

*Part Five*

# Getting around San Francisco

## Driving Your Car

You'll have a love/hate relationship with driving in San Francisco. In one sense, the city's best sites and scenery are most easily explored in a car (mix one convertible and a sunny day for an unforgettable experience). From Route 1 along the Pacific Coast, driving across the Golden Gate Bridge to the Headlands or Mount Tamalpais, to driving through rolling vineyards of Napa or Sonoma, the Bay Area offers the best of scenic drives. And the hills . . . Filbert between Hyde and Leavenworth, Hill Street at 22nd, or Divisadero from Broadway to the Marina . . . white knuckled and gasping, you'll plunge over the edge maniacally laughing, yodeling, screaming . . . whatever inspires you! Stick-shift novices need not apply. The city is compact enough to get in a good bit of sites on your own time, too.

Here's where the hate parts come in. Finding parking, legal parking that is (many innovative parking-blazers have initiated rather creative solutions to the crunch), is frustrating. And to add insult to injury, traffic is a nightmare. There are even websites devoted to the highway horror (check the "I Hate Bay Area Traffic Homepage": [www.geocities.com/MotorCity/Speedway/2004/traffic](http://www.geocities.com/MotorCity/Speedway/2004/traffic)). Downtown, near the financial center, is usually crowded throughout the day, but during peak rush hours of about 8 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. you'll feel about as slow moving and cramped as the Tin Man without a lube job. Most of the traffic frustration comes into play when approaching either of the two bridges. The same goes for North Beach, Chinatown, and Telegraph Hill, areas infamous for traffic congestion and scarce parking.

Our advice is to keep your car in your hotel's garage and use it sparingly for excursions away from downtown and beyond the city or in the evenings after rush hour. If you are planning to go outside of the city, especially during winter months, it is best to call California Road Conditions before heading out. They can inform you of any mudslides, construction,

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or hazardous weather conditions. Call (800) 427-ROAD (7623) if calling from within California or (916) 445-ROAD (7623) if calling from outside California.

### Rental Cars

All the major car-rental agencies operate in the city and have desks at the airports. Take your pick from the national agencies of **Alamo**, **Avis**, **Budget**, **Dollar**, **Hertz**, **National**, and **Thrifty**. There are also some home-grown places to rent a car, like **City Rent-A-Car** (call (415) 861-1312), **Fox Rent-A-Car** (call (800) 225-4369), or **Specialty Car Rental** (call (800) 400-8412), for your chance at that convertible or dream BMW 323i.

All car-rental agencies usually require a minimum age of 25, and fares range depending on class of car, length of rental, where and when you pick up and drop off, and mileage plans. Usually you can find good deals online ([expedia.com](http://expedia.com), or [travelocity.com](http://travelocity.com)). If you are an uninsured driver, you may want to buy an insurance plan for the duration of your rental. The city is notorious for fender benders and knicks and scrapes on vehicles, so protect yourself—purchase the insurance. Keep in mind also that some credit cards offer protection as well. Inquire with the credit card company, or if you do have car insurance, call to verify your plan.

### Time of Day

San Francisco's weekday rush hour starts before 8 a.m. and lasts until around 10 a.m.; it picks up again around 4 p.m. and goes to about 6 p.m. In between, traffic is congested but usually flows—at least beyond downtown and Fisherman's Wharf.

Weekends, on the other hand, can be just as bad as weekday rush hours—and often worse. While traffic on Saturday and Sunday mornings is usually light, it picks up around noon and doesn't let up until well into the evening. Remember, about 6 million people live in the Bay Area, and on weekends many of them jump in their cars and head to San Francisco or to surrounding playgrounds across either bridge.

### A Prayer before Parking

Parking is one of the main reasons *not* to explore San Francisco by car. In some areas you will drive around blocks for more than an hour finding a vacant spot. Often, the meter is timed to allow only a half hour of parking (not a lot of time to go sight-seeing or attend a business meeting) or if it's a non-metered street you have only two hours without a color-coded neighborhood permit. Rules, rules, rules. Traffic cops and meter maids on their mini mobiles uphold those rules diligently, and the meters, unless posted otherwise, are in effect Monday through Saturday, usually from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. (Meter rates: Downtown, 75 cents for 30 minutes; Fisherman's Wharf, \$1 for one hour; rest of the city, 50 cents for one hour.)

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Colored curbs in San Francisco indicate reserved parking zones. Red means no stopping or parking; yellow indicates a half-hour loading limit for vehicles with commercial plates, yellow and black means a half-hour loading limit for trucks with commercial plates; green, yellow, and black indicates a taxi zone; and blue is for vehicles marked with a California-issued disabled placard or plate. Green is a ten-minute parking zone for all vehicles, and white is a five-minute limit for all vehicles.

San Francisco cops don't take parking regulations lightly, and any improperly used spot can become a tow-away zone. The number one source of citations in the city is failing to recognize street cleaning, which requires one side of the street to be vacated on particular days, usually during morning hours. Be aware of street-cleaning signs and stay out of parking lanes opened up for rush-hour traffic. Many residential neighborhoods have permit parking, and a parking ticket can cost you more than \$30, plus \$100 for towing and additional charges for storage. Parking in a bus zone or wheelchair-access space can set you back \$250, while parking in a space marked handicapped or blocking access to a wheelchair ramp costs \$275. If you get towed, go to the nearest district police department for a release and then pick up your car at the towing company.

From meters, color-coded permits and curbs, and the task of parallel parking—and, let's face it, there are some of you who haven't done it since driver's ed—you may wonder how to survive your trip without parking citations taking up half your scrapbook. You can opt for one of many city parking garages throughout the city's neighborhoods. They cost anywhere from \$10 to \$25 a day. Check with your hotel to see if you can get a reduced rate at a nearby garage that allows unlimited access to your car. Or, take advantage of the city's convenient and reliable public transportation, or our favorite, foot it.

When you're parking on San Francisco's steep hills, there is only one way to rest easy: curb your wheels. Turn the front tires away from the curb when your car is facing uphill so that if the brake fails, the car rolls back into the curb. If facing downhill, turn your wheels toward the curb so that the car can roll forward into the curb, effectively using it as a block. Because even the best brakes can fail, curbing your wheels is the law in San Francisco (and you'll see plenty of street signs to remind you).

### The "You Didn't Know to Ask" Q & A:

- **Should I park in the middle turning lane when I see others doing it?**

What you'll see sometimes in and around the Mission and SoMa, especially on busy weekend evenings, is that middle turning lanes become a row of parked cars. *Do not* follow the leader here, the city will dispatch tow trucks faster than you can say "Hold the anchovies."

- **Where can I leave the car for a few days if I don't want to pay for a parking garage?** This is just between you and us—one of the best-kept secrets

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of the Bay Area—the Presidio! Enter from Lombard Street in the Marina, or Park Presidio in the Richmond, and you'll enter parking paradise. No meters, and no permits necessary! The only threats to this parking nirvana are the leaves, pollen, and bird poop that come from tree-lined streets.

- **What time in the morning should I move my car if it's parked in a two-hour permit zone?** Usually the permit zones are enforced from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. If you have left your car overnight you have until 10 a.m. (two hours past 8 a.m.).
- **How do the traffic cops know that my car has exceeded the meter or permit limit?** Remember kindergarten? Chalk! They chalk tires and check back to see if the car has or hasn't moved. One way around this is to check for chalk marks on your tires and if there are none, you might be good for another two hours. Or simply roll your car back and forth to get rid of it.
- **What areas are easiest for parking?** The Marina is fairly easy but *do not* even come an inch over someone's driveway. They are sticklers about that sort of thing. Bernal Heights, Potrero Hill, and parts of Noe Valley are all pretty stress-free. What constitutes stress free, you might ask? Less than a 15-minute search.
- **Where should I worry about theft or vandalism?** The Mission, Chinatown, the financial center, and the Tenderloin Districts are hot spots for broken windows, car break-ins, and keying. Never leave purses or CDs where they are visible from the window. Store them in the trunk.
- **Why do I sometimes see cars parked on the sidewalks outside a house or apartment building?** There is something fun about pulling up the curb onto the sidewalk and parking your vehicle! The thrill of trespassing is sweet indeed. There is a level of understanding between parking officials and residents. Usually it is tolerated during late hours (after midnight). But be ready for an early morning wake-up call to move it before anybody complains, or worse, you get busted!

## Public Transportation

San Francisco Municipal Railway, [www.sfmuni.com](http://www.sfmuni.com), commonly called Muni, is a citywide transportation system that consists of all cable cars, streetcars (called Muni Metro), conventional buses, and electric buses. All fares are \$1.25 for adults and 35 cents for seniors, disabled passengers (with a valid Regional Transit Connection Discount Card), and children ages 5–17; children ages 4 and under ride free. Cable-car fare is \$3 per person (kids ages 4 and under ride free). One-dollar bills are accepted on most buses, but the drivers don't give change. If you need a transfer, ask for one when you board; it's free and valid for two hours and a maximum of two rides in any direction.

Many San Franciscans feel a fierce devotion to the system; some affectionately call it “Joe Muni.” No wonder; it's a European-style transportation system that gets people around the city cheaply and efficiently. You're never more than a couple of blocks from a bus stop or train station. Not that it's without some drawbacks—buses can be jam packed, especially at rush hour and on weekends, and occasionally you may have

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to wait for a bus while fully loaded buses pass you by. Yet despite its problems, riding Muni is interesting. You can learn more about the city from the friendly bus drivers and helpful passengers than from any guidebook.

### Passport to Savings

Muni passports allow unlimited use of all buses, cable cars, and Muni Metro streetcars in San Francisco. It's a great money-saving deal that makes it even easier and more convenient to use San Francisco's public transportation. In addition, Muni passports provide discounts at dozens of city attractions, including museums, theaters, and bay tours.

Muni passports come in three versions: one-day (\$6), three-day (\$10), and seven-day (\$15). Pocket-sized and easy to use, the passports are available at locations throughout the city, including the **San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau Visitor Information Center** (in Hallidie Plaza at Powell and Mason Streets), **TIX Bay Area** (Stockton Street on Union Square), and **Muni** (949 Presidio, room 239). Be sure to pick up a copy of the *Official San Francisco Street and Transit Map* for \$2. To use a passport, scratch off the dates of the day (or days) you're using the pass and simply show it to the driver, who will wave you aboard.

### Buses

You'll never see a more clean, quiet, and pollutant-free (thanks to some of the electric buses) or friendly bus service in any other city. Bus service in San Francisco reaches into all parts of the city and beyond. Numbers are placed on the top of the bus with their destinations on the front. Along the streets, bus stops are indicated by signs displaying the Muni logo; the route numbers of the buses serving the stop are listed below the sign. Some stops are merely marked on light posts with a yellow sign and the bus number spray painted in black. Usually stops along a route are every three or four blocks. Some bus stops have three-sided glass shelters, with route numbers painted on the exterior and route maps posted inside. Along Market Street, some buses stop at the curb while others stop at islands in the street.

When you board, give the driver \$1 or flash your Muni passport; if you need a transfer, get it as soon as you board. The driver will rip off a transfer ticket and it is usually good for two hours. You are only supposed to use the transfer for one other bus ride, but if the bus driver doesn't take it or you don't throw it away, you can keep using it! It's one of those little treasures of public transportation. If you're not sure about where to get off, ask the driver to let you know when you're near your destination. Drivers are usually considerate and glad to help. The buses get very crowded at times. Often you will be standing in the aisle and you may not be aware that your stop has arrived. Fellow passengers are quite cordial and helpful and you'll be pleased when "back door please" is yelled out in your favor, or "wait" as the driver pulls away too soon. Rush hour

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is obviously busy but also consider the after-school rush between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. Kids talking Britney, boys, and basketball snap their gum and fling their backpacks as they load onto the buses on their way home.

Most bus lines operate from 6 a.m. to midnight, after which there is an infrequent Night Owl service; for safety's sake, take a cab at those late hours. Popular tourist bus routes include numbers 5, 7, and 71, which go to Golden Gate Park; numbers 41 and 45, which go up and down Union Street; and number 30, which runs through Union Square, Ghirardelli Square, and the Marina. If you need help figuring out which bus or buses to take to reach a specific destination, call Muni at (415) 673-MUNI (6864). The large maps have all routes marked, making it easy to plan your path and see where different routes intersect.

### Muni Metro Streetcars

Muni Metro streetcars operate underground downtown and on the streets in the outer neighborhoods. At four underground stations along Market Street downtown, Muni shares quarters with BART, the Bay Area's commuter train system. Orange, yellow, and white illuminated signs mark the station entrances; when you get inside the terminal, look for the separate Muni entrance.

Pay or show your Muni passport and go down to the platform. To go west, choose the outbound side of the platform; to go east, choose the downtown side. Electronic signs with the name of the next train begin to flash as it approaches. The doors open automatically; stand aside to let arriving passengers depart before you step aboard. To open the doors and exit at your stop, push on the low bar next to the door.

Five of Muni Metro's six streetcar lines are designated J, K, L, M, and N, and these share tracks downtown beneath Market Street but diverge below the Civic Center into the outer neighborhoods. The J line goes to Mission Dolores; the K, L, and M lines go to Castro Street; and the N line parallels Golden Gate Park. The sleek trains run about every 15 minutes and more frequently during rush hours. Service is offered daily from 5 a.m. to 12:30 a.m., Saturday from 6 a.m. to 12:30 a.m., and Sunday from 8 a.m. to 12:20 a.m.

A new addition to the streetcar system (and its sixth route) is the F-Market line, beautiful green- and cream-colored, 1930s-era streetcars that run along Market Street from downtown to the Castro District and back. The historic cars are charming, and they're a hassle-free alternative to crowded buses and underground terminals.

### BART

BART ([www.bart.gov](http://www.bart.gov)), an acronym for Bay Area Rapid Transit, is a 103-mile system of high-speed trains that connects San Francisco with the East Bay cities of Berkeley, Oakland, Richmond, Concord, and Fremont,

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and to the south, with San Francisco International Airport. Four stations are located underground along Market Street (these also provide access to Muni Metro streetcars). Fares vary depending on distance; tickets are dispensed from self-service machines in the station lobbies. The trains run every 15 to 20 minutes on weekdays from 4 a.m. to midnight, on Saturday from 6 a.m. to midnight, and on Sunday from 8 a.m. to midnight.

BART is mostly used by commuters from the East Bay and is not a very useful means of traveling in the city for visitors. The stop in Berkeley, however, is close enough to the campus and other sites of interest. One other exception is the new BART extension (opened in 2003) to San Francisco International Airport.

### Cable Cars

After the red crown of the Golden Gate Bridge atop fluffy clouds, cable cars are probably San Francisco's most famous symbol. Ride one just to say you've personally experienced its ringing bells on Powell Street. Cynical natives will snub their noses at such a thing—it's as if they are being asked to eat a bowl full of Rice-A-Roni. Generally, the only ones hanging off and freezing their buns are tourists. That's okay, though. It's a fun thing to bring the kids to do—and anybody can appreciate the Willy Wonka-esque Cable Car Barn and Museum on Mason Street (415) 474-1887; there you can stand at an observation platform and watch the cable wind around the giant wheels. The cars, pulled by cables buried underneath the streets, operate on three lines from 6:30 a.m. to 12:30 a.m. daily at about 15-minute intervals.

The first San Francisco cable car made its maiden voyage in 1873. By 1906, just before the earthquake, the system hit its peak, with 600 cars on a 110-mile route. But the system was heavily damaged by the quake and fire, and many lines weren't rebuilt. Electric trolleys took over some routes, and the number of cable cars dwindled over the years. In 1955 the city voted to save the famous hill climbers, and in 1984 it spent more than \$60 million on a two-year renovation of the system, including new track and cable vaults, renovation of the Cable Car Barn, and restoration of the cars, which were given a new coat of shiny maroon, blue, and gold paint, as well as new brakes, seats, and wheels. Today there are 44 cable cars in all, with 27 in use at peak times. An average of 13 million people travel on the 17 miles of tracks each year—more than 35,000 people a day.

### Three Lines

There are three cable-car lines in San Francisco. The most popular route for tourists is the Powell-Hyde line, which starts at the Powell and Market Street turntable south of Union Square. The line skirts Union Square, climbs Nob Hill (with good views of Chinatown), goes past the Cable Car Barn, crosses Lombard Street, and descends to Hyde Street to the turntable

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near Aquatic Park and Fisherman's Wharf. The Powell-Mason line starts at the same place, but after the Cable Car Barn it passes by North Beach and ends at Bay Street. For the best views on either line, try to face east.

The California line runs from California and Market Streets to Van Ness Avenue, passing through the Financial District and Chinatown; it's used more by commuters than tourists (a tourist attraction in itself). At Nob Hill the Powell lines cross over the California line, so passengers can transfer between lines (but they have to pay again). At the end of all lines, all passengers must get off.

For each of the three lines, the return journey follows the outward route, so riders can catch different views from the other side of the car. If you'd rather sit than stand, try boarding at the end of the line. During peak tourist seasons and on weekends, lines are long to board the cars at the turntables where the cars get turned around, and boarding at cable-car stops along the routes can be impossible as the cars rumble by, full of smiling, camera-toting tourists.

### Safety Tips

As much fun as the cable cars are to ride, it's important to keep safety in mind when you're on one. If it's not crowded—not likely in the summer or fall after 9 a.m. or so—you can choose to sit or stand inside, sit outside on a bench, or stand at the end of the car. Adventurous types and some cable-car purists prefer hanging on to a pole while standing on a side running board. But wherever you decide to ride, hang on tight.

Try not to get in the way of the gripman, who operates the grip lever that holds and releases the cable pulling the car; he needs a lot of room. A yellow stripe on the floor marks an off-limits area, and passengers should stay out of it. Be extra cautious while the car is moving. Passing other cable cars is exciting because they pass so close, but be careful not to lean out too far. And be careful getting on and off. Often cable cars stop in the middle of busy intersections; you don't want to step in front of a moving car or truck.

### Ferries

In the days before the Golden Gate and Bay Bridges were built, Bay Area commuters relied on hundreds of ferries to transport them to and from the northern counties and the East Bay. Although no longer a necessity, ferries continue to operate in smaller numbers, transporting suburban commuters who prefer a tension-free boat ride across the bay to the headache of rush-hour traffic. The ferries are also favorite ways for local residents and visitors to enjoy San Francisco's incredible scenery. On weekends, many suburban families leave their cars at home and take the ferries for fun and relaxation.

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One person's commute can be another's excursion. Although the ferries don't offer the narrated audio tours of the commercial sight-seeing cruises offered at Fisherman's Wharf, they're less expensive. Food and bar service is offered on board, but the modern ferries only transport foot traffic and bicycles, not cars.

The Ferry Building at the foot of Market Street is the terminus for ferries to Sausalito and Larkspur. For prices and schedules, call Golden Gate Transit at (415) 923-2000. Private ferry service to Sausalito, Tiburon, and Angel Island operates from Pier 41 at Fisherman's Wharf. For more information, call the **Blue & Gold Fleet** at (415) 705-5555, or visit [www.blueandgoldfleet.com](http://www.blueandgoldfleet.com).

### Taxis

Unlike New York and Chicago, cabs in San Francisco tend to be expensive and scarce. You may be able to hail a moving taxi downtown, but in general it's better to call and make arrangements for pickup. The dispatch will call your number to alert you of the taxi's arrival. Another option is to head toward a cab stand at a major hotel, but the wait can be long during rush hour and in bad weather.

San Francisco taxis have rooftop signs that are illuminated when the cab is empty. Rates are \$2.85 for the first mile and increase 45 cents each additional fifth of a mile. Major cab companies include **Veteran's Cab** (415) 552-1300; **Yellow Cab** (415) 626-2345; **DeSoto Cab** (415) 970-1300; and **Luxor Cab** (415) 282-4141.

### Walking

Forfeit the gym. You have a leg press on almost every street in San Francisco. Pump your quads as you tread the hills—some so steep that stairs have been cut to make the trek easier, and your spirit will be fed dessert as the brightly-colored Victorians and backdrop of blue ocean surprise at every corner. It's a walking nirvana. What separates this city from others is the respect for pedestrians paid by vehicles and buses, and its compact size. Major tourist areas are within a half hour or less of one another. Another nice feature to footing the city is the surprising green spaces still firmly rooted within the city. Duck under a tree or sit in one of the many parks for a picnic as you glare at the glass-covered skyscrapers of downtown.

You don't have to ask the Scarecrow for directions here—most street intersections are marked with green-and-white signs bearing the name of the cross street; this can get confusing along Market Street, where street names are different on each side of the thoroughfare. Street names are also frequently imprinted in the pavement at corners. Often, electronic "walk" signs indicate when it's safe (and legal) to cross the street.

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**TO CROSS OR NOT TO CROSS?**

San Francisco ranks among the top pedestrian fatality rates in the country. In 1999, there were 834 injuries and 25 deaths. In a city that seems so careful and organized, this comes as quite a surprise. One thing to be aware of when crossing the street or aggressively pursuing a yellow light in a car: the traffic lights in San Francisco, unlike pedestrian-heavy cities like New York or D.C., don't have delayed timing. As soon as one side turns red, the other instantly turns green.

***A Walk for Any Mood***

Even if walks have never been a highlight for you, you will find inspiration in San Francisco to lace up and put feet to the path. One of the most active and exhilarating walks is **The Golden Gate Promenade's** three-and-a-half-mile path. Along its trail are joggers, and views of Alcatraz and those cold-blooded souls braving the frigid Pacific as they windsurf or kite-surf. All along the way are pit stops—Aquatic Park, Fort Mason, Marina Green, to the newly renovated Crissy Field. For a more romantic stroll, the **Presidio** is one of the most valued green spaces in the city. And the fact that there is a spot called **Lover's Lane** should be indicative enough. The whole trail takes only about 15 minutes. Another killer spot within the Presidio is **Inspiration Point**, which looks out toward the Palace of Fine Arts and the Golden Gate. A mandatory walk that would fit in nicely if you are already strolling The Golden Gate Promenade is to walk across the **Golden Gate Bridge**. You'll be humming Tony Bennett's classic in no time! If you are a foodie and love to walk, stop, eat, walk, stop, eat, then a stroll down **Union Street** or **Chestnut** in the Marina or almost any street in the **Mission** will satisfy your craving. **Bernal Heights** is one neighborhood being resurrected with community gardens and green spaces and an all out funky vibe. A walk down Cortland Avenue, the main drag here, will take you to **Good Prospect Community Garden**, and further along on Eugenia Street, you climb hidden stairways past bizarre and brightly colored Victorians and bungalows to **Bernal Community Gardens**. The cherry on top of this walk is the short hike to the bald top of **Bernal Hill**, which offers views of Mount Diablo and the Golden Gate. It's really one of the best vantage points to watch the foggy fingers move in and choke the bridge and surrounding neighborhoods. There are great walks even for bargain shoppers. The secondhand stores on **Upper Fillmore Street** are chock full of great deals on hot brand-name items.