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THE HIDDEN GEMS OF SAN FRANCISCO

📖 Tips and Guides, San Francisco,

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From old ruins to beautiful gardens, from peculiar shops to quirky museums, San Francisco is replete with wonderful and unexpected locations to visit. San Francisco is a truly unique city and this is certainly reflected in some of the lesser known attractions available. With all this in mind, we have put together this guide to introduce you to the hidden gems of San Francisco, highlighting the city's best-kept secrets.

Lands End



This wild and rocky corner of San Francisco is well loved by residents but it might not be somewhere that instantly springs to mind when it comes to visiting the city. It should, however, as Lands End (within Golden Gate National Recreation Area) is able to offer stunning views of the water, pretty hillsides, glimpses of old shipwrecks, and a number of fascinating features such as ruins and a labyrinth, not to mention beautiful wildlife. David Shaw of [Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy](#) told us more about this must-visit spot:

“Lands End is the rugged and wild edge of San Francisco where the Pacific Ocean meets a rocky shore just west of the Golden Gate. The views are spectacular looking out to the Pacific to Seal Rock and Mile Rock from the coastal trail and back toward the city in the other direction with views to the Golden Gate Bridge and the Marin Headlands. Because Lands End is outside the Golden Gate, it is possible to often see pilot whales, dolphins, migrating California gray whales, and humpback whales. Bring binoculars!

“There are fascinating ruins of the old Sutro Baths to explore and a lot of history to learn about the area (much of the trail is on the remains of an old rail line that used to bring people to this area from the city). The parking area is located on what is called Merrie Way, which refers to the old days, when

there was an amusement park in the area. The Lands End Lookout Visitor Center has books and interpretive items that tell these stories, as well as a café for food and refreshments. A national park with an urban edge is definitely the feeling that Lands End has.”

The Ice Cream Bar



Image credit: Paul Dyer

When the California sun is out you might be looking for some fun (and tasty) ways to keep cool, or just some terrific food in general. Ice cream is rarely the wrong choice and [The Ice Cream Bar](#) on 815 Cole Street is one of the very best spots in town. At this nostalgia-driven and awesome throwback establishment, visitors can treat themselves to all manner of tasty treats and beverages (far more than just ice cream) and the team there spoke to us about exactly what they have to offer:

“The Ice Cream Bar is a full-service 1930s style soda fountain and classic lunch counter in the heart of San Francisco. The decor is authentically Streamline Moderne and features an antique marble bar

and soda fountain. We serve nostalgic American classics like egg creams, root beer floats, and banana splits, in addition to some new favourites like beer floats, and vegan ice creams.



Image credit: Paul Dyer

“Everything we serve is made in-house. Everything. The ice cream, waffle cones, cookies, candies, soda syrups and tinctures, soup, and even the buttery brioche and wheat bread for sandwiches are made daily in our kitchen. We are lucky to be a destination for visitors from around the world but we still are a true neighbourhood restaurant. We see many of our customers multiple times a week and have watched many of the younger ones grow up over the years.

“Visitors can enjoy a uniquely American experience in a space that feels like it is from another time. There are not very many places where you can sit at a marble bar and watch a soda jerk in uniform make your drink from scratch when you order it. We are proud to serve food made in the way it was meant to be made, by hand and with the freshest ingredients.”

Kabuki Springs & Spa



Trips abroad hopefully turn out to be relaxing endeavours but in case you're feeling like you need a little extra help during your time in SF, heading over to [Kabuki Springs & Spa](#) for a little bit of pampering will be just what the doctor ordered. After exploring the city and all its many delights, this Japanese-style bathhouse will be the perfect way to end the day. Located in Japantown, this oasis features everything you need to soothe all your aches and pains, relaxing both body and mind. Kabuki Springs & Spa spoke to us about what makes them a true hidden gem of the San Francisco experience:

"Kabuki Springs & Spa is an oasis in the heart of San Francisco and Japantown. It has been providing San Franciscans and visitors relaxation and wellness for 50 years, making it the oldest Japanese style bathhouse in the United States. While they are known for the onsen, they provide unique Asian inspired body treatments, facials, and, of course, therapeutic massage.

"Upon entering the Minoru Yamasaki designed building, you are quickly transported by the gentle music, the soothing scents, and the beautiful Buddha at the end of the hallway. The onsen (Japanese bath) can be used as a treatment or in conjunction with a massage; one might want to try Shiatsu for

the full experience. The massage rooms come with a furo tub – the deep, almost square tubs for a private bathing experience.

“Kabuki Springs & Spa is an electronic free space and, to add to the total environment of relaxation, we ask that you keep any necessary conversation to a whisper. You may hear the dreaded gong of silence! The communal bath includes a sauna, steam room and hot and cold soaking pools, as well as Japanese style sit down showers. There is one communal bath, so men and women can use this as a clothing optional experience on separate days. It might sound intimidating at first, but once you relax into the warmth of it all, you will be so happy you tried it.”

Magowan's Infinite Mirror Maze



If you're in search of something truly unique and memorable during your San Francisco adventure, heading on down to Pier 39 and exploring [Magowan's Infinite Mirror Maze](#) is an absolute must. This psychedelic labyrinth is great fun to tackle with friends and family alike, and with the maze being

punctuated by bright colours, it's not an experience you are going to forget any time soon. Part maze, part work of art, this ethereal dungeon of twists and turns is bound to entertain. Thomas Magowan spoke to us about why he believes Magowan's Infinite Mirror Maze is so well loved:

"Magowan's Infinite Mirror Maze is certainly one of San Francisco's hidden gems. The maze is a little difficult to find because it is on the 2nd floor of Pier 39. If you can find the Piano Staircase, you will find the maze. The maze is great family fun. Admission is \$5 and free for under-5s. Admission is valid for the entire day and patrons are invited to go through the maze forward, backward etc. as many times as they like. Magowan's Infinite Mirror Maze features 77 mirrors, flashing lights and lively music. Most of our patrons have great fun getting lost in the maze. Magowan's Infinite Mirror Maze will bring back old memories of classic amusement parks. It is simply fun for the whole family."

Cayuga Park



Image credit: SF Rec and Park Department

Cayuga Park is a much beloved hidden gem of San Francisco, well known for its sculpture gardens, interesting and unique trails and playground, as well as its tennis and basketball courts. This truly picturesque location will be a big favourite with lovers of art and especially those that are looking for a little escape from the hustle and bustle of the city. [San Francisco Recreation & Parks](#) talked to us about what else awaits visitors to the area and what makes the park so special:

“Visitors to Cayuga Park can experience the profound spirit of art that exists throughout the 2.7-acre park, from the breath-taking entry gates by artist Eric Powell to the inspired wood sculptures by Demie Braceros, who worked here at Cayuga as a gardener for 22 years before retiring in 2008. The result of those years here at Cayuga is 376 sculptures of birds, animals, reptiles and famous personalities such as former Mayor Willie Brown, Michael Jordan, Princess Diana and San Francisco’s own Herb Caen. 130 of Demie’s sculptures have been preserved by the SF Arts Commission and are on permanent display throughout the clubhouse and park grounds. Cayuga Park is truly a gem in the heart of the Outer Mission neighbourhood.”

The Interval



Image credit: [Michael David Rose](#)

Museums and bars are certainly two of the most desired destinations for many travellers visiting a new city, so how about an attraction that combines them both? Well, that's exactly what's on offer at [The Interval](#), which is the home of the [Long Now Foundation](#) where visitors can enjoy a superb drink, surrounded by books, prototypes, and other fascinating devices to discover. The Interval spoke to us about the unique nature of this establishment as well as their tantalising drinks menu:

"The Interval is situated within sight of Alcatraz and the Golden Gate Bridge and is at once a bar, a cafe, a library and quirky museum that shows projects of The Long Now Foundation. There are mechanical celestial clock prototypes of the 10,000 Year Clock, and a collection of books curated to be a Manual for Civilization. The Interval is situated within the historic Fort Mason campus right next door to the famed vegetarian restaurant, Greens.

"Our menu was created by beverage director Jennifer Colliau as a trip through cocktail history and moments in time. The signature Navy Gimlet has been named as one of the '50 drinks to try before you die' by Camper English, and the ever-popular Decanted Mother in Law is a strong old fashioned that harkens back to early New Orleans. We also serve coffee by Heart Roasters and tea by Song Tea."

Yerba Buena Gardens



Image credit: Yerba Buena Gardens

Green places in big cities certainly are locations to be cherished and this is doubly true for [Yerba Buena Gardens](#), a location many won't be familiar with but one that can provide for an unquestionably enjoyable day out. Yerba Buena Gardens is a cultural hub of the city and has something to delight every visitor and suit all moods with its landscaped lawns, serene waterfall, delightful gardens, excellent restaurants, and artistic attractions. Telling us more about this lovely destination, Yerba Buena Gardens said:

"Yerba Buena Gardens is the cultural heart of San Francisco. It is where people from all over the world come to explore and celebrate art, culture and diversity and to play, dine, shop, learn or just relax. You are steps away from dozens of attractions, renowned museums, cafes, restaurants and theatres, all cradled by landscaped lawns, public art and award-winning architecture in a multicultural neighbourhood. There's no other place like it in San Francisco.



Image credit: Yerba Buena Gardens

For some specific suggestions of what visitors can do, the team told us: “Yerba Buena Gardens is the front yard to the city, with five acres of landscaped lawns, flowering gardens and one-of-a-kind attractions. Ride the historic LeRoy King Carousel, hand-carved in 1906 with gleaming jewel-studded horses, giraffes and camels.

“Be inspired by the Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial with its majestic waterfall and shimmering glass panels inscribed with Dr. King’s inspiring words, poems and images from the United States’ civil rights movement. Take a public art walk to see the Green Glass Ship, the interactive robotic sculpture Urge and the life-size bronze statue of Shaking Man.

“Visit the Contemporary Jewish Museum designed by Daniel Libeskind that combines contemporary and historic San Francisco. Ignite your kid’s imagination at the Children’s Creativity Museum with

interactive exhibits. Ice skate or bowl. Enjoy an unforgettable performance at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. All of this in one place in downtown San Francisco.”

Conservatory of Flowers

As you can see, there is a true plethora of fascinating locations to discover when visiting San Francisco on a [cruise holiday deal](#), and another marvellous gem to uncover is the [Conservatory of Flowers](#). Boasting the largest original wood glass conservatory in the Western Hemisphere, this glorious section of Golden Gate Park has so much to discover for lovers of wildlife. The Conservatory of Flowers is home to over 2,000 plant varieties, including giant Amazon Lilies in the aquatic plants pond and the Nepenthes pitcher – which survives by digesting insects – as well as many other peculiar and impressive residents. Hosting various events and exhibits to go along with its five distinct galleries, the Conservatory of Flowers will certainly throw some surprises your way, presenting plants that you might not see anywhere else.

Japanese Tea Garden in Golden Gate Park



Golden Gate Park boasts so many brilliant attractions and the [Japanese Tea Garden](#) is one that is not to be missed. Originally a visiting attraction of the 1894 Midwinter Exposition, the Japanese Tea Garden was so popular that it was given permanent residence in the park and is today the oldest Japanese tea house in the United States, welcoming visitors to enjoy its serene and beautiful environs. Those who step foot inside can look forward to a truly sensory experience, not to mention some fantastic photo opportunities, with its azalea-covered waterfall, statues, and lanterns. The garden also features impressive clipped hedges in the form of Mt. Fuji, relaxing areas surrounded by dwarf trees, Chinese pine, a gift shop, and a five-storey tall Pagoda situated in front of the Zen Garden which presents a mini-mountain setting with its waterfall, river, and bonsai trees.

Tonga Room & Hurricane Bar

If you're in search of a fantastic joint to enjoy a delicious meal and tasty cocktail but would like to go somewhere just a little bit different from the usual offerings, the [Tonga Room & Hurricane Bar](#) on Nob Hill is an excellent choice. This tiki establishment is a true gem of the San Francisco bar scene, lined with tropical décor and serving up Polynesian-fusion cuisine since all the way back in 1945. There may be no more vibrant dining location in all of SF and with a menu that includes the likes of 48-hour Korean short rib from the grill and tropical walnut shrimp from the wok, it's an experience you're not going to forget anytime soon. Its range of classic and modern tiki cocktails are certainly not to be missed and The Island Groove Band performing from a thatch-covered barge on the 'lagoon' is the icing on the cake.

Paxton Gate

There are some truly unique and quirky shops lining the streets of San Francisco and one such hidden gem that has to be mentioned is [Paxton Gate](#) – an eclectic store replete with curiosities, taxidermy and natural history oddities. Fuelled by its creators' fascination with the natural world, Paxton Gate is quite unlike any shop you will have come across during your travels. Visitors to the store can find eccentric gardening merchandise, furniture, vintage and antique architectural fixtures, jewellery, 18th-century compasses, vintage pocket watches, and a selection of fascinating books that would make for some brilliant gifts for friends and family back home. Prepare for the unexpected and embrace the bizarre nature of Paxton Gate. You never know what you might discover!

Exploratorium



What major city doesn't have an awesome science museum? San Francisco certainly does and if you've not heard of the [Exploratorium](#) you should read on and add it to your SF to-do list. Home to hundreds of exciting exhibits designed to increase visitor understanding of electricity, sound waves and all things science, the Exploratorium can't fail to impress. This is a truly hands-on museum, experimental in nature and encouraging its guests to interact with the exhibits in order to better grasp the science involved. Visitors can use their bodies to control the flow of electricity, tackle sound puzzles, explore portals of distorted light and join the audience of a science cook-off, and after you're done experimenting, sit down for a nice meal at their café or restaurant. There's no doubt that anyone just a little bit curious about how things work, young or old, will find plenty to enjoy.

Bourbon and Branch

Each city has its fair share of secrets and one of the best kept in San Francisco is the charming speakeasy known as [Bourbon & Branch](#). Found at an unremarkable building on 501 Jones Street, those with reservations (or who know the secret password) enter through an unmarked door and once inside will discover a marvellous bar that has been in operation since 1867 and even survived in secret during the Prohibition era. Operating under rules such as no mobile phones, no photography, and 'please exit quietly', there is something truly endearing about its old-fashioned nature and

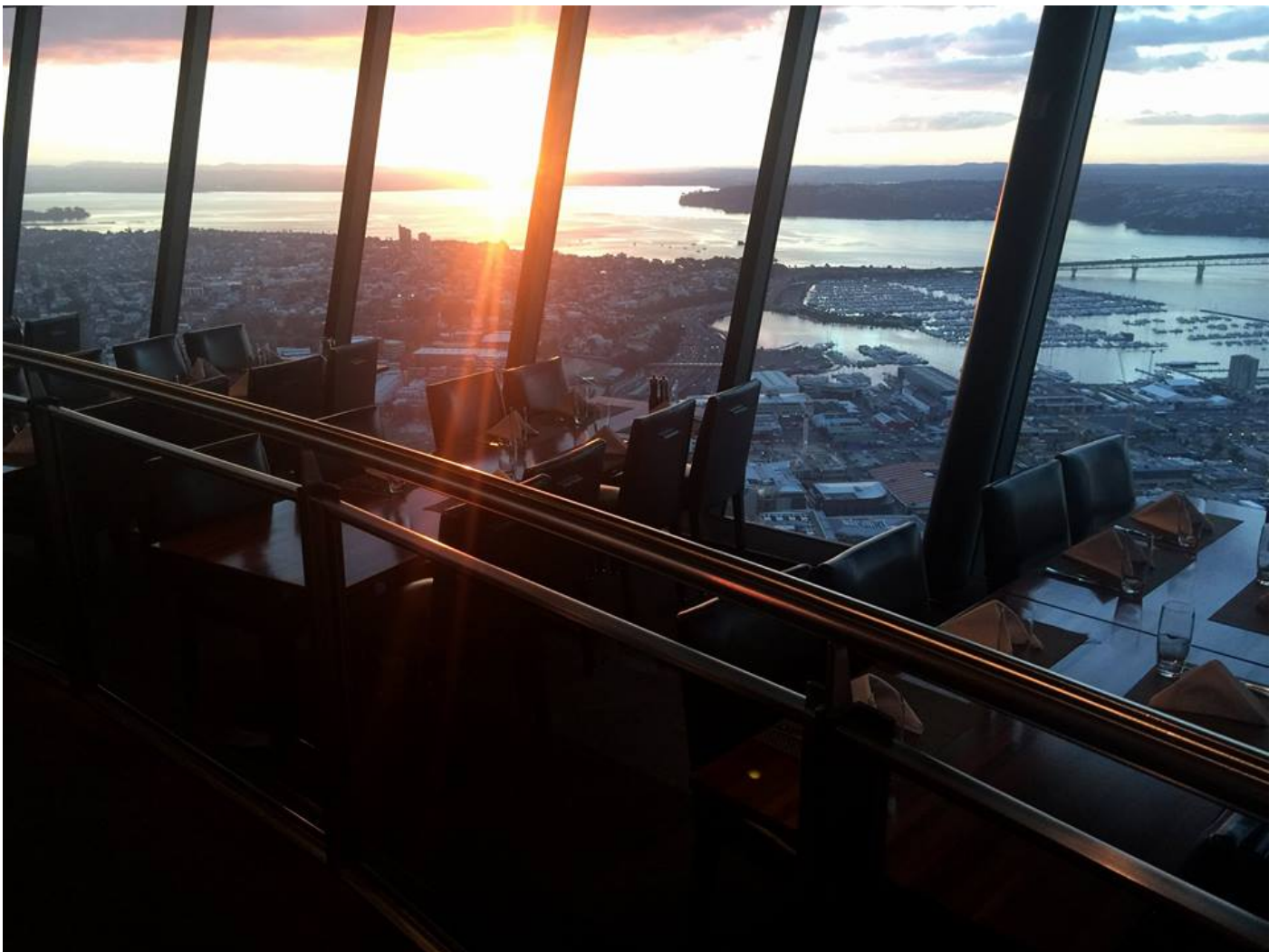
unique eccentricities. Bourbon and Branch offer three separate rooms to enjoy and is known for its rare bourbons, scotch, and expertly crafted mixed cocktails. If you're up for a little adventure, this is the SF bar for you.

Image Credit: [Manuel Delgado Tenorio](#), [Amy Snyder](#)

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