

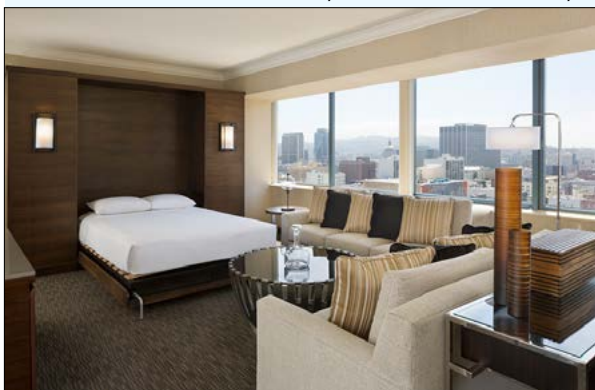


## SAN FRANCISCO

# Adapted Travel

By Mike Cohen

In the beautiful city of San Francisco, where my family spent a week on holiday last summer, most major museums and tourist attractions have wheelchair ramps. Many hotels offer special accommodations and services for wheelchair users and other visitors with disabilities. For the latter, an access guide is available online or via mail (at no cost) at [www.sftravel.com](http://www.sftravel.com). The Mayor's Office



A look at part of the beautiful suite at the Hilton San Francisco Union Square.

on Disability is responsible for ensuring that all public city and county services, facilities and programs are fully accessible to people with disabilities. The guide provides essential information for anyone planning an accessible (ADA) trip to San Francisco. The 32-page publication offers detailed information for individuals with disabilities on more than 150 San Francisco hotels, restaurants, museums, attractions, shopping centers, recreation, public transportation and service providers.

### EVERBODY'S FAVOURITE CITY

San Francisco is often called "Everybody's Favorite City," a title earned by its scenic beauty, cultural attractions, diverse communities, and world-class cuisine. Measuring 49 square miles, this very walkable city is dotted with landmarks like the Golden Gate Bridge, cable cars, Alcatraz and the largest Chinatown in the United States. A stroll of the city's streets can lead from Union Square to North Beach to Fisherman's Wharf, with intriguing neighborhoods to explore at every turn. Views of the Pacific Ocean and San Francisco Bay are often laced with fog, creating a ro-

matic mood in this most European of American cities.

We built our week-long itinerary carefully. One of the nicest things about visiting San Francisco is that, although the city is "big" in terms of attractions and amenities, it is geographically small – only 49 square miles. Consequently, it is very easy to see and do a great many things in a short period of time.

It is also easy to spend weeks in San Francisco and still not experience everything the city has to offer. The Golden Gate Bridge, the most famous bridge in the world, manages to impress even the most experienced travelers with its stunning 1.7-mile span.

Fisherman's Wharf is also home to Pier 39, a festive waterfront marketplace that is one of the city's most popular attractions. A community of California sea lions has taken up residence on the floats in the Pier39 Marina and visitors line the nearby railing to watch their antics. From there it's a short walk to the San Francisco Dungeon and Madame Tussauds, Ripley's Believe It or Not! and the famous crab vendors selling walk-away crab and shrimp cocktails. Union Square is the place for serious shoppers. Major department stores and the most exclusive designer boutiques line streets like Post, Sutter, Geary, Grant, Stockton and Powell. The Westfield San Francisco Shopping Centre houses the largest Bloomingdale's outside of New York and the second largest Nordstrom in the U.S.

The entrance to Chinatown at Grant Avenue and Bush Street is called the "Dragon's Gate". Inside are 24 blocks of hustle and bustle, most of it taking place along Grant Avenue, the oldest street in San Francisco. This city within a city is best explored on foot; exotic shops, renowned restaurants, food markets, temples and small museums comprise its boundaries. Visitors can buy ancient potions from herb shops, relax and enjoy a

dim sum lunch or witness the making of fortune cookies.

Do consider purchasing the San Francisco CityPASS, which saves travellers up to 42 percent off combined admission to top attractions.

### WHERE TO STAY

We were excited to get accommodations at the Hilton San Francisco Union Square ([www.sanfrancisco.hilton.com](http://www.sanfrancisco.hilton.com)), located in the theatre district and within walking distance to cable cars, the Moscone Center and about one mile from night clubs, Chinatown and Nob Hill. Macy's and the Westfield San Francisco Center are only a few blocks away.

This historic three-tower hotel provides rooms with city views, the Cityscape lounge on the 46th floor and a ballroom that occupies an entire floor. You can relax on their 16th floor pool deck. It's only 14 miles from the San Francisco International Airport. There are more than 1,900 rooms here, making it the largest hotel on the West Coast.

We stayed in one of the hotel's newly renovated Tower Two Luxury suites, which has a main bedroom with two Queen size beds and a small sofa. This connects to a much larger room – called a parlor – which features a Murphy bed, two sofas, a round dining room table that can seat six and windows on all sides. Combined you have two bathrooms, two fridges, two in-room safes, more cupboard space, which adds up to ultra-comfort. There is also a tablet in each room, which provides you with all of the necessary hotel and city information. For a nominal charge you can surf the net with it as well.

Classic guest rooms offer HDTV and Wi-Fi access while ultra-modern rooms showcase city skyline or bay views. Accessible rooms are also available. There's plenty of choice for dining here. Head to Herb 'N Kitchen where you can eat your way – sit down, grab and go, or order to your room. Urban Tavern is the place to be for breakfast and the Lobby Bar is the perfect setting to unwind after

a busy day. I enjoyed the breakfast buffet at the hotel a couple of times during my stay. It was terrific!

There are accessible guest rooms with mobility features, entry or passage doors that provide 32 inches as well as special provisions for parking, entry ways, swimming, Braille on the elevators, closed captioning on televisions or closed captioning decoders, TDD devices, a digital alarm clock available with sound and a vibrating pad, grab bars in bathroom, shower baths or roll in showers, an inflatable chair available to assist in getting in and out of a bath and a level or ramp entrance into the building.

### EMBASSY SUITES AIRPORT

Here is a tip when arriving in San Francisco in the middle of the evening. Why head to your main hotel right away? We checked into the modern Embassy Suites by Hilton San Francisco Airport hotel. Here you can enjoy spacious accommodations in this all-suite hotel, where a separate living area and bedroom are standard features. The flexible rooms have tiered Wi-Fi available and convenient, delicious dining options at your fingertips. Their daily cooked-to-order breakfast and evening receptions with drinks are included in all reservations. They offer a complimentary shuttle bus service to and from the airport, a free daily trolley to and from Burlingame (11:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.) and a complimentary motor coach to downtown San Francisco on Fridays and Saturdays. The hotel is located 10 miles south of downtown San Francisco. You can take a refreshing swim in their indoor on-site swimming pool, or check out the fitness center. The tropical atrium, perfect for relaxing after work or a day out, features a beautiful koi fish pond and water fountain. The on-site restaurant is called Two Fifty and there is also a Starbucks on site. I really felt at home here and enjoyed the ambience of the gigantic lobby where I connected to free Wi-Fi and got a lot of work done squeezed between some Netflix binge watching.

The hotel is fully accessible, with a wide  
*Continued on page 35*

*... continued from page 34...***SAN FRANCISCO | Adapted Travel |** *By Mike Cohen*

front entrance, wide hallways, several elevators, walkways above the tropical atrium. There is easy access to the pool as well. Service animals are permitted.

The hotel is located at 250 Gateway Boulevard. For more information call (650) 589-3400 or log on to [www.sanfranciscoairportsouthsanfran.embassysuites.com](http://www.sanfranciscoairportsouthsanfran.embassysuites.com).

**HOP-ON, HOP-OFF BUS**

For our first full day in San Francisco it was a no brainer to take the hop-on, hop-off Big Bus tour. You can buy your tickets in multiple ways. Log on to [www.bigbustours.com](http://www.bigbustours.com) and click on the San Francisco section as this company operates across the globe. Download the free App before you go. In a city like San Francisco with stunning bays, bridges and hills, this bus tour is the perfect way to sightsee. As for accessibility, Big Bus tours does operate wheelchair accessible vehicles with lifts that can accommodate a weight up to 650 pounds. The entire fleet in San Francisco is not wheelchair accessible. If you or your travelling partner(s) requires an ADA accessible vehicle, contact the company 48 hours prior to your planned tour commencement. They can then arrange for a suitable vehicle to be available at the time and location required. Passengers with mobility impairments may not be able to access the upper deck.

**MUIR WOODS AND SAUSOLITO**

Via Best Bay Tours (<https://bestbayreatours.com>), we experienced

the remarkable Muir Woods National Monument and the grove of coastal Sequoias (Redwoods) - the tallest trees in the world! The Muir Woods tour took us across the Golden Gate Bridge, past the Marin Headlands, and into a magical Redwood forest known as Muir Woods. Once we had a special opportunity to walk amongst these Sequoia trees. This walkway is fully wheelchair accessible.

We spent about 90 minutes in the Redwood grove. The tour then moved on to picturesque Sausalito, California, where we had a chance to shop, visit art galleries and have lunch all while gazing across the bay at beautiful San Francisco. Tour prices are \$45 for children and \$60 for adults. This does not include the \$10 entrance fee to the Muir Woods National Park.

**ESCAPE TO ALCATRAZ**

I have always been fascinated by Alcatraz, once home to some of America's most notorious criminals. The federal penitentiary that operated here from 1934 to 1963 brought a dark mystique to the Rock as the presence of infamous inmates like Al "Scarface" Capone, and the "Birdman" Robert Stroud helped to establish the island's notoriety. To this day, Alcatraz is best known as one of the world's most legendary prisons. A visit to Alcatraz is high on every San Francisco tourist's list. We booked our tickets via Alcatraz Cruises ([www.alcatrazcruises.com](http://www.alcatrazcruises.com)), the National Park Service concessioner of ferry service to Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. Plan about two and a half hours for your visit.

Much of Alcatraz is steep and hilly, so be

prepared for walking long distances uphill. The distance from the dock to the prison at the top of the island is about 1/4 mile (0.4

km) and the elevation change is 130 feet (40 meters). This is equivalent to climbing a 13-storey building. Visitors unable to make the climb up Alcatraz's steep road can take advantage of SEAT-Sustainable Easy Access Transport - an electric shuttle that runs twice an hour from the dock to the prison building, and twice an hour from the front of the prison back to the dock. Boarding is available on a first come, first served basis. Anyone with a health condition or physical disability which limits mobility qualifies for a ride on SEAT. The use of SEAT is limited to those with the physical need only. Family and friends, who are physically able to make the walk, are advised to walk to the designated arrival area to meet SEAT passengers. One personal attendant is permitted for those who physically cannot board/disembark the tram under their own power or cannot be safely left alone. Common examples of those needing an attendant are visitors who are in wheelchairs and the visually impaired. Children of any age, on foot or in strollers, must meet the above qualifications or be under the care of a qualifying parent. There are

*Alcatraz is a major attraction.*

no wheelchairs available for loan either on Alcatraz Island or at the Pier 33 Alcatraz Landing. Large-print and Braille transcriptions of the Cellhouse Audio Tour and other interpretive materials are available upon request.

Alcatraz Landing at Pier 33 in San Francisco is fully accessible. There is limited accessible parking at Pier 33, available on a first-come, first-served basis. Individuals need to show their permanent or temporary disabled placard at the entry of Pier 33 to utilize the accessible parking spaces. In addition, an Accessibility Drop Off zone is available at Alcatraz Landing entrance for visitors with special needs arriving by automobile. For further information on Alcatraz accessibility, please call the National Park Service at (415) 561-4900.

**CALIFORNIA ACADEMY OF SCIENCE**

The California Academy of Sciences (<http://www.calacademy.org>) is home to an aquarium, planetarium, natural history museum, and research and educa-

*Continued on page 36*

Mega-Plex  
**GUZZO**  
**IMAX**

[www.cinemasguzzo.com](http://www.cinemasguzzo.com)**A proud supporter of Inspirations Newspaper**





... continued from page 35...

## SAN FRANCISCO | Adapted Travel | *By Mike Cohen*

tion programs, which engage people of all ages and backgrounds on two of the most important topics of our time: life and its sustainability. Based in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, it's remarkable what is housed all under one living



*A look at Farallon Restaurant.*

roof. The Academy's entrance and exits are fully wheelchair-accessible from either street level or the underground parking garage. All entrance lines accommodate wheelchairs. The Academy is fully wheelchair accessible, welcoming manual and electric wheelchairs. Manual wheelchairs are available to borrow free of charge at Coat Check on a first-come, first-served basis. To borrow one, visitors are asked simply to leave their photo ID at Coat Check for the duration of their visit. Electric mobility scooters, and other power-driven mobility devices (OPDMDs) such as Segways are subject to reasonable restrictions in certain areas of the facility.

All exhibits have built-in detection points for the blind, and the public elevators are equipped with auditory signals. Wherever possible, exhibits have been made tactile for an enhanced experience. A person who accompanies and performs the task of interpreter for a visitor, who is blind or visually impaired, is admitted free-of-charge. Readers and specially-trained tour

guides are available with two weeks prior notice. For more information, or to book a service, call the Contact Center at (415) 379-8000 or see their Plan Your Visit page.

For the hearing impaired, transcripts are available for all regularly scheduled Planetarium shows and other multimedia in the Academy, and assistive listening transmitters are positioned in the Planetarium, Earthquake Mini-Dome Theater, and Earthquake Shake House exhibit. Any interpreter accompanying a deaf or hearing-impaired visitor (for the purpose of interpreting) is admitted free of charge. Additionally, sign-language interpreters for the Planetarium, the 3D theater in the Forum, and exhibit tours are available with two weeks prior notice. To book a service, call the Contact Center at (415) 379-8000.

### DINNER AT FARALLON AND SHOW

We came upon the ideal dinner and show combination under the same roof of the Kensington Hotel at Union Square - a fabulous meal at Farallon Restaurant ([www.farallonrestaurant.com](http://www.farallonrestaurant.com)), followed by an evening at the San Francisco Playhouse and a presentation of the La Cage Aux Folles, which we thoroughly enjoyed. The dinner and a show promotion that Farallon has with the Playhouse is a \$49 three-course prix fixe dinner.

Farallon has been enchanting guests for 18 years. It offers a sophisticated menu, featuring "coastal cuisine". The freshest seafood available comprises the majority of the menu, rounded out with local produce, meat, and game. Dinner entrees are priced from \$27 to \$36. We had an absolutely fabulous dinner. Our server Nancy nicely described the options and paired different wine with our appetizers and main courses. The restaurant is wheelchair accessible. Reservations for dinner are recommended by phone or Open Table. For information call (415)956-6969.

### SAN FRANCISCO PLAYHOUSE

Now beginning its second decade as San Francisco's premiere Off-Broadway style theatre company, the San Fran-

cisco Playhouse (<http://sfplayhouse.org>) presents a diverse line up of shows from cutting edge, bold plays direct from Broadway runs to innovative musicals like Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson or classics. The Playhouse has a cool bar and happy hour, as well as the diverse entertainment offering, presenting a wide range of theatre including premieres by new writers, all in an intimate setting of 200 seats. They are in performances throughout the year, so there is always something for people to see. I'd make this an automatic stop for any planned trip to San Francisco. You can find the full lineup of their productions planned through September 2018 on their website. There is elevator service.

### JOHN'S GRILL

There is a very historic restaurant in San Francisco called John's Grill ([www.johnsgrill.com](http://www.johnsgrill.com)). This is one of the city's oldest and most famous dining establishments, born in 1908, known for its great steaks, seafood, salads and pastas and the price is indeed right. The restaurant was actually a setting in author Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*. You will be impressed with the interior, complete with original period furnishings as well as a kind of virtual museum of authentic memorabilia. Little did we realize that there were two more floors and a total capacity for nearly 300 diners. Last year they installed an elevator for patrons in wheelchairs or with mobility problems. Washrooms are also wheelchair accessible. On the bright and cheerful top floor a private room with a door, can accommodate a small group. This is excellent for business meetings or family gatherings.

The restaurant is located at 63 Ellis Street. It is always crowded so call first for reservations at (415) 986-3274.

### PIER MARKET

Be sure to experience the Pier Market Seafood Restaurant, located at Pier 39. The family owned restaurant specializes in mesquite-grilled fresh, local, sustainable seafood and fabulous California wines enjoyed while providing bay views of Alcatraz and the Pier 39 sea lions. You can also enjoy dining on their fabulous outdoor patio, perfect for people watching on the Pier. Owned

and operated by the Simmons family, who created and built Pier 39, they own three other restaurants - the Fog Harbor Fish House, the Wipeout Bar & Grill and the Biscoff Coffee Corner.

The restaurant is very much wheelchair accessible; in fact the entire pier is beautifully set up to accommodate those in wheelchairs.

Log on to [www.piermarket.com](http://www.piermarket.com) for more information.

### DINNER CRUISE

We had a wonderful evening on the Hornblower Dining Cruise ([www.hornblower.com](http://www.hornblower.com)). You're not truly a San Franciscan, we were told, until you cruise the Bay! With the Hornblower you can embark upon an exquisite brunch, lunch, or dinner cruise, feast on shimmering Bay views of the Golden Gate Bridge and Bay Bridge, and take it that gorgeous city skyline. There is great food, special cocktails, champagne, live music, and the most stunning views in town. We chose a three-hour dinner cruise, complete with a four-course seated dinner. Our server Lupita welcomed us to our table with some glasses of sparkling wine, summer spinach salads and a basket of fresh bread. We each enjoyed some piping hot tomato basil soup and ordered the herb roasted chicken breast, with risotto cake, seasonal vegetables and lemon butter sauce and the braised lamb shank with parmesan truffle mashed potatoes and seasonable vegetables. Decadent chocolate flourless cake with raspberry glaze topped off one fine meal.

You can call (415) 788-8866 or email [sf@hornblower.com](mailto:sf@hornblower.com) Monday to Friday. Hornblower does have accessible yachts in the fleet. However, not all yachts and decks are accessible. Call 1 (888) 467-6256 to ensure wheelchair accessibility for the date you are planning to cruise.

*Mike Cohen is the editor of Inspirations. He can be reached at [mcohen@inspirationsnews.com](mailto:mcohen@inspirationsnews.com).*

