including story hours, concerts, and films. All events are free. The Main Library is open Sunday from noon to 5pm, Monday from 10am to 6pm, Tuesday to Thursday from 9am to 8pm, Friday from noon to 6pm, and Saturday from 10am to 6pm. 100 Larkin St. © 415/557-4554. www.sfpl.org.

For visitors, the following branch libraries are easy to reach on foot or by Muni streetcars or buses:

- **Chinatown Branch** Preschool story time is on Saturdays at 10:30am. Preschool films are shown Tuesdays and Thursdays at 10am. Films for elementary age kids are shown at 4pm Tuesday through Thursday. 1135 Powell St. (near Jackson St.) ☎ 415/355-2888. Muni: 30-Stockton or Powell-Mason or Powell-Hyde cable cars to Jackson St.
- **Eureka Valley/Harvey Milk Memorial Branch** Lap-sit/story time for infants to 5-year-olds is on Tuesdays at 10:30am. Children's films and videos are shown Thursdays at 10:30am. 3555 16th St. (between Sanchez and Noe sts.) ☎ 415/355-5616. Muni: F-Market streetcar to 16th St.
- **Marina Branch** Preschool story time for ages 3 to 5 is on Tuesdays at 10:30am. Lapsit/storytime for ages 3 and younger is on Mondays at 10:30 and 11am. Children's films and videos are shown Tuesdays at 10:30am. 1890 Chestnut St. (at Webster St.) ☎ 415/355-2823. Muni: 30-Stockton to Webster St.
- **Noe Valley Branch** Preschool story time for ages 3 to 5 is on Tuesdays at 10am. Infant/toddler lap-sit is on Saturdays at 10:30am. Preschool films are screened Tuesdays at 10 and 11am. 451 Jersey St. (near Castro St.) ☎ 415/355-5707. Muni: J-Church to 24th St.; walk 1 block south to Jersey St. and 3½ blocks east. Or bus 24-3rd & Palou to Castro and 25th sts., then walk 1 block north on Castro St. and ½ block east on 24th St.
- **North Beach Branch** Infant/toddler lap-sit is on Thursdays at 10:15am and story time for 3- to 5-year-olds is at 11am. Children's films and videos are shown on Tuesdays at 6:30pm and on Thursdays at various times from 10am through 3:45pm. 2000 Mason St. (at Columbus Ave.) ☎ 415/355-5626. Muni: 30-Stockton to Mason St.
- **Parkside Branch** Musical lap-sit is on Saturdays 10 and 11am. Preschool story time and videos are on Tuesdays at 10 and 11am. 1200 Taraval St. (at 22nd Ave.) ☎ 415/355-5770. Muni: L-Taraval streetcar to 22nd Ave.
- **Richmond Branch** Story time for 3- to 5-year-olds is on Tuesdays at 11am. Family lap-sit for infants to 3-year-olds is on Saturdays at 11am. Children's films and videos are shown Tuesdays at 10:15 and 11am and Wednesdays at 7pm. 350 10th Ave. (between Geary and Clement sts.) ☎ 415/355-5600. Muni: 38-Geary to 9th Ave.

Strybing Arboretum **Ages 4 to 8.** Docents at this beautiful botanical garden combine a Sunday morning story with a guided walk. This is an ongoing program on the first and third Sundays of the month starting at 10:30am. Phone before you arrive just in case. 9th Ave. and Lincoln Way in Golden Gate Park. ☎ 415/661-1316. Free admission. Muni: N-Judah streetcar to 9th Ave.

11 Arcades

The Amusement Center **Ages 12 and up.** Is it too late to introduce the kids to Ms. Pac-Man? At last check she was still gobbling up dots in this North Beach arcade with more than 65 video and pinball games. The grungy arcade was closed for renovation at press time, so we hope Ms. Pac-Man is still around when they reopen in 2005. 447 Broadway St. (near Kearny St.) ☎ 415/668-1881.

The Great Entertainer **Ages 8 and up.** With 40 pool tables, Ping-Pong, darts, a video arcade, foosball, and even shuffleboard to choose from, no one will dare tell you they're bored. If they do, plunk them in front of one of seven screens to watch sports. Actually, bringing the family here on a rainy evening to bond over cue sticks is a brilliant idea. The facilities are clean, like all public places in California smoking isn't allowed, and the snack-oriented food is edible. 975 Bryant St. (at 8th St.). ☎ **415/861-8833**. www.tge.com.

Musée Mécanique **All ages.** Open daily, this fun arcade has penny arcade machines, fortunetellers, games of skill, and beautifully restored antique mechanical musical instruments. See p. 170 for a full review. Pier 45 (at Taylor St.). ☎ **415/386-1170**.

Riptide Arcade **Ages 8 and up.** With 100-plus video games, virtual-reality units, and even a shooting gallery on offer, you run the risk of losing your hearing and a lot of quarters in this loud, dark room. PIER 39. ☎ **415/981-6300**.

OUT OF TOWN

Malibu Grand Prix **Ages 6 and up.** About 25 minutes south of San Francisco, Malibu Grand Prix gets the blood moving for kids with Indy-style $\frac{3}{4}$ -scale cars that they can race on a $\frac{1}{2}$ -mile track. When that gets old, there are batting cages, a game room, and miniature golf. 320–340 Blomquist St., Redwood City. ☎ **650/366-6463**. Directions: 101 S. to Seaport Blvd./Woodside Rd., stay left and turn east on Seaport and left on Blomquist.

Paramount's Great America **Ages 6 and up.** With over 100 acres of typical theme park attractions, this massive family entertainment venue provides plenty of ways to lose your lunch. Favorites include the *Top Gun* suspended jet coaster, a *Psycho Mouse* roller coaster, and a 3-acre Nickelodeon Center appropriate for the youngest ones in the family. The park, under an hour's drive from San Francisco, closes in November for the winter and reopens in March. Great America Parkway (off U.S. 101), Santa Clara. ☎ **408/988-1776**. www.pgathrills.com. Admission \$46 adults and children 7–17, \$40 seniors 60 and over, \$34 children 3–6.

Side Trips from San Francisco

San Francisco offers so much to see and do that visiting families could easily spend several days within the city limits. But the fact remains that San Francisco is nestled in one of the most scenic corners of the world—with stunning natural beauty, world-class vineyards, and lovely national parks just a stone's throw away. Add to that its proximity to the East Bay cities of Berkeley and Oakland, both rich in family-friendly attractions, and you have a very good excuse to hop on the BART or rent a car to explore a bit further afield.

The big decision may be which way to go. Berkeley is so easily accessible by BART, there is almost no reason not to go, but some other East Bay attractions will be more easily reached by car. If it's the great outdoors you seek, look no further than the Point Reyes National Seashore—certain to be a highlight of your trip to the Bay Area. Or, like many San Francisco visitors, you may have your heart set on visiting the wine country. While this may not be an intrinsically child-centered outing, even in Napa Valley you can find activities that will appeal to youngsters.

1 Berkeley

In 25 minutes, the BART will take you from Market Street to downtown Berkeley. When you emerge, you'll be in a different world. Berkeley is warmer, sunnier, and more wooded than San Francisco. Its Bohemian character is also palpable. Berkeley's spirit of idealism, in full swing when the University of California Berkeley was a focal point of 1960s student protests, persists today, even as the city takes in more families fleeing real estate prices in San Francisco. On the university campus and in Tilden Park, you'll find some terrific activities for kids. Teens will enjoy strolling down Telegraph Avenue and may even be inspired by a campus tour to start thinking about college. For the whole family, Berkeley is also a delightful place to eat and shop.

EXPLORING BERKELEY

Adventure Park and Playground **Ages 7 and up.** A fenced outdoor workshop/playground, this unusual park is heaven for any child whose idea of a good time involves a hammer, some nails, and a pile of wood. It's located at the Berkeley Marina, which offers several great options for a day outdoors including Cesar Chavez park, where you can fly kites or picnic, and the Shorebird Nature Center (see below). At the Adventure Park, with the help of students from UC Berkeley, kids are encouraged to create and build whatever they want, sawing and painting as they see fit. They can climb on towers and ships and play in shacks and other structures designed and assembled by fellow builders. They can also zip down a cable with the help of a pulley slide and play on a jungle gym made out of automobile tires. The park is so popular that groups arriving with 5 or more children must reserve ahead of time.

Berkeley Marina (south of University Ave.). ☎ 510/981-6720. www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/marina/marinaexp/adventplgd.html. Free for children supervised by a parent/guardian, \$6 per unaccompanied child for 3-hr. session. Weekends and school holidays 11am–5pm; summer weekdays 9am–5pm. Closed when raining and also Dec 24–26 and Dec 31–Jan 1. Phone to confirm. **To get there:** By car: Take I-80 to Powell St. Make a left under the freeway and a right onto Frontage Rd. Follow Frontage Rd. to University Ave. Take a left onto University and follow the signs for the marina.

The Berkeley Hall of Health **Ages 3 to 12.** Located across the street from Habitot, The Berkeley Hall of Health is an interactive museum designed to teach children about the human body, nutrition, and health. The museum includes hands-on exhibits on the human heart, the inside of the body, and how to prevent diseases.

2230 Shattuck Ave., lower level. ☎ 510/549-1564. www.hallofhealth.org. Admission \$3 per person, children under 3 free. Tues–Sat 10am–4pm. **To get there:** By BART: Exit at the Berkeley station; walk 1 block south to the museum. By car: Take I-80 to the University Ave. exit. Drive east (toward the hills) until you reach Shattuck Ave. Take a right on Shattuck and another right on Kittredge St. There is parking in the garage across from the main entrance.

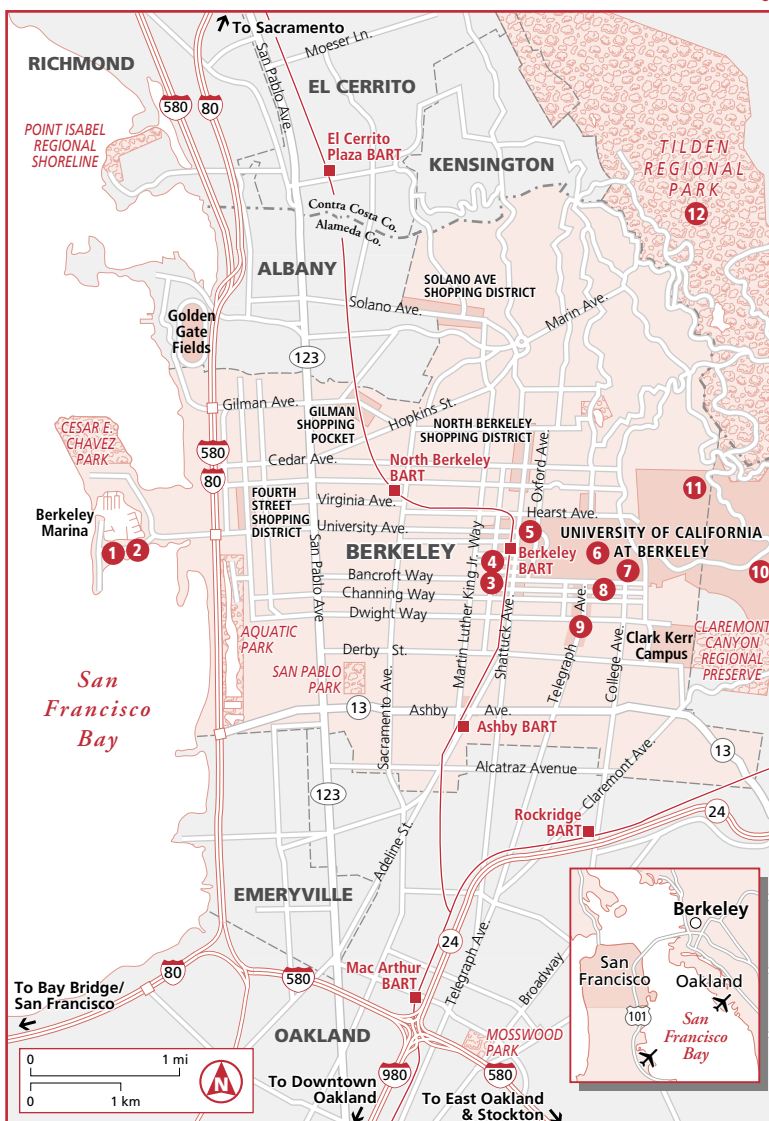
Habitot Children's Museum **Ages infant to 7.** A hands-on exhibition center, Habitot helps children develop and explore creative and interactive skills that they will use for life. This delightful museum provides opportunities for kids, even toddlers, to explore art, science, history, cultural heritage, architecture, and technology through six exhibits. Each gallery offers a specific, age-appropriate activity. At the **Medical Center**, kids can ride in a mini ambulance, practice caring for plastic newborns, and examine x-rays. At **Waterworks**, kids can experience different types of water activity: a flowing river ramp, a pumping station, and a water table. The **Little Town Grocery & Cafe** provides a miniature shopping experience with kid-size shopping carts and plastic fruits, vegetables, and breads that kids can also sort themselves into grocery bins. Cash registers with working buttons and play money help them practice counting and encourage interactive play. The **Infant-Toddler Garden**, designed for crawlers, has carpeted walls depicting a garden mural landscape and interactive activities including a carrot patch, a pretend pond, and shapes to Velcro to the wall—all surrounded by a white picket fence.

The **Drop-in Art Studio** is open to children of all ages. Kids can paint or draw their own murals on the wall, participate in various organized art activities, or create their own masterpieces on paper. A **Wiggle Wall** allows children to feel their way through an “underground” labyrinth. Habitot has kiddy cars and toys available to play with, offers special outreach programs to neighborhood families with special needs, and works closely with the Head Start program.

2065 Kittredge St. (near Shattuck Ave.), Berkeley. ☎ 510/647-1111. www.habitot.org. Admission \$6 children, \$5 adults. Mon and Wed 9:30am–1pm; Tues and Fri 9:30am–5pm; Thurs 9:30am–7pm; Sat 10am–5pm; Sun (Sept–May only) 11am–5pm. Closed major holidays and Sundays June–Aug. **To get there:** See “Berkeley Hall of Health,” above. The entrance to the museum is on the lower level of the parking garage.

Shorebird Nature Center **Ages 4 to 12.** Here families can learn about San Francisco Bay ecology. Exhibits include a 100-gallon aquarium featuring marine plants and animals found in the San Francisco Bay. There are several wildlife displays to see and explore as well as a touch table, where kids can gently handle different species of marine life.

Berkeley Marina (east of the Adventure playground). ☎ 510/981-6720. www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/marina/marinaexp/naturecenter.html. Tues–Sat 1–5pm. Free admission. **To get there:** By car: Take I-80 to Powell St. Make a left under the freeway and a right onto Frontage Rd. Follow Frontage Rd. to University Ave. Take a left onto University and follow the signs for the marina.



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|--|--|
| Adventure Park and Playground 2 | Shorebird Nature Center 1 |
| The Berkeley Hall of Health 3 | Telegraph Avenue 9 |
| Habitot's Children's Museum 4 | Tilden Park 12 |
| Hearst Museum of Anthropology 7 | UC Berkeley Botanical Garden 10 |
| Lawrence Hall of Science 11 | University Art Museum 8 |
| Sather Tower 6 | Visitor Information Center 5 |

Tilden Park **All ages.** This 2,077-acre woodland park, which opened in the Berkeley hills in 1936, is home to numerous hiking and horseback riding trails, several picnic areas, and fields for playing Frisbee or just running around. For those needing mental stimulation, the **Environmental Education Center** has a man-made canyon cavern that shows various species of wildlife that can be found around the park. Microscopes are available for getting a close-up look at the life within the park's lakes and ponds.

Just beyond the education center is the **Little Farm**, where kids can pet sheep, donkeys, cows, and other animals. Tilden Park is famous for the **Steam Train**, a scaled-down version of a real steam train that travels around the edge of the park through a miniature town, over bridges, and through tunnels (☎ 510/548-6100; open during the school year 11am–6pm weekends and holidays, except Thanksgiving and Christmas, open daily in summer; rides \$1.75 each or five for \$7, kids under 2 free). The **Herschell-Spillman Merry-Go-Round** is an antique carousel with features like hand-carved wooden frogs, lions, and giraffes (☎ 510/524-6773; open during the school year weekends and holidays 11am–5pm winter, open daily in summer; rides \$1). For more adventurous little ones, pony rides are available just beyond the carousel (☎ 510/527-0421; open 11am–5pm weekends, 11am–4pm Tues–Fri in summer; rides \$3).

Families visiting in the warm weather months can spend the afternoon swimming and sunning at **Lake Anza**, right in the center of the park. You can park nearby or hike to the lake area, where the facilities include changing rooms, showers, and, in the summer, lifeguards. There is a small snack bar open during the summer as well.

Another interesting area is **Jewel Lake**, a marshy wetland with lots of animals and birds, including ducks, squirrels, and turtles. Watch out for the poison oak. If you are around after a rain, you might see some California newts. Jewel Lake is not open for swimming.

For families interested in learning more about California's flowers and plant life, the **Regional Parks Botanic Garden** in Tilden Park is a lovely place to explore (visit www.nativeplants.org for more information).

☎ 510/562-7275. www.ebparks.org/parks/tilden.htm. **To get there:** By car: Take I-80 to the Buchanan St. exit. Go east and stay to the right; Buchanan turns into Marin Ave. Follow Marin to Grizzly Peak Blvd. and make a left. Turn right on Wildcat Canyon Rd., then left on Canon Dr. into the park.

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY (UCB)

The attractive campus tucked into the woodsy Berkeley hillside has produced 18 Nobel Prize winners and continues to be one of the finest institutions of higher learning in the United States. Its **Visitor Information Center** (☎ 510/642-5215) is located at 101 University Hall, 220 University Ave., at Oxford Street. A free campus tour is available from the center at 10am Monday through Friday. Perhaps the best reason to visit the campus with kids is the Lawrence Hall of Science (see below).

Other notable UCB stops include the **Hearst Museum of Anthropology** at Kroeber Hall (☎ 510/642-3682; hearstmuseum.berkeley.edu; Wed–Sat 10:30am–4pm, Sun noon–4pm; admission \$4 adults, \$1 students with ID, free children under 12, free every Thursday); the **Berkeley Art Museum** at 2621 Durant Ave. (☎ 510/642-0808; www.bampfa.berkeley.edu; Wed–Sun 11am–5pm, Thurs 11am–7pm; admission \$8 adults, \$5 children 12–17, free children under 12); and the 307-foot-tall **Sather Tower**, also known as the Campanile, in the center of the campus. Take the elevator to the top for the view (open daily 10am–4pm; admission \$2 adults, \$1 seniors and children 18 and under).

Above the campus at 200 Centennial Drive is the **UC Berkeley Botanical Garden** (☎ 510/643-2755; botanicalgarden.berkeley.edu), boasting one of the most diverse collections of plants in the country, with over 12,000 different species and sub-species. It's a wonderful place for an easy hike. (Open daily 9am–5pm in winter, open Mon–Tues 9am–5pm and Wed–Sun 9am–8pm in summer; admission \$3 adults, \$2 seniors 65 and up, \$1 children 3–18, free children under 3.)

If you're driving to the campus, take I-80 to 580 and exit at University Avenue. Drive east on University for 2 miles until you reach the campus.

Lawrence Hall of Science (LHS) Ages 2 and up. The Lawrence Hall of Science, which honors UC Berkeley's Nobel Prize winner Ernest O. Lawrence, is both a resource center for students and an exciting hands-on museum for the entire family. Sitting at the upper edges of the hillside campus, the entry plaza offers endless views of the bay and the cities beyond. On a clear day, take in the views as the kids climb all over a 60-foot-long DNA model.

LHS programs are renowned throughout the state for their imaginative interactive activities and multifaceted approach to teaching math and science to kids of all ages. Among the permanent exhibits is a biology lab where kids can pet snakes and befriend tarantulas, an insect zoo popular with young children, computer labs, and an earthquake exhibit with a working seismograph and tips on how to react during an earthquake (duck and cover). An area designated especially for toddlers is filled with blocks, books, and puppets.

Special weekend workshops are regularly scheduled. Participants must register a week in advance and workshop fees include museum admission. The museum's Holt Planetarium offers shows, films, and lectures on weekends and holidays and all summer for an additional \$3 for adults and \$2.50 children 18 and under. Most shows are for older kids, but some are geared for the younger set. As you might expect, the gift shop is filled with fascinating books, toys, and kits. When you need a snack, a downstairs cafe offers hot dogs and sandwiches.

Centennial Dr., Berkeley. ☎ 510/624-5132. www.lawrencehallofscience.org. Admission \$8.50 adults, \$6.50 students 5–18 and seniors 62 and over, \$4.50 children 3–4, free 2 and under. Daily 10am–5pm. Planetarium shows Sat, Sun, and holidays 1, 2:15, and 3:30pm. **To get there:** By BART: Exit at the Downtown Berkeley Station. Take the University of California local shuttle on the corner of Center St. and Shattuck Ave. to the campus. Once there, transfer to the Hill Service Shuttle at the Hearst Mining Circle (☎ 510/642-4834 for details on fares and times). By car: Take I-80 to 580. Exit at University Ave. Drive east on University 2 miles until you reach the campus. Turn left on Oxford St. Turn right on Hearst St., pass through 2 stoplights to the east side of campus. Make a right on Gayley Rd. Take your first left past the Greek Theatre, Stadium Rimway. Make a left at the stop sign, Centennial Dr., and continue 1 mile to the top of the hill.

WHERE TO DINE IN BERKELEY

Not far from the University on Shattuck Avenue is an area known as the Gourmet Ghetto, so named for its principal occupant **Chez Panisse** and the myriad imitators it has spawned. Chez Panisse is the creation of Alice Waters, who in the 1970s revolutionized California, indeed American, cuisine with her emphasis on using seasonal and local ingredients of the highest quality. If you can fit it in, a visit to Chez Panisse is well worth it. The light and airy upstairs cafe is suitable for kids at lunchtime (1517 Shattuck Ave.; ☎ 510/548-5049; www.chezpanisse.com).

If you'd prefer to check out the area, but dine somewhere more casual, options include **Saul's Restaurant and Deli**, a New York-style deli (1475 Shattuck Ave.; ☎ 510/848-3351; www.saulsdeli.com) and the **Cheeseboard Collective** (1504 Shattuck Ave.; ☎ 510/549-3183; cheeseboardcollective.com), serving good

pizzas, fabulous cheeses, and fresh-baked breads. For a terrific brunch spot a few blocks off of Shattuck Avenue, try **Fat Apple's Restaurant and Bakery** (1346 Martin Luther King Jr. Way; ☎ 510/526-2260).

In downtown Berkeley, **Caffe Venezia** (1799 University Ave.; ☎ 510/849-4681; www.caffevenezia.com) is a casual place for tasty Italian food, and **La Note** is a kid-friendly French bistro (2377 Shattuck Ave.; ☎ 510/843-1535). For the best pizza in town, head to **Zachary's Chicago Pizza** (1853 Solano Ave.; ☎ 510/525-5950).

If chocolate is your meal of choice, Berkeley is home to a boutique producer of high-octane cooking and eating chocolate. **Scharffen Berger Chocolate Maker** (914 Heinz Ave., near 7th St.; ☎ 510/981-4050; www.scharffenberger.com) gives free 1-hour tours of its factory daily by appointment. Participants must be in the 5th grade at least, and sandals are not permitted for safety reasons. Call or visit the website to schedule your tour. The factory is off the Ashby Avenue exit on I-80.

2 Oakland

Oakland has always been regarded as San Francisco's poor relation. The heavy crime rate and proximity to higher profile Berkeley and San Francisco have often kept this bayside city from getting its just due. But the city has one of the state's best museums right downtown and an excellent space science center in the hills. Moreover, Bay Area families have been visiting Children's Fairyland and the Paramount Theater for generations. Jack London Square is touristy, but it's a fine starting point for a bike ride and exactly where you want to be for hot Bay Area jazz.

Chabot Space and Science Center **Ages 4 and up.** This 86,000-square-foot facility high in the East Bay hills will thrill youngsters with an interest in space. The center focuses on educating students, teachers, and the general public about astronomy and related sciences and has a number of delightful exhibits to do just that. The **Observatory** houses 3 powerful telescopes, among them one of the largest open to the public in the United States. (Free access to the refractor telescope is available from 7–10pm Nov–Mar, and from dusk–11pm Apr–Oct.) The **Planetarium & Theater** takes viewers on a musically-enhanced and narrated trip across the heavens on a 70-foot screen. The **Challenger Learning Center** boasts a full-sized space station, and the **Discovery Room** offers activities for children ages 4 to 7. You'll find the drive up here well worth it, as the center is housed on 13 wooded acres full of lovely walking trails with wonderful bay views.

10000 Skyline Blvd., Oakland. ☎ 510/336-7300. www.chabotspace.org. General admission (required except when visiting evening shows or when exhibits are closed) \$13 adults, \$9 seniors 65 and over, \$9 children 4–12 or students with a valid ID, free for kids 3 and under. Center: Wed–Thurs 2–5pm; Fri 2–10pm; Sat 10am–10pm; Sun 10am–5pm. Observatory: Closed Mon–Tues except certain holidays; check website or call for details. **To get there:** Head east on I-580 to Highway 24 (towards Walnut Creek). From 24, go south on Highway 13 (Warren Freeway) towards Hayward. Take the Joaquin Miller/Lincoln Avenue exit. Turn left and proceed up the hill on Joaquin Miller to the crest, then turn left at the signal onto the two lane portion of Skyline Blvd. The center is 1.3 miles up Skyline on the right.

Children's Fairyland **Ages infant to 7.** Fairy tales and nursery rhymes come alive at the delightfully low-tech and innocent Children's Fairyland. Purchase a magic key for \$2 when entering, which lets the kids listen to nursery rhymes at each of 30 animated sets. Spiffed up in 2001, but not at all spoiled, the park has rides for the little ones including Jolly Trolley, a train that rounds the park, and a

miniature Ferris wheel. Fairyland also offers daily puppet shows, arts and craft events, and special presentations throughout the year. For families with preschoolers, it is a magical place.

There's a picnic area, or you can pick something up (PB&J, burgers, hot dogs) at the Johnny Appleseed Cafe. Fairyland is located on the shores of **Lake Merritt**, a fine place for boating, lawn bowling, or a scenic stroll. From the **Municipal Boathouse** (☎ 510/238-2196) you can rent sailboats, rowboats, pedal boats, and canoes for \$6 to \$12 per hour. Another option is a gondola ride from **Gondola Servizio** (☎ 510/663-6603; www.gondolaservizio.com).

Grand Ave. at Bellevue Ave. ☎ 510/452-2259. www.fairyland.org. Tickets \$6 per person, children under 1 free. Adults must be accompanied by a child. Open Fri–Sun and holidays 10am–4pm in winter (Nov to mid-Apr); Wed–Sun and holidays 10am–4pm in spring and fall (mid-Apr to May and Sept–Oct); Mon–Fri 10am–4pm and Sat–Sun 10am–5pm in summer (June–Aug). **To get there:** By BART: Exit at the 19th St. Station. Take the 20th St. stairway and exit at street level. Walk down 20th St., make a left on Harrison St. Turn right on Grand Ave. Fairyland is 1 block over on the right-hand side at the intersection of Grand and Bellevue aves.. By car: From the Bay Bridge, take 580 East to Harrison St. exit. Turn right on Harrison and continue for approximately ½ mile. Turn left on Grand Ave. Fairyland is at the corner of Grand and Bellevue aves.. There is parking available at the park.

Oakland Museum **Ages 5 and up.** The Oakland Museum is unique because of its emphasis on recreated “environments” rather than separate exhibits. Each floor of the museum presents the nature, art, and history of California. Life-size dioramas reflect California's vast environment and give children and adults a chance to experience California's natural wildlife on a simulated walk across the state. The aquatic gallery takes visitors along California's coastline and rivers to see the fresh water and marine animals living within. The Cowell Hall of California History takes kids back in time from the first missions to the gold rush and up to the present day. Touch-screen computers and video presentations make the trip through time fun and exciting for kids who are less than enthusiastic about history lessons. The museum's temporary exhibits have included cultural and ecological topics, and the California Art Gallery houses paintings, sculptures, and photographs all created by California artists.

If you get hungry, you can have lunch at the museum restaurant, which offers sandwiches, salads, and daily specials. Live jazz is played during the week.

1000 Oak St., Oakland. ☎ 510/238-2200. www.museumca.org. Admission \$8 adults, \$5 seniors 65 and over, \$5 children or students with a valid ID, free for kids under 6, free for everyone the second Sun of each month. Wed–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun noon–5pm; open until 9pm the first Fri of each month. Closed major holidays. **To get there:** By BART: Exit at the Lake Merritt station. The museum is located 1 block north of the station. By car: Take I-880 to the Jackson St. off-ramp, follow signs south toward San Jose. Make a left on Oak St. and you'll see it on the right, between 10th and 12th sts.

Paramount Theatre A trip to this theater, built in 1931, will take you back to the age of Cary Grant and Katharine Hepburn. Built in Art Deco style, the restored theater is used for concerts, plays, old Hollywood films, and often the Oakland symphony. It still has an original Wurlitzer organ that is played before all films and some other events. Tours are offered on the first and third Saturdays of the month at 10am. Tickets for tours are \$1 each; children must be at least 10 years old and accompanied by an adult. Call or check the website for specific dates and prices of other events.

2025 Broadway (at 21st St.). ☎ 510/465-6400 (24-hr. recorded hot line), or 510/893-2300 (office). www.paramounttheatre.com. Tickets available at the box office or through Ticketmaster. **To get there:** By BART: exit at the 19th St. station. The theater is about ½ block north of the station. By car: Take I-880 to the Broadway exit. Turn left on Broadway. The theater will be on the left, around 20th St.

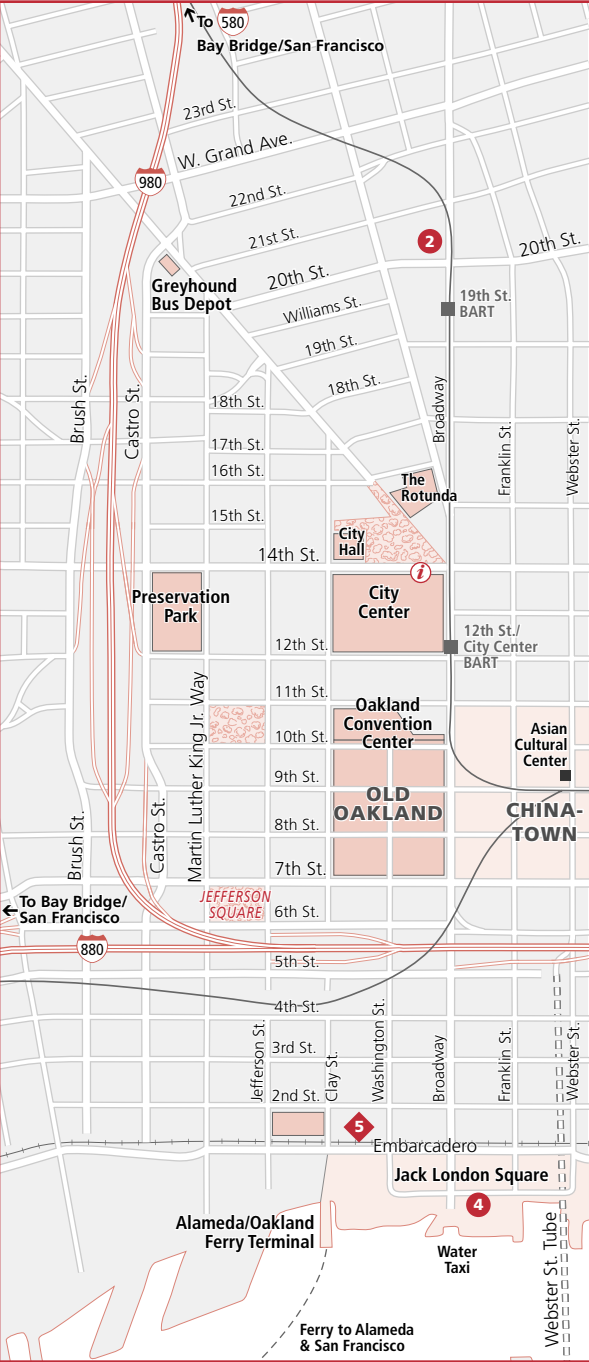
Oakland

ATTRACTIONS ●

- Children's Fairyland 1
- Jack London Square 4
- Oakland Museum of California 3
- Paramount Theater 2

DINING ◆

- Yoshi's 5





JACK LONDON SQUARE

Built as a rival port to San Francisco, Jack London Square has an enviable location on the waterfront, steps from the pier where the Alameda/Oakland Ferry lands. Filled with lots of chain restaurants, souvenir shops, and a multiplex cinema, the square could be put to better use, but it is a convenient place from which to explore the immediate surroundings and get a great view of the Bay Bridge on a clear day.

You could drive, but the best way to get to Jack London Square is by a 40-minute ferry ride. Board the **Alameda/Oakland ferry** at PIER 39 or the Ferry Building. For a schedule and fares, phone Blue and Gold Fleet (☎ 415/773-1188).

By car, take I-880 from the Bay Bridge. Exit at the Broadway/Alameda offramp. Make a right on Adelaide Street, a left on 3rd, and continue 12 blocks to Broadway and turn right. Lot parking is available.

By BART, exit at 12th Street/Downtown Oakland. Take a bus from the station or try the free downtown shuttle that runs weekdays between 11am and 2pm between Broadway and Jack London Square.

WHAT TO SEE At the **USS *Potomac*'s Floating Museum** (☎ 510/627-1318; www.usspotomac.org), Franklin Delano Roosevelt's restored presidential yacht is open year-round for dockside tours. Tours run on Wednesday between 10:30am and 3:30pm and on Friday and Sunday between noon and 3:30pm. Reservations are required for groups of 10 or more. Tour admission is \$7 for ages 13 to 59, \$5 seniors 60 and over, free for kids 12 and under. Two-hour history cruises around the bay are offered on alternating weeks Thursday, Sunday, and Saturday at 11am, from April to October. Tickets are \$40 adults, \$35 seniors 60 and over, \$20 children 6 to 12, free for kids under 5. A 15-minute video accompanies the tour. Advanced ticket purchase is recommended and can be done through the website or by calling ☎ 866/468-3399.

Active families should check out the **Embarcadero Bay Bicycle Trail**. The 3-mile trail along the waterfront from Jack London Square to Alameda's Park Street Bridge is part of the 400-mile San Francisco Bay trail, which connects all nine Bay Area counties, 47 cities, and major bridges crossing the bay.

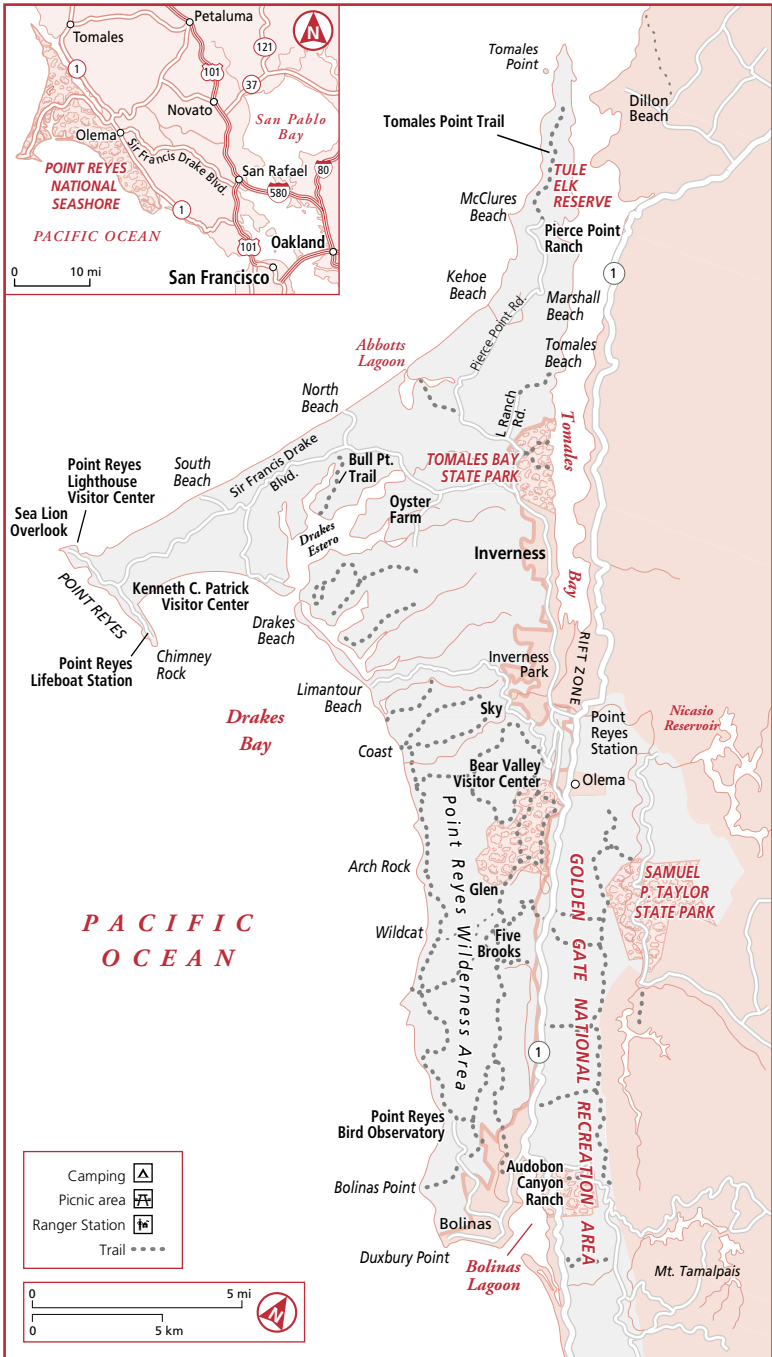
WHERE TO DINE Several recognized chain restaurants and cafes, such as Pizzeria Uno, the Old Spaghetti Factory, and Starbucks, are located at Jack London Square, and most welcome children. The best place to dine at Jack London Square is **Yoshi's** (510 Embarcadero West; ☎ 510/238-9200; www.yoshis.com), a Japanese restaurant and jazz club. Yoshi's Sunday matinee jazz concerts are tailor-made to introduce young audiences to the world of jazz and matinee brunches offer special priced options for families. Doors open at noon for the 2pm concerts.

A short walk from Jack London Square takes you to Broadway, Oakland's Chinatown, renowned for some of the best dim sum in the Bay Area. A couple of blocks off Broadway, at 1007 Clay St., you'll find **Le Cheval**, serving terrific Vietnamese food at large round tables in a very family-friendly atmosphere (☎ 510/763-8957). Near the shores of Lake Merritt, **Zza's Trattoria** offers great pizza and other Italian fare (552 Grand Ave.; ☎ 510/ 839-9124).

3 Point Reyes National Seashore

Once you traverse the Golden Gate Bridge, a pleasant one-hour drive through Marin County and Samuel P. Taylor State Park leads you to Point Reyes National Seashore, a mix of wild coastline and forest of unequivocal appeal to hikers,

Point Reyes National Seashore



nature lovers, and wildlife-watchers of all ages. The rocky shore along this part of the coast is a direct result of earthquake activity. Point Reyes Station, the minuscule town nearby, is a tourist magnet on the weekends, so it supports a handful of good restaurants and craft shops within its 4-block radius. You can easily drive to Point Reyes, spend the day, and get back to San Francisco by dinner, but if you'd like to spend a night or two, the area is well served by B&Bs. For information on what's available, contact **Point Reyes Lodging** (☎ 800/539-1872 or 415/663-1872; www.ptreyes.com).

To reach Point Reyes, cross the Golden Gate Bridge and exit on San Anselmo/Sir Francis Drake Boulevard. Turn left, heading west on Sir Francis Drake and stay on this road as it passes through the pricey suburbs of San Anselmo, Ross, Woodacre, and Lagunitas. The drive to park headquarters takes an hour in light traffic.

WHAT TO SEE At the junction of Highway 1 and Sir Francis Drake Boulevard in Olema, follow the signs to the **Bear Valley Visitor Center** (☎ 415/464-5100) about a minute away. The center has maps, informative park rangers, a book/gift section, and some interesting exhibits on the ecology of the area. Many trails begin here, including an under-1-mile earthquake trail along the San Andreas Fault. Another park attraction is **Kule Loklo**, a Coast Miwok Native Indian village replica. If you're visiting during the school year, you may run into groups of kids.

Hiking is the prime activity in the park, but a drive to **Limantour Beach** is a good alternative or add-on. You get to the beach by turning left on Bear Valley Road and left again on Limantour Road. Although swimming is not recommended (and it's usually too cold), you can bird-watch and picnic here.

Point Reyes Lighthouse is a big attraction in these parts all year long, but especially from January through March when migrating gray whales pass by. From the Bear Valley Visitor Center, the lighthouse is a 21-mile drive along Sir Francis Drake Boulevard through dairy farms and pastures, where you can see many a cow lounging around. At the end of the road is a parking lot. The lighthouse is a half-mile walk away, and down 300 steps. The cliffs all around this area are not stable enough to climb on, and you'll see lots of warnings to that effect. **Sea Lion Overlook** near the lighthouse is the place to watch those creatures as well as harbor seals.

From this stop, it's a short drive to **Drake's Beach** (just follow the signs as you drive to or from the lighthouse). Another fine visitor center with friendly park rangers is on the beach parking lot, next to a cafe specializing in deep-fried foods. As is the case at all the area beaches, there is no lifeguard on duty and the undertow can be dangerous, so swimming is absolutely discouraged. At the end of Drake's Beach, past the Point Reyes Lifeboat Station, is **Chimney Rock**. The **Elephant Seal Overlook** nearby is a good vantage point for observing elephant seals in the winter months.

At the northernmost tip of the seashore at **Tomaes Point** is the **Tule Elk Reserve**, where over 500 of these once nearly extinct creatures live on 2,600 protected acres. The reserve is a 30-minute drive from Inverness. Stay on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard until you reach Pierce Point Road, which takes you directly into the reserve.

WHERE TO DINE If you're hungry or want to gather a picnic, continue on Sir Francis Drake Boulevard until it meets Point Reyes–Petaluma Road. Drive across the little bridge and you'll be in Point Reyes Station. The **Pine Cone Diner**, 60 4th St. (☎ 415/663-1536), is open for breakfast and lunch daily and

Tips Taking a Dip

If you happen to be making this trip in August in warmer weather, there are some wonderful swimming beaches along Tomales Bay in Inverness. Look for signs along Sir Francis Drake Boulevard leading to **Chicken Ranch Beach** or **Shell Beach**. Other times of the year, dress warmly. Point Reyes gets foggy and cold.

for dinner Wednesday through Saturday. **The Station House**, 11180 State Rte. 1 (☎ 415/663-1515), serves terrific breakfasts and lunch and dinner specials that draw on local and organic ingredients, such as fresh wild salmon or fresh local mussels. It's moderately priced, immensely popular, and hosts live music on weekend nights. For takeout, **Tomales Bay Foods**, 80 4th St. (☎ 415/663-9335), open Wednesday through Sunday from 10am to 6pm, has a small but fantastic menu of seasonal salads and sandwiches ready to go. It shares a building with a small creamery and a shop featuring lovely hand-woven clothing.

4 Calistoga & the Napa Valley

The Napa Valley is the country's most celebrated wine-growing region. Less than 30 miles from end to end, this fertile area is covered in vineyards and accessorized with world-class wine-tasting rooms, excellent restaurants, and marvelous resorts and inns. It's paradise for couples with time to relax. For families, it's welcoming but will require some flexibility. Many of the valley's copious bed and breakfasts are not open to children; room occupancy may be limited to 2 people, no interconnecting rooms may be available, or children may be expressly discouraged. Likewise, a number of restaurants may not be appropriate for young children.

That said, we have found ways to enjoy Napa with the kids. Romantic B&Bs aside, several family-friendly motels grace the area, and many have swimming pools. My suggestion is to head straight to Calistoga, at the northern edge of the Napa Valley. Well-preserved and historical, Calistoga offers the best of the Napa Valley in terms of relaxation. The restaurants are more casual than down valley, and with the great wine to be had with your meal, it's fortunate that most hotels will be within walking distance.

The fastest route to Napa Valley is to cross the Bay Bridge (I-80) and continue east on I-80 until you see the Napa/Highway 29 exit near Vallejo. Highway 29 is the main road through the Napa Valley. Follow it past Yountville, Oakville, St. Helena, and drive another 8 miles until you reach Calistoga. An arrow on the right directs you into town. Once there, you won't need to face infamously crowded Highway 29 until it's time to head back to San Francisco.

WHAT TO DO If you gather the strength to drag the kids away from the pool, horseback riding past the redwoods in **Bothe-Napa Valley State Park** includes some history of the area delivered by the knowledgeable guide. **Napa Valley Trail Rides** (☎ 707/255-2900; www.napavalleytrailrides.com) offers 90-minute guided rides for people 8 years and above. Horses work between April and November and reservations are necessary.

Old Faithful Geyser, one of only three such geysers in the world, works full-time blowing off steam. The 350°F (177°C) water spews out to a height of about 60 feet every 30 to 40 minutes depending on barometric pressure, the moon,

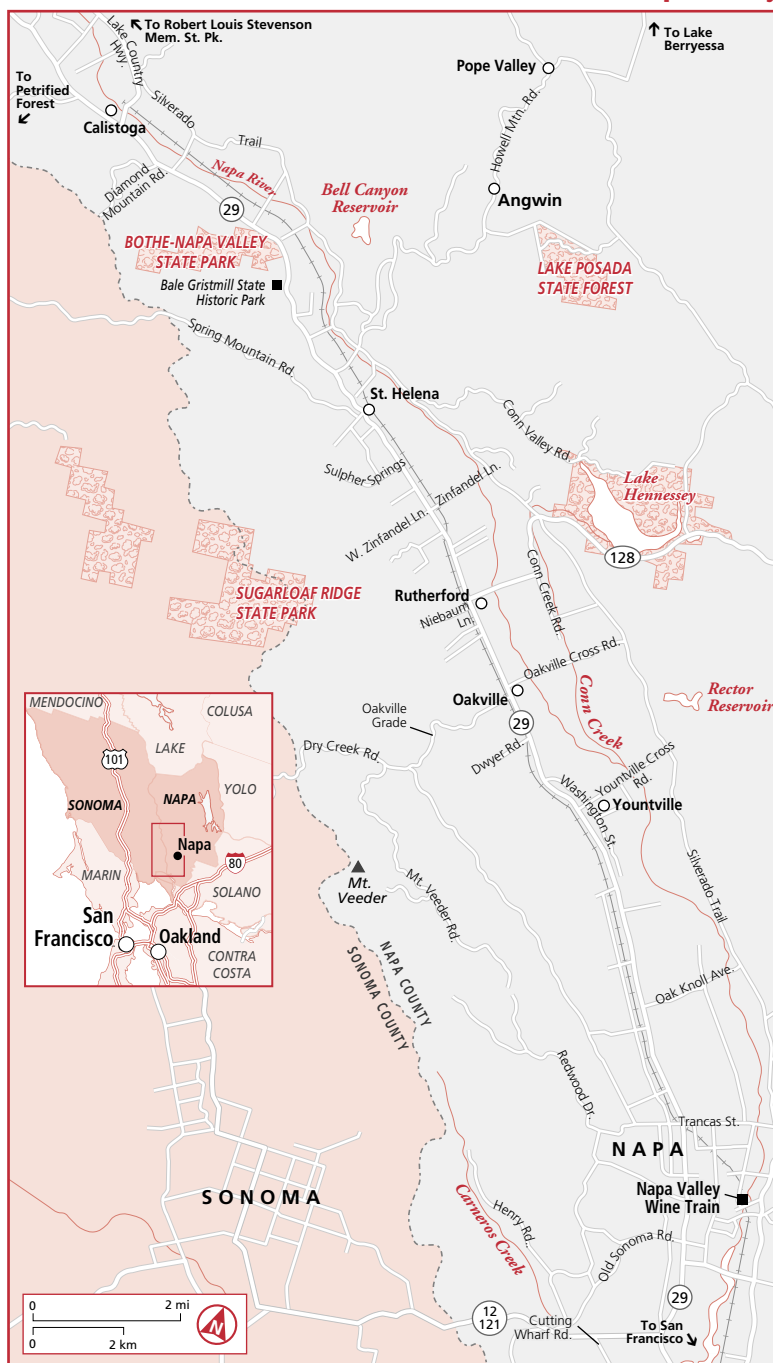
tides, and tectonic stresses. (The Exploratorium, on p. 160, in San Francisco, has an exhibit on geysers if you want to learn more.) The performance lasts about a minute, but you can stay as long as you like, picnicking and waiting for the next explosion. It's located just north of Calistoga off Highway 29 at 1299 Tubbs Lane. It's open daily from 9am to 6pm in summer and 9am to 5pm in winter; call ☎ 707/942-6463 for more information. Admission is \$8 adults, \$7 seniors 60 and up, \$3 children 6 to 12, and free children under 6. (AAA cards give you a \$1 discount.)

Biking around the valley is another option. Rentals are available at **Calistoga Bikeshop** (1318 Lincoln Ave., Calistoga; ☎ 707/942-9687; www.calistogabikeshop.com), or you can reserve a guided bicycle winery tour with lunch or a mountain-biking tour, through **Getaway Adventures** (☎ 800/499-2453; www.getawayadventures.com). Soaring above the valley in a hot-air balloon is a coveted early morning adventure apparently, given the number of tour operators in Napa alone. **Balloons Above the Valley** (☎ 800/464-6824 or 707/253-2222; www.balloonrides.com) provides pickup and drop-off within Napa Valley, a pre-flight snack, and postflight brunch. The cost is \$195 per person, but their website offers a discounted price of \$175 for adults and \$145 per child 12 and under. **Bonaventura Balloon Company** (☎ 800/359-6272 or 707/944-2822; www.bonaventuraballoons.com) is one of Napa's most trusted hot-air balloon operators. Prices are \$198 per person and \$125 to \$135 for kids 12 and under, but various packages are available and discounts are also available.

If you do want to visit a winery, I recommend two in Calistoga when traveling with kids. **Clos Pegase** (1060 Dunweal Lane; ☎ 707/942-4981; www.clospegase.com), located close to Old Faithful Geyser, has a delightful picnic facility under an old oak tree. You can bring your own lunch or purchase one from the visitor's center, which is open daily from 10:30am to 5pm. After running around outside, the kids will probably be amenable to one of the free guided tours, offered daily at 11am or 2pm. Clos Pegase also offers tastings (for a fee) if you can get the kids to hang around while you contemplate the bouquet of your merlot. At **Sterling Vineyards** (1111 Duweal Lane; ☎ 800/726-6136 or 707/942-3345; www.sterlingvineyards.com), the children will appreciate the aerial tram that takes you from the parking lot to the dramatic hilltop winery. You'll have to pay for the ride, though. Fees to visit Sterling, open daily from 10am to 4:30pm, are \$15 for adults, and \$10 for anyone under 21 (under 3 free). Once there, however, wine tasting is complimentary.

WHERE TO STAY Calistoga has lots of hotels and motels with swimming pools and spa facilities, both of which are very important to make this retreat work for the entire family. If you plan far in advance, the ideal resort is **Indian Springs** (1712 Lincoln Ave., Calistoga; ☎ 707/942-4913; www.indianspringscalistoga.com; \$185–\$285 double). The property is made up of old-fashioned but stylish wooden bungalows with furnished kitchens. Picnic tables and barbecues are placed on the lawn outside for guest use along with surreys (bikes with bench seats and awnings) and Ping-Pong tables. A fine 1913 bathhouse is now a spa with a full range of services including mud baths, facials, and massage. The topper is an Olympic-size heated mineral pool surrounded by lounge chairs and a mountain view that will mesmerize you. Pick up something to barbecue, a little fruit, and some drinks and there will be no reason to leave the premises. If Indian Springs is completely booked (phone 48 hr. before you'd like to come to get in on cancellations), check availability at the **Best Western Stevenson Manor Inn** (1830 Lincoln Ave., Calistoga; ☎ 707/942-1112; \$99–\$244 double). It doesn't

Napa Valley



have the charm or amenities of Indian Springs, but the spacious motel rooms are nicely equipped, with fridges, coffeemakers, fireplaces, or whirlpool tubs available, and there's an enclosed pool with a hot tub, sauna, and steam room.

WHERE TO DINE One benefit of staying in Calistoga is that the 4-block town and its restaurants and shops are walking distance from the lodgings. There are a lot of restaurants for a town this size, most somewhat expensive given that they cater to tourists. **Catahoula Restaurant and Saloon** in the Mount View Hotel (1457 Lincoln Ave., Calistoga; ☎ 707/942-2275) has a party-like atmosphere and a New Orleans edge to the menu. There's a bar area where you can eat without reservations. It's open for breakfast weekends and dinner nightly; try one of the yummy gourmet pizzas cooked in the wood-fired ovens.

Just south of Calistoga, in the town of St. Helena, you'll find **Taylor's Refresher** (933 Main St., St. Helena; ☎ 707/963-3486). Open since 1949, this delightful diner is the older sibling of the terrific one in San Francisco (p. 122). Also in St. Helena is one of our favorite restaurants, **Tra Vigne** (1050 Charter Oak Ave., St. Helena; ☎ 707/963-4444; www.travignerestaurant.com). The restaurant itself, a Napa institution, is always packed and may not be the best choice with kids. Instead, pick up sandwiches or salads at its adjacent Cantinetta delicatessen and eat in the lovely courtyard.

5 Amusement Parks

Paramount's Great America **Ages 5 and up.** Since opening in 1978, this tawdry amusement park has undergone several incarnations and is currently owned by Paramount Studios, so many attractions feature a Nickelodeon theme. At Kidzville, the park area for younger children, you might run into characters from Blues Clues, SpongeBob SquarePants, Scooby Doo, Fred Flintstone, and other Hanna Barbara characters can often be seen walking about as well. Some easygoing family rides include a white-water rafting expedition, the Columbia Carousel (proclaimed the world's tallest double-decker carousel), and The Grizzly, a replica of an old-style wooden roller coaster. Splat City is 3 acres of slime, water, and mess (bring a change of clothing). Daredevils will take pleasure in rides that take you free-falling, upside down, through loops, backward and forward at speeds up to 50 mph, or twisting and weaving on one of the newest attractions, the Delirium, that spins through the sky at high speed.

4701 Great America Pkwy., Santa Clara. ☎ 408/988-1776. www.pgathrills.com. Check website or phone for admission prices. Weekends Apr–May; daily with a few exceptions June–Aug, open from 10am (closing times vary). Parking \$10. **To get there:** Take 101 south to the Great America Pkwy. exit.

Six Flags Marine World **Ages 4 and up.** Marine World is America's only amusement park to combine thrills with a wildlife and marine park. A day at Marine World can have some family members free-falling at 70 mph on the V-2 Vertical Velocity (at 150 ft., the tallest attraction in Northern California and only one of three in existence), or spinning floorless on Medusa, the fastest roller coaster in the West. Calmer rides more suitable for families that like to keep their stomachs in one place include a submarine, a balloon Ferris wheel, and bumper cars. The famous dolphin and sea lion shows have now been joined by elephant rides and a Bengal tiger exhibit; however, the tigers do not jump through hoops. Experienced trainers help kids feed the elephants and giraffes while teaching the kids about the animals' natural habitat. Because cartoon themes are apparently mandatory at amusement parks, Looney Toons characters parade around for photographs, admittedly delighting young children.

Marine World Pkwy. (off I-80), Vallejo. ☎ 707/643-6722 (recording) or 707/644-4000 (voice). www.sixflags.com/marineworld. Admission \$46 adults, \$30 seniors 60 and over, \$25 children 48 in. and under, 2 and under free. (Check the website for big discounts). Open daily 10am June–Aug, weekends and holidays Mar 15 to May and Sept–Oct (closing times vary). **To get there:** From the end of May to the end of Aug, the Blue and Gold Fleet provides ferry service from Pier 41 to the Vallejo dock with connecting shuttle bus transportation to Marine World. The ferry ticket price, \$48 adults and \$32 children 3–7 in 2002, is all-inclusive. By car: Take I-80, to the Marine World Pkwy. (Hwy. 37) exit from Bay Bridge. Alternatively, you can drive over the Golden Gate Bridge on 101 North, to Hwy. 37 east to Marine World Pkwy.

6 Another Family Outing by the Bay

Coyote Point Museum (CPM) **All ages.** Coyote Point Museum is an educational facility located at Coyote Point Park in San Mateo. The goal of the museum is nature education, thus kids are invited to observe daily otter and fox feedings, take a “nature” walk through a model of the Bay Area’s different ecosystems, visit a variety of rescued animals, and bird-watch at the aviary. CPM assembles exhibits on different aspects of California’s environment, most of which are hands-on, and children are encouraged to use the computers and interactive activities. Weekends feature animal talks (at 2pm), which are included with admission, and special events that may incur an additional fee.

Along with the museum, families can enjoy the walking trails, beaches, playgrounds, and marina at Coyote Point Park. Picnic facilities are available in the park and on the beaches are boat rentals. The park is open every day including holidays from 8am (closing time varies from 5–8pm depending on the season).

1651 Coyote Point Dr., San Mateo. ☎ 650/342-7755; Coyote Point Recreation Area 650/573-2592. www.coyoteptmuseum.org. Admission \$6 adults, \$4 seniors and children 13–17, \$2 children 3–12, free the first Wed of each month. Tues–Sat 10am–5pm; Sun noon–5pm. **To get there:** Take 101 south to the Poplar Ave. exit. Turn right on Humboldt St. to Peninsula Ave. Turn right on Peninsula. Drive over the freeway, then circle into the park. Parking \$4 per car but space is limited, so arrive early.

Appendix:

For International Visitors

Whether it's your first visit or your tenth, a trip to the United States may require an additional degree of planning. This chapter will provide you with essential information, helpful tips, and advice for the more common problems that some visitors encounter.

1 Preparing for Your Trip

ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

Check at any U.S. embassy or consulate for current information and requirements. You can also obtain a visa application and other information online at the U.S. State Department's website, at www.travel.state.gov.

VISAS The U.S. State Department has a **Visa Waiver Program** allowing citizens of certain countries to enter the United States without a visa for stays of up to 90 days. At press time these included Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Citizens of these countries need only a valid passport and a round-trip air or cruise ticket in their possession upon arrival. If they first enter the United States, they may also visit Mexico, Canada, Bermuda, and/or the Caribbean islands and return to the United States without a visa. Further information is available from any U.S. embassy or consulate. Canadian citizens may enter the United States without visas; they need only proof of residence.

Citizens of all other countries must have (1) a valid passport that expires at least 6 months later than the scheduled end of their visit to the United States and (2) a tourist visa, which may be obtained without charge from any U.S. consulate.

To obtain a visa, the traveler must submit a completed application form (either in person or by mail) with a 1½-inch-square photo and must demonstrate binding ties to a residence abroad. Usually you can obtain a visa at once or within 24 hours, but it may take longer during the summer rush from June through August. If you cannot go in person, contact the nearest U.S. embassy or consulate for directions on applying by mail. Your travel agent or airline office may also be able to provide you with visa applications and instructions. The U.S. consulate or embassy that issues your visa will determine whether you will be issued a multiple- or single-entry visa and any restrictions regarding the length of your stay.

British subjects can obtain up-to-date visa information by calling the **U.S. Embassy Visa Information Line** (☎ 0891/200-290) or by visiting the "Consular Services" section of the American Embassy London's website at www.usembassy.org.uk.

Irish citizens can obtain up-to-date visa information through the **Embassy of the USA Dublin**, 42 Elgin Rd., Dublin 4, Ireland (☎ 353/1-668-8777), or by checking the "Consular Services" section of the website at <http://dublin.usembassy.gov>.

Australian citizens can obtain up-to-date visa information by contacting the **U.S. Embassy Canberra**, Moonah Place, Yarralumla, ACT 2600 (☎ **02/6214-5600**) or by checking the U.S. Diplomatic Mission's website at <http://usembassy-australia.state.gov/consular>.

Citizens of **New Zealand** can obtain up-to-date visa information by contacting the **U.S. Embassy New Zealand**, 29 Fitzherbert Terr., Thorndon, Wellington (☎ **644/472-2068**), or get the information directly from the "Services to New Zealanders" section of the website at <http://usembassy.org.nz>.

MEDICAL REQUIREMENTS Unless you're arriving from an area known to be suffering from an epidemic (particularly cholera or yellow fever), inoculations or vaccinations are not required for entry into the United States. If you have a medical condition that requires **syringe-administered medications**, carry a valid signed prescription from your physician—the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) no longer allows airline passengers to pack syringes in their carry-on baggage without documented proof of medical need. If you have a disease that requires treatment with **narcotics**, you should also carry documented proof with you—smuggling narcotics aboard a plane is a serious offense that carries severe penalties in the U.S.

For **HIV-positive visitors**, requirements for entering the United States are somewhat vague and change frequently. According to the latest publication of *HIV and Immigrants: A Manual for AIDS Service Providers*, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) doesn't require a medical exam for entry into the United States, but INS officials may stop individuals because they look sick or because they are carrying AIDS/HIV medicine.

If an HIV-positive noncitizen applies for a non-immigrant visa, the question on the application regarding communicable diseases is tricky no matter which way it's answered. If the applicant checks "no," INS may deny the visa on the grounds that the applicant committed fraud. If the applicant checks "yes" or if INS suspects the person is HIV-positive, it will deny the visa unless the applicant asks for a special waiver for visitors. This waiver is for people visiting the United States for a short time, for instance, to attend a conference, to visit close relatives, or to receive medical treatment. It can be a confusing situation. For up-to-the-minute information, contact **AIDSinfo** (☎ **800/448-0440** or 301/519-6616 outside the U.S.; www.aidsinfo.nih.gov) or the **Gay Men's Health Crisis** (☎ **212/367-1000**; www.gmhc.org).

DRIVER'S LICENSES Foreign driver's licenses are mostly recognized in the U.S., although you may want to get an international driver's license if your home license is not written in English.

PASSPORT INFORMATION

Safeguard your passport in an inconspicuous, inaccessible place like a money belt. Make a copy of the critical pages, including the passport number, and store it in a safe place, separate from the passport itself. If you lose your passport, visit the nearest consulate of your native country as soon as possible for a replacement. Passport applications are downloadable from the websites listed below.

Note: The International Civil Aviation Organization has recommended a policy requiring that *every* individual who travels by air have a passport. In response, many countries are now requiring that children must be issued their own passport to travel internationally, where before those under 16 or so may have been allowed to travel on a parent or guardian's passport.

FOR RESIDENTS OF CANADA

You can pick up a passport application at one of 28 regional passport offices or most travel agencies. Canadian children who travel must have their own passport. However, if you hold a valid Canadian passport issued before December 11, 2001, that bears the name of your child, the passport remains valid for you and your child until it expires. Passports cost C\$85 for those 16 years and older (valid 5 years), C\$35 children 3 to 15 (valid 5 years), and C\$20 children under 3 (valid 3 years). Applications, which must be accompanied by two identical passport-sized photographs and proof of Canadian citizenship, are available at travel agencies throughout Canada or from the central **Passport Office**, Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, Ottawa, ON K1A 0G3 (☎ 800/567-6868; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/passport). Processing takes 5 to 10 days if you apply in person, or about 3 weeks by mail.

FOR RESIDENTS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

To pick up an application for a standard 10-year passport (5-year passport for children under 16), visit the nearest Passport Office, major post office, or travel agency. You can also contact the **United Kingdom Passport Service** at ☎ 0870/571-0410 or visit its website at www.passport.gov.uk. Passports are £42 for adults and £25 for children under 16 by mail, or £70 and £60 if you apply in person (by appointment only) at a Passport Office. Processing takes about 3 weeks by mail, 1 week if you apply in person.

FOR RESIDENTS OF IRELAND

You can apply for a 10-year passport, costing €57, at the **Passport Office**, Setanta Centre, Molesworth Street, Dublin 2 (☎ 01/671-1633; www.irlgov.ie/iveagh). Those under 18 and over 65 must apply for a €12 3-year passport. You can also apply at 1A South Mall, Cork (☎ 021/272-525) or over the counter at most main post offices.

FOR RESIDENTS OF AUSTRALIA

You can get an application from your local post office or any branch of Passports Australia, but you must schedule an interview at the passport office to present your application materials. Call the **Australian Passport Information Service** at ☎ 131-232 or visit the government website at www.passports.gov.au. Passports for adults are A\$144 and for those under 18 are A\$72.

FOR RESIDENTS OF NEW ZEALAND

You can pick up a passport application at any New Zealand Passports Office or download it from their website. Contact the **Passports Office** at ☎ 0800/225-050 in New Zealand or ☎ 04/474-8100, or log on to www.passports.govt.nz. Passports for adults are NZ\$80 and for children under 16 NZ\$40.

CUSTOMS

WHAT YOU CAN BRING IN

Every visitor more than 21 years of age may bring in, free of duty, the following: (1) 1 liter of wine or hard liquor; (2) 200 cigarettes, 100 cigars (but not from Cuba), or 3 pounds of smoking tobacco; and (3) \$100 worth of gifts. These exemptions are offered to travelers who spend at least 72 hours in the United States and who have not claimed them within the preceding 6 months. It is altogether forbidden to bring into the country foodstuffs (particularly fruit, cooked meats, and canned goods) and plants (vegetables, seeds, tropical plants, and the like). Foreign tourists may bring in or take out up to \$10,000 in U.S. or foreign

currency with no formalities; larger sums must be declared to U.S. Customs on entering or leaving, which includes filing form CM 4790. For more specific information regarding U.S. Customs and Border Protection, contact your nearest U.S. embassy or consulate or the **U.S. Customs** office (☎ 202/927-1770 or www.customs.ustras.gov).

WHAT YOU CAN TAKE HOME

U.K. citizens returning from a non-EU country have a customs allowance of: 200 cigarettes; 50 cigars; 250g of smoking tobacco; 2 liters of still table wine; 1 liter of spirits or strong liqueurs (over 22% volume); 2 liters of fortified wine, sparkling wine, or other liqueurs; 60cc (ml) perfume; 250cc (ml) of toilet water; and £145 worth of all other goods, including gifts and souvenirs. People under 17 cannot have the tobacco or alcohol allowance. For more information, contact HM Customs & Excise at ☎ 0845/010-9000 (from outside the U.K. 020/8929-0152) or consult their website at www.hmce.gov.uk.

For a clear summary of **Canadian** rules, request the booklet *I Declare*, issued by the **Canada Customs and Revenue Agency** (☎ 800/461-9999 in Canada or 204/983-3500; www.cra-adrc.gc.ca). Canada allows its citizens a C\$750 exemption, and you're allowed to bring back duty-free one carton of cigarettes, 1 can of tobacco, 40 imperial ounces of liquor, and 50 cigars. In addition, you're allowed to mail gifts to Canada valued at less than C\$60 a day, provided they're unsolicited and don't contain alcohol or tobacco (write on the package "Unsolicited gift, under \$60 value"). All valuables should be declared on the Y-38 form before departure from Canada, including serial numbers of valuables you already own, such as expensive foreign cameras. **Note:** The \$750 exemption can only be used once a year and only after an absence of 7 days.

The duty-free allowance in **Australia** is A\$400 or, for those under 18, A\$200. Citizens age 18 and over can bring in 250 cigarettes or 250 grams of loose tobacco and 1,125 milliliters of alcohol. If you're returning with valuables you already own, such as foreign-made cameras, you should file form B263. A helpful brochure available from Australian consulates or Customs offices is *Know Before You Go*. For more information, call the **Australian Customs Service** at ☎ 1300/363-263 or log on to www.customs.gov.au.

The duty-free allowance for **New Zealand** is NZ\$700. Citizens over 17 can bring in 200 cigarettes, 50 cigars, or 250 grams of tobacco (or a mixture of all 3 if their combined weight doesn't exceed 250g), plus 4.5 liters of wine and beer or 1.125 liters of liquor. New Zealand currency does not carry import or export restrictions. Fill out a certificate of export, listing the valuables you are taking out of the country; that way, you can bring them back without paying duty. Most questions are answered in a free pamphlet available at New Zealand consulates and Customs offices: *New Zealand Customs Guide for Travellers, Notice no. 4*. For more information, contact **New Zealand Customs**, The Customhouse, 17–21 Whitmore St., Box 2218, Wellington (☎ 0800/428-786 or 04/473-6099; www.customs.govt.nz).

HEALTH INSURANCE

Although it's not required of travelers, health insurance is highly recommended. Unlike many European countries, the United States does not usually offer free or low-cost medical care to its citizens or visitors. Doctors and hospitals are expensive, and in most cases will require advance payment or proof of coverage before they render their services. Policies can cover everything from the loss or theft of your baggage and trip cancellation to the guarantee of bail in case you're

arrested. Good policies will also cover the costs of an accident, repatriation, or death. See “Health & Insurance,” in chapter 2, for more information. Packages such as **Europ Assistance’s “Worldwide Healthcare Plan”** are sold by European automobile clubs and travel agencies at attractive rates. **Worldwide Assistance Services, Inc.** (☎ 800/821-2828; www.worldwideassistance.com) is the agent for Europ Assistance in the United States.

Though lack of health insurance may prevent you from being admitted to a hospital in nonemergencies, don’t worry about being left on a street corner to die: The American way is to fix you now and bill the living daylights out of you later.

INSURANCE FOR BRITISH TRAVELERS Most big travel agents offer their own insurance and will probably try to sell you their package when you book a holiday. Think before you sign. **Britain’s Consumers’ Association** recommends that you insist on seeing the policy and reading the fine print before buying travel insurance. **The Association of British Insurers** (☎ 020/7600-3333; www.abi.org.uk) gives advice by phone and publishes *Holiday Insurance*, a free guide to policy provisions and prices. You might also shop around for better deals: Try **Columbus Direct** (☎ 020/7375-0011; www.columbusdirect.net).

INSURANCE FOR CANADIAN TRAVELERS Canadians should check with their provincial health plan offices or call **Health Canada** (☎ 613/957-2991; www.hc-sc.gc.ca) to find out the extent of their coverage and what documentation and receipts they must take home in case they are treated in the United States.

MONEY

CURRENCY The U.S. monetary system is very simple: The most common **bills** are the \$1 (colloquially, a “buck”), \$5, \$10, and \$20 denominations. There are also \$2 bills (seldom encountered), \$50 bills, and \$100 bills (the last two are usually not welcome as payment for small purchases). All the paper money was recently redesigned, making the famous faces adorning them disproportionately large. The old-style bills are still legal tender.

There are seven denominations of coins: 1¢ (1 cent, or a penny); 5¢ (5 cents, or a nickel); 10¢ (10 cents, or a dime); 25¢ (25 cents, or a quarter); 50¢ (50 cents, or a half dollar); the new gold-colored “Sacagawea” coin worth \$1; and, prized by collectors, the rare, older silver dollar.

Note: The “foreign-exchange bureaus” so common in Europe are rare even at airports in the United States, and nonexistent outside major cities. It’s best not to change foreign money (or traveler’s checks denominated in a currency other than U.S. dollars) at a small-town bank or even a branch in a big city; in fact, leave any currency other than U.S. dollars at home—it may prove a greater nuisance to you than it’s worth.

TRAVELER’S CHECKS Though traveler’s checks are widely accepted, make sure that they’re denominated in U.S. dollars, as foreign-currency checks are often difficult to exchange. The three traveler’s checks that are most widely recognized—and least likely to be denied—are **Visa**, **American Express**, and **Thomas Cook**. Be sure to record the numbers of the checks and keep that information in a separate place in case they get lost or stolen. Most businesses are pretty good about taking traveler’s checks, but you’re better off cashing them in at a bank (in small amounts, of course) and paying in cash. **Remember:** You’ll need identification, such as a driver’s license or passport, to change a traveler’s check.

CREDIT CARDS & ATMS Credit cards are the most widely used form of payment in the United States: **Visa** (Barclaycard in Britain), **MasterCard** (Euro-Card in Europe, Access in Britain, Chargex in Canada), **American Express**, **Diners Club**, and **Discover**. There are, however, a handful of stores and restaurants that do not take credit cards, so be sure to ask in advance. Most businesses display a sticker near their entrance to let you know which cards they accept. (**Note:** Businesses may require a minimum purchase, usually around \$10, to use a credit card.)

It is strongly recommended that you bring at least one major credit card. You must have a credit or charge card to rent a car. Hotels and airlines usually require a credit-card imprint as a deposit against expenses, and a credit card can be priceless in an emergency.

You'll find **automated teller machines (ATMs)** on just about every block—at least in almost every town—across the country. Some ATMs will allow you to draw U.S. currency against your bank and credit cards. Check with your bank before leaving home, and remember that you will need your personal identification number (PIN) to do so. Most accept Visa, MasterCard, and American Express, as well as ATM cards from other U.S. banks. Expect to be charged up to \$3 per transaction, however, if you're not using your own bank's ATM.

One way around these fees is to ask for cash back at grocery stores that accept ATM cards and don't charge usage fees. Of course, you'll have to purchase something first.

ATM cards with major credit card backing, known as "debit cards," are now a commonly acceptable form of payment in most stores and restaurants. Debit cards draw money directly from your checking account. Some stores enable you to receive "cash back" on your debit-card purchases as well.

SAFETY

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS Although tourist areas are generally safe, U.S. urban areas tend to be less safe than those in Europe or Japan. You should always stay alert. This is particularly true of large American cities. If you're in doubt about which neighborhoods are safe, don't hesitate to make inquiries with the hotel front desk staff or the local tourist office.

Avoid deserted areas, especially at night, and don't go into public parks after dark unless there's a concert or similar occasion that will attract a crowd.

Avoid carrying valuables with you on the street and keep expensive cameras or electronic equipment bagged up or covered when not in use. If you're using a map, try to consult it inconspicuously—or better yet, study it before you leave your room. Hold onto your pocketbook and place your billfold in an inside pocket. In theaters, restaurants, and other public places, keep your possessions in sight.

Always lock your room door—don't assume that once you're inside the hotel you are automatically safe and no longer need to be aware of your surroundings. Hotels are open to the public, and in a large hotel, security may not be able to screen everyone who enters.

See also the "Health, Insurance & Safety" section of chapter 2 for safety information specific to San Francisco.

Travel Tip

Be sure to keep a copy of all your travel papers separate from your wallet or purse and leave a copy with someone at home should you need it faxed in an emergency.

DRIVING SAFETY Driving safety is important too, and carjacking is not unprecedented. Question your rental agency about personal safety and ask for a traveler-safety brochure when you pick up your car. Obtain written directions—or a map with the route clearly marked—from the agency showing how to get to your destination. (Many agencies now offer the option of renting a cellphone for the duration of your car rental; check with the rental agent when you pick up the car. Otherwise, contact **InTouch USA** at ☎ 800/872-7626 or www.intouchusa.com for short-term cellphone rental.) And, if possible, arrive and depart during daylight hours.

If you drive off a highway and end up in a dodgy-looking neighborhood, leave the area as quickly as possible. If you have an accident, even on the highway, stay in your car with the doors locked until you assess the situation or until the police arrive. If you're bumped from behind on the street or are involved in a minor accident with no injuries and the situation appears to be suspicious, motion to the other driver to follow you. Never get out of your car in such situations. Go directly to the nearest police precinct, well-lit service station, or 24-hour store.

Park in well-lit and well-traveled areas whenever possible. Always keep your car doors locked, whether the vehicle is attended or unattended. Never leave any packages or valuables in sight. If someone attempts to rob you or steal your car, don't try to resist the thief/carjacker. Report the incident to the police department immediately by calling ☎ 911.

SIZE CONVERSION CHART

Women's Clothing

American	4	6	8	10	12	14	16
French	34	36	38	40	42	44	46
British	6	8	10	12	14	16	18

Women's Shoes

American	5	6	7	8	9	10
French	36	37	38	39	40	41
British	4	5	6	7	8	9

Men's Suits

American	34	36	38	40	42	44	46	48
French	44	46	48	50	52	54	56	58
British	34	36	38	40	42	44	46	48

Men's Shirts

American	14½	15	15½	16	16½	17	17½
French	37	38	39	41	42	43	44
British	14½	15	15½	16	16½	17	17½

Men's Shoes

American	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
French	39½	41	42	43	44½	46	47
British	6	7	8	9	10	11	12

2 Getting to the U.S.

AIRLINES AND DISCOUNTS The smart traveler can find numerable ways to reduce the price of a plane ticket simply by taking time to shop around. For example, overseas visitors can take advantage of the APEX (Advance Purchase Excursion) reductions offered by all major U.S. and European carriers. For more money-saving airline advice, see “Getting There,” in chapter 2. For the best rates, compare fares and be flexible with the dates and times of travel.

A number of international carriers serve the Bay Area airports. They include **Aer Lingus** (☎ 01/0818/365000 in Ireland; www.aerlingus.ie), **Air Canada** (☎ 888-247-2262; www.aircanada.ca), **British Airways** (☎ 0845/773-3377 in the UK; www.british-airways.com), **Japan Airlines** (☎ 0120-25-5971 in Tokyo; www.jal.co.jp), **Qantas** (☎ 13-13-13 in Australia; www.qantas.com.au), and **Virgin Atlantic** (☎ 01293/450-150 in the UK; www.virgin-atlantic.com). British Airways and Virgin Atlantic offer direct flights to San Francisco from London. **Air New Zealand** (☎ 0800/352-266 in New Zealand; www.airnewzealand.co.nz) flies to Los Angeles and will book you through to San Francisco on a partner airline.

Major U.S. carriers, such as **Continental** (☎ 01293/776-464 in the U.K.; www.continental.com), **United** (☎ 084/584-44777 in the U.K.; www.ual.com), **American** (☎ 44-207-365-0777 in London, 44-8457-789-789 outside London in the U.K.; www.aa.com), and **Delta** (☎ 0800/414-767 in the U.K.; www.delta.com), have service from Europe to the United States. **United** (☎ 61/131-777 from within Australia) flies from Sydney to San Francisco.

IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS CLEARANCE Visitors arriving by air, no matter what the port of entry, should cultivate patience and resignation before setting foot on U.S. soil. Getting through immigration control can take as long as 2 hours on some days, especially on summer weekends, so be sure to carry this guidebook or something else to read. This is especially true in the aftermath of the World Trade Center attacks, when security clearances have been considerably beefed up at U.S. airports.

People traveling by air from Canada, Bermuda, and certain countries in the Caribbean can sometimes clear Customs and Immigration at the point of departure, which is much quicker.

Tips Prepare to Be Fingerprinted

Many international visitors traveling on visas to the United States will be photographed and fingerprinted at Customs in a relatively new program created by the Department of Homeland Security called **US-VISIT**. Non-U.S. citizens arriving at airports and on cruise ships must undergo an instant background check as part of the government's ongoing efforts to deter terrorism by verifying the identity of incoming and outgoing visitors. Exempt from the extra scrutiny are visitors entering by land or those from 28 countries (mostly in Europe) that don't require a visa for short-term visits. For more information, go to the Homeland Security website at www.dhs.gov/dhspublic.

3 Getting Around the U.S.

BY PLANE Some large airlines (for example, Northwest and Delta) offer travelers on their transatlantic or transpacific flights special discount tickets under the name **Visit USA**, allowing mostly one-way travel from one U.S. destination to another at very low prices. These discount tickets are not on sale in the United States and must be purchased abroad in conjunction with your international ticket. This system is the best, easiest, and fastest way to see the United States at low cost. You should obtain information well in advance from your travel agent or the office of the airline concerned, since the conditions attached to these discount tickets can be changed without advance notice.

BY TRAIN International visitors (excluding Canada) can also buy a **USA Rail Pass**, good for 15 or 30 days of unlimited travel on Amtrak (☎ 800/USA-RAIL; www.amtrak.com). The pass is available through many overseas travel agents. Prices in 2004 for a 15-day pass were \$295 off-peak, \$440 peak; a 30-day pass costs \$385 off-peak, \$550 peak. With a foreign passport, you can also buy passes at some Amtrak offices in the United States, including locations in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Miami, Boston, and Washington, D.C. Reservations are generally required and should be made for each part of your trip as early as possible. Regional rail passes are also available.

BY BUS Although bus travel is often the most economical form of public transit for short hops between U.S. cities, it can also be slow and uncomfortable—certainly not an option for everyone (particularly when Amtrak, which is far more luxurious, offers similar rates). **Greyhound/Trailways** (☎ 800/231-2222; www.greyhound.com), the sole nationwide bus line, offers an **International Ameripass** that must be purchased before coming to the United States or by phone through the Greyhound International Office at the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York City (☎ 212/971-0492). The pass can be obtained from foreign travel agents or through Greyhound's website (order at least 21 days before your departure to the U.S.) and costs less than the domestic version. 2004 passes cost as follows: 4 days (\$160), 7 days (\$219), 10 days (\$269), 15 days (\$329), 21 days (\$379), 30 days (\$439), 45 days (\$489), or 60 days (\$599). You can get more info on the pass at the website or by calling ☎ 402/330-8552. In addition, special rates are available for seniors and students.

BY CAR Unless you plan to spend the bulk of your vacation time in a city where walking is the best and easiest way to get around (read: New York City or New Orleans), the most cost-effective, convenient, and comfortable way to travel around the United States is by car. The interstate highway system connects cities and towns all over the country; in addition to these high-speed, limited-access roadways, there's an extensive network of federal, state, and local highways and roads. Some of the national car-rental companies include **Alamo** (☎ 800/462-5266; www.alamo.com), **Avis** (☎ 800/230-4898; www.avis.com), **Budget** (☎ 800/527-0700; www.budget.com), **Dollar** (☎ 800/800-3665; www.dollar.com), **Hertz** (☎ 800/654-3131; www.hertz.com), **National** (☎ 800/227-7368; www.nationalcar.com), and **Thrifty** (☎ 800/847-4389; www.thrifty.com).

If you plan to rent a car in the United States, you probably won't need the services of an additional automobile organization. If you're planning to buy or borrow a car, automobile-association membership is recommended. **AAA, the American Automobile Association** (☎ 800/222-4357), is the country's largest

auto club and supplies its members with maps, insurance, and, most important, emergency road service. The cost of joining runs from \$63 for singles to \$87 for two members, but if you're a member of a foreign auto club with reciprocal arrangements, you can enjoy free AAA service in America.

FAST FACTS: For the International Traveler

Automobile Organizations Auto clubs will supply maps, suggested routes, guidebooks, accident and bail-bond insurance, and emergency road service. The **American Automobile Association (AAA)** is the major auto club in the United States. If you belong to an auto club in your home country, inquire about AAA reciprocity before you leave. You may be able to join AAA even if you're not a member of a reciprocal club; to inquire, call AAA (☎ **800/222-4357**). AAA is actually an organization of regional auto clubs; so look under "AAA Automobile Club" in the White Pages of the telephone directory. AAA has a nationwide emergency road service telephone number (☎ **800/AAA-HELP**).

Business Hours Offices are usually open weekdays from 9am to 5pm. Banks are open weekdays from 9am to 3pm or later and sometimes Saturday mornings. Stores typically open between 9 and 10am and close between 5 and 6pm from Monday through Saturday. Stores in shopping complexes or malls tend to stay open late—until about 9pm on weekdays and weekends—and many malls and larger department stores are open on Sundays.

Currency & Currency Exchange See "Entry Requirements" and "Money" under "Preparing for Your Trip," earlier in this chapter.

Drinking Laws The legal age for purchase and consumption of alcoholic beverages is 21; proof of age is required and often requested at bars, nightclubs, and restaurants, so it's always a good idea to bring ID when you go out. Beer and wine often can be purchased in supermarkets, but liquor laws vary from state to state.

Do not carry open containers of alcohol in your car or any public area that isn't zoned for alcohol consumption. The police can fine you on the spot. And nothing will ruin your trip faster than getting a citation for DUI ("driving under the influence"), so don't even think about driving while intoxicated.

Electricity Like Canada, the United States uses 110 to 120 volts AC (60 cycles), compared to 220 to 240 volts AC (50 cycles) in most of Europe, Australia, and New Zealand. If your small appliances use 220 to 240 volts, you'll need a 110-volt transformer and a plug adapter with two flat parallel pins to operate them here. Downward converters that change 220–240 volts to 110–120 volts are difficult to find in the United States, so bring one with you.

Embassies & Consulates All embassies are located in the nation's capital, Washington, D.C. Some consulates are located in major U.S. cities, and most nations have a mission to the United Nations in New York City. If your country isn't listed below, call for directory information in Washington, D.C. (☎ **202/555-1212**) or log on to www.embassy.org/embassies.

The embassy of **Australia** is at 1601 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036 (☎ **202/797-3000**; www.austemb.org). There are consulates in New York, Honolulu, Houston, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

The embassy of **Canada** is at 501 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001 (☎ **202/682-1740**; www.canadianembassy.org). Other Canadian consulates are in Buffalo (NY), Detroit, Los Angeles, New York, and Seattle.

The embassy of **Ireland** is at 2234 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20008 (☎ **202/462-3939**; www.irelandemb.org). Irish consulates are in Boston, Chicago, New York, and San Francisco.

The embassy of **Japan** is at 2520 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20008 (☎ **202/238-6700**; www.embjapan.org). Japanese consulates are located in many cities including Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, New York, San Francisco, and Seattle.

The embassy of **New Zealand** is at 37 Observatory Circle NW, Washington, DC 20008 (☎ **202/328-4800**; www.nzemb.org). New Zealand consulates are in Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, San Francisco, and Seattle.

The embassy of the **United Kingdom** is at 3100 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20008 (☎ **202/462-1340**; www.britainusa.com). Other British consulates are in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco, and Seattle.

Emergencies Call ☎ **911** to report a fire, call the police, or get an ambulance anywhere in the United States. This is a toll-free call. (No coins are required at public telephones.)

If you encounter serious problems, contact the **Traveler's Aid International** (☎ **202/546-1127**; www.travelersaid.org) to help direct you to a local branch. This nationwide, nonprofit, social-service organization geared to helping travelers in difficult straits offers services that might include reuniting families separated while traveling, providing food and/or shelter to people stranded without cash, or even emotional counseling. If you're in trouble, seek them out.

Gasoline (Petrol) Petrol is known as gasoline (or simply "gas") in the United States, and petrol stations are known as both gas stations and service stations. Gasoline costs about half as much here as it does in Europe (about \$1.85 per gallon at press time), and taxes are already included in the printed price. One U.S. gallon equals 3.8 liters or 0.85 Imperial gallons.

Holidays Banks, government offices, post offices, and many stores, restaurants, and museums are closed on the following legal national holidays: January 1 (New Year's Day), the third Monday in January (Martin Luther King, Jr. Day), the third Monday in February (Presidents' Day, Washington's Birthday), the last Monday in May (Memorial Day), July 4 (Independence Day), the first Monday in September (Labor Day), the second Monday in October (Columbus Day), November 11 (Veterans' Day/Armistice Day), the fourth Thursday in November (Thanksgiving Day), and December 25 (Christmas Day). Also, the Tuesday following the first Monday in November is Election Day and is a federal government holiday in presidential-election years (held every four years, and next in 2008).

Legal Aid If you are "pulled over" for a minor infraction (such as speeding), never attempt to pay the fine directly to a police officer; this could

be construed as attempted bribery, a much more serious crime. Pay fines by mail or directly into the hands of the clerk of the court. If accused of a more serious offense, say and do nothing before consulting a lawyer. Here the burden is on the state to prove a person's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt, and everyone has the right to remain silent, whether he or she is suspected of a crime or actually arrested. Once arrested, a person can make one telephone call to a party of his or her choice. Call your embassy or consulate.

Mail If you aren't sure what your address will be in the United States, mail can be sent to you, in your name, c/o General Delivery at the main post office of the city or region where you expect to be. (Call ☎ **800/275-8777** for information on the nearest post office.) The addressee must pick up mail in person and must produce proof of identity (driver's license, passport, and so on). Most post offices will hold your mail for up to one month and are open Monday to Friday from 8am to 6pm, and Saturday from 9am to 3pm.

Generally found at intersections, mailboxes are blue with a red-and-white stripe and carry the inscription U.S. MAIL. If your mail is addressed to a U.S. destination, don't forget to add the five-digit postal code (or zip code), after the two-letter abbreviation of the state to which the mail is addressed. This is essential for prompt delivery.

At press time, domestic postage rates were 23¢ for a postcard and 37¢ for a letter. For international mail, a first-class letter of up to one-half ounce costs 80¢ (60¢ to Canada and Mexico), a first-class postcard costs 70¢ (50¢ to Canada and Mexico), and a preprinted postal aerogramme costs 70¢.

Measurements See the chart on the inside front cover of this book for details on converting metric measurements to U.S. equivalents.

Taxes The United States has no value-added tax (VAT) or other indirect tax at the national level. Every state, county, and city has the right to levy its own local tax on all purchases, including hotel and restaurant checks, airline tickets, and so on.

Telephone, Telegraph, Telex & Fax The telephone system in the United States is run by private corporations, so rates, especially for long-distance service and operator-assisted calls, can vary widely. Generally, hotel surcharges on long-distance and local calls are astronomical, so you're usually better off using a **public pay telephone**, which you'll find clearly marked in most public buildings and private establishments as well as on the street. Convenience grocery stores and gas stations always have them. Many convenience groceries and packaging services sell **prepaid calling cards** in denominations up to \$50; these can be the least expensive way to call home. Many public phones at airports now accept American Express, MasterCard, and Visa credit cards. **Local calls** made from public pay phones in most locales cost either 25¢ or 35¢. Pay phones do not accept pennies, and few will take anything larger than a quarter.

You may want to look into leasing a cell-phone for the duration of your trip.

Most long-distance and international calls can be dialed directly from any phone. **For calls within the United States and to Canada**, dial 1

followed by the area code and the seven-digit number. **For other international calls**, dial 011 followed by the country code, city code, and the telephone number of the person you are calling.

Calls to area codes **800**, **888**, **877**, and **866** are toll-free. However, calls to numbers in area codes **700** and **900** (chat lines, bulletin boards, "dating" services, and so on) can be very expensive—usually a charge of 95¢ to \$3 or more per minute, and they sometimes have minimum charges that can run as high as \$15 or more.

For **reversed-charge or collect calls**, and for person-to-person calls, dial 0 (zero, not the letter O) followed by the area code and number you want; an operator will then come on the line, and you should specify that you are calling collect, or person-to-person, or both. If your operator-assisted call is international, ask for the overseas operator.

For **local directory assistance** ("information"), dial ☎ **411**; for long-distance information, dial 1, then the appropriate area code and 555-1212.

Telegraph and telex services are provided primarily by Western Union. You can bring your telegram into the nearest Western Union office (there are hundreds across the country) or dictate it over the phone (☎ **800/325-6000**). You can also telegraph money, or have it telegraphed to you, very quickly over the Western Union system, but this service can cost as much as 15 to 20 percent of the amount sent.

Most hotels have **fax machines** available for guest use (be sure to ask about the charge to use it). Many hotel rooms are even wired for guests' fax machines. A less expensive way to send and receive faxes may be at stores such as **The UPS Store** (formerly Mail Boxes, Etc.), a national chain of retail packing service shops. (Look in the Yellow Pages directory under "Packing Services.")

There are two kinds of telephone directories in the United States. The so-called **White Pages** list private households and business subscribers in alphabetical order. The inside front cover lists emergency numbers for police, fire, ambulance, the Coast Guard, poison-control center, crime-victims hotline, and so on. The first few pages will tell you how to make long-distance and international calls, complete with country codes and area codes. Government numbers are usually printed on blue paper within the White Pages. Printed on yellow paper, the so-called **Yellow Pages** list all local services, businesses, industries, and houses of worship according to activity with an index at the front or back. (Drugstores/pharmacies and restaurants are also listed by geographic location.) The Yellow Pages also include city plans or detailed area maps, postal zip codes, and public transportation routes.

Time The continental United States is divided into **four time zones**: eastern standard time (EST), central standard time (CST), mountain standard time (MST), and Pacific standard time (PST). Alaska and Hawaii have their own zones. For example, noon in New York City (EST) is 11am in Chicago (CST), 10am in Denver (MST), 9am in San Francisco (PST), 8am in Anchorage (AST), and 7am in Honolulu (HST).

Daylight saving time is in effect from 1am on the first Sunday in April through 1am on the last Sunday in October, except in Arizona, Hawaii,

most of Indiana, and Puerto Rico. Daylight saving time moves the clock 1 hour ahead of standard time.

Tipping Tips are a very important part of certain workers' income, and gratuities are the standard way of showing appreciation for services provided. (Tipping is certainly not compulsory if the service is poor!) In hotels, tip **bellhops** at least \$1 per bag (\$2–\$3 if you have a lot of luggage) and tip the **chamber staff** \$1 to \$2 per day (more if you've left a disaster area for him or her to clean up). Tip the **doorman** or **concierge** only if he or she has provided you with some specific service (for example, calling a cab for you or obtaining difficult-to-get theater tickets). Tip the **valet-parking attendant** \$1 every time you get your car.

In restaurants, bars, and nightclubs, tip **service staff** 15% to 20% of the check, tip **bartenders** 10% to 15%, tip **checkroom attendants** \$1 per garment, and tip **valet-parking attendants** \$1 per vehicle.

As for other service personnel, tip **cab drivers** 15% of the fare, tip **skycaps** at airports at least \$1 per bag (\$2–\$3 if you have a lot of luggage), and tip **hairstylists** and **barbers** 15% to 20%.

Toilets You won't find public toilets or "restrooms" on the streets in most U.S. cities, but they can be found in hotel lobbies, bars, restaurants, museums, department stores, railway and bus stations, and service stations. Large hotels and fast-food restaurants are probably the best bet for good, clean facilities. If possible, avoid the toilets at parks and beaches, which tend to be dirty; some may be unsafe. Restaurants and bars in resorts or heavily visited areas may reserve their restrooms for patrons. Some establishments display a notice indicating this. You can ignore this sign or, better yet, avoid arguments by paying for a cup of coffee or a soft drink, which will qualify you as a patron.

Index

See also Accommodations and Restaurant indexes, below.

GENERAL INDEX

A AA (American Automobile Association), 66, 289
AARP, 31, 32
Access America, 29
Accessible Journeys, 32
Accommodations, 70–98.
See also Accommodations Index
accessibility, 72–73
best bets, 7–12
concierges, 77
The Embarcadero, 92–93
Fisherman's Wharf, 89–92
getting the best rate, 72
house cars, 77
Laurel Heights, 98
The Marina & Cow Hollow, 96–98
money-saving tips, 20
Nob Hill, 93–96
price categories, 71–72
reservations, 71
South of Market (SoMa), 84–89
surfing for, 42
tipping, 293
Union Square/Financial District, 73–84
Acropports, 217
A.C.T. (American Conservatory Theater), 240, 247, 249–250
ACT Young Conservatory, 251
Adventure Park and Playground (Berkeley), 263–264
Aer Lingus, 287
Afternoon tea, 15, 111
A G Ferrari Foods, 125
AirBART shuttle, 40
Air Canada, 33, 287
Airlines, 33–34, 287, 288
bankruptcy and, 36
Air New Zealand, 287

Airports, 33
getting to and from, 39–40
Air Tickets Direct, 36
AirTrain, 40
Air travel, 36–39
game books, 38
packing for, 28
seats, 38–39
security measures, 34
A La Carte, A La Park, 25
Alamo Square, 55, 180
Alamo Square Park, 209
Alaska Airlines, 33
Alcatraz Island, 154–157
Alemany Flea Market, 234
Alexander Book Co., 230
All About Chinatown!
Walking Tours, 185
Alonzo King's LINES
Ballet, 257
Alta Plaza Park, 210
Ambassador Toys, 239
AMC Kabuki, 256
AMC 1000 Van Ness, 256
American Airlines, 33, 287
American Automobile Association (AAA), 66, 289
American Child Care Service, 67
American Conservatory Theater (A.C.T.), 240, 247, 249–250
American Express
office of, 66
traveler's checks, 19
American Foundation for the Blind, 33
American Gymnastics, 216–217
American Pie, 233
America West, 33
Amoeba Music, 235
Amtrak, 41
The Amusement Center, 261
Amusement parks, 278–279
Angelina's Bakery, 125
Angel Island, 156
Angray Fantastico, 226, 232, 236

Anza, Lake (Berkeley), 266
APEX (Advance Purchase Excursion) fares, 287
Apron Strings, 222
Aquarium of the Bay, 167
Aquatic Park, 195
Arcades, 261–262
Archery, 214
Area codes, 66
The Ark Toys, 239
Art and craft supplies, 226–227
Art cars, 191
Art classes, 222
Art museums
Asian Art Museum, 174–175
California Palace of the Legion of Honor, 164, 176
Cartoon Art Museum, 176–177, 196
M.H. de Young Memorial Museum, 174
Museum of Craft and Folk Art, 177
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), 178, 179
Tattoo Art Museum, 179
Artsake, 226
Arts & Craft Supplies Outlet, 226, 232
Ashkenaz, 255
Asian Art Museum, 165, 174–175
Asian Art Museum Store, 235
ATMs (automated teller machines), 18, 285
Avenue Cyclery, 215
Avis, 62
B aby Gap, 227
Babysitters, 67
Baker Beach, 213
Ballet, 257–258
Balloons Above the Valley (Napa Valley), 276

- Barnes & Noble Booksellers, 164, 230
- Bars and lounges, 253
- BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit), 61
to/from airport, 40
- Baseball, 214
- Basic Brown Bear Factory, 221
- Basic Brown Bear Store, 239
- Basketball, 214
- Battery Chamberlin, 213
- Bay Area Discovery Museum, 175
- Bay Area Parent*, 17, 241
- Bay Area 2nd Mom, 67
- Bay Area Theatresports (BATS), 250
- Bayporter Express, 40
- Bay to Breakers, 24–25
- B. Dalton Bookseller, 230
- Beach Blanket Babylon*, 250
- Beach Chalet Restaurant, 180
- Beachcombing, 213
- Beaches, Point Reyes, 274, 275
- Bear Valley Visitor Center (Point Reyes), 274
- Beleza, 227
- Ben & Jerry's, 137
- Berkeley, 263–268
- Berkeley Art Museum, 266
- Berkeley Convention & Visitors Bureau, 17
- The Berkeley Hall of Health, 264
- Bernal Heights Park, 180
- Bicycling, 4–5, 184, 214
Napa Valley, 276
Oakland, 272
- BiddingForTravel, 42
- Bike Hut, 194, 215
- Bike rentals, 215
- Biordi Art Imports, 233
- Biscuits and Blues, 254
- Bix, 253
- Black Nativity, 247
- Blazing Saddles, 215
- Blue and Gold Fleet, 182
- Blues bars, 252
- The Boathouse (Golden Gate Park), 172
- Boating
kayaking, 219
Oakland, 269
on Stow Lake, 5, 214
- Boat tours and cruises, 182–183
- Boingo, 43
- Bonaventura Balloon Company, 276
- Book Passage, 230
- Books, about San Francisco, 46
- Books by the Bay, 25
- Books Inc., 230
- Booksmith, 230
- Bookstores, 164, 230–231
- Boom Boom Room, 252
- Border's Books and Music, 230
- Botanical Garden(s)
The Strybing Arboretum and, 172, 174, 261
UC Berkeley, 267
- Bothe-Napa Valley State Park, 275
- Bowling, 214
lawn, 219
- Brain Quest for the Car: 1100 Questions and Answers All About America*, 38
- British Airways, 33, 287
- Broadway by the Bay, 251
- Brook's Shoes for Kids, 237
- Brown, Vivian and Marian, 191
- The Bubble Lounge, 253
- Bucket shops, 36
- Budget, 62
- Buffalo Exchange, 239
- Burlington Coat Factory, 232
- Buses and streetcars, 57, 60–61
- Business hours, 67, 289
- Bus tours, 186
- Bus travel, 288
- By the Great Horn Spoon!*, 46
-  *Cable Car and the Dragon, The*, 46
- Cable Car Museum, 175
- Cable cars, 61, 158, 159
- Cabs, 63
to/from airport, 39
- Cafe.com, 68
- Cafe du Nord, 252
- Calendar of events, 23–26
- California Academy of Sciences, 176, 196
store, 237
story time, 260
- California Historical Society, 196
- California Palace of the Legion of Honor, 164, 176, 222
- Calistoga, 275–278
- Calistoga Bikeshop, 276
- Camera repair, 67
- Cameras, digital, 35
- The Campanile (Sather Tower; Berkeley), 266
- The Cannery, 165
- Canton Bazaar, 190
- Carnaval, 24
- Car rentals, 62, 288
surfing for, 42
- Carry-on luggage, 37
security measures, 34
- Cartoon Art Museum, 176–177, 196, 230
- Car travel, 40–41, 61–62, 288–289
driving rules, 62
driving safety, 286
foreign driver's licenses, 281
packing for, 28
- The Castro
brief description of, 56
restaurants, 144–145
shopping, 225–226
sights and attractions, 211
- Castro Theatre, 257
- Catnip and Bones, 202
- Catnip & Bones, 236
- The Cellar (Macy's), 114
- Cellphones, 44–45
- Chabot Space and Science Center (Oakland), 268
- Challenger Learning Center (Oakland), 268
- The Cheesecake Factory, 181
- Cherry Blossom Festival, 23–24
- Chestnut Street, 202
- Chicken Ranch Beach (Point Reyes), 275
- Children's Art Center, 222
- Children's Fairyland (Oakland), 268–269
- The Children's Place, 227
- Children's Playground (Golden Gate Park), 172
- Chimney Rock (Point Reyes), 274
- China Beach, 213
- Chinatown, 2, 4
brief description of, 49
funeral processions, 191
planning family outings in, 65
restaurants, 116–119
shopping, 224
sights and attractions, 163–167, 207–208
walking tour, 188–192
- Chinatown Branch, San Francisco Public Library, 261
- Chinatown Kite Shop, 190, 239

- Chinese cuisine, 118
 Chinese Culture Center, 164
 Chinese Historical Society of America, 165, 192
 Chinese New Year Parade and Celebration, 6, 23
 The Chinese Playground, 207
 Chocolate Festival, Ghirardelli Square, 25
 Christine Foley, 232
 Christmas at Sea, 26
A Christmas Carol, 247
 Christopher's Books, 230
 Chronicle Books, 230
 Cinco de Mayo, 24
 Circus Center, 219
 Circus shows, 258
 Cirque du Soleil, 247
 Citikids Baby News Store, 227, 238
 City Box Office, 241
The City by the Bay: A Magical Journey Around San Francisco, 46
 City Cycle, 237
 City Guides, 185
 City Lights Bookstore, 230
 Citypass, 60
 Civic Center
 brief description of, 53
 restaurants, 129–130
 shopping, 225
 Civic Center Plaza, 209
 Clarion Music Center, 190, 235, 254–255
 Classes and workshops, 221–222
 Classical music, 255, 256
 A Clean Well-Lighted Place for Books, 230
 The Clement Street Kids Festival, 25
 Cliff House, 164, 181
 Cliff's Variety, 226, 239
 Climate, 22
 Clos Pegase (Calistoga), 276
 Clothing
 baby and preschooler, 227, 230
 at department stores, 231–232
 discount, 232
 fashion and maternity, 232–233
 vintage, 239
 Cobb's Comedy Club, 253
 Coca-Cola Fan Lot, 207, 259
 Coit Tower, 181, 182, 198
 Colds, air travel and, 33
 Color Me Mine, 221–222
 Comedy clubs, 253
 Comedy Day Celebration, 25
 Comic Outpost, 230
 Concierges, 77
 Connection kit, 44
 The Conservatory of Flowers, 172, 174
 Consolidators, 36
 Continental Airlines, 33, 287
 Conventions and trade shows, 22
 Cooking, 222
 Copy Central, 68
 Costumes on Haight, 231
 Cover to Cover Booksellers, 231
 Cow Hollow
 accommodations, 96–98
 brief description of, 54
 shopping, 225
 sights and attractions, 209
 Cow Hollow Playground, 209
 The Cow Palace, 241
 Coyote Point Museum (CPM), 279
 Craft and art supplies, 226–227
 Credit cards, 19, 285
 Crissy Field, 4, 54, 125, 158, 206, 210, 213
 Crissy Field Center, 210
 Critical Mass, 191
 Crocker Galleria food court, 114
 Crossroads Trading, 239
 Curbside check-in, 34
 The Curran Theatre, 241
 Currency and currency exchange, 284
 Customs regulations, 282–283
- D**an, Bill, 191
 Dance-Along Nutcracker, 247
 Dance performances, 257–258
 Dancing, 215, 252–253
 Davis Symphony Hall, 241
 Deck the Hall, 247
 Delta Airlines, 33, 287
 Delta Tower, 125
 Dentists, 67
 Department stores, 231–232
 Desoto Cab, 63, 244
 Digital cameras, 35
 Dim sum, guide to, 15
 Dining. *See also* Restaurant Index
 Belden Place, 109
 Berkeley, 267–268
 best bets, 12–16
 the Castro & Noe Valley, 144–145
 chains, 101
 Chinatown, 116–119
 Civic Center/Hayes Valley, 129–130
 by cuisine, 101–104
 Fisherman's Wharf, 126–129
 at food courts, 114
 Japantown/Pacific Heights/Presidio Heights, 133–135
 Marina/Cow Hollow, 130–131
 Nob Hill, 115–116
 North Beach, 122–126
 price categories, 99, 101
 reservations, 77
 the Richmond & Sunset, 145–148
 Russian Hill, 135–137
 South of Market, 110–115
 tipping, 293
 tips on dining out, 100
 Union Square/The Financial District, 104–110
 Discount Camera, 67
 Discount Fabrics, 226
 Discount shopping, 232
 Disney Store, 238
 Doctors, 67
 Dolls and dollhouses, 232
 Dolores Park, 56, 181, 211
 Dottie Doolittle, 232
 Douglass Playground, 211
 The Dragon's Gate, 188
 Drake's Beach (Point Reyes), 274
 Dress Maternity, 202
 Drinking laws, 289
 Driver's licenses, foreign, 281
 Driving rules, 62
 Driving safety, 286
 Drop-in Art Studio (Berkeley), 264
 Drugstores, 27
 Duboce Park, 211
 Dungeness Crab season, 168
- E**arthquakes, 67
 Easter Parade & Spring Celebration, Union Street, 23
 Educational Exchange, 231
 Elderhostel, 31
 Electricity, 289
 Elephant Seal Overlook (Point Reyes), 274

Ellis-O'Farrell Garage, 63
 ELTExpress, 36
 The Embarcadero
 accommodations, 92–93
 biking, 214–215
 brief description of, 52–53
 shopping, 224–225
 walking tour, 192–195
 Embarcadero Bay Bicycle Trail (Oakland), 272
 Embarcadero Center
 Cinema, 257
 Embarcadero Center Lighting Ceremony and Celebration, 26
 The Embarcadero YMCA, 214, 215, 220–221
 Embassies and consulates, 289–290
 Emergencies, 67, 290
 Empire Plush Room, 252
 The Endup, 252
 Enrico's Sidewalk Cafe, 252
 Enterprise, 62
 Entertainment, 240–262
 for adults, 252
 big venues, 241–247
 current listings, 240
 seasonal events, 247–248
 spectator sports, 258–260
 story hours, 260–261
 theater, 249–251
 tickets, 241
 weekend shows, 249
 Environmental Education Center (Berkeley), 266
 Ethnic Dance Festival, 24
 Eureka Valley/Harvey Milk Memorial Branch, San Francisco Public Library, 261
 Expedia, 41, 42
 Exploratorium, 200, 237
 The Exploratorium, 160, 165
 Explorer's Club, 67, 185–186

Family Service Agency, 68
 Family Travel Forum, 31
 Fastmail, 43
 Fax machines, 292
 Ferries, 182–183
 Alameda/Oakland, 272
 to Sausalito or Tiburon, 6
 Ferry Building, 52, 125, 194
 Ferry Building Marketplace, 160–161
 Ferry Plaza Farmer's Market, 2, 160, 235
 Festivals and special events, 23–26

Fifth and Mission Garage, 63
 Filbert Steps, 200
 The Fillmore Auditorium, 241, 254
 Film, flying with, 35
 Financial District
 accommodations, 73–84
 brief description of, 53
 restaurants, 104–110
 shopping, 223–224
 Fire Engine Tours, 186
 Firehouse Engine 35, 194
 Fish Alley, 168
 Fisherman's Wharf, 195
 accommodations, 89–92
 brief description of, 49, 52
 planning family outings in, 66
 restaurants, 126–129
 shopping, 224
 sights and attractions, 167–172
 walking tour, 192–195
 Fishing, 215
 Fishing boats, 182–183
 Flax Art & Design, 226
 Flea Market, Alemany, 234
 Fleet Week, 25–26
 FlyCheap, 36
 Flying trapeze, 219
 Flying Wheels Travel, 32
 F-Market streetcar, 165, 195
 Foreign visitors, 280–293
 customs regulations, 282–283
 entry requirements, 280–281
 health insurance, 283–284
 immigration and customs clearance, 287
 medical requirements for entry, 281
 money matters, 284–285
 passport information, 281–282
 safety suggestions, 285–286
 traveling around the U.S., 288–289
 traveling to the U.S., 287
 Fort Funston, 184, 213
 Fort Mason, 202
 Fort Mason Center, 244
 Fort Mason Center Museums, 177
 Fort Point, 184
 Fortune cookies
 Golden Gate Fortune Cookie Company, 165–166, 190
 recipe for, 166

42nd Street Moon, 250
 Foul Play (film), 46
 Fourth of July, 25
 Francisco Bay Guardian, 68
 Free (or nearly free) things to do, 21
 The Freight & Salvage, 255
 Frequent-flier clubs, 36
 Friends of Recreation and Parks Fall Music Series, 247–248
 Frisson, 253
 FTC Skateboarding, 237

Game books, 38
 Games, 233
 Gamescape, 233
 GAMH (Great American Music Hall), 245
 Gap Kids, 232
 Garages, 63
 Gardens Ghoulery Walk, 26
 Gasoline, 290
 Gay and lesbian parents, 32
 George, 236
 George R. Moscone Recreation Center, 202, 209
 Getaway Adventures, 276
 Ghirardelli Soda Fountain & Chocolate Shop, 238
 Ghirardelli Square, 167
 Ghirardelli Square Chocolate Festival, 25
 Giants, 258, 259
 Giants Baseball Dugout Stores, 239
 Gifts and souvenirs, 233–234
 GoCityKids.com, 240
 Golden Access Passport, 33
 Golden Age Passport, 31–32
 Golden Gate Bridge, crossing, 183–184
 Golden Gate Ferry, 183
 Golden Gate Fortune Cookie Company, 165–166
 Golden Gate National Park Association, 206, 212
 Golden Gate National Recreation Area, 208
 Golden Gate Park, 6, 55, 211
 bicycling, 214
 planning family outings in, 66
 sights and attractions, 172–174
 Golden Gate Park Band, 172
 Golden Gate Park Municipal Golf Course, 216
 Golden Gate Park Skate & Bike, 218

Golden Gate Park Tennis Complex, 221
 Golden Gate Theatre, 244
 Golden State Warriors, 259
 Golf, 216
 Gondola Servizio (Oakland), 269
 GoToMyPC, 43
 Grandparents, advice for, 31
 Grant Avenue, 188
 Gray Line Tours, 186
 Great American Music Hall (GAMH), 245, 254
 The Great Entertainer, 262
 Greek Theater (Berkeley), 246
 Green Apple Books and Music, 231
 Greens to Go, 125
 Greyhound/Trailways, 288
 Growing Up, 239
 GSM (Global System for Mobiles) wireless network, 44
 Guitar Center, 235
 Guitar Solo, 236
 Gump's, 233
 Gymnastics, 212, 227
 Gymnastics, 216–218

Habitot Children's Museum (Berkeley), 264
 Haight-Ashbury (The Haight)
 brief description of, 55–56
 restaurants, 137–140
 shopping, 225
 Haight Street Fair, 24
 Haircuts, 234
 Halloween, 26
 Handball, 218
 Hansel and Gretel, 248
 Harding Park golf course, 216
 Harvey Milk Recreation Center, 211
Hawaiian Chieftain, 183
 Hayes Valley
 brief description of, 53–54
 restaurants, 129–130
 shopping, 225
 Health concerns, 27–28
 Health insurance, 283–284
 Hearst Museum of Anthropology (Berkeley), 266
 Herb Caen Way, 194
 The Herbst Theater, 245
 Heroes Club, 239
 Hertz, 62
 High tea, 111, 164
 Hiking, 184–185, 218
 Hi's Tackle Box, 215, 237

HIV-positive visitors, 281
 Hobby Co. of San Francisco, 226
 Holidays, 290
 Horseback riding, 218, 275
 Hospitals, 67
 Hotels, 70–98. *See also*
 Accommodations Index
 accessibility, 72–73
 best bets, 7–12
 concierges, 77
 The Embarcadero, 92–93
 Fisherman's Wharf, 89–92
 getting the best rate, 72
 house cars, 77
 Laurel Heights, 98
 The Marina & Cow Hollow, 96–98
 money-saving tips, 20
 Nob Hill, 93–96
 price categories, 71–72
 reservations, 71
 South of Market (SoMa), 84–89
 surfing for, 42
 tipping, 293
 Union Square/Financial District, 73–84
 Hotels.com, 42
 Hot lines, 68
 Hotwire, 41–42
 House of Magic, 234
 Howard's Shoes for Children, 237
Humphrey, the Lost Whale: A True Story, 46
 Hyde Street Pier, 168, 195
 music-oriented events, 249

Ice skating, 218
 In-line skating, 218
 Insurance, 28–29, 36
 International Ameripass, 288
 International visitors, 280–293
 customs regulations, 282–283
 entry requirements, 280–281
 health insurance, 283–284
 immigration and customs clearance, 287
 medical requirements for entry, 281
 money matters, 284–285
 passport information, 281–282
 safety suggestions, 285–286

traveling around the U.S., 288–289
 traveling to the U.S., 287
 Internet access, 42–44, 68
 InTouch USA, 44, 45, 286
 IPass, 43–44
 Isotope Comics, 231
 Italian Heritage Parade, 26
 Itineraries, suggested, for first-time visitors, 149, 152–154
 Itravelnet.com, 41
 I2roam, 44

Jack London Square (Oakland), 272
 Japan Airlines, 287
 Japanese Tea Garden (Golden Gate Park), 172, 174
 Japanese Weekend, 232
 Japantown
 brief description of, 54–55
 Cherry Blossom Festival, 23–24
 restaurants, 133–135
 Jazz, 252, 254, 255
 Jazz at Pearl's, 252, 254
 Jean et Marie, 227
 Jeffrey's Toys, 239
 JetBlue, 33
 Jewel Lake (Berkeley), 266
 Jewish Community Center, 214
 Joe DiMaggio North Beach Playground, 125, 198, 208, 220
 John McLaren Park golf course, 216
 Jonathan Kaye Baby, 238
 Jonathan Kaye Children, 238
 Juggling, 219
 Julia Morgan Center for the Arts (Berkeley), 246–247
 Julius Kahn Park, 211
 The Junior Boot Shop, 237
 Just for Fun-Scribbledoodles, 234

Kar'ikter, 234
 Kayaking, 219
Kidding Around San Francisco, 46
 Kidiniki, 227
 Kid's Foot Locker, 237
 Kids Only, 232
 Kindersport, 233
 Kinko's, 68
 Kinokuniya Bookstore, 231
 Kite flying, 219

Koret Education Center, 178
 Koret Health and Recreation
 Center, 221
 Kristi Yamaguchi Holiday Ice
 Rink, 218
 Kule Loklo (Point Reyes),
 274

Lafayette Park, 210
 Lamplighters Music Theatre,
 250

Land's End, 184
 Lark In The Morning
 Musique Shoppe, 236
 Lastminutetravel.com, 41
 Laurel Heights

accommodations, 98
 brief description of, 56

Lavatory, airplane, 37

Lavish, 227

Lawn bowling, 219

Lawrence Hall of Science
 (LIGHTHOUSES; Berkeley),
 267

Lee's Sandwiches, 125

Legal aid, 290–291

Legion of Honor Museum
 Store, 235

Levende Lounge, 253

Levi's, 233

Levi Strauss Plaza, 200

Limantour Beach (Point
 Reyes), 274

Limited Too, 233

Lincoln Park, 181

golf course, 216

Liquor laws, 68

Li's Trading Co., 227

Little League Baseball, 214

Littleluggage, 27

Loews Theatre at Metreon,
 256–257

Lombardi Sports, 237

Lombard Street, 186, 198

Lorraine Hansberry Theatre,
 246, 247

Lotta's Fountain, 191

Lovely Martha, 215

Luggage

carry-on, 37
 security measures, 34
 shipping your, 39

Luggage Express, 39

Luxor Cabs, 63, 244

Macy's, 231
 Maddie's Pet Adoption
 Center, 236

Magic shops, 234

Mail, 291

Mail2web, 43

Main Library, 68

Maison de Belles Choses,
 227

Make*A*Circus, 24, 258

Malibu Grand Prix, 262

Manifesto, 227

Maps, 61, 68

The Marina

accommodations, 96–98
 brief description of, 54
 shopping, 225
 sights and attractions, 209

Marina Branch of the San
 Francisco Public Library,
 261

Marina Green, 202

Marin County Convention &
 Visitors Bureau, 17

Marines Memorial Theatre,
 246

Mario's Bohemian Cigar
 Store, 125

Maritime Museum, 168, 195

Maritime National Historical
 Park, 5–6

Markets, 234–235

Market Street, 6

The Marsh, 253

Mar Vista Stable, 218

MasterCard, traveler's
 checks, 19

MasterCard ATM Locator, 18

Mastrelli's Delicatessen, 125

Meals, airline, 38

Medical requirements for
 entry, 281

Mendel's Art Supplies & Far
 Out Fabrics, 227

Merritt, Lake (Oakland), 269

Mervyn's, 232

Metronome Ballroom, 215,
 253

The Mexican Museum, 177

Mezzanine, 252

M.H. de Young Memorial
 Museum, 174

Michelangelo Park, 208

Minis-Kids and Maternity,
 233

Misdirections, 234

The Mission

restaurants, 140–143
 shopping, 226
 sights and attractions, 211

Mission Bay Golf Center, 216

Mission Cliffs, 212

Mission Cliffs Rock Climbing
 Center, 164

The Mission District, brief
 description of, 56

Mission Dolores, 177

Mission Playground, 211
 Miwok Livery and Stables,
 218

Mock Café, 253

Modern Times Bookstore,
 231

Molinari, 125

Mom's the Word, 233

Money matters, 18–21
 for international visitors,
 284–285

Money-saving tips, 20–21
 airfares, 35–36

public transportation, 60

Moscone Recreation Center,
 202, 209

MossRehab, 32

Mountain Lake Park, 212

Movies, 256–257

Mrs. Doubtfire (film), 45

Mudpie, 227

Muir Woods, 185

Muni (Municipal Railway),
 57, 60

maps, 61

Municipal Boathouse
 (Oakland), 269

Murals, 187

Murik Children's Store, 230

Musée Mécanique, 170, 262

Museo Italo Americano, 177

Museum of Craft and Folk
 Art, 177

Museums. *See also* Art
 museums; *And specific
 museums*

tips for making museum
 visits more fun, 170

Museum stores, 235

Music

for all ages, 254
 blues bars and other live
 music, 252

concerts, 254–256

jazz, 252, 254, 255

Music Concourse (Golden
 Gate Park), 172

Music festivals, 24, 25

The Music Store, 236

Music stores, 235

Napa Valley, 275–278
 Napa Valley Trail Rides, 275
 Nate Thurmond Courts, 214
 Natural Resources, 231
 Neighborhoods, 48–57

for family outings, 65–66
 shopping, 223–226
 strolls in, 188–205

Chinatown, 188–192

Neighborhoods (cont.)

- The Embarcadero and Fisherman's Wharf, 192–195
- The Marina, 200–202
- Russian Hill to Telegraph Hill, 198–200
- South of Market, 195–198
- the vertical tour, 203–205

Neiman Marcus, 231–232

New Conservatory Theatre Center, 250

Newspapers and magazines, 68

New World Sports, 237

Nightlife and entertainment, 240–262

- for adults, 252
- big venues, 241–247
- current listings, 240
- seasonal events, 247–248
- spectator sports, 258–260
- story hours, 260–261
- theater, 249–251
- tickets, 241
- weekend shows, 249

Niketown, 237

Nob Hill

- accommodations, 93–96
- brief description of, 52–53
- restaurants, 115–116

Noe Valley

- brief description of, 56–57
- restaurants, 144–145
- shopping, 225–226
- sights and attractions, 211

Noe Valley Branch, San Francisco Public Library, 261

Noe Valley Ministry Music Series, 249

Noe Valley Pet Co., 236

Nordstrom, 165, 232

North Beach

- brief description of, 52
- cafes, 6
- restaurants, 122–126
- shopping, 224
- sights and attractions, 208

North Beach Branch, San Francisco Public Library, 261

North Beach Garage, 63

North Beach Playground, 125, 198, 208, 220

Northwest Airlines, 33

The Nutcracker (San Francisco Ballet), 248

The Nutcracker by the City Ballet School, 248

Oakland, 268–272

Oakland Athletics, 259

Oakland Convention and Visitors Bureau, 17

Oakland International Airport, 33

getting to and from, 40

Oakland Museum, 269

Oakland Raiders, 259

Observatory (Oakland), 268

Ocean Beach, 213

Old Faithful Geyser, 275–276

Old Navy, 233

Old St. Mary's Church, 190

Ol' Fashioned Fourth of July Alternative Family Picnic, 25

One Stop Party Shop, 236

Opera, 254–256

Opera Plaza Cinema, 257

Orbitz, 41

The Orpheum Theater, 246

Our Family Coalition, 32

Outdoor activities

- beachcombing, 213
- parks and playgrounds, 206–212

The Castro & Noe Valley, 211

Chinatown, 207–208

Civic Center & Hayes Valley, 209

Golden Gate Park. See Golden Gate Park

The Marina & Cow Hollow, 209

The Mission, 211

North Beach, 208

Pacific Heights, 210

The Presidio, 210–211

The Richmond & Sunset, 211–212

South of Market, 207

Pacific Cab, 63

Pacific Heights

- brief description of, 55
- restaurants, 133–135
- shopping, 225

Packing tips, 26–28

Painted Ladies, 209

Palace Hotel, 196

The Palace of Fine Arts, 160, 200

Palace of the Legion of Honor, 164, 176, 222

Pampanito, USS, 172

Panelli Bros., 125

Paramount's Great America, 262

Paramount's Great America (Santa Clara), 278

Paramount Theatre (Oakland), 269

Parent's Press, 17

The Parent Trap (film), 45

Parking, 62–64

Parks and playgrounds, 206–212

The Castro & Noe Valley, 211

Chinatown, 207–208

Civic Center & Hayes Valley, 209

Golden Gate Park, 6, 55, 211

bicycling, 214

planning family outings in, 66

sights and attractions, 172–174

The Marina & Cow Hollow, 209

The Mission, 211

North Beach, 208

Pacific Heights, 210

The Presidio, 210–211

The Richmond & Sunset, 211–212

South of Market, 207

Parkside Branch, San Francisco Public Library, 261

Party supplies, 236

Passport information, 281–282

Patagonia, 233

Pea in the Pod, 233

Pearl Art & Craft Supplies, 227

Peek-a-Bootique, 232

Peppermint Cuts, 234

Peppermints in the Parlor, 46

Peter and the Wolf, 248

Petrol, 290

Pets, 68

Pet shops and pet supplies, 236

Pets Unlimited, 236

Pharmacies, 68

Pickle Circus and San Francisco Youth Circus, 258

Picnic spots, 125

Pied Piper Bar, 196

PIER 39, 52, 170, 195

sea lions at, 23, 171

Pioneer Park, 198

Planning family outings, 63–66

Pocket Opera, 254

Point Reyes Lighthouse, 274

Point Reyes Lodging, 274
 Point Reyes National Seashore, 272–275
 Poison Control Center, 68
 Police, 68
 Police Activities League, 214
 Pools, hotel, 72
 best, 7–8
 Portsmouth Square, 166,
 192, 207–208
 Portsmouth Square Garage, 63
 Post Street Theatre (formerly Theatre on the Square), 250–251
Potomac, USS, Floating Museum (Oakland), 272
 Precita Eyes Mural Art Center, 187
 PresidiGo, 210
 The Presidio, 185
 brief description of, 54
 sights and attractions, 210–211
 Presidio Bowl, 214
 Presidio Golf Course, 216
 Presidio Heights
 brief description of, 56
 restaurants, 133–135
 shopping, 225
 Priceline, 41–42
The Princess Diaries (film), 45
 Pumpkin, Hip Clothes for Cool Babes, 230
 Punchline Comedy Club, 253
 Puppets on the Pier, 239
 Purple Skunk, 237

Qantas, 287
 Quikbook.com, 42

Radio stations, 69
 Rainy-day activities, 164
 The Ramp, 253
 Randall Museum, 177–178, 222, 260
 Randall Museum Cine Club, 257
 Randall Museum Halloween Festival, 26
 Randall Theater, 249
 Rand McNally, 231
 Rape Crisis Center, 68
 Rasselas, 252
 Rechiuti Confections, 238
 Recreation and Parks Department, 206, 214
 Redwood Room, 253

Regional Parks Botanic Garden (Berkeley), 266
 REI, 237
 Reservations
 hotel, 71
 restaurant, 77
 Reservation services, 69
 Restaurants. *See also* Restaurants Index
 Belden Place, 109
 Berkeley, 267–268
 best bets, 12–16
 the Castro & Noe Valley, 144–145
 chains, 101
 Chinatown, 116–119
 Civic Center/Hayes Valley, 129–130
 by cuisine, 101–104
 Fisherman's Wharf, 126–129
 at food courts, 114
 Japantown/Pacific Heights/Presidio Heights, 133–135
 Marina/Cow Hollow, 130–131
 Nob Hill, 115–116
 North Beach, 122–126
 price categories, 99, 101
 reservations, 77
 the Richmond & Sunset, 145–148
 Russian Hill, 135–137
 South of Market, 110–115
 tipping, 293
 tips on dining out, 100
 Union Square/The Financial District, 104–110
 Restrooms, 65, 66, 69, 293
 Chinatown, 65
 Fisherman's Wharf, 66
 Golden Gate Park, 66
 South of Market, 65
 Union Square, 65
 Richmond Branch of the San Francisco Public Library, 261
 The Richmond District
 brief description of, 57
 restaurants, 145–148
 shopping, 226
 sights and attractions, 211–212
 The Right Start, 238
 Rincon Center, food court at, 114
 Ripley's Believe It or Not, 171
 Riptide Arcade, 262
 Ritz-Carlton Teddy Bear Teas, 26

Roadpost, 44, 45
 Rock balancer, 191
 Rock climbing, 164
 Roller skating, 218
 Ross Alley, 190
 Ross Dress for Less, 232
 Rossi Pool and Playground, 212, 220
 Russian Hill
 brief description of, 55
 restaurants, 135–137
 shopping, 225
 walking tour, 198–200
 Russian Hill Books, 231

Safety, 29–30
 air travel, 37
 suggestions for international visitors, 285–286
 Sailboarding, 221
 St. Francis Memorial Hospital, 67
 St. Mary's Square, 188, 208
 St. Patrick's Day Parade, 23
 Sales tax, 223
 Sand Castle Classic, 25
 Sandwich bars, 125
 San Francisco 49ers, 260
 San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society, 177
 San Francisco Archery Shop, 214
 San Francisco Art Institute, 181–182, 198
 San Francisco Ballet, 257–258
 San Francisco Bay Area Pro-Am Summer Basketball, 259–260
San Francisco Bay Guardian, 18, 241
 San Francisco Blues Festival, 25
 San Francisco Chocolate Store, 238
San Francisco Chronicle, 18, 240
 San Francisco Comedy Day Celebration, 25
 San Francisco Conservatory of Music, 255
 San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau, 17
 San Francisco Dental Office, 67
 San Francisco Dental Society, 67
 San Francisco Fire Department Museum, 178

- San Francisco General Hospital, 67
- San Francisco Giants, 258, 259
- San Francisco Gymnastics, 217–218
- San Francisco International Airport (SFO), getting to and from, 33, 39–40
- San Francisco Italian Heritage Parade, 26
- San Francisco Lawn Bowling Greens, 219
- San Francisco Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community Center, 32
- San Francisco Magazine*, 17, 68
- San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), 178, 179, 196, 235
- San Francisco Opera, 255–256
- San Francisco Performances, 256
- San Francisco Public Library, 257, 260
- San Francisco Shakespeare Festival (SFSF), 251
- San Francisco Shopping Centre, 198, 235
food court at, 114
- San Francisco Symphony, 256
- San Francisco Transit Rider Map and Guide, 68
- San Francisco Visitors Information Center, 48, 68
- San Francisco Youth Symphony Orchestra, 256
- The San Francisco Zoo, 161–162
- San Jose Earthquakes, 260
- San Jose Sharks, 260
- Sanrio, 234
- Satellite phones (sat-phones), 44
- Sather Tower (Berkeley), 266
- SBC Park, 6, 194
- Scharffen Berger Chocolate Maker (Berkeley), 238, 268
- Science stores, 237
- SCRAP, 227
- Sea Lion Overlook (Point Reyes), 274
- Sea lions, 23, 171
- Seasons, 22
- Sea Trek, 219
- Seats, airplane, 36–39
- Security measures, air travel, 34
- See's Candies, 238
- 7x7, 17, 68
- SFMOMA (San Francisco Museum of Modern Art), 178, 179, 196
- SF Reservations, 69
- SFSF (San Francisco Shakespeare Festival), 251
- SF Transit Map and Guide*, 48
- Shaw's, 238
- Shell Beach (Point Reyes), 275
- Shipping your luggage, 39
- Shoe Biz, 237
- Shoes, 237
- Shopping, 223–239
discount, 232
neighborhoods, 223–226
- Shorebird Nature Center (Berkeley), 264
- Shoreline Amphitheater (Mountain View), 247
- Shuttle vans, 39–40
- SideStep, 41
- Sights and attractions, 149–187
best views, 180–182
Chinatown, 163–167
Fisherman's Wharf, 167–172
Golden Gate Bridge, 183–184
Golden Gate Park, 172–174
guided tours, 185–187
hiking, 185
museums, 174–180
rare or unusual, 191
suggested itineraries for first-time visitors, 149
top attractions, 154–174
- Single parents, advice for, 31
- Single Parent Travel Network, 31
- Site59.com, 41
- Six Flags Marine World (Vallejo), 278–279
- 6th Avenue Aquarium, 236
- Skateboarding, 219
- Skates on Haight, 237
- Skechers USA, 232
- Skiing, 220
- SkyCap International, 39
- Slim's, 254
- Small Frys, 230
- Smarterliving.com, 41
- Smoking, 69
- Smuin Ballet/SF, 258
- Snacks, for air travel, 38
- Snippetty Crickets, 234
- Snowboarding, 220
- Society for Accessible Travel and Hospitality, 32–33
- Sock Heaven, 233
- Soko Hardware, 234
- SoMa (South of Market)
accommodations, 84–89
brief description of, 49
parks, 207
planning family outings in, 65
restaurants, 110–115
shopping, 224
sights and attractions, 165
walking tour, 195–198
- Sony Metreon Entertainment Center, 162
food court at, 114
- South Beach Park, 194, 207
- Southwest Airlines, 33
- Special events and festivals, 23–26
- Special needs, families with, 32–33
- Specialty's Café and Bakery, 125
- Spectator sports, 258–260
- Sports and games, 214–221
- Sports Basement, 237–238
- Sportsfishing, 215
- Sports gear, 237
- Spring, 22
- Stacey's Bookstore, 231
- Standard 5 & 10, 239
- Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home* (film), 45–46
- STA Travel, 36
- Sterling Vineyards (Calistoga), 276
- Stern Grove Midsummer Music Festival, 24, 248
- Stockton Street, 192
- Stolen wallet, 19–20
- Stonestown Galleria, 235
- Story hours, 260–261
- Stow Lake (Golden Gate Park), 5, 172, 214
- Streetcars, 57, 60–61
- Streetlight Records, 249
- Strollers, cribs and furniture, 238
- Strybing Arboretum and Botanical Gardens, 172, 174, 261
- Sue Fisher King, 234
- Summer, 22
- The Sunset District
brief description of, 57
restaurants, 145–148
shopping, 226
sights and attractions, 211–212

SuperShuttle, 40
 Surf Camp Pacifica, 220
 Surfing, 220
 Sushi, 135
 Sutter-Stockton Garage, 63
 Sweets, 238
 Swimming, 220

Tactile Dome, 160
 Tai Yick Trading Company, 234
 Tattoo Art Museum, 179
 Taxes, 69, 223, 291
 Taxis, 63
 to/from airport, 39
 Teens, best hotels for, 11
 Telegraph and telex services, 292
 Telegraph Hill
 walking tour, 198–200
 wild parrots of, 191
 Telephone, 291–292
 Telephones, 69
 Temperatures, average, 23
 The Tenderloin, brief
 description of, 57
 Tennis, 221
 Terra Mia, 222
 Theater, 249–251
 Theme stores, 238–239
This is San Francisco, 46
 Thrifty, 62
 Tien Hou Temple, 166–167
 Tilden Park (Berkeley), 266
 Time zones, 69, 292–293
 Tin How Temple, 190
 Tipping, 293
 Tix Bay Area half-price ticket
 booth, 49, 60, 241
 T-Mobile Hotspot, 43
 Toilets, public, 293
 Tomales Point (Point Reyes),
 274
 Top of the Mark, 182
 Tosca Café, 253
 Town & Country Resources,
 67
 Toys
 for air travel, 28, 37–38
 shopping for, 239
 Toy Symphony, 239
 Train travel, 41, 288
 Transit information, 69
 Transportation, 57–63
 to entertainment venues,
 244
 Transportation Security
 Administration (TSA), 34
 TravelAxe, 42
 Traveler's checks, 18–19, 284

Travellex Insurance Services,
 29
 Travel Guard International,
 29
 A Traveling Jewish Theatre
 (ATJT), 251
 Travel insurance, 28–29, 36
 Travel Insured International,
 29
 Travelocity, 41, 42
 Travelweb, 42
 Trip-cancellation insurance,
 29
 Triptel Mobile Rental
 Phones, 44
 Tule Elk Reserve (Point
 Reyes), 274
 Tutti Frutti, 234
*'Twas the Night Before
 Christmas*, 247
 12 Galaxies, 255
 Twin Peaks, 182

UCB (University of
 California at Berkeley),
 266–267
 UC Berkeley Botanical
 Garden, 267
 Union Square
 accommodations, 73–84
 brief description of, 48–49
 planning family outings
 in, 65
 restaurants, 104–110
 shopping, 223–224
 Union Square Garage, 63
 Union Street Art Festival, 24
 Union Street Easter Parade
 & Spring Celebration, 23
 United Airlines, 34, 287
 University of California at
 Berkeley (UCB), 266–267
 Urban Outfitters, 233
 US Airways, 34
 USA Rail Pass, 288
 USS *Potomac's* Floating
 Museum (Oakland), 272
 Utrecht Art Supplies, 227

Vacation Fun Mad Libs:
*World's Greatest Party
 Game*, 38
The Velveteen Rabbit, 248
 Vermont Street, 186
 Veteran's Cab, 63, 244
 Victoria Pastry Co., 125
 Video, flying with, 35
 Vintage clothing, 239
 Virgin Atlantic, 287

Virgin Megastore, 236
 Virtual Bellhop, 39
 Visa ATM Locator, 18
 Visas, 280
 Visa traveler's checks, 19
 Visitor information, 17–18,
 48, 68
 Visitor's Center (the Presidio),
 210
 Visit USA, 288

Waldenbooks, 231
 Walgreens, 27, 68
 Walking tours, 17
 guided
 All About Chinatown!
 Walking Tours, 185
 City Guides, 185
 Explorer's Club,
 185–186
 self-guided, 188–205
 Chinatown, 188–192
 The Embarcadero and
 Fisherman's Wharf,
 192–195
 The Marina, 200–202
 Russian Hill to Tele-
 graph Hill, 198–200
 South of Market,
 195–198
 the vertical tour,
 203–205

Wallet, stolen, 19–20
 The Warfield, 246, 254
 The War Memorial Opera
 House, 246
 Warming Hut, 210
 The Wasteland, 239
 Wave Organ, 200
 Waverly Place, 190
 Wax Museum, 172
 Wayport, 43
 Weather, 22–23
 Websites
 traveler's toolbox, 18
 travel-planning and book-
 ing, 41–42
 Wee Scotty, 233
 Wells Fargo History Museum,
 179–180
 West Coast Live, 249
 Western Union, 19
 West Plaza, 168
What's Up, Doc? (film), 46
 Wheelchair accessibility,
 32–33
Where San Francisco, 241
 Wild parrots of Telegraph
 Hill, 191
 Williams, Robin, 191

Windsurfing, 221
 Winter, 22
 Wireless networks, 43
 Wise Surfboards, 238
 The Wok Shop, 190
 Workshops and classes, 221

XOX Truffles, 238

Yahoo! Mail, 43
 Yellow Cab, 63, 244
 Yerba Buena Bowling Center, 214
 Yerba Buena Center for the Arts and Yerba Buena Gardens, 125, 155, 162, 196, 207
 entertainment, 246
 special events, 25, 26
 Yerba Buena Ice-Skating Rink and Bowling Center, 162–163, 218
 Yoshi's, 255
 Young People's Teen Musical Theater Company (YPT), 251
 Young Performer's Theatre, 251
 Yountville, 230
 Youth Arts Festival, 24

Zellerbach Hall (Berkeley), 247

Zeum, 162, 163, 235

ACCOMMODATIONS

The Argent, 9, 88
 The Argonaut, 7, 9, 89–90
 Best Western Stevenson Manor Inn (Calistoga), 276, 278
 Cartwright Hotel, 7, 80
 Chancellor Hotel, 80–81
 Cow Hollow Motor Inn & Suites, 7, 8, 12, 96
 Fairmont Hotel, 8, 93–94, 203
 Four Seasons, 7–10, 85
 Galleria Park Hotel, 8, 76–77
 Golden Gate Hotel, 10, 81
 Grant Plaza, 10, 84
 The Handlery Union Square, 7, 8, 81
 Harbor Court Hotel, 9, 92–93
 Holiday Inn Fisherman's Wharf, 90
 Hostelling International San Francisco, Fisherman's Wharf, 10, 91–92

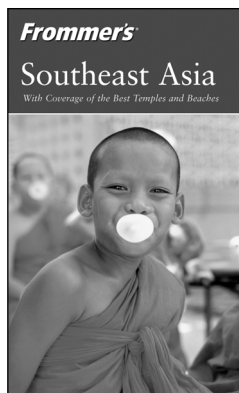
Hotel Adagio, 9, 82
 Hotel Bijou, 8, 82
 Hotel Del Sol, 7, 8, 97
 Hotel Metropolis, 83
 Hotel Milano, 11, 89
 Hotel Monaco, 8, 9, 77–78
 Hotel Nikko, 7, 9, 73
 Hotel Triton, 9, 11, 78
 The Huntington Hotel, 8, 10, 94
 Hyatt at Fisherman's Wharf, 8, 12, 90
 Hyatt Regency San Francisco, 9, 11, 93, 203
 Indian Springs (Calistoga), 276
 The Inn at Union Square, 83
 Koh Samui & The Monkey, 115
 The Laurel Inn, 10, 12, 98
 The Marina Inn, 97
 Marina Motel, 8, 10, 12, 97–98
 Mark Hopkins InterContinental, 8, 9, 94–95
 Monticello Inn, 12, 83–84
 Nob Hill Lambourne, 7, 10, 96
 Palace Hotel, 7, 85, 88
 Pan Pacific Hotel, 7, 10, 76, 203
 Pazzia, 115
 Radisson Hotel Fisherman's Wharf, 91
 Ritz-Carlton, 9, 95
 San Remo Hotel, 92
 Serrano Hotel, 7, 8–10, 78–79
 The Sheehan, 7–8, 84
 Sir Francis Drake Hotel, 79, 191
 Tuscan Inn, 91
 Westin St. Francis, 11, 79–80
 Westin St. Francis Hotel, 203
 W Hotel, 11, 88–89

RESTAURANTS

Acre Cafe, 210
 Amici's East Coast Pizzeria, 121, 132
 Ana Mandara, 13, 126–127
 Antica Trattoria, 14, 135–136
 A16, 13, 131
 Aziza, 14, 145
 Beach Chalet Restaurant, 180
 Ben & Jerry's, 137
 B44, 109
 Blondie's Pizza, 110
 Blue Front Cafe, 137–138
 Blue Mermaid Chowder House, 128
 Bocadillos, 119–120
 Boulange de Polk, 14, 136
 Brindisi Cucina di Mare, 109
 Burger Joint, 12, 138, 142
 Café Bastille, 109
 Café 52, 109
 Café Kati, 13, 133
 Café Marimba, 14, 131
 Café Pescatore, 128
 Café Tiramisu, 109
 Caffè Macaroni, 123
 Caffè Museo, 178, 196
 Caffè Venezia (Berkeley), 268
 The Canvas Cafe/Gallery, 146–147
 Catahoula Restaurant and Saloon (Calistoga), 278
 Cha Cha Cha's, 137
 Cheeseboard Collective (Berkeley), 267–268
 Chez Panisse (Berkeley), 267
 Chow, 144
 Citizen Cake, 130
 The Citrus Club, 138
 Cliff House Bistro, 13, 145
 Crepe Express, 138, 140
 Crossroads Café, 121
 Delfina, 13, 140, 142
 Desiree Cafe, 210
 Dolores Park Cafe, 142
 Dottie's True Blue Cafe, 110
 Dragon Well, 14, 132, 202
 East Coast West Delicatessen, 136
 Eliza's, 134
 Ella's, 12, 134
 Fairmont Hotel, 164
 Fairmont Hotel's Tonga Room, 116
 Fat Apple's Restaurant and Bakery (Berkeley), 268
 Firefly, 144
 Fleur de Lys, 13, 104–105
 Fog City Diner, 120, 200
 Foreign Cinema, 16, 140
 Franciscan, 127
 Frjtz, 128, 130
 Gary Danko, 13, 126
 Gelato Classico, 124
 Ghirardelli Soda Fountain & Chocolate Shop, 128
 Giorgio's Pizzeria, 147
 Grand Café, 105
 Great Eastern Restaurant, 14, 116
 Greens, 13, 130–131, 202
 The Grove, 132, 135, 202
 Hayes Street Grill, 14, 129
 Human's Home Restaurant, 116
 Il Pollaio, 124

- IN-N-OUT Burger, 128–129
 Isa, 14–15, 131–132
 Isobune, 134
 Juban Yakiniiku House, 134
 Khan Toke, 146
 King George Hotel, 164
 Kokkari Estiatorio, 13, 119
 La Corneta Taqueria, 14, 142
 La Note (Berkeley), 268
 La Rondalla, 142
 Laurel Court, 115–116
 Le Cheval (Oakland), 272
 Lichee Garden, 118
 Long Life Noodle Company
 & Jook Joint, 121–122
 L'Osteria del Forno, 123
 Lovejoy's Tea Room, 15–16,
 144
 Mario's Bohemian Cigar
 Store, 124
 Marnee Thai, 14, 147
 McCormick and Kuleto's,
 13, 127
 Mel's Drive-In, 12, 115,
 132–133, 147
 Memphis Minnie's, 13, 138,
 140
 Millennium, 13, 105, 108
 Mitchell's Ice Cream, 15,
 143, 202
 Moose's, 13, 122
 Naan-N-Curry, 126
 Neiman Marcus, 164
 Palace Hotel, 110–111
 Palace Hotel's Garden Court,
 15, 110–111
 Pancho Villa Taqueria, 143
 Park Chalet, 16, 146
 Park Chow, 147
 Pasta Pomodoro, 16, 126,
 133, 135, 145, 147
 Pine Cone Diner (Point
 Reyes), 274
 Pizzetta 211, 146
 Plouf, 109
 Polker's Gourmet Burgers,
 136
 Puccini and Pinetti, 12–13,
 108
 Rainforest Cafe, 127–128
 R&G Lounge, 14, 119, 192
 Restaurant LuLu, 111
 Ritz-Carlton, 164
 Rose Pistola, 123
 Rotunda, 164
 Sam's Grill, 109
 San Francisco Art Institute
 Café, 181, 198
 San Francisco Crepe Cart,
 129
 Sanraku, 108
 Saul's Restaurant and Deli
 (Berkeley), 267
 Sears Fine Foods, 110
 Sheraton Palace, 164
 Slanted Door, 120
 The Station House (Point
 Reyes), 275
 Swensen's Creamery,
 136–137
 Tadich Grill, 108
 Tartine, 14, 143
 Taylor's Refresher, 12, 122,
 194
 Taylor's Refresher (St.
 Helena), 278
 Ti Couz, 143
 Tamales Bay Foods (Point
 Reyes), 275
 Tommaso's Restaurant, 123
 Ton Kiang, 2, 14, 15, 148
 Town Hall, 111
 Town's End, 16, 121
 Toy Boat Dessert Cafe, 148
 Trattoria Contadina, 14, 124
 Tra Vigne (St. Helena), 278
 Vicolo Pizzeria, 13, 130, 154
 Westin St. Francis, 164
 Yank Sing, 14, 15, 114
 Yoshi's (Oakland), 272
 Zachary's Chicago Pizza
 (Berkeley), 268
 Zao Noodle Bar, 133, 135
 ZA Pizza, 13, 136, 137
 Zuni Cafe, 129
 Zza's Trattoria (Oakland), 272

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Frommer's Best Day Trips from London
Frommer's Best RV & Tent Campgrounds
in the U.S.A.
Frommer's Caribbean Hideaways
Frommer's China: The 50 Most Memorable Trips
Frommer's Exploring America by RV
Frommer's Gay & Lesbian Europe
Frommer's NYC Free & Dirt Cheap

Frommer's Road Atlas Europe
Frommer's Road Atlas France
Frommer's Road Atlas Ireland
Frommer's Wonderful Weekends from
New York City
The New York Times' Guide to Unforgettable
Weekends
Retirement Places Rated
Rome Past & Present

Travel Tip: He who finds the best hotel deal
has more to spend on facials involving
knobbly vegetables.

Hello, the Roaming Gnome here. I've been nabbed from the garden and taken round the world. The people who took me are so terribly clever. They find the best offerings on Travelocity. For very little cha-ching. And that means I get to be pampered and exfoliated till I'm pink as a bunny's doodah.



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Travel Tip: Make sure there's customer service for any change of plans - involving friendly natives, for example.

One can plan and plan, but if you don't book with the right people you can't seize le moment and canoodle with the poodle named Pansy. I, for one, am all for fraternizing with the locals. Better yet, if I need to extend my stay and my gnome nappers are willing, it can all be arranged through the 800 number at, oh look, how convenient, the lovely company coat of arms.



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