

SAN FRANCISCO

California's bayside city fuses beatnik charm with colour, culture and cuisine, writes Tracey Davies



FISHERMAN'S WHARF

WHY GO?

Seafood, street performers and spectacular bay views: for the classic San Francisco stay, it has to be Fisherman's Wharf. Set along the city's northern waterfront, this bright, buzzy neighbourhood is famous for its sunbathing sea lions, vintage wooden piers and pelican's-eye views of the Golden Gate Bridge and Alcatraz Island. Yes, it's busy and somewhat touristy – and clients might not find many locals to chat with – but it's also quintessential San Francisco and promises the best vistas in town.

WHAT TO DO?

Easy mornings can be spent drinking coffee with noisy neighbours – the hundreds of sea lions basking in the sun on the docks. Potter around the shops on Pier 39, stopping for a lunch of clam chowder or *cioppino*, the rich fish stew that originated in San Francisco, at Pier Market Seafood Restaurant or the Crab House. In the afternoon, visit the Exploratorium, San Francisco's super hands-on science museum; Musée Mécanique, a treasure trove of vintage and modern arcade machines; or hop on a bay cruise under the Golden Gate Bridge or over to Alcatraz Island, the former prison that's now a San Francisco stalwart.

If clients are spending more than a couple of days on the Wharf, suggest hiring a bike and cycling across the Golden Gate Bridge to Sausalito for lunch. Visit nearby Ghirardelli Square, once the site of the Ghirardelli Chocolate Factory, now host to chi-chi boutiques, wine-tasting rooms and The Original Ghirardelli Chocolate & Ice Cream Shop. As the sun sets, catch the ever-changing cabaret of street performers who perform outside Pier 39.

UNION SQUARE

WHY GO?

The Bay City's most convenient location, Union Square is where you'll find all the big-ticket shops, top-dollar restaurants and theatres. Agents can book the recently renovated Beacon Grand Hotel, which was San Francisco's original grande dame when it opened in 1928. It's also a hop and skip away from Chinatown, one of the oldest and largest in the US.

WHAT TO DO?

From Barney's to Bloomingdales, Macy's to Saks Fifth Avenue, Union Square is a shopper's paradise. It's also a popular foodie destination where you'll find everything from fancy French dining at One65 to great steaks at the historic John's Grill, one of the top-10 restaurants in the US, according to *Esquire*. After supper, suggest catching a show in the theatre district.



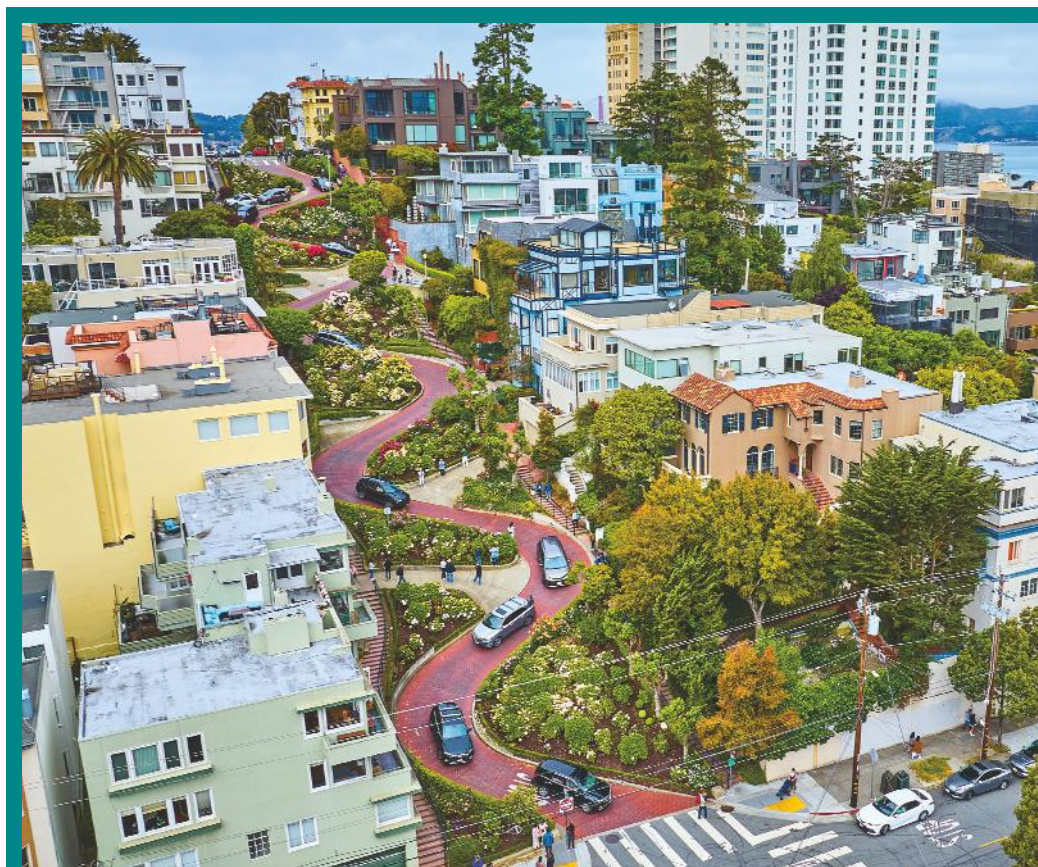
NOB HILL

WHY GO?

Cable cars, colourful Victorian houses and sweeping city views: Nob Hill's elevated position – both socially and geographically – makes it a classic San Francisco neighbourhood.

WHAT TO DO

Ride the vintage Powell and Market cable car, see the French Gothic-style Grace Cathedral and visit the Cable Car Museum. Alternatively, play real-life Snakes and Ladders on Lombard Street (pictured), where eight hairpin bends have earned it the moniker of the 'crookedest street in the world'. Even if clients are not staying at the Fairmont San Francisco, they should at least enjoy a drink in its legendary Tonga Room, a throwback to the South Seas tiki bars from the 1940s, complete with lagoon and floating bandstand.



Best OF THE REST

San Francisco's **Japantown** is the oldest and largest of the three remaining in the US. Spread across six blocks in the **Western Addition** neighbourhood, it has karaoke bars, shabu-shabu restaurants (a variation on hotpot) and a 30m-high Peace Pagoda sent from Osaka. It also hosts the city's annual Cherry Blossom Festival each spring.

Culture and sports fans should check out **SoMa**, which stands for South of Market Street. Take a stroll through San Francisco's best museums, including SF Modern Art Museum (SFMOMA) and the Museum of the African Diaspora, while baseball fans can catch a game at **Oracle Park**, home of the San Francisco Giants.

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Nicholas J Klein, Sergio TB



HAIGHT-ASHBURY

WHY GO?

Visit for a flashback to the 60s and the Summer of Love, when San Francisco was the epicentre of America's counterculture movement. Today Haight-Ashbury is still a bohemian kaleidoscope of vintage stores, psychedelic murals and quirky independent cafes.

WHAT TO DO

It's a great neighbourhood to hang out in. Visit the Grateful Dead house and browse the vintage stores and funky shops such as Amoeba Music, the world's largest independent record store. Nearby are the famous Painted Ladies, a clutch of rainbow-hued Victorian homes, while at the bottom of Haight is Golden Gate Park.

DESTINATIONS

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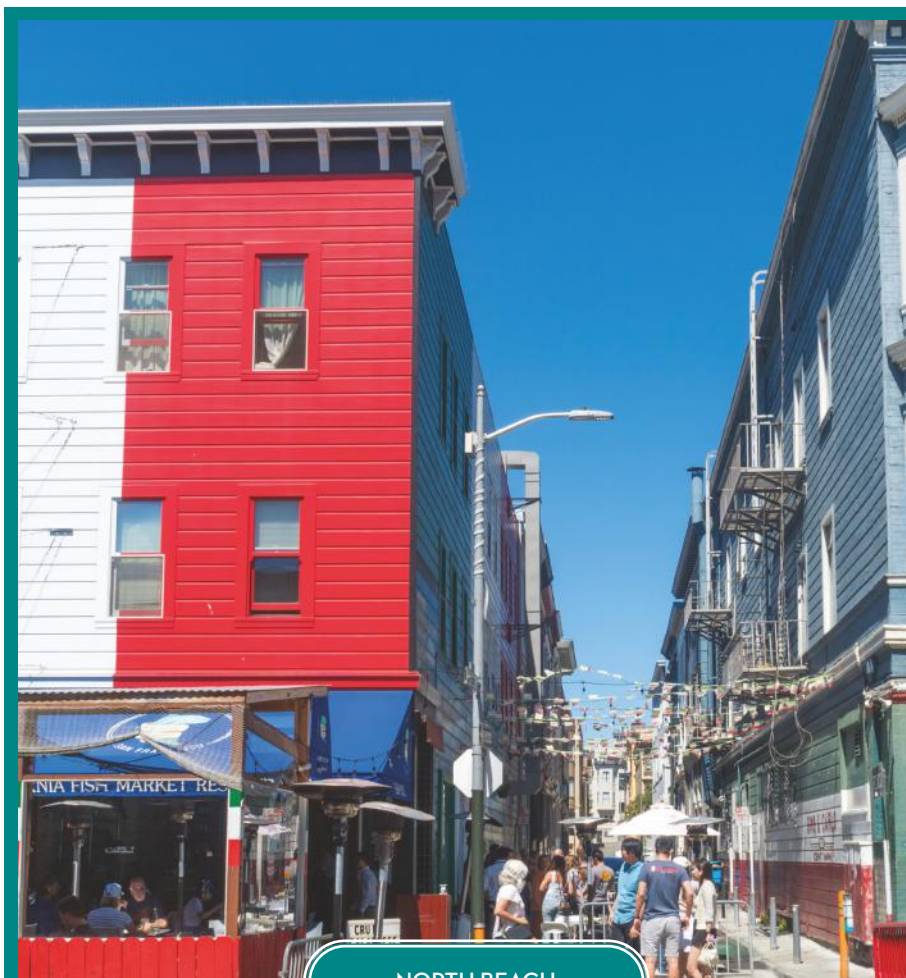
WHERE TO GO NEXT IN CALIFORNIA?

An hour's drive north of San Francisco is Napa Valley, famed for its picturesque vineyards (*below*) and accompanying wine-tasting rooms, farm-to-table restaurants and spa hotels. Agents can suggest exploring Napa Valley's five main towns – St Helena, Yountville, Calistoga, Napa and American Valley – and upsell tours such as hot-air balloon rides or a trip on the distinctive Napa Valley Wine Train.



fast fact

The Timbri Hotel San Francisco, part of Hilton's Curio Collection, opened this year on Market Street near Union Square. Its central location, curated local art and swanky rooftop bar are big selling points.



NORTH BEACH

WHY GO?

North Beach is San Francisco's Little Italy (*pictured*), where the crosswalks are painted in the colours of the Italian flag and you'll find some of the best coffee, gelato and pizza in town.

WHAT TO DO

Strewn with Italian delis, vintage record shops and thrift stores, North Beach is the perfect place for a potter. It was also the birthplace of beatnik, so kick back in Vesuvio Cafe and Caffè Trieste,

where the likes of Jack Kerouac and William S Burroughs hung out in the 60s, or drop by City Lights Bookstore, an icon of American literature. Don't miss climbing up Coit Tower, an art deco landmark on Telegraph Hill boasting Great Depression-era murals on the inside and panoramic views from the top. At night, brave the delicious but garlic-heavy dishes at The Stinking Rose, before catching a performance of acrobatic spectacle *Dear San Francisco* at Club Fugazi.

BOOK IT

USAirtours offers a 14-day Fly-Drive California package, including flights from London with Virgin Atlantic, for £1,879 per person, based on two sharing. Price includes three nights in San Francisco, car hire including insurance, a night in Monterey, two nights in Pismo Beach, three in Los Angeles and four in Las Vegas. usairtours.co.uk

Premier Holidays has a three-night San Francisco Highlights itinerary from £499 per person, based on two sharing, including a half-day city tour, a trip to Alcatraz Island, a San Francisco CityPass including bay cruise, and three nights' room-only accommodation. The price excludes flights. premierholidays.co.uk

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