



Clockwise from main picture: view from the Penthouse Suite of the Fairmont San Francisco; the hotel exterior; Alcatraz; the city skyline; Lombard Street; the Tonga Room



## City guide: San Francisco

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The cosmopolitan Californian metropolis offers plenty to see and do whether you're visiting for business or pleasure

### Where to stay

If you like your hotels to be atmospheric and steeped in history then the legendary Fairmont San Francisco atop Nob Hill is the place to be. Opened in 1907, it made history when the UN Charter was drafted in the Garden Room in 1945 and signed by 50 countries. It has also welcomed several US presidents including Theodore Roosevelt, JFK and Bill Clinton. JFK checked into the Penthouse Suite which, until 1981, was a private residence – rumour has it he used the secret passage in the library to sneak in a certain Hollywood starlet. The hotel is conveniently located and a short cable-car trip from Downtown, the Financial District, Union Square and Fisherman's Wharf. It is also the only spot where each of the city's cable car lines meet.

### Where to eat

A tropical-themed tiki bar may not be the obvious San Francisco dining choice, but the Tonga Room & Hurricane Bar at the Fairmont is certainly worth a visit. In 1929 the hotel opened a 75ft terrace plunge pool, which over the years attracted celebrities such as actress Helen Hayes and future president Ronald Reagan. In 1945 it was renovated, the pool became a lagoon with a floating stage and The Tonga Room was born. It was one of America's first Polynesian-themed restaurants and the bartender who created the Mai Tai served the signature cocktail to hotel patrons for the next two decades. Today it remains justifiably famous for its dynamic thunder and rainstorm special effects, Pacific Rim cuisine and exotic drinks.

### What to see

In a sprawling city blessed with so many attractions, the best way for the time-poor business traveller



to swiftly soak up San Francisco is by cable car and a bay boat tour. The cable car system – the world's last of its kind – is an experience in itself, serving up a colourful showcase of the city's sharp inclines and famed Victorian buildings. Boat tours, of course, provide spectacular views of the Golden Gate Bridge and the ominous rocky outpost of Alcatraz. There are several tour operators, but Wylie Charters is a good option for entertaining clients. If you have time to explore more closely, note that tours of Alcatraz book up online weeks in advance, with the atmospheric night tours particularly popular. Golden Gate Park, meanwhile, is a focal point for attractions and events, and also home to the De Young fine arts museum.

### Useful info

[fairmont.com/san-francisco](http://fairmont.com/san-francisco)  
[sf.cablecar.com](http://sf.cablecar.com)  
[wyliecharters.com](http://wyliecharters.com)  
[alcatrazcruises.com](http://alcatrazcruises.com)  
[goldengatebridge.org](http://goldengatebridge.org)  
[goldengatepark.com](http://goldengatepark.com)  
[deyoung.famsf.org](http://deyoung.famsf.org)

### Etiquette and customs

Californians tend towards informality so expect business partners to call you by your first name right away. Silicon Valley is famous for its casual dress code and the stereotypical tech start-up



uniform of company T-shirt, jeans and hoodie. That said, entrepreneurs do often wear smart casual for business meetings. Layering is essential as temperatures can go from warm to wind-chilled in a matter of minutes.

### For the flight

To get in a San Fran frame of mind, catch up on HBO's comedy series *Silicon Valley*, which focuses on six men who start a tech company. When it comes to movies, *Milk* – in which Sean Penn plays the pioneering Harvey Milk, California's first openly gay elected official – is a must. Meanwhile, the iconic 1968 thriller *Bullitt*, starring Steve McQueen, has to be seen for its astonishing car chase – arguably the greatest in movie history – which roars through San Francisco's undulating streets for over 10 dizzying minutes. For lighter viewing, try the 1972 screwball comedy *What's Up Doc?* – with Barbra Streisand – in which mixed-up luggage results in hilarity on the streets of the city. For a flavour of 1970s San Fran, read *Tales of the City* by Armistead Maupin – which was first serialised in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and explores the alternative lifestyles and underground culture of the city.