

Family-Friendly Dining

San Francisco is a food-lover's city. Even before renowned local chef Alice Waters gave birth to California cuisine, San Francisco took advantage of its access to fresh seafood, local produce, and ethnic influences to foster a thriving dining scene. To the north, east, and south are dozens of small family farms, many organic, which supply city restaurants. In addition, the melting pot of immigrants has added serious depth to the epicurean offerings. Great Mexican food abounds in the Mission, and you'll find Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Thai restaurants everywhere. Although North Beach has its share of Italian restaurants, you can also find Spanish, Indian, and Greek cuisine very close by.

With so many tantalizing options, it would be a shame to stick to pizza simply because you have the kids in tow—although San Francisco does have some excellent pizzerias, which are listed in this chapter. Experiencing the city's fabulous food needn't deplete your wallet—ethnic restaurants are often inexpensive, and many moderately-priced restaurants are home to capable, aspiring young chefs. But it may mean you'll be taking young kids out of their culinary comfort zone and that you'll be eating in restaurants not populated exclusively by families. You'll soon discover, though, that San Franciscans are a friendly bunch and that most chefs will be happy to accommodate tiny palates should the need arise. My husband and I have dragged our kids to any number of local restaurants and found that, by

following the guidelines I list below (see the "Dining Out in Peace" box), we've been able to enjoy many wonderful dinners and, at the same time, introduce our girls to new and interesting foods.

With that spirit of discovery in mind, I've listed several dining options in this chapter that are not specifically designed for families but to which kids will certainly feel welcome. I have, however, passed over those restaurants that are simply not suitable for kids under 12. The exceptions are restaurants I suggest for when you have a babysitter.

Of course, you may hit moments in the sightseeing frenzy when you just want a place where everyone can sit, find something they like on the menu, and eat—without worrying about keeping the kids quiet or persuading them to think beyond buttered noodles. For those moments, I've included plenty of restaurants that are tailor-made for big, messy, family meals.

A NOTE ABOUT PRICES The restaurants in the reviews that follow are categorized as Very Expensive, Expensive, Moderate, and Inexpensive, based on an approximation of what a family of four would spend for nonalcoholic drinks and four main courses. If this family would have to pay \$120 or more for a meal, I consider that restaurant **Very Expensive**; from \$75 to \$120 **Expensive**; between \$40 and \$75, **Moderate**; under \$40, **Inexpensive**. I've included cafes, pizzerias, and casual, order-at-the-counter places under the Inexpensive

 **Tips Dining Out in Peace**

- **Set the ground rules.** Before entering a restaurant, remind kids that you are going to a special place and that a few key rules apply, such as inside voices and good manners.
- **Bring entertainment.** Crayons, markers, paper, stickers, and so on, will give your children something to do while awaiting their food. If the kids are old enough, bring postcards for them to write.
- **Try word games.** “I Spy” is a good one. Another word game involves one person naming something in a category, such as food. The next person names a word in the same category that starts with the last letter of the previous word. (For example: orange, eggplant, tomato, onion . . .)
- **Remember the value of conversation.** Talk with your kids about what you did during the day or what you have planned for the next one. That will help pass the time and encourage restaurant-appropriate behavior.
- **Decide who’s “on duty.”** Decide ahead of time which adult will have to interrupt his or her meal, should a child act up. Take turns at each meal.
- **Use time-outs.** If your normally polite child acts up, immediately and quietly take him or her outside. This will avoid embarrassment, and will be a lesson to the child. You shouldn’t have to do this more than a few times before your child gets the message.
- **Make exceptions.** Your child may normally drink milk with dinner. Permit him or her to have a Shirley Temple (7Up and grenadine with a cherry). This will make dinner out seem special.
- **Use rewards and bribery.** Tell kids that if they behave well and eat their dinner, they’ll get a bowl of vanilla ice cream for desert.
- **Be flexible.** If the kids are tired, skip the appetizers or order food that is quick to prepare. If they’ve reached their limit, have one parent take them outside to stretch their legs or hunt down a dessert spot while the other parent pays the bill.
- **Slow down.** Before dinner, take them back to the hotel for a nap to rest up or to a playground to let loose some pent-up energy.
- **Eat early.** If you plan to eat at a more elegant restaurant or if it’s the weekend, arrive early, before the restaurant gets full. (Plan a post-dinner walk or activity, such as seeing the sea lions at Fisherman’s Wharf in summer or the Union Square Christmas tree in winter.)
- **Do lunch.** Some of the city’s finer restaurants are open for lunch. Why not make lunch your special meal of the day? The ambience may be more kid-friendly, the prices lower, and your children better behaved. Then you can all have pizza for dinner, and you won’t feel you’ve missed out.
- **Relax.** San Franciscans are very friendly, and most restaurants are delighted to have children come dine with them.

header, and restaurants that have positioned themselves as combining high-quality ingredients and value in the Moderate column. The Expensive category includes afternoon tea in hotels, usually costly, but delightful if you like that sort of thing. Very Expensive restaurants are for the evenings you've hired a babysitter, unless you're rearing a future Julia Child or Jacques Pepin and wish to inspire her or him. Tax in San Francisco is 8.5%. Tip 15% for good service; more for exemplary service; and at your discretion for poor service.

CHAINS, CHAINS, CHAINS & FAST FOOD You don't find a lot of national chains or even fast-food

restaurants in any but the most touristed neighborhoods, such as Fisherman's Wharf and Union Square. For the most part you'll find San Franciscans, with or without kids, prefer chef-driven restaurants with unique identities. As for fast food, you can't do much better than a burrito, but I do understand that kids crave pizzas or burgers once in a while. Instead of pointing you to the nearest McDonald's however, I have done my best to offer alternatives including locally owned diners and regional chains of Italian restaurants, noodle bars, and pizza parlors.

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2 Union Square/The Financial District**VERY EXPENSIVE**

Fleur de Lys ★★ FRENCH Ironically, the first entry in a chapter called "Family Friendly Dining" doesn't really fit that description. It is one of two exceptions I've listed for a night when you have a babysitter and want to experience one of the top restaurants in the country. It's clear from the moment you walk in the door and see the regal, intimate dining room, tented in 900 yards of richly-patterned red and gold fabric, that Fleur de Lys is the epitome of ultra-luxurious dining. In keeping with the warm, inviting decor, the impeccable service is comfortably unpretentious.

As for the awe-inspiring food, the man behind the mastery is award-winning chef Hubert Keller, a native of the Alsace region of France who has trained with some of the top chefs in the world. Keller's kitchen is firmly rooted in classic French cooking, but includes some playful touches inspired by his new country, such as truffle-infused popcorn and an amazing mini foie gras hamburger. Choose from a menu of three, four, or five courses and expect to be blown away by such offerings as seared Moroccan spiced sea scallops with pomegranate *jus*, cauliflower flan, and Osetra caviar or veal *tournedos* scented with foamy lobster bisque and veal essence. A vegetarian tasting menu, with options like truffled white bean soup with green garlic fondue and wild mushrooms, is also available. The desserts and cheese selection are obscenely delicious, and the wine list includes several hundred selections. (Although I've noted this isn't a place for kids, I did once spot two pre-teen boys dining with their parents; they were well behaved and seemed to enjoy the experience.)

777 Sutter St. (between Jones and Taylor sts.) ☎ 415/673-7779. www.fleurdeyss.com. Reservations essential. 3-course menu \$68, 4-course \$76, 5-course \$88. Mon–Thurs 6–9:30pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:30pm. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Muni: 2-Clement, 3-Jackson, 4-Sutter, or 27-Bryant to Jones St.

EXPENSIVE

Grand Café ★ FRENCH The restaurant certainly lives up to its name in terms of decor and style: from the soaring ceilings, massive columns, and wall-sized murals that depict turn-of-the-20th-century Paris to the fine food, this brasserie is abuzz with energy and activity. Located next to the Hotel Monaco and close to the theaters around Union Square, tourists and locals gravitate to the stunning dining room for California-inspired French dishes prepared in an open kitchen with a theatrical flair. Appetizers may include herb-encrusted soft shell crab, to be followed by braised rabbit or sautéed skate, and, for dessert, a very tasty banana cream pie. Although the food has improved since the arrival of seasoned chef Paul Arenstam, it is not quite as majestic as the room that houses it.

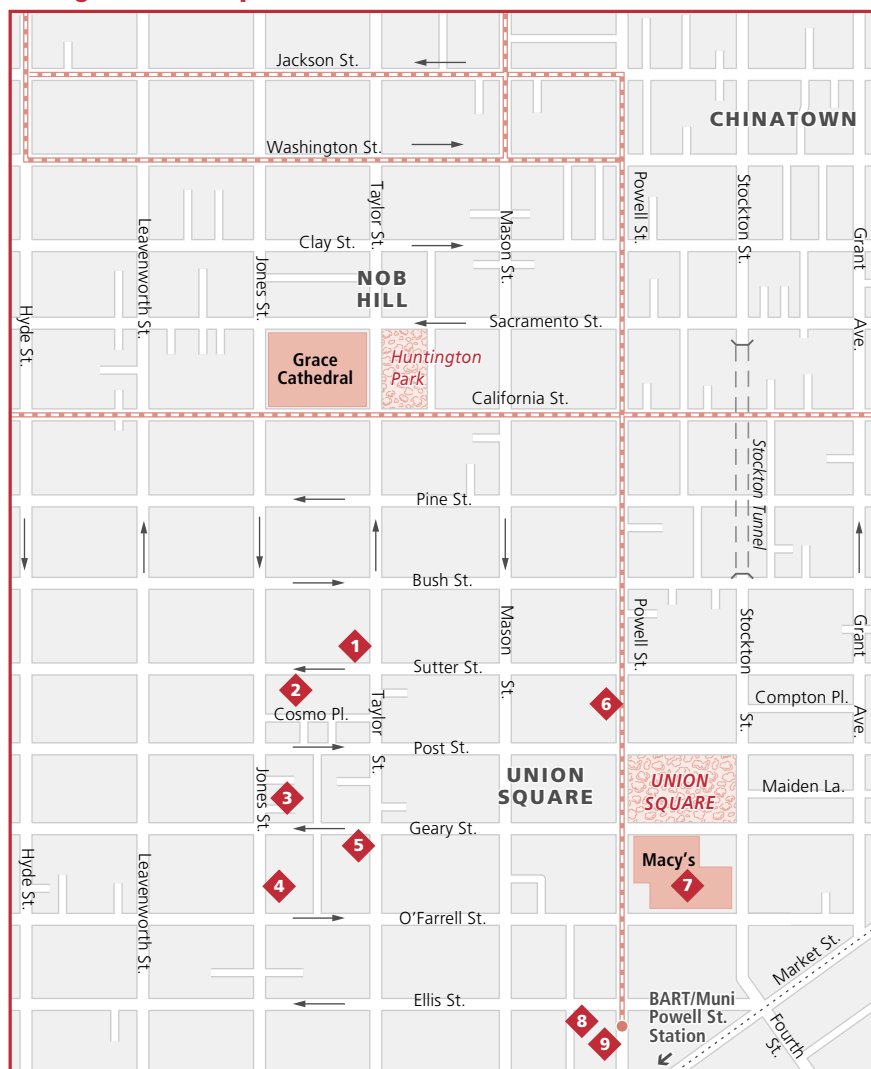
For a taste of grandeur without the grand prices, check out the adjacent, more casual Petit Café for pizzas, salads, sandwiches, and desserts. Even in the main room, children may order off the Petit Café menu.

501 Geary St. (at Taylor St.) ☎ 415/292-0101. www.grandcafe-sf.com. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$12–\$17 lunch, \$19–\$25 dinner; Petit Café \$7–\$16. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Breakfast Mon–Fri 7–10:30am, Sat 8–10:30am, Sun brunch 9am–2:30pm; lunch Mon–Sat 11:30am–2:30pm; dinner Sun–Thurs 5:30–10pm, Fri–Sat 5:30–11pm. Petite Café, Sun–Thurs 11:30am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–midnight. Muni: Powell-Hyde or Powell-Mason cable car to Union Sq.; walk 2 blocks west.

Millennium VEGETARIAN/VEGAN Admittedly, Millennium is not for everyone. Some vegetarian eateries are so good even the most avowed carnivores will find something to love. One such place is Greens in the Marina (p. 130). But Millennium is not just vegetarian. It's vegan, meaning you won't find any animal products on the premises. Even honey is a no-no (although I'm told there's a bottle of the stuff hidden in the back). Without eggs or dairy, concocting a meal meat-eaters can sink their teeth into becomes more challenging.

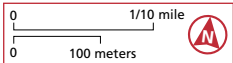
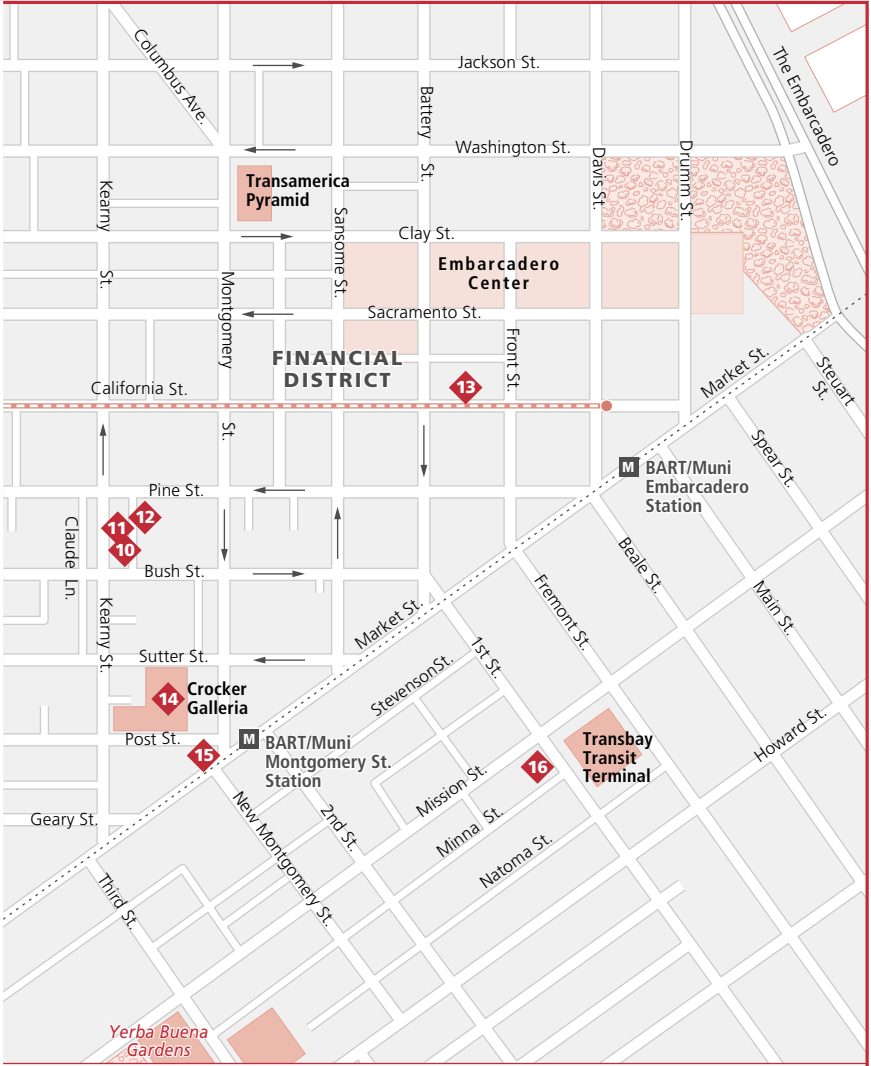
But I list this place precisely because so many young adults are opting out on meat these days, and at least here teens won't be groaning at the menu and then ordering little more than plain lettuce leaves. They can choose instead from various meatless concoctions that are rich in flavors and protein. One note of advice: stick to dishes that don't try to mimic ones traditionally made with animal products. If you find fried green tomatoes or Indian samosa pastries with roasted eggplant and zucchini on the seasonally changing menu, you won't be disappointed. But the warm spinach salad with tofu tempura left me wishing for




Dining in Union Square & the Financial District



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 Dottie's True Blue Cafe **4**
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Lee's Sandwiches **11**
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 Puccini and Pinetti **8**
 Sam's Grill **10**
 Sanraku **1**
 Sears Fine Foods **6**
 Specialty's Café and Bakery **15**
 Tadich Grill **13**



-  BART/Muni
-  Cable Car
-  One Way

real goat cheese, and the truffled vegetable gratin with garlic chive polenta cried out for real cream. One plus is that the restaurant can accommodate any food aversion or allergy. Call ahead and let them know your kid is allergic to eggs, dairy, soy, wheat, and nuts, and they'll happily put something together.

580 Geary St. (at Jones St.). ☎ 415/345-3900. www.millenniumrestaurant.com. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$18–\$21. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 5:30–9:30pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:30pm. Muni: 27-Bryant or 38-Geary to Jones St., or Powell-Hyde or Powell-Mason cable car to Union Sq. and walk 2 blocks west.

MODERATE

Puccini and Pinetti ITALIAN This is one Union Square restaurant the kids will definitely enjoy. Children are awfully pleased with the restaurant's activity pack, which includes crayons, and the make-your-own pizza option, where servers bring the pizza dough and fixings to the table so young chefs can create exactly what they want. For adults, the menu offers plenty of hearty pasta dishes and well-known Italian favorites like eggplant parmigiana and veal piccata. Service is considerate, and the colorful decor welcoming. You can treat Puccini and Pinetti as a casual dinner stop or make an evening of it.

129 Ellis St. (at Cyril Magnin St.). ☎ 415/392-5500. www.pucciniandpinetti.com. Kids' menu, highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$12–\$16 lunch, \$14–\$20 dinner; kid's menu \$3–\$6. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–3:30pm; Mon–Thurs 4–10pm; Fri–Sat 4–11pm; Sun 5–10pm. Muni: Powell-Hyde or Powell-Mason cable car to Union Sq.; walk 2 blocks south on Powell to Ellis and turn right.

Sanraku ★ *Finds* JAPANESE/SUSHI Every neighborhood in San Francisco has a smattering of restaurants boasting “artistic,” “exciting,” or just plain cheap sushi. That is all well and good, but raw fish is raw fish. It should be fresh and prepared by sushi chefs who know what they're doing. Although it's tough to mess up a California roll, it's equally hard to serve a truly delicious slice of *maguro* (tuna) sashimi, but Sanraku succeeds in doing just that. The Spartan decor and casual atmosphere belie the truly fresh and well-prepared sushi. Some people may wonder what a sushi joint is doing in a family guide, but at least in these parts kids are well acquainted with sushi. My family and I are regulars here. While Dad and I sip sake, the girls enjoy steamed *edamame* (soybeans), avocado rolls, and tempura. Sanraku is moderately priced, but ordering a la carte could edge the bill into the expensive category. For more dollar-conscious options, consider the combination dinners, such as sushi and sashimi, sushi and tempura, or sushi and teriyaki beef, which come with steamed rice, a house salad, and fresh fruit.

704 Sutter St. (at Taylor St.). ☎ 415/771-0803. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$8.50–\$25. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 11am–10pm. Muni: 2-Clement, 3-Jackson, 4-Sutter, or 27-Bryant to Taylor St.

Tadich Grill AMERICAN/SEAFOOD People come to the Tadich Grill as much for the history as for the food. Businesspeople and tourists alike appreciate the clubby, traditional feel of San Francisco's oldest restaurant, which started life in a different location over 150 years ago. The long bar, dark wood interior and gruff waiters may seem intimidating to little ones, so settle the family into one of the many cozy booths to better enjoy the old-time feel. Stick to uncomplicated and traditional dishes, such as shrimp *louie*, grilled fish of the day, clam chowder or creamed spinach, and you will eat well. The Tadich doesn't take reservations, so be prepared to stand in line.

240 California St. (between Front and Battery sts.). ☎ 415/391-2373. Boosters. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$15–\$34. MC, V. Mon–Fri 11am–9:30pm; Sat 11:30am–9:30pm. Muni: F-Market streetcar to Front St. or 1-California or 41-Union bus to California St.

Belden Place—A Slice of Europe in SF

If you want to eat downtown without slumming it at a diner or breaking the bank at a posh, pricey restaurant, come to Belden Place. This alley in the Financial District, bordered by Kearny, Montgomery, Pine, and Bush streets, is lined with moderately priced restaurants cooking up French, Italian, Catalan, and other Mediterranean fare. The lane is patronized by plenty of business people, but the outdoor tables and colorful banners lend an informal feeling, so don't hesitate to bring the kids. Stroll on over and take your pick from the following:

Starting at the Pine Street side of Belden Place is **Brindisi Cucina di Mare** (88 Belden Place; ☎ 415/593-8000), one of the newest restaurants in the alley, specializing in Italian seafood. From stuffed calamari and seafood risotto to plenty of kid-friendly pasta, most main courses are under \$20. Named for its address at 52 Belden Place, **Café 52** (☎ 415/433-5200) serves California-inspired Mediterranean food with a Greek accent, such as lamb or chicken shish kabobs, stuffed grape leaves, and pilaf dishes. The menu of small plates, none over \$11, is great for sharing.

With a name that is also a play on the address, **B44** (44 Belden Place; ☎ 415/986-6287) is a Catalan-style bistro, serving nine kinds of paella, including meat, seafood, and vegetarian at \$17 to \$21 each. Salads, small plates, and dishes such as roasted salt cod or roasted rabbit are also on the menu. The tasty food could be too challenging for less adventurous kids. Just next door, **Plouf** (40 Belden Place; ☎ 415/986-6491) offers mussels prepared seven different ways, as well as French-accented salads, sandwiches, fish, and meats. All lunch items are under \$20, but there aren't many kid-friendly choices on the menu other than fish and chips.

A better choice for families is at 28 Belden Place: **Café Tiramisu** (☎ 415/421-7044; www.cafetiramisu.com). Kids will appreciate the Italian fare, including pasta dishes from \$12 to \$19 that those with smaller appetites can easily share. Main courses like *cioppino*, Italian seafood stew, or veal scaloppini range from \$16 to \$29 (up to \$32 at dinner). The most moderately priced pick of the bunch is Parisian-Bistro inspired **Café Bastille** (22 Belden Place; ☎ 415/986-5673). While parents savor French onion soup, quiche, or grilled steak and fries, kids can share a French hot dog on a baguette with cheese and fries. Most lunch choices are \$9 to \$13, and dinner is just a tad more.

But perhaps you want something more traditional, and you've reached the end of the alley. You're in luck. On the corner at 374 Bush Street you'll find **Sam's Grill** (☎ 415/421-0594), one of the oldest restaurants in San Francisco. Grab a cozy wooden booth and order charcoal-broiled fish, roasted chicken, or a simple pasta dish. Entrees range from \$10 to \$27.

INEXPENSIVE

Blondie's Pizza PIZZA The staff here cuts and sells huge wedges of thick-crust pizzas slathered with tomato sauce, cheese, and various toppings at a constant pace. At \$2.75 a slice, you can feed an army and still have change left over for a cable car ticket. You can order pepperoni, but if you ask for carrots and broccoli, you've even got yourself a healthy meal. You won't find tables here, but the benches at Union Square are just 2 blocks away.

63 Powell St. (between Ellis and Market sts.). ☎ 415/982-6168. Pizza \$2.75–\$3 per slice. No credit cards. (AE, MC, V accepted on orders over \$30.) Mon–Sat 10am–10pm; Sun 10am–9:30pm. Muni: Powell-Hyde or Powell-Mason cable car to Ellis St.

Dottie's True Blue Cafe ☞ AMERICAN/BREAKFAST The best meal to have here is breakfast (many locals and tourists claim it's the best in town), but the place is so small that you'll have to wait—unless you have a family of early risers. The big portions of house-made breads, cornmeal pancakes, French toast, eggs, gourmet sausages, fresh orange juice, and cheery trim make the wait well worth it. The lunch menu features hearty salads, sandwiches, and burgers. Among the chintz and souvenir snow globes is a poster of Josephine Baker with bared breasts, just so you know.

522 Jones St. (between Geary and O'Farrell sts.). ☎ 415/885-2767. Highchairs. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$5–\$10. DISC, MC, V. Wed–Sun 7:30am–3pm. Muni: Powell-Hyde or Powell-Mason cable car to Union Sq.; walk 3 blocks west on Geary to Jones and turn left.

Sears Fine Foods AMERICAN/BREAKFAST A one-time Union Square institution famous for its stack of 18 silver dollar–sized Swedish pancakes, Sears was turned over to new management in 2004. The first step was a face-lift that included lifting the old carpet to show off the original hexagonal tile flooring and, overall, returning a sense of polish and pride to the old-time decor. The new manager retained the old menu, including the famous Swedish pancakes and the reasonable prices. In addition to the pancakes, the waffles and Canadian bacon are very tasty. The lunch menu includes hamburgers, a tuna melt on rye, and a BLT Sears says it will only serve when the tomatoes are good. All lunch options are under \$10, making this place a good bargain. The newly-added dinner menu, with entrees like New York strip steak or linguini with red seafood sauce, puts this restaurant into the moderate category price-wise. Because I'd just as soon go elsewhere for dinner, I've left Sears categorized as inexpensive.

439 Powell St. (between Post and Sutter sts.). ☎ 415/986-1160. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$7–\$13 breakfast/lunch, \$14–\$22 dinner. AE, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 6:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 6:30am–11pm. Muni: Powell-Hyde or Powell-Mason cable car to Union Sq.

3 South of Market**EXPENSIVE**

Palace Hotel ☞ AFTERNOON TEA Tea under the stained-glass dome of the Garden Court at the Palace Hotel, which is every bit as grand as the poshest hotels in London, is a celebratory affair even if your feet hurt from sightseeing. Linen and silver grace the elegant tables, and the menu consists of the customary dainty sandwiches, scones, and sweets, served with tea of your choice. The Palace cleverly offers a special “Princess” and “Prince” tea for children 12 and under. Along with the sandwiches and pastries, children receive a crown and scepter, and are treated royally as well.

Fun Fact High Tea

The British tradition of high tea is quite different from afternoon tea. High tea was a hearty meal eaten by the working class around the kitchen table, which often featured high-back chairs—hence the name. Afternoon tea is a more delicate affair with guests perched on the end of cushioned chairs and settees, with the lady of the house playing “Mother,” a term of endearment bestowed on the person in charge of pouring the tea.

2 New Montgomery St. (at Market St.). ☎ 415/512-1111. www.sfpalace.com. Kids’ menu, highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Tea service \$30–\$40; children’s tea \$25. AE, DC, MC, V. Sat 2–4pm. Muni: Any streetcar to Montgomery St. station.

Restaurant LuLu ★ CALIFORNIA/FRENCH There’s seldom less than a roaring multitude packing the bar and taking up every seat at Restaurant LuLu, one of the more popular and enduring SoMa restaurants. Seasonally changing dishes like leek, goat cheese, and bacon tart; stuffed pumpkin blossoms; and grilled prawn risotto are meant to be shared and are apportioned accordingly. Rotisserie specials alternate during the week—Wednesday may be leg of lamb day, while Saturday is reserved for roast duck—but the mouth-watering rosemary-scented chicken is a staple. (Just make sure you’re not seated too close to the rotisserie, lest you come out smelling like smoked meat.) With its upscale clientele and sophisticated menu, Lulu’s feels quite grown-up, but the recently-added children’s menu, offering linguini, cheese pizza, or a grilled cheese sandwich, means kids will find something they can enjoy as well. Moreover, the large, multi-level space and constant buzz of diners means you won’t have to worry about noisy children making a scene; no one will hear them. In its price category, Lulu’s is the most family-friendly option in the neighborhood.

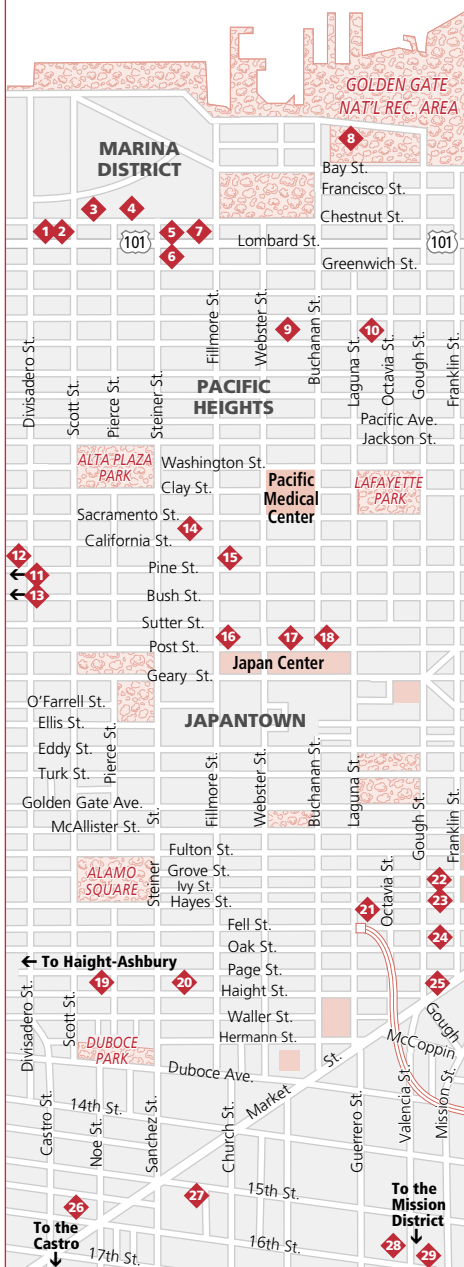
816 Folsom St. (between 4th and 5th sts.). ☎ 415/495-5775. www.restaurantlulu.com. Kids’ menu, highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$15–\$30; kids’ menu \$4.25–\$11. AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–10:30pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–11:30pm. Muni: 30-Stockton or 45-Union-Stockton bus to Folsom St.

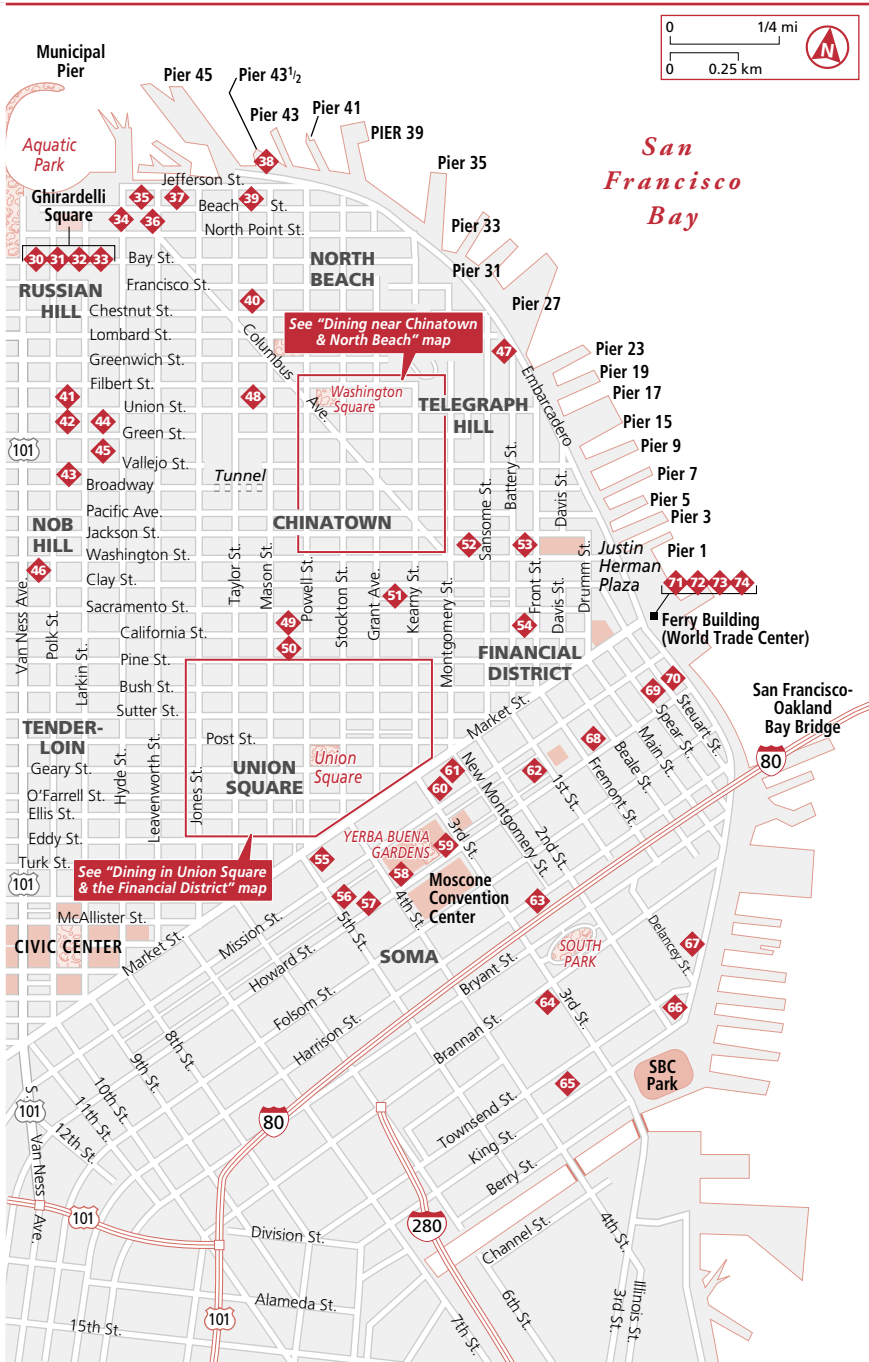
Town Hall ★★ AMERICAN This outstanding tribute to New American cuisine opened to great fanfare in early 2004, and the hype is well deserved. The co-owning brothers Mitchell and Steven Rosenthal earned their fame as chefs at one of San Francisco’s more upscale, glitzy restaurants, Postrio, but the mood at Town Hall is much more low-key. Housed in a hundred-year-old former electric warehouse, Town Hall’s decor evokes early American architecture and sensibilities, with exposed brick walls, crisp white ribbed wainscoting, and Craftsman style tables and chairs. The food echoes the American feel, drawing on traditions from around the country, with a special nod to New Orleans. Starters may include cornmeal-fried oysters on baby spinach with creamy bacon dressing or warm biscuits with local ham and pepper jam. Two stellar dishes we’ve enjoyed include wild king salmon with corn and shrimp hash, cherry tomatoes, and hush puppies and a naturally raised pork chop with smashed potatoes, English peas, and fava beans in garlic parsley butter. For dessert, don’t miss the butterscotch and chocolate *pot de crème*. I’ve spotted pre-teens here at dinnertime, but you may prefer bringing the kids here for lunch. Dinner is still quite a scene.

342 Howard St. (at Fremont St.). ☎ 415/908-3900. www.townhallsf.com. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$10–\$17 lunch, \$19–\$26 dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–2:30pm and 5:30–10pm (until 11pm Fri–Sat), Sun 5:30–10pm. Muni: Any streetcar on Market to Fremont St.; walk 2 blocks south.

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Food Courts

What could be more democratic than a food court? Having a wide variety of options reduces strife for families with different tastes, which is just about every family I know. Also, kids have fun waiting in the line of their choice and exercising a bit of independence. In the Union Square area, the **Crocker Galleria** at 50 Post St., at Sutter Street, has a terrific food court on the third level, open Monday through Friday until 6pm and Saturdays until 5pm. It's always packed at lunch with office workers seeking a quick, inexpensive bite. At the Fountain Café you'll find breakfast bagels, eggs, and baked goods in the morning and sandwiches and burgers at lunch. Get a chili fix at Chili Up; the different versions come with tortillas or corn bread. In addition to American food, you'll find counters for Leila Mediterranean Cuisine, 360 Degree Gourmet Burritos, New Asia Restaurant, and Niji Japanese Grill, among other international options. To avoid the rush, arrive before 11:30am or after 1pm and grab a table in the light-filled atrium.

The Cellar in Macy's on Geary and Stockton Streets, is not technically a food court, but it does have a Jamba Juice, a Wolfgang Puck Express Café, a Boudin bakery, a Ben & Jerry's, and a cookie counter. If you're in SoMa, don't bother with the unimpressive concourse food court at the **San Francisco Shopping Centre** at 5th and Mission. It's filled with low-end Chinese, Mexican, Italian, and American food that may fill your stomach but will leave you cold. If you're hungry and in the vicinity, the **Metreon's** food court at 4th and Mission streets is a much better bet. The restaurants, all part of small, locally owned chains, are higher quality and dressier than the mall standard. Firewood Cafe provides pizzas and excellent salads, and Luna Azul makes generously-sized burritos. You'll also find tasty Asian specialties and first-class Japanese fare at these branches of the Long Life Noodle Co. and Sanraku, which are described on p. 121 and 108, respectively.

The most beautiful food court is **Rincon Center**, at 101 Spear St., between Mission and Howard streets. The 1930s Moderne/Art Deco building is on the National Register of Historic Places and contains an 85-foot waterfall inside the dramatic atrium and murals in the former post office lobby. For a truly cosmopolitan experience, you can send emissaries to Arabi for top-notch Middle Eastern salads, to Sorabol for Korean grilled meats and soup, to Thai to Go for pad Thai, to Wazwan for Indian dishes and naan bread, and to Taqueria Pepe's for burritos. Burgers, pizzas, sandwiches, and soups are also to be had. Yank Sing, the preeminent dim sum restaurant, has a lovely dining room here, which I highly recommend if you have time for a more leisurely lunch. With the exception of Yank Sing, which is open daily, the restaurants in Rincon Center are open weekdays from 11am to 3pm.

MODERATE

Koh Samui & The Monkey THAI Thai seems to be the new Chinese, with spring rolls and pad Thai having taken the place of broccoli beef and cashew chicken as favored take-out fare. But if you want a break from the “typical” Thai food you find most places these days, come to Koh Samui. The chic decor featuring rare antiques, unusual menu items, and servers clad in traditional Thai attire all make clear this restaurant seeks to elevate Thai cuisine to a more memorable dining experience. Combinations sure to whet your appetite include crushed sesame scallops in yellow curry sauce or pumpkin curry chicken. Certainly, you’ll find plenty of familiar menu items, from green papaya salad to green curry chicken, but the presentation has a refined California sensibility about it (which also means smaller portions—perhaps an inconvenience when feeding a family of hungry diners).

Despite the restaurant’s refined touches, the atmosphere is still relaxed and family-friendly. Order the kids the wok-tossed noodles with peanut sauce or even some of the satays. As long as you steer clear of anything marked with an asterisk (for spicy), the kids will be fine. Be sure to order the fried bananas for dessert. “The Monkey” part of the restaurant name refers to the attractive shop next door, which sells Thai antiques.

415 Brannan St. (at 3rd St.). ☎ 415/369-0007. www.kohsamuiandthemonkey.com. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations accepted. Main courses \$8–\$13. MC, V. Daily 11am–3pm and 5–10pm. Muni: 30-Stockton or 45-Union to Brannan St.

Pazzia ★ *Finds* ITALIAN This restaurant, a quick walk from the Yerba Buena Center and the Museum of Modern Art, serves simple and satisfying dishes like excellent pizza, delicious pasta, and roasted meats and chicken. The uncomplicated menu is a delightful California twist on traditional Italian fare. The staff is warm and friendly to kids, and it’s definitely a family-oriented little place. If you’re in the area and want a real, sit-down meal, there’s no better pick for the price.

337 3rd St. (between Folsom and Harrison sts.). ☎ 415/512-1693. Highchairs. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$8.75–\$25. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri lunch 11:30am–2:30pm; Mon–Thurs dinner 5:30–10pm, Fri–Sat dinner 5:30–10:30pm. Muni: Any streetcar to Montgomery St. station; 15-3rd, 30-Stockton, or 45-Union to Folsom St.

INEXPENSIVE

Mel’s Drive-in HAMBURGERS This popular diner/burger chain has a few locations throughout the city. See p. 132 for a full review.

801 Mission St. (at 4th St.; 3 blocks south of Union Sq.). ☎ 415/227-4477. www.melsdrive-in.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$5–\$15. MC, V. Daily 6am–2pm. Muni: 30-Stockton or 45-Union-Stockton bus to Mission St.

4 Nob Hill**EXPENSIVE**

Laurel Court AFTERNOON TEA The Fairmont Hotel’s lovely Laurel Court restaurant, with ivory pillars surrounding lighted domes, and a low ceiling that actually makes the space feel more intimate, is open for meals almost all day long. Taking the California Street cable car from the foot of Market up to Nob Hill for breakfast sounds like fun to me, but you’ll spend a small fortune on your waffles or eggs. Afternoon tea is dear as well, but seems more fitting given the surroundings, and will be especially appreciated by any girls in the

Value Bargain Alert!

For a measly \$7 and a one-drink minimum each, you can feed the kids at the Fairmont Hotel's Tonga Room during happy hour from 5 to 7pm on weekdays. Polynesian appetizers, including pot stickers, chicken drummettes, Shanghai noodles, fruit, and crudités will fill 'em up, and the tropical storm cued to thunder on the half-hour will provide entertainment. There's nothing else like it.

family. The kid's tea menu isn't exactly to code: the crustless sandwiches include peanut butter and jelly and tuna salad, and hot cider and cocoa are non-tea alternatives.

Fairmont Hotel, 950 Mason St. (at California St.). ☎ 415/772-5259. www.fairmont.com. Kids' menu, high-chairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Tea service \$30–\$50, children's tea \$30. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 6–11am, noon–2:30pm, 6–10pm; afternoon tea daily 2:30–4:30pm. Muni: 1-California bus or California St. Cable Car to the Fairmont Hotel.

5 Chinatown

MODERATE

Great Eastern Restaurant CHINESE The specialty here is seafood, which you can observe swimming around in tanks against the back wall. Dinner doesn't come fresher than this, so if you're in the mood for steamed whole rockfish, crab served in a dozen ways, shrimp, lobster, or whatever's in season, Great Eastern is the best choice in the 'hood. Just don't let the waiter steer you away from the fish tanks towards more "typical" Chinese-American fare; you'll get the same food you could have gotten for less at a corner Chinese take-out joint. That's what happened to us some years back when we were tourists in San Francisco—now we know better. Like the vast majority of Chinatown restaurants, this one has big tables for extended families. The basement dining room is comfortable, but we prefer the upstairs. One of the nice things about eating in Chinatown is that you're almost expected to have kids in tow.

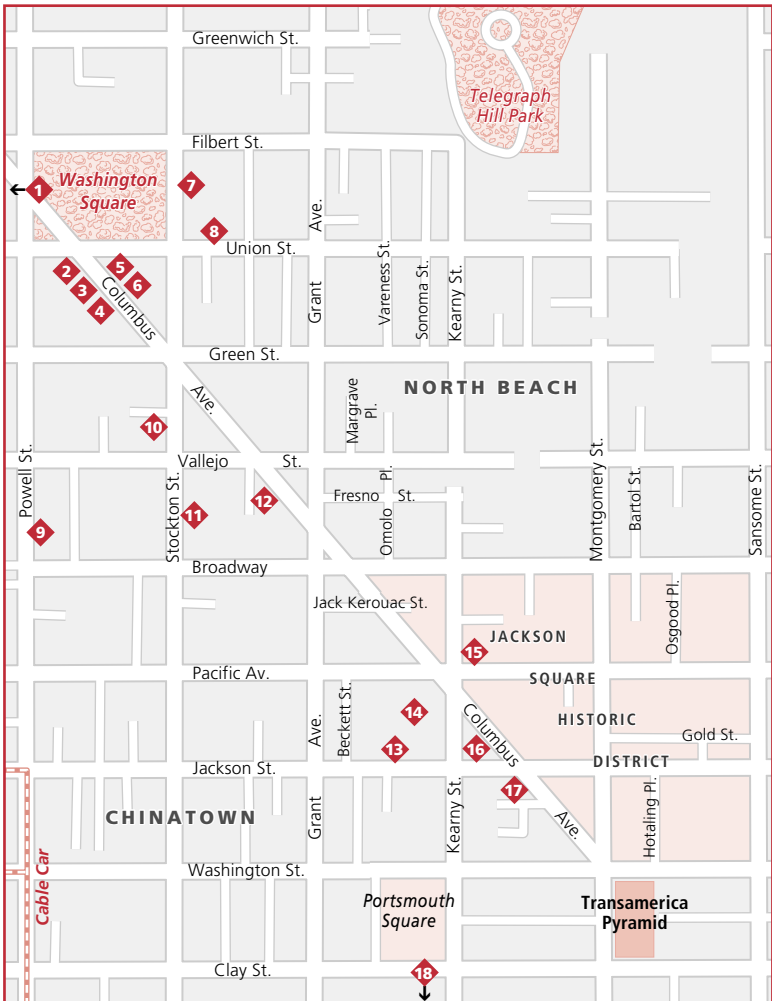
649 Jackson St. (between Grant and Kearny sts.). ☎ 415/986-2500. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$8–\$30. AE, MC, V. Daily 10am–1am. Muni: 15-3rd St. bus to Jackson St.

INEXPENSIVE

Hunan's Home Restaurant CHINESE I was struck by a recent newspaper article stating that 39% of U.S. kids aged 10 to 13 surveyed said Chinese was their favorite type of food. My guess is these kids were thinking about well-known American-Chinese favorites like cashew nut chicken and sweet and sour pork when they answered the pollster. Well, Hunan Home is made for them. I'm sure your kids will enjoy their meal as much as mine did at this place, which offers all the old favorites in abundance. Tired of Kung Pao chicken? Try Kung Pao squid. Even if you've seen it all before, rest assured that the quality will be high and the portions generous. The family dinner option includes egg rolls and wonton soup for \$13 per person. There's also a fish tank the kids will enjoy—just don't tell them it's dinner.

622 Jackson St. (at Kearny St.). ☎ 415/982-2844. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$6–\$13. AE, DISC, DC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11:30am–9:30pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–10pm. Muni: 15-3rd St. bus to Jackson St.

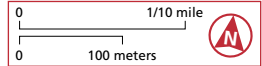
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- Naan-N-Curry **17**
- Panelli Bros. **10**

- Pasta Pomodoro **2**
- R & G Lounge **18**
- Rose Pistola **6**
- Tommaso's Restaurant **15**
- Trattoria Contadina **1**
- Victoria Pastry Co. **11**

Cable Car



Fun Fact How to Tell Your Hakka from Your Hunan

Chinese cuisine comes in many guises. If the menu doesn't state what province the recipes hail from, can you tell your Shanghai from your Szechuan? Here's a little cheat sheet you can use to impress your kids.

Cantonese Most of the Chinese restaurants in this chapter fall into this category. In the wet, coastal province of Canton, seafood and vegetables grew in abundance. Cantonese food thus relies on fresh ingredients, which are mildly seasoned with flavors like ginger, soy sauce, and spring onions. Specialties include dim sum, noodles, seafood, and vegetable dishes.

Hakka Hakka peoples' ancestors settled in the less fertile, hilly regions of southern China. Their cuisine uses dried and preserved ingredients and little seafood. Specialties include salt-baked chicken, stuffed bean curd, and crispy meatballs.

Hunan Hot weather in the mountainous Hunan region called for strong spices to help preserve food and mask spoilage. Today refrigeration keeps food fresh, but Hunan's fondness for chili peppers, shallots, garlic, and other piquant flavors remains. Familiar dishes include stir-fries, sweet and sour chicken, and Hunan beef.

Mandarin Mandarin, or Northern Chinese, cuisine stems from the nation's capital, Beijing, and neighboring provinces. Specialties include Peking duck and hot and sour soup.

Shanghai Hailing from the eastern coast of China, Shanghai cuisine is noted for using a lot of alcohol and sugar, in addition to soy sauce. Specialties include drunken chicken and crispy shrimp balls.

Szechuan This western Chinese fare is well known for its spicy, flavorful seasonings. Chile pepper pastes and oils are liberally used as cooks strive to combine hot, sour, sweet, and salty tastes in dishes. Specialties include twice-cooked pork and tea leaf duck.

Lichee Garden CHINESE This longtime, consistently good Cantonese restaurant is even a favorite among Chinatown residents. Lichee Garden's lengthy menu is filled with familiar items like egg foo young, sweet-and-sour pork, delicious wonton soup, and every other dish you remember from your own childhood, assuming you weren't raised in China. The kitchen caters to those who can't make the leap from American broccoli to Chinese broccoli by offering both, but the menu includes more adventurous fare as well. The list of seafood showcases many scallop inventions, and live lobster and crab in season—both highly recommended. The excellent dim sum makes a great lunch option. Large and bright, the dining room has seen lots and lots of families over the 25-plus years it's been open. Service is businesslike and you won't have to wait long for your meal. Technically, it's not in Chinatown, but because it's just 1 block west of it, it's best listed here.

1416 Powell St. (between Broadway and Vallejo sts.). ☎ 415/397-2290. www.licheegarden.citysearch.com. Highchairs. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$5.50–\$14. MC, V. Daily 7am–9:15pm. Muni: 30-Stockton or 45-Union-Stockton bus to Broadway.

R & G Lounge 🌟 *Finds* CHINESE When you walk into this favored joint at the edge of Chinatown, you've got two options: proceeding upstairs to the fancier dining room, or descending into the basement. If you have little ones with you, it's likely the host will send you downstairs. This troubled my husband greatly; the linoleum flooring, fluorescent lighting, and omnipresent mirrors of the downstairs dining room offended his aesthetic sensibilities. But the decor doesn't seem to bother most diners, who return time and again to R&G for authentically prepared Cantonese fare featuring lots of fresh seafood and plenty of meat dishes as well. Salt and pepper crab is a big hit, as is the smoky barbecued pork. Something about putting all the dishes on a big lazy Susan seems to encourage adventuresome dining, at least with my kids, who happily munched on all kinds of crab, pork, and noodle dishes. For a real conversation-stopper, call 24 hours in advance and order the sweet-rice-stuffed chicken.

631 Kearny St. (at Commercial St.). ☎ 415/982-7877. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$7–\$25 lunch, \$10–\$50 dinner. AE, DISC, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–9:30pm; Fri 11am–10pm; Sat 11:30am–10pm; Sun 11:30am–9:30pm. Muni: 30-Stockton bus.

6 The Embarcadero/South Beach

EXPENSIVE

Kokkari Estiatorio 🌟🌟 GREEK This modern Greek restaurant provides a memorable and upscale dining experience that you can comfortably enjoy with kids. Although the subtle lighting, crowded bar and roaring fire in the first room suggest a more adult establishment, don't be concerned. The expansive back room, made to feel warmer with the inclusion of heavy wood furniture and richly-hued tapestries, is an ideal place for families and large parties. The cozy booths along the hall connecting the two rooms are also very suitable for diners with kids. The delectable menu is based on traditional Greek cuisine, but is inspired by the Bay Area's bounty of fresh, local ingredients and, as such, changes seasonally. At any time of the year, however, look for such house specialties as moussaka (eggplant and lamb casserole) and delectable lamb chops made with naturally-raised Niman Ranch meat. The plate of traditional Greek spreads and pita bread is great for sharing, but is less inspired than some of the more exotic appetizers, such as fried zucchini cakes with yogurt-mint dressing, or crispy smelts with lemon and parsley. For finicky eaters, the kitchen can fix up a plate of buttered orzo pasta. The staff also insists the traditional spinach and cheese pastry spanakopita is a hit with little ones . . . Sounds like a great, sneaky way to get them to eat their spinach!

200 Jackson St. (at Front St.). ☎ 415/981-0983. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$9.50–\$23 lunch, \$15–\$34 dinner. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2:30pm; Mon–Thurs 5:30–10pm; Fri 5:30–11pm; Sat 5–11pm. Muni: 10-Townsend to Jackson St.; walk 2 blocks east.

MODERATE

Bocadillos 🌟 SPANISH/TAPAS Bocadillos had just opened when we visited, and new places sometimes have a knack for folding up and going away just as quickly as they appeared. But there's good reason to believe that Bocadillos is here to stay—not just until this guidebook hits store shelves but well beyond then—and so I took the plunge and decided to include it. For one, even though the wait staff was still green, the collection of Spanish *tapas* on the menu was clearly well thought out and prepared by experienced hands. Second, the location between the Embarcadero and the Financial District, just below North Beach, has seen quite a few dining options emerge lately—meaning more

people will be trekking to these parts for a good meal. Moreover, Bocadillos is already gathering up rave reviews in the local dining scene. Finally, it's in good hands with talented chef Gerald Hirigoyen, whose Basque restaurant Piperade my husband and I are very keen on.

While Piperade may be too refined and pricy for a family meal (which is why I didn't list it here), Bocadillos is moderately priced and has a low-key attitude enhanced by the long communal table in the center of its small dining room. As for the food, every one of the clever and unusual *tapas* is delightful—from the roasted peppers to the lamb chops with mango and peach chutney.

710 Montgomery St. (at Washington St.). ☎ 415/982-2622. No reservations. *Tapas* \$3–\$12. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 7am–10pm; Fri 7am–10:30pm; Sat 5–10pm. Muni: 12-Folsom to Pacific and walk 2 blocks south or 15-3rd St. to Jackson St and walk 1 block south.

Fog City Diner AMERICAN A San Francisco institution immortalized in a Visa commercial, the Fog City Diner has quite a few things going for it: terrific location, a fun metallic exterior, sleek wood interior, festive atmosphere, and great outdoor area. Because it's located near Levi's Plaza, kids can climb around the fountain on the opposite side of Battery Street (next to Il Fornaio) or run around in the minipark next door. In fair weather, the outdoor seating lets you enjoy the bay views and green space. As for the food, the children are sure to be satisfied. The kids' menu features all the usual fare (hot dogs, grilled cheese, buttered noodles, kids' sundaes) and comes complete with a pack of crayons as well. The grown-up menu, on the other hand, tries a little too hard. Although it's nice that they've branched out from more common diner fare, some of the more inventive creations—like mu shu pork burritos filled with stir-fried veggies—are not always as tasty as they look on the menu. You're best off sticking to the more basic items like the burgers or the “Cobb” sandwich. Last time I checked, the cayenne-peppered onion rings were good, too.

1300 Battery St. (at Embarcadero). ☎ 415/982-2000. www.fogcitydiner.com. Kids' menu, highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$11–\$19; kids' menu all items \$5.95. DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri 11am–11pm; Sat 10:30am–11pm; Sun 10:30am–9pm. Muni: 10-Townsend bus or F-Market streetcar to Battery St.

Slanted Door ★★☆☆ VIETNAMESE This may well be the most popular restaurant in San Francisco. No matter that it has twice relocated to bigger spaces—moving from its original site in the Mission to a larger space in the Embarcadero to its current location in an enormous corner of the Ferry Building—the huge space, overlooking the water and framed by walls of glass, is still nearly impossible to get into without reservations. Even the expansive bar area has an hour-long wait on weekend evenings. But fame has not made Charles Phan, the owner behind this success story, rest on his laurels. The restaurant continues to produce mouth-watering delicacies based on traditional Vietnamese dishes like claypot beef and lemongrass tofu, and the rave reviews keep pouring in. Children will have enough to choose from in the appetizer section—the fresh spring rolls don't include any icky mushrooms, by the way—and no one can go wrong with a bowl of *phô bó*, Vietnamese beef soup with noodles. This isn't particularly a kid-centered restaurant, although Bill Clinton did once eat at the Valencia St. location with Chelsea. Nonetheless, the food is such a treat for adults that you might want to ask your kids to rise to the occasion.

1 Market St. (at Embarcadero). ☎ 415/861-8032. www.slanteddoor.com. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$7.50–19 lunch, \$10–\$29 dinner. AE, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–3pm; Sun–Thurs 5:30–10pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:30pm. Muni: F-Market streetcar.

Town's End ★ *Finds* CALIFORNIA/BRUNCH Named after the street it's on, this low-key spot is in a part of town that really was once the "town's end," with little beyond it except warehouses and other industrial buildings. Now the little neighborhood of South Beach has a lot going for it, including the cleaned-up waterfront, SBC stadium, new condominiums, and wonderful restaurants like this one. In addition to tasty, reasonably priced food, Town's End has one of the best outdoor dining areas in the city. The kids can run around on the grass while you await your meal, but they may just want to stay put because the first thing that comes to the table is a basket full of house-baked goodies: muffins and scones at brunch, fresh breads and rolls at dinnertime. After that, feast on thick blueberry pancakes, creative omelettes and frittatas, or organic salads. If you come for dinner, check out the \$23 *prix fixe* option, which includes an appetizer, main course, and dessert. (On Tues, the *prix fixe* price is just \$14, but beware the crowd.) Depending on the season, dinner offerings may include a New Mexico Caesar salad; ravioli with spinach, ricotta, and caramelized onions; or a naturally raised beef hamburger, served on a homemade roll, of course.

2 Townsend St. (at Embarcadero). ☎ 415/512-0749. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$6.50–\$11 brunch, \$9–\$17 dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. Tues–Thurs 7:30–11am, 11:30am–2pm, and 5:30–9pm; Fri 7:30–11am and 5:30–10pm; Sat 8am–2:30pm and 5:30–10pm; Sun 8am–2:30pm. Muni: N-Judah streetcar to the Brannan Station; walk south towards Townsend St.

INEXPENSIVE

Amici's East Coast Pizzeria PIZZA Located across the street from SBC Park, this is the second San Francisco location of this regional pizza joint specializing in East Coast style pizzas baked in wood-fired brick ovens. Although it's not my very favorite pizza in the city, it is pretty good, and the menu features several other items as well, including an assortment of pastas, hearty sandwiches such as Italian sausage or eggplant parmigiana, and salads (the Caesar salad is quite tasty). With friendly waiters, crayons, and speedy service, what more could you need? Kid's can get a mini cheese pizza for \$6.35, or a small plate of plain noodles for just \$1.95.

216 King St. (at 3rd St.). ☎ 415/546-6666. www.amicis.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$8–\$13. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri 11am–11pm; Sat 11:30am–11pm; Sun 11:30am–10pm. Muni: N-Judah streetcar to the 4th and King Station; walk ½ block east on King St.

Crossroads Café ★ CALIFORNIA Just a block off the Embarcadero, this cafe/bookshop with a fenced-in outdoor patio is a comfy haven for a snack, lunch, and a rest. Order turkey sandwiches, salads, smoked salmon plates, fountain treats, coffee drinks, and hot chocolate from the counter, and find a seat while you wait for your name to be called. The shop stocks a nice selection of children's books and gifts, and there are a few couches and overstuffed chairs to enjoy them in.

699 Delancey St. (½ block south of Embarcadero). ☎ 415/836-5624. Main courses \$5–\$8. MC, V. Mon–Fri 7am–10pm; Sat 8am–10pm; Sun 8am–5pm. Muni: N-Judah streetcar to the Brannan Station; walk south towards Townsend St.

Long Life Noodle Company & Jook Joint ASIAN If you want good, cheap noodles, this is the place. Although nothing here will wow you, you will get a better-than-average meal for little money. The theme is noodles from all over Asia prepared in a variety of ways. Egg, rice, and wheat noodles are served with soup, stir-fried, cold, or over salad in dishes with names like Buddha's Bliss (ramen noodles in miso broth with smoked trout, tofu, and enoki mushrooms)

or the Dragon's Breath (garlicky lo mein noodles wok-tossed with button mushrooms and parsley). You'll also find dishes made with rice or jook (rice porridge) and other pan-Asian favorites like pot stickers, spring rolls, and fried wontons. The decor at this location of the small, regional chain is hyper-modern with too much neon. But with all entrees under \$9, who's complaining? (You can also slurp Long Life noodles at their Sony Metreon food court branch.)

139 Steuart St. (at Mission St.) ☎ 415/281-3818. Main courses \$5.50–\$8.75. MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–9pm. Muni: F-Market streetcar to Steuart St.; walk 1½ blocks south.

Taylor's Refresher ★ *Finds* AMERICAN/HAMBURGERS This must be what diner food tasted like half a century ago, when cows still roamed pastures and a tomato still tasted like a tomato. Eating here made me understand how diners got to be so popular in the first place. The hamburgers, made with local, naturally raised beef, are mouth-watering, and the sweet potato fries were a hit with my kids (I ordered them without the chile powder). Even the cherry tomatoes on the garden salad were sweet and delicate, not the tasteless, hard-skinned variety one expects at a typical diner. Then again, this diner isn't exactly typical. The first, and still existing, Taylor's Refresher was established in 1949 in the heart of the Napa Valley, with plenty of nearby family farms to draw on for fresh, local ingredients. This site, housed in the San Francisco Ferry Building, takes advantage of the neighboring Farmer's Market for its raw materials. Despite the gourmet touch, the food still comes on trays, the music is loud, and the price is right. On a sunny day, choose an outdoor table and order one of the awesome milk shakes or a root beer float—all made with San Francisco's luscious Double Rainbow ice cream.

1 Market St. (at Embarcadero) ☎ 415/328-3663. www.taylorsrefresher.com. Highchairs. Main courses \$3.60–\$13. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 10:30am–9pm. Muni: F-Market streetcar.

7 North Beach

EXPENSIVE

Moose's ★★☆☆ CALIFORNIA Although the name evokes thoughts of a dark and smoky joint with heavy, unimaginative food, Moose's is just the opposite. The appellation actually derives from its owner, longtime restaurateur Ed Moose. Overlooking Washington Park, Moose's serves innovative California cuisine using local, organic ingredients in a light and spacious setting. Despite the lack of real antlers (you'll see drawings of them everywhere), the restaurant does maintain a classic, old-fashioned feel—with a live pianist, professional waiters, and well-dressed clientele of all ages. It's easy to see how it has become a veritable San Francisco institution since its creation in 1992. The ever-changing menu may include such inventive offerings as a strawberry salad with locally grown cress and herb-infused Sonoma goat cheese, or wild king salmon with grilled Japanese eggplant and Thai basil puree. Dishes based on more traditional fare include grilled pork porterhouse chop with cranberry beans and maple-glazed cipollini onions. The restaurant has a verbal kids' menu with burgers, chicken fingers, or pasta with veggies for \$6 apiece. If you don't mind foregoing the Italian fare that abounds in North Beach, you will eat well here.

1652 Stockton St. (at Union St.) ☎ 415/989-7800. Kids' menu, highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$8–\$13 brunch, \$11–16 lunch, \$11–\$36 dinner; kids' menu \$6. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Thurs–Sat 11:30am–2:30pm; Mon–Thurs 5:30–10:30pm, Fri–Sat 5:30–11pm, Sun 5–10pm; Sun brunch 10am–2:30pm. Muni: Powell-Mason cable car to Union St and walk 2 blocks east; or 30-Stockton bus to Union St. and walk 1 block east.

Rose Pistola 🌟 ITALIAN Rose Pistola didn't originally start out as a family-friendly restaurant, but perhaps its location in North Beach meant it had to get better at accommodating tourists who may have their kids in tow. That's good news for you, as it means you can enjoy the delightful offerings at this upscale Northern Italian establishment without feeling stressed about how the staff will react to the little ones. Your bigger worry will be getting a table at this ever-crowded hot spot, so make reservations or arrive early. The hot and cold antipasti may be the best thing on the menu: zucchini chips, roasted chili and garlic shrimp, and shaved artichoke salad are among the choices. Main courses highlight fish, pastas, and pizzas, and rotisserie grilled meats are also on offer.

532 Columbus Ave. (between Union and Green sts.). ☎ 415/399-0499. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$19–\$36. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–4pm and 5:30pm–midnight. Muni: Powell-Mason cable car to Union St and walk 2 blocks east; or 30-Stockton bus to Union St. and walk 1 block east.

MODERATE

Caffè Macaroni 🌟 *Value* ITALIAN This place is so small, it's hard to believe they can cook food here, let alone serve it. But cook it up they do, in hearty portions. Then flirtatious waiters who make mom feel young again serve it up with a Mediterranean flair. The gnocchi with gorgonzola cheese are delicious, but so rich that if you eat a whole serving you may feel the need to sleep for the rest of the day. In fact, most of the Neapolitan plates are so generous you may want to share a main course or two. Given the already reasonable prices, Caffè Macaroni is a value proposition, but I recommend sitting outside (sitting a family inside the cramped dining room seems a recipe for an expensive accident).

59 Columbus Ave. (at Jackson St.). ☎ 415/956-9737. Highchairs. Main courses \$9.50–\$15. No credit cards. Mon–Sat 5:30–10pm. Muni: 15 bus to Jackson St.

L'Osteria del Forno 🌟🌟 ITALIAN A perennial favorite among in-the-know locals, L'Osteria seems to have as many people lining up outside as are actually seated inside. Once you have gotten a table, you'll appreciate the authentic, rustic feel in the cozy dining room. The terrific Italian dishes, which rank among the best in North Beach, include such delightful dishes as crepes filled with sautéed porcini mushrooms, ham, and béchamel sauce and succulent skewered lamb marinated in ginger, rosemary, and garlic. If the kids are apt to be noisy, this tiny place may not be the best choice.

519 Columbus Ave. (between Union and Green sts.). ☎ 415/982-1124. Reservations not accepted. Highchairs. Main courses \$11–\$13. No credit cards. Mon, Wed, Thurs, Sun 11:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–10:30pm. Closed Tues. Muni: Powell-Mason cable car to Union St. and walk 1 block east or 30-Stockton bus to Union St.

Tommaso's Restaurant ITALIAN/PIZZA You'll have to pass some XXX-rated storefronts on Broadway to get to Tommaso's, and then you may have to wait to get a table in one of the best family Italian pizza parlors in North Beach. Thin-crust pizzas with all kinds of toppings are baked in a wood-fired brick oven, the first in San Francisco. (Order one with spinach on top; there's a good chance your kids will actually like it.) They feed two or three people, but don't just limit yourself to pizza here; the Italian specialties—the lasagna, spaghetti with meatballs, parmigianas, fried calamari—are too yummy to pass up completely. The tables are all lined up together in one big communal row that provides an opportunity to meet the neighbors. If you want more privacy, ask for a booth along one side of this basement restaurant.

1042 Kearny St. (between Broadway St. and Pacific Ave.). ☎ 415/398-9696. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$9–\$17. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sat 5–10:45pm; Sun 4–9:45pm. Muni: 15-3rd St. bus to Broadway and walk 2 blocks east.

Trattoria Contadina ★★ *Finds* ITALIAN So you brought the kids to North Beach and you just want a nice Italian restaurant where you can have a tasty, reasonably priced meal? And each tiny restaurant is already full and the street is jammed with other hungry-looking tourists? Here's a hint: get away from the crowds and start heading up Union Street (and I do mean "up"—the hill is quite steep) 2 blocks to this quaint, family-owned eatery. Trattoria Contadina isn't exactly spacious and you may still wait if you don't have reservations, but the restaurant does have more tables and a more welcoming feel than many of its counterparts on Columbus Street. In keeping with the ma-and-pa atmosphere, the food is hearty and no nonsense. The linguini with co-owner Anna Maria's homemade Italian meatballs will take you back to your own childhood, and the spinach, meat- and cheese-filled ravioli, served in a porcini mushroom cream sauce, is rich and delicious. There's no kids' menu, but the kitchen will happily serve up half orders at this very family-friendly trattoria.

1800 Mason St. (at Union St.). ☎ 415/982-5728. www.trattcontadina.citysearch.com. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$12–\$24. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 5:30–9:30pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:30pm. Muni: Powell-Mason cable car to Union St.; or 30-Stockton bus to Union St. and walk west (up) 2 blocks.

INEXPENSIVE

Gelato Classico ★ ICE CREAM These tiny stores make gelato that's nearly as delicious as what you might have in Rome. The gelato is so rich and creamy, it's best had neat. But if you can't resist going all out, how about the "Coppa Carmelita," dark chocolate and hazelnut gelato covered in a luscious caramel sauce?

576 Union St. (between Stockton and Grant sts.). ☎ 415/391-6667. No credit cards. Cups \$2.85–\$4.25. Daily noon–9pm. Muni: Powell-Mason cable car to Union St and walk 2 blocks east; or 30-Stockton bus to Union St. and walk 1 block east.

Il Pollaio ★ CHICKEN At Il Pollaio, located across the street from Washington Square Park, a table by an open window, a fragrant roast chicken, and a mixed salad speak of a gentle end to a good day. In addition to the signature chicken, you'll also see steak, pork chops, lamb chops, rabbit, and sausages on the grill. Beyond that, Il Pollaio offers a few salads, soup, and just two sides: French fries and marinated eggplant. Daily specials, consisting of roasted meat with fries and a salad, are the way to go.

555 Columbus Ave. (between Union and Green sts.). ☎ 415/362-7727. Highchairs. Main courses \$6.50–\$9. MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–9pm. Muni: Powell-Mason cable car or 30-Stockton bus to Union St.

Mario's Bohemian Cigar Store ITALIAN This corner storefront could truthfully be called Mario's Bohemian Shoebox, it's so small. Gone are the days when you could find a cigar on the premises, much less smoke one; instead, Mario's has been serving big, warm focaccia sandwiches filled with meatballs or breaded chicken cutlets, pizzas, salad, and drinks for about 20 years. Grab a seat on the funky wooden counter and watch the waitress efficiently fill the drink orders while the cook prepares the food in a miniature oven. Kids will love the Torani Italian syrups used to make sodas. You can also ask the sandwiches to be wrapped up, so you can enjoy them in Washington Park across the street.

566 Columbus Ave. (at Union St.). ☎ 415/362-0536. Main courses \$7–\$9. MC, V. Daily 10am–midnight (until 11pm Sun). Muni: Powell-Mason cable car or 30-Stockton bus to Union St.

Sandwich Bars & Picnic Spots

An urban picnic could be an adventure, or at least a novelty. To start, hunt for sandwiches at **Specialty's Café and Bakery** (☎ 877/502-2837; 1 Post St. at Market St.) or **Lee's Sandwiches**, 322 Kearny St. at Bush Street (☎ 415/986-1052), and other Financial District locations. Specialty's bakes its own bread and offers deli-style sandwiches with some more inventive options like Thai chicken and turkey curry. Lee's is fast, inexpensive, and basic: tuna on white or thickly sliced real turkey. Once you've packed your bag with lunch, you're ready to head to 100 1st Street. There you'll find the award-winning second-floor garden in the **Delta Tower**, a lush respite from busy Mission Street. The black granite and green glass fountain sculpture provides a soothing counterpoint to the street traffic. If you're in SoMa, stop by **A G Ferrari Foods** on 688 Mission St. (☎ 415/344-0644) to pick up delectable Italian sandwiches on fresh focaccia bread. Then head to **Yerba Buena Gardens** (p. 162) for an urban retreat.

Picnicking by the water may be an even better idea. Go to the **Ferry Building** (p. 160) on the Embarcadero and purchase sandwiches from **Mastrelli's Delicatessen** (☎ 415/397-3354). Then head out behind the building, grab a bench, and enjoy your picnic as you watch the ferries head out across the bay. At Fort Mason, pick up delicious vegetarian sandwiches like egg salad at **Greens to Go** (Building A, Fort Mason Center, ☎ 415/771-6330) and then sit yourselves under a palm tree on the expansive lawn. If you're at **Crissy Field** (p. 158) grab a soup or sandwich at the Warming Hut. You'll find plenty of picnic spots outside.

North Beach provides more sources for filling your hamper. **Molinari**, located at 373 Columbus Ave. at Vallejo Street (☎ 415/421-2337), and **Panelli Bros.**, located at 1419 Stockton St. near Vallejo (☎ 415/421-2541), are two Italian delicatessens with a fantastic assortment of imported foodstuffs and friendly staffs who will create delicious, everything-on-'em sandwiches to go. Both are open Monday through Saturday. Also consider getting takeout from **Mario's Bohemian Cigar Store** (reviewed below). You can't pass on dessert if you're anywhere near **Victoria Pastry Co.**, at 1362 Stockton St. at Vallejo (☎ 415/781-2015). The chewy almond cookies are divine, as are the cakes, which are all sold by the slice or whole. You may be able to find a bench in Washington Square Park if you can't wait to dig into your lunch. Otherwise, head to **North Beach Playground** at Lombard and Mason streets, where you'll find picnic facilities and a playground.

If you're headed out to Lincoln Park in the Richmond District, a must-stop is **Angelina's Bakery** at 6000 California St., at 22nd Ave. (☎ 415/221-7801). Pick up delectable sandwiches, salads, or quiches and hop back on the 1-California bus to 32nd Street. Then walk north 2 blocks to Eagle's Point at the end of the Land's End trail. Enjoy your picnic with a priceless view of the Marin Headlands and western side of the Golden Gate Bridge.

Naan-N-Curry *Value* INDIAN/PAKISTANI When San Franciscans want good, inexpensive Indian/Pakistani food, they come to Naan-N-Curry. Flavorful tandoori-oven-baked meats, delightful curries, a great selection of vegetarian options, and plenty of naan breads are on offer here. Although some dishes from this part of the world can be too spicy for younger kids, we've found a few items that even our young daughters love, including chicken tikka masala, which is cooked in a mild yogurt sauce, and vegetable biryani, or vegetables with rice. With a casual atmosphere and hearty portions for just pennies, it's worth branching out from pizza, noodles, and the other usual suspects. (There's also a Naan-N-Curry at 474 O'Farrell St., at Jones Street, but it's on an unsavory block of the Tenderloin, so I don't recommend eating at that location.)

533 Jackson St. (at Columbus Ave.). ☎ 415/693-0499. www.geocities.com/nncsf. Main courses \$5–\$10. MC, V. Mon–Fri 10am–11:30pm; Sat–Sun noon–11:30pm. Muni: 15 bus to Jackson St.

Pasta Pomodoro ITALIAN This chain has branches at several locations throughout the city. See p. 133 for a full review.

655 Union St. (at Columbus Ave.). ☎ 415/399-0300. www.pastapomodoro.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$7.50–\$11. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–11pm; Sun noon–11pm. Muni: Powell-Mason cable car or 30-Stockton bus to Union St.

8 Fisherman's Wharf

VERY EXPENSIVE

Gary Danko ★★ CALIFORNIA Opened in 1999 by an award-winning chef of the same name, Gary Danko quickly earned the reputation as one of the best restaurants in San Francisco, if not the world. Although I would be remiss to omit it in a guidebook about the city, it is best visited without the little ones, unless they are older kids well accustomed to eating at exclusive restaurants. Novelist and San Francisco local Danielle Steele does bring her own children to dine here but reserves the private dining room at the back on such occasions. Richly decorated in blond oak and black granite, the atmosphere at Gary Danko is elegant and subdued. Diners can choose three, four, or five courses for \$58, \$68, or \$78 respectively. The menu changes seasonally and may include such delicacies as lobster salad with melon and Thai mango dressing, roasted quail stuffed with wild mushrooms and roasted apricots, and, for desert, flambéed nectarines and berries with vanilla crepes and lemon ice cream. The service is impeccable. Reservations are advised 4 weeks in advance, although walk-ins are sometimes seated at the bar.

800 North Point St. (at Hyde St.). ☎ 415/749-2060. www.garydanko.com. Reservations strongly recommended. *Prix-fixe* menu \$58–\$78. AE, DC, D, MC, V. Sun–Wed 5:30–9:30pm; Thurs–Sat 5:30–10pm. Muni: Powell-Hyde cable car to North Point St.

EXPENSIVE

Ana Mandara ★ VIETNAMESE The moment you walk through the doors of this serene restaurant, you are transported to Vietnam—or at least a movie set of it. The interior includes façades of a Vietnamese-style home and a French colonial building, palm trees, and other Indochinese artifacts. Yet the 18-foot-high black ceiling is dotted with spotlights, as if to remind you that this is not Vietnam, but a replica of it. The food seems to follow suit. Appetizers such as crispy rolls with crab, shrimp, and shiitake mushrooms and entrees like *tourne-dos* of beef tenderloin with onions and pepperpress are very tasty, but seem firmly grounded on this continent—which may be just as well for the little ones among

you. Although there is no children's menu, kids do enjoy the beef *tournedos*, as well as the side of garlic noodles. There are a few truly exotic options, like the luscious mango soup with durian sorbet, which is a must-have for dessert. The dinner menu edges this restaurant into the expensive category, but lunch prices are more moderate, with main courses starting at \$10.

891 Beach St. (at Polk St.). ☎ 415/771-6800. High chairs, boosters. Weekend reservations recommended. Main courses \$15–\$29. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2pm; Sun–Thurs 5:30–9:45pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:45pm. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Polk St. and walk 1 block north; or Powell-Hyde cable car to Beach St and walk 2 blocks west.

Franciscan CALIFORNIA It's all about the view here, which explains the upside-down nature of this oddly shaped, peach-colored structure. Stairs lead you from the crowded wharf below into a welcoming dining room, which offers bay views from practically every table. Given the Franciscan's location in the most heavily touristed part of town, you'll pay more than you should for a crab cake appetizer (\$14) or rare *ahi* tuna (\$25), but you do get a fabulous vista, friendly service, and better fare than at most restaurants in the vicinity. A few main courses do come in at under \$20, and the kids' menu is reasonably priced. A generous portion of kids' fish and chips is \$5.95, and it comes with crayons and drawing materials. I wouldn't go out of my way to eat here, but if you want a nice lunch without having to leave the neighborhood, the Franciscan may be worth the higher prices.

Pier 43½ (at Embarcadero). ☎ 415/362-7733. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations accepted. Main courses \$13–\$26; kids' menu \$4.95–\$5.95. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–4:30pm; Sat–Sun 11am–4:30pm; Sun–Thurs 4:30–10pm; Fri–Sat 4:30–10:30pm. Muni: F-Market streetcar to Mason St.

McCormick & Kuleto's 🍴 AMERICAN/SEAFOOD I'm not usually into extra-large restaurants with massive menus smack dab in the most touristy parts of town. But this establishment, which brings well-known local restaurateur Pat Kuleto together with the nationally renowned McCormick & Schmick's seafood restaurant chain, keeps high standards. Overlooking the lovely Hyde Street Pier, with Alcatraz in the background, it has one of the best views in all of San Francisco and has become our stand-by for visiting relatives. The options are not especially inventive—cedar plank-smoked Alaskan salmon and griddled Parmesan-coated *petrale* sole are typical dishes—but they are fresh and well prepared. Although the menu is dominated by seafood, it's so long that there are still plenty of choices for the fish-averse. The kids' menu includes a tasty fish and chips plate that you'll want to polish off if your little one doesn't manage to. Be sure to come in daylight to enjoy the view, but don't expect a quick meal—service can be slow.

900 North Point St. (between Larkin and Polk sts.). ☎ 415/929-1730. www.msmsg.com. Kids' menu, high-chairs. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$11–\$31; kids' menu \$5.35–\$7.75. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–11pm; Sun 10:30am–10pm. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Larkin St. and walk 1 block north; or Powell-Hyde cable car to Beach St and walk 1 block west.

Rainforest Cafe 🍴 *Overrated* AMERICAN The phony flowers and plastic rain forest complete with waterfall, aquarium, and African music in the background just cry out for a B ticket (for those of you old enough to remember how things once worked at Disneyland). The food at this merchandised-to-the-hilt restaurant is strictly pedestrian: a little fish, a little chicken, a hamburger, a steak—something for everyone. With 500 seats, however, you're going to get production-line quality. My suggestion is if you want the fun of a tropical storm,

head for the Tonga Room at the Fairmont Hotel. For a lot less money, in civilized surroundings, treat the kids to snacks and an umbrella-bedecked drink with benign rainstorms on the half-hour.

145 Jefferson St. (next to the Wax Museum). ☎ 415/440-5610. www.rainforestcafe.com. Kids' menu, highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$11–\$29; kids' menu \$6–7. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Wed 11:30am–9pm; Thurs 11:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–11pm. Muni: F-Market streetcar to Mason St.

MODERATE

Blue Mermaid Chowder House AMERICAN/SEAFOOD Amid the plethora of mediocre, overpriced Fisherman's Wharf restaurants, the relatively new Blue Mermaid stands out for offering a no-nonsense menu of chowders, sandwiches, salads, and a few bigger main course options at pretty reasonable prices. The decor plays on the restaurant's location in the Cannery, with boats suspended from the ceiling, heavy wood columns wrapped in shipping rope, and hand-painted posters depicting advertisements of long-gone canned fish and produce exporters. Outdoor seating in the lovely Cannery courtyard is also available. Kids' meals, like fish sticks or hot dogs, are served up with French fries in blue beach buckets. **One note:** stick to the traditional chowders, like the Manhattan or New England, which are tastier than the restaurant's much touted Dungeness corn and crab chowder.

495 Jefferson St. (at Hyde St.). ☎ 415/771-2222. www.argonauthotel.com/argdini. Kids' menu, highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$9–\$22; kids' menu \$6.95. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 7:30am–9pm; Fri–Sat 7:30am–10pm. Muni: Powell-Hyde cable car to Beach St.; walk 1 block north.

Café Pescatore ITALIAN You could probably pay less for Italian fare a few blocks away in North Beach, but this is the wharf, after all. Given the mediocre, over-priced alternatives, this trattoria located on one corner of the Tuscan Inn hotel looks downright appealing. Floor to ceiling windows open onto heated sidewalk seating, but there's no ocean view here (the waterfront is 2 blocks away). Menu highlights include Caesar salad, wood-fired pizza, and plenty of pasta options. Skip the chicken marsala; when I tried it, I thought it could have used less wine in the sauce. The kids' menu includes pasta or pizza, which kids can have plain, with sausage, or with another topping of choice.

2455 Mason St. (at North Point St.). ☎ 415/561-1111. Kids' menu, highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$8–\$16 lunch, \$9–\$22 dinner; kids' menu \$3.25–\$6.95. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Daily 7am–10pm. Muni: F-Market streetcar to Mason St.; walk 1 block south.

INEXPENSIVE

Frjtz BELGIAN FRIES/CREPES For a paper-wrapped cone of piping hot fries, crepes, or soups and sandwiches, come to Frjtz. See p. 130 for a full review.

Ghirardelli Sq., 900 North Point St. ☎ 415/928-3886. www.frjtzfries.com. Fries \$3–\$4.50. Main courses \$7–\$8. AE, DISC, DC, MC, V. Open daily, seasonal hours. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Larkin St. and walk 1 block north; or Powell-Hyde cable car to Beach St and walk 1 block west.

Ghirardelli Soda Fountain & Chocolate Shop ICE CREAM There's a reason for the ever-present line here: Ghirardelli makes a good product. If you haven't ever had a Ghirardelli brownie, order one under a scoop of ice cream.

Ghirardelli Sq., 900 North Point St. ☎ 415/771-4903. www.ghirardelli.com. Desserts \$5–\$9. Mon–Thurs 10am–10:30pm; Fri–Sat 10am–midnight; Sun 10am–11pm. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Larkin St. and walk 1 block north; or Powell-Hyde cable car to Beach St and walk 1 block west.

IN-N-OUT Burger HAMBURGERS Having spent my teenage years in California, I can tell you that IN-N-OUT is a statewide phenomenon. Fans, who insist it's the best fast food anywhere, tell me what makes the burgers so good

are the toasted buns, crisp lettuce, and fresh tomatoes. They also swoon over the extra-crisp, extra-thin fries, which are, in addition to a grilled cheese sandwich, the only vegetarian option on the very short menu.

333 Jefferson St. (between Jones and Leavenworth sts.). ☎ 800/786-1000. www.in-n-out.com. Main courses \$1.65–\$2.80. No credit cards. Sun–Thurs 10:30am–1am, Fri–Sat 10:30am–1:30am. Muni: F-Market streetcar to Jefferson and Taylor sts.

San Francisco Crepe Cart ★ *Finds* CREPES A few of these crepe carts are scattered about Fisherman’s Wharf, but this one is my favorite due to its location in the charming, brick-lined courtyard of the Cannery, adjacent to a small outdoor stage. Order a ham and cheese or spinach and goat cheese crepe, grab a table under the shade of a tree, and enjoy a quick, inexpensive meal accompanied by live music. Our kids love to listen to the jazz or folk musicians who play there regularly. For desert, share a chocolate and banana or simple powdered sugar crepe.

The Cannery (Jefferson St., between Hyde and Jones sts.). Crepes \$4.50–\$6.75 No credit cards. Daily 10am–6pm Muni: Powell-Hyde cable car to Beach St.; walk 1 block north.

9 Civic Center/Hayes Valley

EXPENSIVE

Hayes Street Grill ★ CALIFORNIA/SEAFOOD Chef-owner Patricia Unterman, the author of the *Food Lover’s Guide to San Francisco*, is pretty much the authority on the local culinary scene—so it’s no surprise her restaurant serves delicious, uncomplicated dishes that showcase local, in-season ingredients. The specialty here is very fresh fish: whatever’s been caught that morning will be prepared simply and with integrity and be accompanied with crisp, thin fries. All sauces are thoughtfully served on the side. The non-fish selections, such as the naturally raised Niman Ranch pork chop with mashed potatoes, are equally flavorful. The atmosphere balances between informal and businesslike, with a clientele of politicians and professionals at lunch and artists and audiences eating a pre-show dinner. At lunch, kids might enjoy eating at the bar; it’s situated in the front and commands a view of many tables and the door, so they can keep tabs on what’s going on.

320 Hayes St. (between Gough and Franklin sts.). ☎ 415/863-5545. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$13–\$22 lunch; \$18–\$23 dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 11:30am–2pm; Mon–Thurs 5–9:30pm; Fri–Sat 5–10:30pm; Sun 5–8:30pm Muni: 21-Hayes bus to Franklin St. or any streetcar to Franklin St.; walk north 3 blocks.

Zuni Cafe ★★ CALIFORNIA/MEDITERRANEAN For over 2 decades, Zuni Cafe has been serving Mediterranean-infused California cuisine in this spacious, sunny, Market Street location. The whitewashed walls and two-story-high south-facing windows combine with odd angles, heavy wood, and exposed brick to give a casual, airy feel to the place. The eclectic, inventive, and always delicious cuisine from famed chef-owner Judy Rodgers (which can also be found in her fabulous 500-plus page cookbook) changes regularly, but her signature roast chicken with bread salad is always on the menu. It’s no wonder this place still draws a crowd after all these years. Although there is no children’s menu, the kitchen is always happy to whip up a special concoction. Whatever you do get for the kids, make sure it comes with the shoestring potatoes.

1685 Market St. (between Gough and Franklin sts.). ☎ 415/552-2522. Highchairs and boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$10–\$19 lunch, \$15–\$26 dinner. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sat 11:30am–midnight; Sun 11am–11pm. Muni: F-Market streetcar to Gough St.

MODERATE

Citizen Cake BAKERY/CALIFORNIA When you walk into this cafe, you are immediately faced with such a fetching array of cakes, tarts, cookies, pastries, and ice creams that all thought of the food pyramid dissipates as you grapple with the mind-bending question: *What do I choose?* You can take time to figure that out while drooling at the counter or sitting at one of the tables in the austere room, where ample windows keep you in touch with the street action. Brunch is a good time to eat here, as it will give you an excuse to order their homemade donuts. But you're best off making it a teatime treat. The lunch and dinner menus may be too esoteric and pricy for a family meal.

399 Grove St. (at Gough St.). ☎ 415/861-2228. www.citizencake.com. Highchairs. Reservations for brunch recommended. Main courses \$10–\$13 lunch, \$16–\$19 dinner. AE, MC, V. Tues–Fri 8am–10pm; Sat 10am–10pm; Sun 10am–9pm. Muni: 21-Hayes bus to Gough St. and walk 1 block north to Grove St.; or any streetcar to Van Ness St. station and walk 3 blocks north to Grove St. and 2 blocks west to Gough St.

INEXPENSIVE

Frijt BELGIAN FRIES/CREPES Among the hip boutiques and antique shops of Hayes Valley is this very narrow, very funky teahouse specializing in fries. Thick and crispy, and wrapped in a paper cone just like you get on the streets of Brussels, the starchy wedges are best eaten when they're as hot as your fingers can handle. If you feel guilty just feeding your kids fries for lunch, you can order them salads, sandwiches, or crepes, all of which are named after artists.

579 Hayes St. (at Laguna St.). ☎ 415/864-7654. www.frijtzfries.com. Fries \$3–\$4.50. Main courses \$7–\$8. AE, DISC, DC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 9am–10pm; Fri–Sat 9am–midnight; Sun 10am–9pm. Muni: 21-Hayes bus to Laguna St; or any streetcar to Van Ness St. station and walk 2 blocks north to Hayes and 4 blocks east to Laguna St.

Vicolo Pizzeria ★ *Finds* PIZZA Vicolo's delicious cornmeal-crust pizzas have developed such a following that you can now find them at the local Whole Foods market—or stocked in my freezer (they're very handy when a writing deadline means mom's not cooking). But if you're traveling here on vacation, it's unlikely you've got access to an oven, so you're better off ordering one at the restaurant. And there are a couple of good reasons to come to the restaurant even if you do have an oven. For one, the atmosphere in this odd, alley-side corrugated metal building is cozy and comfortable; it makes you feel like you've discovered something special. Second, you can partake of their yummy salads (the beets, blue cheese, and walnut salad is a winner). There's also house-made lasagna with all-natural beef, which is almost as good as the pizza.

150 Ivy Alley (between Hayes and Grove sts., off Franklin St.). ☎ 415/863-2382. Highchairs. Reservations not accepted. Main courses \$8–\$8.50. MC, V. Sun–Thurs 5–8pm; Fri–Sat 5–9pm; Lunch 11:30am–2pm (only open for lunch during Davies Symphony and Opera House matinees). Muni: 21-Hayes bus to Franklin St. and walk ½ block north to Ivy Alley.

10 Marina/Cow Hollow**EXPENSIVE**

Greens ★★☆☆ VEGETARIAN The setting is so lovely and the food so good at this vegetarian spot, even dedicated carnivores will enjoy it. Built by the San Francisco Zen Center in a converted warehouse, the restaurant boasts very high ceilings and a wall of windows that frames a stunning view of a marina, the bay, and the Golden Gate Bridge. Come in the early evening, and you'll be rewarded with a glorious sunset as well.

One taste of the delectable offerings, and you may decide meat is overrated. Start with baked goat cheese with grilled bread and golden beets, and follow it with risotto with snap, snow, and English peas, or yellow vegetable curry with cashew jasmine rice. For dessert, how about a warm fruit cobbler with buttermilk ice cream? Vegan appetizers, entrees, and desserts—like egg-free, dairy-free chocolate mousse—are also available. Most nights are a la carte, but on Saturday night a \$46 four-course *prix fixe* dinner is served. Some folks gripe that meatless fare should be less expensive, but I feel Greens' prices are in line with vegetarian options at any upscale restaurant. If you can't get a table at lunchtime, pick up sandwiches from the Greens to Go take-out counter and have a picnic overlooking the bay.

Building A, Fort Mason (at Bay St.). ☎ 415/771-6222. greensrest.citysearch.com. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$8.50–\$13 lunch, \$15–\$19 dinner; *prix fixe* (Sat night only) \$46. AE, DISC, MC, V. Mon 5:30–9pm, Tues–Fri noon–4pm and 5:30–9pm; Sat noon–2:30pm and 5:30–9pm. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Laguna St. and transfer to the 28 bus to Fort Mason.

MODERATE

A16 ★★ ITALIAN/PIZZA This hopping new addition to Chestnut Street is named after the motorway that transverses the Italian region of Campania, home to Naples. As one might expect, A16's most acclaimed specialty is its wood-oven-fired Neapolitan pizza, which could blow away your youngsters' preconceptions of what pizza is all about. Order a "pizza marinara," with just tomato, oregano, garlic, and olive oil, and they'll be amazed that something without melted cheese could taste so good. Of course, there are mozzarella-topped pizzas as well. The rest of the menu is also impressive (and changes seasonally). Dishes like house-made fennel sausage with grilled bread or wild salmon with basil, almonds, and lemon are deliciously inspired by southern Italian cuisine. For dessert, your options might include ricotta almond mousse or warm chocolate hazelnut cake. Although the menu is more limited at lunch, it may be the best time to bring younger children. They'll enjoy watching the pizzas being made or drawing on the paper-covered tables. The dinner scene is usually too noisy and grown-up for all but the hippest teenagers.

2355 Chestnut St (between Scott and Divisadero sts.). ☎ 415/771.2216. www.a16sf.com. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$8–\$13 lunch, \$8–\$20 dinner. AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Tues 5–10pm; Wed–Fri 11:30am–2:30pm and 5–10pm (until 11pm Fri); Sat 5–11pm.

Café Marimba ★ MEXICAN Disregard any preconceived notions of Mexican cuisine that those Tex-Mex chain restaurants have impressed on your psyche. When you visit this colorful, festive eatery, you're in for a treat. The Oaxacan offerings here bring together the flavors of southern Mexico with a California freshness and lightness. Flavorful fish and grilled meats arrive at your table with homemade tortillas and tasty salsas. The dishes with traditional Mexican mole (*mo-lay*) sauces are also quite good. Kids will love the decor, which includes huge mythical characters on the ceiling and walls. The freshly made chips and guacamole are so good, you could make a meal of them alone—but it would be a shame to miss the better offerings to come.

2317 Chestnut St. (between Scott and Divisadero sts.). ☎ 415/776-1506. Reservations accepted. Main courses \$8–\$14. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11:30am–10pm; Sun 11:30am–9pm. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Scott St.

Isa ★★ CALIFORNIA/FRENCH Chef Luke Sung put his training with some of the San Francisco's best French chefs to creative use at this unique, family-run restaurant. He calls his creations French *tapas*, displaying his epicurean mastery in delicious small plates that you order from a number of categories. The

potato-wrapped sea bass was so good I wished there were more of it. But that's just the point: with small plates, you've got room to try other wonderful creations, like the roast chicken or truffled risotto. The front room gets quite cramped, especially when other diners waiting to be seated start filing in, so sit on the lovely heated patio if at all possible. Sung runs Isa with his wife Kitty, and the restaurant was named for the younger of their two children. The owners, who also live upstairs, make a point of being kid-friendly and are happy to welcome families. Nonetheless, the menu is pretty sophisticated and the crowd quite hip, so I wouldn't take very young children here. Also, come early because once the place fills up service can really slow down.

3324 Steiner St. (between Chestnut and Lombard sts.). ☎ 415/567-9588. Highchairs. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$9–\$17. MC, V. Mon–Thurs 5:30–10pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:30pm. Muni: 22-Fillmore, 28-19th Ave., or 30-Stockton to Steiner St.

INEXPENSIVE

Amici's East Coast Pizzeria PIZZA Amici's specializes in East Coast style pizzas and other Italian specialties. See p. 121 for a full review.

2033 Union St. (between Webster and Buchanan sts.). ☎ 415/885-4500. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$8–\$13. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri 11am–11pm; Sat 11:30am–11pm; Sun 11:30am–10pm. Muni: 41-Union or 45-Union-Stockton bus to Webster St.

Dragon Well ★ *Finds* CHINESE Dragon Well was established with the idea of serving light, fresh, flavorful, and reliably good Chinese food. It has succeeded. Traditional favorites like pork-filled potstickers (a big hit with my kids) and cashew chicken do not disappoint, and the tea-smoked duck, served in a bun with plum sauce, is not to be missed. Even kids can enjoy it, provided you leave out the fresh cilantro. The spacious and airy decor matches the light and healthful food.

2142 Chestnut St. (between Steiner and Pierce sts.). ☎ 415/474-6888. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$7–\$11. MC, V. Daily 11:30am–10pm. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Steiner St.

The Grove ★ AMERICAN/BREAKFAST The Grove is one of my favorite hangouts in San Francisco. I confess to having written large portions of this book while sipping a latte alongside other over-caffeinated, laptop-bearing Grove denizens. On weekends, our whole family regularly hits the Grove for lunch. With a wooded interior, an eclectic assortment of tables and chairs, windows that open up like terrace doors, lots of plants, and plenty of outdoor seating, it's simply one of the most agreeable places to hang out on a sunny day. The menu is equally pleasing, with breakfast options like hot oatmeal with brown sugar and fruit or a breakfast burrito with guacamole and sour cream. Lunch options include fresh salads and unique sandwiches, like the Cuban pork or the turkey with chipotle mayo. Kids will enjoy the cheese quesadilla or the homemade macaroni and cheese.

2250 Chestnut St. (at Alma St., between Scott and Pierce sts.). ☎ 415/474-4843. Highchairs. Main courses \$7–\$10. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7am–11pm; Sat–Sun 8am–11pm. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Scott St.

Mel's Drive-in HAMBURGERS The original Mel's was opened in 1947 on Van Ness Avenue by Mel Weiss. It was demolished 25 years later, but not before George Lucas filmed *American Graffiti* there. In 1985 Mel's son Steven opened a new Mel's on Lombard Street but kept the old 1950s theme, complete with booths, chrome, and tabletop jukeboxes. He eventually opened three more San Francisco locations and a smattering elsewhere in the state. The food is nothing to write home about, but under 10s love this place—uniformed waitresses deliver their meals

in cardboard Cadillacs, they can select '50s tunes on the jukebox, and they get balloons just for stopping by. The menu includes all the typical diner options: blue-plate specials, chicken potpie, salads, humongous desserts, and all-day breakfast.

2165 Lombard St. (at Steiner St.). ☎ 415/921-2867. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$5–\$15. MC, V. Sun–Wed 6am–2am; Thurs 6am–3am; Fri–Sat 24 hr. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Steiner St.; walk 1 block south on Steiner St.

Pasta Pomodoro ITALIAN Families, and the good fresh food, are responsible for making this locally-owned chain so successful. The fare isn't going to have you phoning home in a rapture, but it's cheap, healthy, and you can make everyone happy here with a plate of lasagna for meat-eaters, a nice linguine primavera for the vegetarian, plain capellini for the refusnik, and some sautéed broccoli because you need your veggies. The best news is that Pasta Pomodoro, which has locations all over the city, also delivers. Should you be in a hotel without room service, don't stress about taking exhausted kids out once again: those buttered noodles are just a phone call away.

1875 Union St. (between Hyde and Larkin sts.). ☎ 415/771-7900. www.pastapomodoro.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$7.50–\$11. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–11pm; Sun noon–11pm. Muni: 41-Union or 45-Union-Stockton bus to Laguna St.

Zao Noodle Bar ASIAN What kid doesn't love a good plate of noodles? This small chain of Asian-style restaurants, with just two San Francisco locations, is sure to satisfy even the pickiest eater. The kids' menu is basically a choice of noodles served four ways: with chicken, with chicken and veggies, with peanut sauce, or just plain. You won't spend more than \$5, and plain noodles or rice will cost you a mere 99¢. Grown-ups can order more interesting options like coconut-lemongrass soup or yellow curry salmon and prawns. The food isn't going to win any awards for Asian cooking, but the inexpensive kids' menu—complemented by plastic kids' cups, special kids' "chop sticks," and a tolerant staff—makes this a popular option for local families with young children.

2031 Chestnut St. (at Fillmore St.). ☎ 415/928.3088. www.zaonoodle.com. Highchairs, boosters, kids' menu. Main courses \$8–\$10; kids' menu 99¢–\$4.99. AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm. Muni: 30-Stockton bus to Fillmore St.

11 Japantown/Pacific Heights/Presidio Heights

EXPENSIVE

Café Kati 🌶️🌶️ ASIAN FUSION Even though it's been around for years, this is still one of my favorite restaurants in town. It somehow manages to marry a sophisticated, inventive menu with a very relaxed, neighborhood atmosphere. The eclectic decor looks cozy and homemade, and the already-small space is divided into two even smaller dining areas in front and back rooms. As in all the best spots, the menu changes depending on what's available locally. It always reflects the unique influence of chef Kirk Webber, who likes to include a little something Eastern and a little something Western. Thus, you might find seafood steamed in red Thai curry and a marinated skirt steak with Vidalia onion rings sharing the table and giving patrons great pleasure. If you're lucky, the towering Caesar salad with Cajun cornmeal catfish will be on the menu as well. Be prepared to wait on the weekends, unless you have an early reservation. The staff is very kid-friendly, but the dim lighting and exotic menu may be too much for younger diners.

1963 Sutter St. (between Fillmore and Webster sts.). ☎ 415/775-7313. www.cafekati.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$21–\$27. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 5:30–10pm. 2-Clement, 3-Jackson, 4-Sutter, 22-Fillmore, or 38-Geary bus to Fillmore St.; walk ½ block east on Sutter St.

MODERATE

Isobune JAPANESE/SUSHI If you want to introduce the kids to sushi, this could be a fun place to start. The spicy tuna rolls, *maguro* tuna, and a few vegetarian options cruise by on little boats in front of diners. See something that looks enticing? Go ahead and take it. The chefs are constantly at work, refilling the little boats on their aquatic conveyer belt. You won't find the greatest selection here, but you're best off sticking to the mainstream stuff like California rolls anyway. **Warning:** This is one place that's actually better when it's crowded. If you come at odd hours, you'll see limp fish that's been around the loop a few too many times.

1737 Post St. (in the Japan Center). ☎ 415/563-1030. Highchairs. 2 pieces of sushi \$1.80–\$3.75. MC, V. Daily 11:30am–10pm. Muni: 38-Geary bus to the Japan Center at Webster St.

Juban Yakiniku House JAPANESE Although the grill-your-own concept may not have the dramatic appeal of a Benihana's, where the chef comes to your table and sautés while you watch, it's really more fun to take responsibility for your own dinner. At Juban, a gas grill embedded in the center of your table quickly cooks thin slices of tender beef, chicken, short ribs, shrimp, and other items while you and yours handle the cooking implements. The wait staff makes sure the temperature is just so, but in any event, it's pretty difficult to ruin your dinner. Smoke is relieved by special downdraft grills. Juban is big and modern, with wide tables to hold the various plates of raw and cooked food, and an accommodating staff. *Yakiniku*, or grilling, works well for children, who can pick and choose what they like and in reasonable quantities.

1581 Webster St. (in the Japan Center). ☎ 415/776-5822. www.jubanrestaurant.com. Highchairs. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$7.50–\$20. AE, MC, V. Mon and Wed–Thurs 11:30am–2pm and 5:30–9:30pm; Fri 11:30am–2pm and 5–9:30pm; Sat–Sun 11:30am–4:30pm and 5–9:30pm. Closed Tues. Muni: 38-Geary bus to the Japan Center at Webster St.

INEXPENSIVE

Eliza's CHINESE Despite the presence of nearby Chinatown, many San Francisco locals choose to come here to get their fix of good old Hunan food. This is the kind of Chinese food most people have in mind when they think Chinese: Kung Pao chicken, broccoli beef, and sweet and sour pork. My guess is the only dish you won't have seen before is the shrimp with chantrelle mushrooms. The difference is that, this being health-conscious California, Eliza's uses no MSG and dishes are generally not too greasy. Ask them to adjust the spiciness and you can all eat family-style.



2877 California St. (at Divisadero St.). ☎ 415/621-4819. Highchairs, boosters. Lunch items \$5–\$7.50. Dinner main courses \$6.50–\$13. Daily 11am–3pm and 5–10pm. MC, V. Muni: 1-California bus to Divisadero St.

Ella's ★ *finds* AMERICAN/BREAKFAST I haven't met a family who doesn't agree this is the best place for brunch in San Francisco. Maybe that explains why the line at Ella's usually goes well out the door. The menu changes frequently, but expect fresh baked breads, exceptional pancakes, and omelets with appetizing fillings like sausage, mushroom, roasted red pepper, and Gruyère. To skip the weekend wait, come for a regular weekday breakfast. If you just can't come by in the morning, lunch (think cashew egg salad on cornmeal molasses bread) and dinner (curried lamb stew, perhaps) are also fine times to try Ella's neoclassical American cuisine.

500 Presidio Ave. (at California St.). ☎ 415/441-5669. www.ellassanfrancisco.com. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations accepted for lunch. Brunch main courses \$7.50–\$11. Lunch/dinner main courses \$7–\$13. MC, V. Mon–Fri 7am–9pm; Sat–Sun 8:30am–2pm. Muni: 1-California bus to Presidio Ave.

Tips Sushi for the Whole Family

San Francisco kids have grown up with sushi, and it's not unusual to see sushi served at lunchtime in some of the city's middle and upper schools. Even very young children in the city are used to accompanying their parents on sushi outings. For a fun Japanese dining experience, arrive early when the restaurant is less busy and sit your family down at the sushi bar. Your kids will love watching the sushi chef expertly patting the rice into oblong shapes and placing raw fish on top, or making artistic rolls and slicing them ever so precisely with a very big knife. Finicky eaters may prefer leaving the *hamachi* (yellowtail) or spicy tuna rolls to their parents and sticking to cooked shrimp or vegetarian rolls. Many sushi restaurants also serve other Japanese dishes like tempura, teriyaki chicken, or *udon* noodles. Don't forget to order *edamame* (soybeans in the shell) to start. They're fun to eat and very healthy.

The Grove   **AMERICAN/BREAKFAST** A delightful place for breakfast, lunch, or just a cup of coffee. See p. 132 for a full review.

2016 Fillmore St. (between California and Pine sts.) ☎ 415/474-1419. Highchairs. Main courses \$7–\$10. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Fri 7am–11pm; Sat–Sun 8am–11pm. Muni: 1-California bus to Fillmore, walk ½ block south.

Pasta Pomodoro **ITALIAN** This chain, with locations around the city, serves good, basic Italian food at reasonable prices. See p. 133 for a full review.




3611 California St. (at Spruce St.) ☎ 415/831-0900. www.pastapomodoro.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$7.50–\$11. AE, MC, V. Mon–Sat 11am–11pm; Sun noon–11pm. Muni: 1-California bus to Spruce St. Also in the Kabuki Theater, 1865 Post St. (at Fillmore St.) ☎ 415/674-1826. Muni: 38-Geary bus to Fillmore St. and walk 1 block north to Post St.

Zao Noodle Bar **ASIAN** This kid-friendly chain serves hearty, flavorful noodles and other Asian fare. See p. 133 for a full review.

2406 California St. (at Fillmore St.) ☎ 415/345-8088. www.zaonoodle.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$8–\$10. AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm. Muni: 1-California bus to Fillmore St.

12 Russian Hill

EXPENSIVE

Antica Trattoria    **Finds** **ITALIAN** This neighborhood favorite is no ordinary Italian restaurant. Considered one of the best trattorias in San Francisco, its homemade pasta dishes are elegant and uncomplicated, accentuating high-quality, fresh ingredients over busy, heavy sauces. The menu also varies with the time of year. Although you can't go wrong with any of the pasta dishes, including such possibilities as fettuccine with porcini mushrooms, oven-dried olives and brown-butter sage, if you consider a fish or meat dish for a change you will not be disappointed. Options like Alaskan halibut and clams in white wine and tomatoes, or thinly sliced sirloin steak with arugula and roasted potatoes, are delectable. If you have room for dessert, the rich chocolate cake and airy tiramisu are transcendent. With white walls and not much adornment, the crisp, simple decor matches the food perfectly. Antica has no kids' menu, but the kitchen is happy to serve a kids' portion of hot buttered penne with veggies, and the friendly hostess keeps a supply of

crayons on hand. Whenever we eat at Antica, which is frequently, we wonder why we don't come even more often.

2400 Polk St. (at Union St.). ☎ 415/928-5797. Highchairs, boosters. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$9.50–\$20. DC, MC, V. Thurs–Sun 5:30–9:30pm; Fri–Sat 5:30–10:30pm. Muni: 19-Polk to Union St., 41-Union, or 45-Union-Stockton bus to Polk St.

INEXPENSIVE

Boulangere de Polk ✨ BAKERY If you can claim one of the outdoor tables here on a sunny day, consider yourself very lucky. These are prime people-watching spots and exactly where you'd want to eat absolutely anything from this always busy, very French bakery. In the mornings, cappuccino and an almond croissant, or a chewy baguette with sweet butter and jam, will transport you to the Marais in Paris. Lunch items include smoked salmon quiche and *tartines* (savory tarts) served with salad. Kids will enjoy the chocolate croissants for breakfast or the ham and cheese baguette for lunch.

2310 Polk St. (at Green St.). ☎ 415/345-1107. Lunch items \$3.25–\$9. No credit cards. Tues–Sat 7am–6:30pm; Sun 7am–6pm. Muni: 19-Polk to Green St., 41-Union, or 45-Union-Stockton bus to Van Ness Ave. and Union St. and walk 1 block south and 1 block east.

East Coast West Delicatessen DELICATESSEN There's actually been one Jewish deli in town forever, but it's out in the Richmond District and people forget that it's there, preferring to complain of the lack of a real deli like in New York City. That was until two enterprising and thoughtful chefs with Jewish mothers jumped into the breach and opened what looks, feels, and tastes like the genuine article. Among the offerings are chicken soup with matzo balls, corned beef and chicken liver sandwiches, and blintzes.

1725 Polk St. (at Washington St.). ☎ 415/563-3542. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$3.50–\$13. AE, DISC, MC, V. Daily 8am–9pm. Muni: 19-Polk to Washington St. or 27-Brannan bus to Polk St.

Polker's Gourmet Burgers AMERICAN/BREAKFAST/HAMBURGERS

Despite the carnivorous name, Polker's is probably best known as a terrific place for brunch, featuring an array of delicious omelets, French toast, and the best butter-milk pancakes you may ever taste. Of course, several burger options, including turkey and garden burgers in addition to juicy red meat, also grace the menu, as do entrée-sized salads. The booth seats are perfect for families of four, and the round tables by the window can seat up to six. Don't come if you're in a rush—service can be a slow. On weekends, arrive early and write your name on the list by the door.

2226 Polk St. (between Vallejo and Broadway sts.). ☎ 415/885-1000. Highchairs. Main courses \$6–\$11. MC, V. Daily 8am–11pm. Muni: 19-Polk to Broadway.

Swensen's Creamery ICE CREAM As is proudly advertised on its sign at the corner of Union and Hyde Streets, this is the original Swensen's creamery, established in 1948. You won't find the exotic flavors you get at Mitchell's Ice Cream, but they do offer three kinds of vanilla, which may be your little one's

Moments Picnic with a View

The Powell-Hyde cable car stops a half block from ZA Pizza. Grab some slices to go and re-board the cable car for the ride to Aquatic Park. Munching on tasty slices of crisp-crust pizza with a view of both bridges sounds like a special moment to me.

favorite flavor anyway. The location along the Powell-Hyde cable car route is pretty convenient, too. Stop here for a scoop, perhaps after you've lunched at nearby ZA Pizza (see the next review), and before walking 2 blocks to crooked Lombard Street.

1999 Hyde St. (at Union St.). ☎ 415/775-6818. Cones \$2.45–\$3.95. AE, MC, V. Sun and Tues–Thurs noon–10pm; Fri–Sat noon–11pm. Muni: Powell-Hyde cable car to Union St.

ZA Pizza 🍷 Finds PIZZA On a tree-lined section of Hyde Street along the cable car route, this is a favorite neighborhood gathering spot. Families can hang out at the counter of this tiny establishment and watch a game on TV or take a seat at one of the few indoor and outdoor tables. The thin-crust pizzas, named after painters and other luminary characters, include the Pesto Picasso, with roasted chicken, sun-dried tomatoes, and fresh pesto, and the Popeye the Greek, with spinach and feta cheese. Two salads are also on the menu, but the house salad wins out over the plain-tasting Caesar.

1919 Hyde St. (between Green and Union sts.). ☎ 415/771-3100. Highchairs. Slices \$3.30–\$4.35. AE, DC, MC, V. Sun–Wed Noon–10pm; Thurs–Sat Noon–11pm. Muni: Powell-Hyde cable car to Green St.

13 The Haight

MODERATE

Cha Cha Cha's 🍷 CARIBBEAN If you have high-energy kids who enjoy busy settings with lots of colors, bring them to this Caribbean *tapas* joint. You'll see funky tropical decor, palm trees, even a Caribbean "Santos" altar, and you'll hear plenty of salsa and meringue. What you'll taste are little morsels of Jamaican jerk chicken, crispy new potatoes, or fried plantains served with black beans and sour cream. Slide the kids into a booth for lunch and order them a chicken quesadilla, with salsa on the side for the spice-averse, while you feast on a Cajun fish sandwich. Dinnertime features large plate meals as well, but the place could be a bit too boisterous for children then.

1801 Haight St. (at Shrader St.). ☎ 415/386-7670. www.cha3.com. *Tapas* \$4–\$9; Sandwiches \$7.50–\$8; Main courses \$13–\$16. MC, V. Daily 11:30am–4pm; Sun–Thurs 5–11pm; Fri–Sat 5–11:30pm. Muni: 6-Parnassus, 7-Haight, or 71-Haight-Noreiga bus to Shrader St.

INEXPENSIVE

Ben & Jerry's ICE CREAM I can't think of a more appropriate place to indulge in this politically correct frozen delight. Ben & Jerry's is all about social responsibility, which is clear enough from the unbleached recycled paper napkins and the pictures of hormone-free cows grazing happily in Vermont. But it's also about a counter-culture that once had its epicenter right in the neighborhood. How great is it to enjoy a scoop of Cherry Garcia just around the corner from where Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead lived during the '67 Summer of Love? And, with all those pure, natural ingredients, it's delicious as well.

1480 Haight St. (between Masonic Ave. and Ashbury St.). ☎ 415/626-4143. www.benjerry.com. Cones from \$2.75. No credit cards. Daily noon–10pm (until 11pm Fri–Sat). Muni: 6-Parnassus, 7-Haight, or 71-Haight-Noreiga bus to Ashbury St.

Blue Front Cafe AMERICAN/BREAKFAST/MEDITERRANEAN The Blue Front's menu is as eclectic as the upbringing of its friendly owners, three Greek Orthodox Christian brothers who were raised in the Old City of Jerusalem. The specialties are Middle Eastern/Mediterranean—spit-roasted lamb gyros in pita bread and falafel wraps are among the choices—but you'll

find all-American turkey, club, and Reuben sandwiches on the menu as well. The Blue Front is also a good breakfast spot, serving up three-egg omelets, toasted bagels, and breakfast wraps in Mediterranean *lavash* bread. The room is nothing fancy—wooden tables are close together with plenty of people reading their papers and nursing their coffees—but the huge Genie hanging out front blends in well with the colorful neighborhood.

1430 Haight St. (between Masonic Ave. and Ashbury St.). ☎ 415/252-5917. www.bluefrontcafe.com. High-chairs. Main courses \$5.25–\$9.75. MC, V. Sun–Thurs 7:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 7:30am–11pm. Muni: 6-Parnassus, 7-Haight, or 71-Haight-Noreiga bus to Masonic Ave.

Burger Joint ★ HAMBURGERS In a setting reminiscent of a '50s-era TV sitcom, with vinyl-covered chairs and vintage Formica patterns on the tables, you can enjoy a really good burger. They're made with naturally raised, hormone-free Niman Ranch beef and served on a bun that has enough personality to handle a juicy hand-formed patty. The only alternatives to a hamburger or cheeseburger are a hot dog, free-range chicken breast sandwich, or veggie burger, all served with crispy fries. Yummy milkshakes and root beer floats are made with San Francisco's Double Rainbow ice cream.

700 Haight St. (at Pierce St.). ☎ 415/864-3833. www.burgerjointsfc.citysearch.com. Boosters, highchairs. Main courses \$5.45–\$6.95. MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11am–11pm. Muni: 6-Parnassus, 7-Haight, or 71-Haight-Noreiga bus to Pierce St.

The Citrus Club Value ASIAN You'll find tasty, nourishing noodle dishes in this extremely casual eatery furnished with plain laminated tables, a tile floor, and a counter lit by lamps cleverly covered in Vietnamese straw hats. Huge bowls of soup and Asian noodle salads are almost too big for one regular-size person and overwhelm those with smaller appetites, so consider sharing. Lunch here before a Golden Gate Park visit makes sense, as the restaurant isn't far from the Children's Playground entrance on Stanyan Street. In the evening, neighborhood folk queue up to order such delicacies as *pho-ga*, a Vietnamese soup full of thin rice noodles, chicken, cilantro, and chopped vegetables, or vegetarian offerings like buckwheat noodles and veggies in a spicy coconut-lime sauce. The surroundings are funky and suit the block just fine.

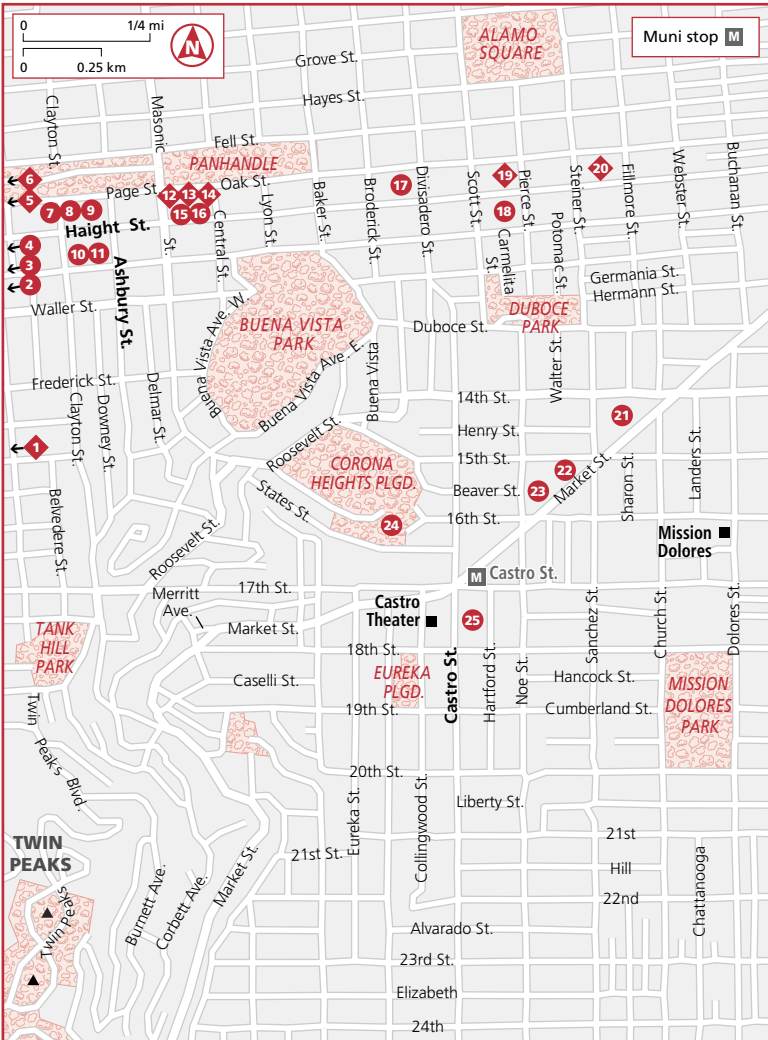
1790 Haight St. (at Shrader St.). ☎ 415/387-6366. Boosters. Main courses \$5–\$8. MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11:30am–10pm; Fri–Sat 11:30am–11pm; Sun 11:30am–10pm. Muni: 6-Parnassus, 7-Haight, or 71-Haight-Noreiga bus to Shrader St.

Crepe Express CREPES For an afternoon snack, you can't do better by the kidlets than a thin crepe filled with Nutella and bananas and topped with whipped cream. That's living. This very casual cafe also serves savory crepes, baguette sandwiches, and salads. The food is good, but the crepes are the reason to stop here.

1476 Haight St. (at Ashbury St.). ☎ 415/865-0264. Main courses \$3–\$5. AE, MC, V. Daily 9:30am–10pm. Muni: 6-Parnassus, 7-Haight, or 71-Haight-Noreiga bus to Ashbury St.

Memphis Minnie's ★ BARBECUE If you've got a hankering for a tender piece of slow-cooked meat, head straight to Memphis Minnie's. The owner smokes his brisket for 12 hours and adds his own spice rub for kick and flavor. Other options are finger-licking-good ribs and succulent pulled pork. The protocol is simple: stand in line and choose your meat and two sides, such as sweet potato or corn muffin, and have a seat at one of the tables lined up against the bright yellow and red wall. Look around at the playful decor, which includes

Haight-Ashbury & the Castro



DINING ◆

- Ben & Jerry's **12**
- Blue Front Cafe **14**
- Burger Joint **19**
- Cha Cha Cha's **5**
- The Citrus Club **6**
- Crepe Express **13**
- Gelato Classico **1**
- Memphis Minnie's **20**

ENTERTAINMENT ●

- Cafe du Nord **21**
- Randall Museum **24**

SHOPPING ●

- Amoeba Music **4**
- Book's Inc. **23**
- Buffalo Exchange **10**
- Cliff's Variety **25**
- Costumes on Haight **18**
- Crossroads Trading **11, 22**

- Discount Fabrics **15**
- FTC Skateboarding **3**
- Gamescape **17**
- Kids Only **8**
- Mendel's Art Supplies & Far Out Fabrics **9**
- Shoe Biz **16**
- Skates on Haight **2**
- The Wasteland **7**

plastic pigs, black and white cow-print ceiling fans, pinned up trucker hats, and pithy sayings like “Never Trust a Skinny Cook.” You can also read the favorable newspaper clippings about Minnie’s under glass at each table. Once your meal is ready, choose from one of the three sauces at your table: red Texan, North Carolina vinegar, and South Carolina yellow mustard. Fortunately, each table has a full roll of paper towels on it as well. All the meat is delicious, and most of the sides, with the exception of the overly-dry corn muffins, are tasty too.

576 Haight St. (at Steiner St.). ☎ 415/864-8461. www.memphisminnies.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$6.25–\$13. AE, MC, V. Tues–Sun 11am–10pm. Muni: 6-Parnassus, 7-Haight, or 71-Haight-Noreiga bus to Steiner St.

14 The Mission

If you’re headed to or from any of these restaurants at night and you’re not driving, I’d recommend taking a cab.

EXPENSIVE

Foreign Cinema ★★ *Finds* CALIFORNIA/MEDITERRANEAN What sets this establishment apart from any other place in the city is its outdoor courtyard with a large exposed-cement wall onto which are projected foreign films, many of them Oscar winners. Heat lamps keep the place cozy, and, well, it’s just an incredibly fun way to have a meal. The overall tone of the place is quite grown-up, with an adjoining, very hip bar next door. Fortunately, the chefs have a young boy of their own, who can be seen running around the courtyard in the early part of the evening. They’ve even added a kids’ menu, so arrive early and bring the children. Or try the weekend brunch, which is the family-friendliest meal here.

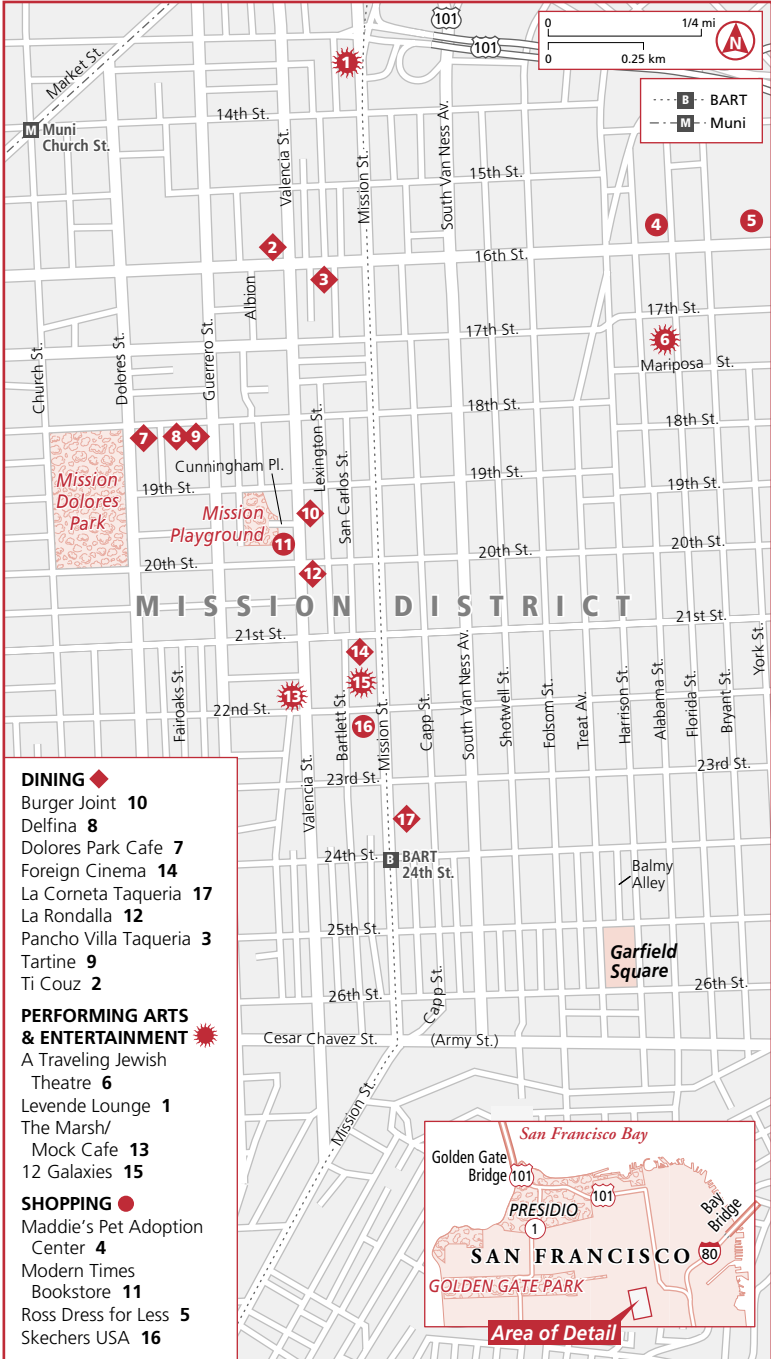
The best part of the whole experience is that the food is very good—even though this place is so cool it doesn’t need to be. Chefs/parents Gayle Pirie and John Clark are both veterans of two of the best kitchens in the Bay Area, Zuni Cafe and Berkeley’s Chez Panisse. In addition to 20 different choices from the oyster bar, their seasonally changing menu may include such appetizers (“premieres”) as beef carpaccio with fried herbs, Manchego cheese, and horseradish sauce. Main courses (“features”) could include seared sea scallops with heirloom tomatoes, bacon aioli, and basil sauce. Their naturally raised beef hails from Montana and most of the produce is local and organic.

2534 Mission St. (between 21st and 22nd sts.). ☎ 415/648-7600. www.foreigncinema.com. Reservations recommended. Kids’ menu, high chairs, boosters. Main courses \$22–\$30; brunch \$8.50–\$18; kids’ menu \$7. AE, MC, V. Sun and Tues–Wed 5:30–10pm; Thurs–Sat 6–11pm; Sat–Sun brunch 11am–5pm. Muni: BART to 24th St.; walk 2 blocks north. If it’s dark, take a cab there. After dinner, cab it home.

MODERATE

Delfina ★★ ITALIAN This renowned Tuscan-Italian restaurant defines what’s incredible about the city’s neighborhood eats. Every day chef/co-owner Craig Stoll, who was one of *Food & Wine*’s Best New Chefs in 2001, whips up a new menu of delectable, ultra-fresh fare. Diners trek in from all over the city for it, even though there’s absolutely nowhere to park. (Take a cab.) The Niman Ranch flat-iron steak with French fries is a standard, but a more seasonal option might be winter gnocchi with squash and chestnuts or lamb with polenta and sweet peas. Don’t fail to order the buttermilk *panna cotta* for dessert. The yellow walls, close-together tables, and hip young clientele give this place an adult energy—but the staff is friendly and relaxed. Moreover, chef Stoll and his wife Annie, who works in front, are parents themselves and sure to be accommodating.

The Mission District



DINING

- Burger Joint **10**
- Delfina **8**
- Dolores Park Cafe **7**
- Foreign Cinema **14**
- La Corneta Taqueria **17**
- La Rondalla **12**
- Pancho Villa Taqueria **3**
- Tartine **9**
- Ti Couz **2**

PERFORMING ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

- A Traveling Jewish Theatre **6**
- Levende Lounge **1**
- The Marsh/
Mock Cafe **13**
- 12 Galaxies **15**

SHOPPING

- Maddie's Pet Adoption Center **4**
- Modern Times Bookstore **11**
- Ross Dress for Less **5**
- Skechers USA **16**

The food here is so memorable, I wouldn't hesitate to bring the kids in order to enjoy a fabulous and well-priced meal.

3621 18th St. (between Dolores and Guerrero sts.). ☎ 415/552-4055. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$12–\$18. MC, V. Nightly 5:30–10pm (until 11pm Fri–Sat). Muni: J-Church streetcar to 18th; walk 2 blocks east.

INEXPENSIVE

Burger Joint ★ HAMBURGERS Come to either of Burger Joint's two locations to get yummy, satisfying burgers for the whole family. See full review on p. 138.

807 Valencia St. (between 19th and 20th sts.). ☎ 415/824-3494. Main courses \$4.95–\$6.95. No credit cards. Daily 11am–11pm. BART to 16th and Mission; walk west to Valencia St. and walk 3 blocks south.

Dolores Park Cafe ★ Finds AMERICAN/BREAKFAST The setting alone, across the street from Dolores Park with a spacious front deck, would probably be enough to guarantee this café's popularity. But it also happens to serve a terrific café latte, and plenty of other tasty items, like albacore tuna melts on whole grain bread and Niman Ranch honey glazed ham sandwiches. Breakfast items, soups, and salads are all worth stopping by for as well. Enjoy your meal in the sunshine, alongside other diners rocking strollers or perusing the newspaper. An all-ages music show Friday nights from 7:30 to 9:30pm is a big hit with kids, but it's also packed, so make sure to eat your dinner before the crowds stream in.

501 Dolores St. (at 18th St.). ☎ 415/621-2936. www.doloresparkcafe.org. Highchairs. Sandwiches/salads \$5–\$6.25. No credit cards. Daily 7am–8pm. Fri music nights until 9:30pm. Muni: J-Church streetcar to 18th; walk 1 block east.

La Corneta Taqueria ★ MEXICAN *Taquerias* abound in the Mission, so it may be useful to clarify what they actually sell, especially if you are not from the Southwest. They do not sell the crunchy, uniformly shaped “tacos” that break into a million pieces when you bite them, such as you find at the fast food chains Del Taco or Taco Bell. Mission *taquerias* sell flavorful tacos on soft corn or flour tortillas, in addition to tostadas, enchiladas, and even plated dinners. But the biggest reason most San Franciscans come to a *taqueria* is for the burritos. And at La Corneta, in addition to a more colorful, spacious, and clean-feeling dining room than you find at many neighborhood *taquerias*, you'll get a darn good burrito. Stand in line to choose beans (black, pinto, refried), a filling (beef, beef tongue, chicken, pork, shrimp, vegetarian), and your salsa preference (mild or hot). Make sure to ask for guacamole and sour cream as well. After that, you won't need to eat until tomorrow.

2731 Mission St. (between 23rd and 24th sts.). ☎ 415/643-7001. Highchairs. Main courses \$1.25–\$12. MC, V. Daily 10am–10pm. BART to 24th and Mission.

La Rondalla MEXICAN A Mexican friend of mine, who left Mexico for the woody hills Marin County 2 decades ago, can't resist crossing the Golden Gate Bridge every few weeks to bring her kids here for a fiesta-like evening. The place is strung up in colorful Christmas lights all year-round, and mariachi music is sure to accompany every meal. Huge burritos, enchiladas, and tacos are served with the traditional rice and beans, and more interesting Mexican dishes like *carne asada* and chicken with mole sauce are also on the menu. The festive atmosphere is fueled by tasty, and potent, margaritas.

901-903 Valencia St. (at 20th St.). ☎ 415/647-7474. Highchairs. Main courses \$5–\$12. No credit cards. Sun–Thurs 5pm–midnight; Fri–Sat 5pm–3am. Muni: BART to 24th St.; walk up to Valencia St. and walk 3 blocks north.

Mitchell's Ice Cream ★ *Finds* ICE CREAM Getting to Mitchell's is going to require commitment on the part of anyone without a car because it's located in the outer Mission a few blocks from the nearest streetcar line. For true ice cream lovers, however, it's a schlep worth your time. Beyond the ice cream's incredible creaminess, Mitchell's is best loved for its lengthy menu featuring seasonal fresh fruit and such unusual ice cream flavors as *maiz/queso* (corn/cheese) and lychee fruit. I love the avocado, but *buko* (baby coconut) is hands-down the most popular flavor, with the cinnamon Mexican chocolate coming in second. Even plain old vanilla is delicious. Be sure to elbow your way inside this small store if you arrive after dinner or in the afternoon and take a number from the dispenser by the door. If you just can't make it out this way, a more limited selection of Mitchell's flavors can be found at the Santa Barbara Ice Creamery on 2240 Chestnut St. in the Marina (☎ 415/922-6417).

688 San Jose Ave. (at 29th St.). ☎ 415/648-2300. www.mitchellsicecream.com. 1 scoop \$2.10, 2 scoops \$4.10. No credit cards. Daily 11am–11pm. Muni: J-Church streetcar to 28th St.; walk east to Guerrero and turn right; Guerrero St. will turn in San Jose Ave.

Pancho Villa Taqueria ★ MEXICAN This is an old standby and one of the best *taquerias* in the city. The ever-present line testifies to the quality and consistency of the burritos, tacos, quesadillas, and enormous combination plates of prawns, *carne asada*, and chicken. The dining room isn't much to look at—utilitarian comes to mind—but who cares? With a choice of meats, beans, tortillas, salsas, and extras like sour cream or avocado, your eyes will be on your plate. Portions are substantial, and a late lunch will easily serve for dinner. Baby burritos are available for smaller appetites.

3071 16th St. (between Mission and Valencia sts.). ☎ 415/864-8840. www.panchovillasf.com. Highchairs. Main courses \$1.35–\$16. AE, MC, V. Daily 10am–midnight. Muni: BART to 16th and Mission sts.; walk 1 block west.

Tartine ★ *Finds* BAKERY Crowds from far and near are drawn by the smell of freshly baked bread at Tartine, considered by many to be the best bakery in San Francisco. You could be forgiven for forgoing dinner and simply dining on a loaf of oven-fresh walnut bread, which comes out of the oven after 4pm and sells out quickly. If the walnut bread is gone, all is not lost: Tartine also has some wonderful toasted sandwiches and plenty of other mouth-watering baked goods to choose from. **Note:** Only breakfast items are served Mondays.

600 Guerrero St. (at 18th St.). ☎ 415/487-2600. No reservations. Sandwiches \$6–\$10. AE, MC, V. Mon 8am–2pm; Tues–Wed 7:30am–7pm; Thurs–Fri 7:30am–8pm; Sat 8am–8pm; Sun 9am–8pm. Muni: BART to 16th St.; walk west to Guerrero Street and walk 2 blocks south.

Ti Couz ★ *Finds* CREPES This stylish stand-out started as a tiny creperie featuring Norman buckwheat crepes, which come served in folded squares. Combinations of fillings are suggested, but diners are also free to choose from such options as sausage, smoked salmon, mushrooms, or goat cheese. For dessert, fillings include fruit, chocolate, and ice cream. The soups and salads are also top-notch. The place got so popular that it soon expanded to include the neighboring storefront. On sunny days, put your name down and wait for an outside table.

3108 16th St. (between Guerrero and Valencia sts.). ☎ 415/252-7373. Highchairs. Reservations not accepted. Crepes \$2–\$10. MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri 11am–11pm; Sat 10am–11pm; Sun 10am–10pm. Muni: BART to 16th and Mission sts.; walk 1½ blocks west.

15 The Castro & Noe Valley

MODERATE

Firefly ★★ *Finds* AMERICAN If you happen to find yourself in this neck of the woods, I highly recommend dining at this charming neighborhood alcove. Located at the residential end of 24th Street, Firefly is a bright and welcoming oasis of calm after a busy day of sightseeing. It's one of those places you sense is going to be good as soon as you walk in the door. The decor is subtle and welcoming; the space cozy but not crowded. A look at the menu confirms that you will eat well here. It combines classic comfort foods—think fried chicken with mashed potatoes, Niman Ranch ribeye steak, and vegetarian lasagna—with more novel concoctions like grilled wild king salmon with lobster-mushroom sauce or roasted vegetable *tagine* (a Moroccan style of cooking). Make sure to start with a sharing plate of their signature shrimp and scallop potstickers, and end with the flourless chocolate cake if you have room. Everything is delicious. The dining room is teeny-tiny, so please come early if you're toting young kids. Sunday through Thursday you can order a \$29 *prix fixe* option, including appetizer, main course, dessert, and coffee.

4288 24th St. (at Douglass St.). ☎ 415/821-7652. www.fireflyrestaurant.com. Highchairs. Main courses \$15–\$19. AE, D, MC, V. Daily 5:30–10pm. Muni: J-Church streetcar to 24th St. and transfer to the 48 bus west to Douglass St.

Lovejoy's Tea Room AFTERNOON TEA Crowded with settees, chairs, lace-covered tables, and breakfronts holding teapots and china cups, Lovejoy's has successfully brought a bit of old England across the pond. Tea here is much less formal than hotel teas, and cheaper, so plenty of moms and children celebrate quality time over a cuppa without waiting for a special occasion. Crustless tea sandwiches come with cream cheese and apple, roast beef with horseradish, Stilton cheese with pear, and other very British combinations. Raisin scones are served with clotted cream and jam, and there's always a selection of sweets. The tea selection is bountiful, but children have the option of drinking cocoa, and jelly sandwiches are served with the Wee Tea. If you like the chair you're sitting on or the teacup from which you're sipping, go ahead and buy it. Lovejoy's doubles as an antiques store, and everything is for sale.

1351 Church St. (at Clipper St.). ☎ 415/648-5895. www.lovejoystearoom.com. Reservations recommended. Light tea \$12; high tea \$15; Queen's Tea \$19; Wee Tea \$9. MC, V. Wed–Sun 11am–6pm (kitchen closes at 5:30pm). Muni: J-Church streetcar to 26th St to Clipper St.

INEXPENSIVE

Chow ★ AMERICAN The raw ingredients in the kitchen include organic and local produce and naturally-raised meats. The end product on your table is flavorful, appealing comfort food. From chicken potpie to spaghetti and meatballs, the food here resembles something grandma might cook up . . . if she lived on an organic farm and had a high-tech kitchen. If you're in the mood for something a bit more exciting, wood-fired pizzas, delicious grilled meats, and a more inventive ethnic-inspired entrée or two are also on offer. With wooden floors and wainscoting, dark green walls, and close-together tables, the overall ambience is as comfortable as the food. With desserts like ginger cake with pumpkin ice cream and caramel sauce, and comfortable prices to boot, it's easy to see how this place stays so popular.

215 Church St. (at Market St.). ☎ 415/552-2469. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$6–\$11. MC, V. Sun–Thurs 11am–11pm; Fri–Sat 11am–midnight. Muni: F-Market or J-Church streetcar to Church St. Station; walk ½ block south on Church St.

Pasta Pomodoro ITALIAN This chain, with locations around the city, serves good, basic Italian food at reasonable prices. See p. 133 for a full review.

2304 Market St. (at 16th St.). ☎ 415/558-8123. www.pastapomodoro.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$7.50–\$11. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–11pm; from noon on Sun. Muni: F-Market to Castro St. station and walk 1 block northeast to Noe St. Also at 4000 24th St. (at Noe St.). ☎ 415/920-9904. Muni: J-Church streetcar to 24th St. and walk 2 blocks west to Noe St.

16 The Richmond & Sunset

EXPENSIVE

Cliff House Bistro AMERICAN We squeezed in a meal here just before press time. The newly opened restaurant has a lot going for it, and our expectations were high. The building sits on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean, with views to the north, west, and south. Moreover, it boasts a rich history. Three U.S. presidents visited the first 1863 Cliff House before it was destroyed by fire. In 1886 local millionaire Adolph Sutro built the second Cliff House, but eleven years later it, too, burned down. In 1909 Sutro's daughter built the third Cliff House, which was eventually acquired by the National Park Service.

In January 2003, the Cliff House closed for a \$19 million renovation and reopened in late 2004. A stylish modern wing features an expensive new restaurant, Sutro's. I opted to take my family to the more casual Cliff House Bistro. The breathtaking view does not disappoint. The decor, with old-fashioned tile flooring and over 200 photographs of bygone movie stars, is charming. Unfortunately, the menu was a letdown. Perhaps people are expected to pay for the vistas, because in my book \$26 is a lot for a crab Louie. I was, in fact, told not to order it because another customer had complained that the crab was too salty. I opted for the \$18 fish and chips, which were decent. My green salad was tasty, as was my husband's halibut. Of course the girls liked their buttered pasta. Because the view is so terrific, and the old-time feel delightful, I would actually try this place again, and I think you can too. Just come for breakfast or lunch, when prices will be a bit more reasonable—and don't order the crab Louie.

1090 Point Lobos Ave. (Geary Blvd. turns into Point Lobos Ave. west of 48th Ave.). ☎ 415/386-3330. Highchairs. Main courses \$9.50–\$18 breakfast; \$10–\$23 lunch; \$13–\$28 dinner. AE, DC, D, MC, V. Daily 9am–9:30pm. Muni: 38-Geary bus to 48th Ave., then walk 1 block or transfer to 18–46th Ave. bus.

MODERATE

Aziza ★★ MOROCCAN Attention to detail is the watchword at this North African oasis nestled in the city's most multicultural neighborhood. The arched ceilings, Moroccan lamps, hand-painted Arabesque plateware, and traditional Moroccan dishes will transport you to a distant continent. The food is lovingly prepared using local, organic ingredients. The *bastilla*, saffron-braised chicken and almonds baked in phyllo dough and dusted with powdered sugar and cinnamon, is out of this world. It takes 25 minutes to prepare, though, which may be too much of a wait for tired, hungry kids. Everyone will be pleased with the classic "couscous Aziza": vegetables, grilled chicken, prawns, and spicy lamb sausage on a bed of steamed couscous. Grown-ups may opt for the Moroccan spiced prawn *tagine*, and kids will enjoy the chicken brochettes—made with naturally raised poultry, of course. The lighting is muted and the mood gets more adult as the evening wears on, so plan on arriving early if you have younger kids. That said, families dining on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday nights always stay past 7pm, when the belly dancer arrives.

5800 Geary Blvd. (at 22nd Ave.). ☎ 415/752-2222. www.aziza-sf.com. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$10–\$20. MC, V. Wed–Mon 5:30–10:30pm. Muni: 38-Geary bus to 22nd Ave.

Khan Toke ✨ THAI The first thing you do upon entering this pretty restaurant, one of the oldest Thai establishments in the city, is relinquish your shoes. Then, you follow the host down the hallway to a large room trimmed in teak, with low tables surrounded by cushions. As far as the children are concerned, dinner is already an adventure; the actual food may be irrelevant. Happily, the dishes on the rather lengthy menu are terrific, marked for levels of spiciness (although nothing seemed that incendiary), and familiar if you've ever eaten Thai food. For picky eaters, and nonpicky alike, skewers of marinated beef and chicken never fail to disappear, and the green curries, fragrant rice, pad Thai, papaya salad, and fried bananas with coconut ice cream are all kid-tested, although we had to order seconds on the fried bananas to keep the peace. Service is lovely and serene.

5937 Geary Blvd. (at 24th Ave.). ☎ 415/668-6654. Reservations recommended. Main courses \$7.95–\$13. AE, DC, MC, V. Daily 5–10pm. Muni: 38-Geary bus to 24th Ave.

Park Chalet ✨ AMERICAN Opened in April 2004 by the owners of the Beach Chalet, the Park Chalet has the best outdoor dining area in the city. Located on the ground floor behind the Golden Gate Park Visitor's Center, it opens onto a lovely garden framed by the park's tall trees. With a glass ceiling, retractable glass walls, a stone fireplace, and more upscale furnishings than the Beach Chalet, it feels like a European countryside restaurant. The menu is essentially American, though, featuring classic salads, sandwiches, and meat dishes like barbeque pork ribs or shepherd's pie. The most inventive options are the individual pizzas, such as one with wild mushrooms, roasted garlic, goat cheese, truffle oil, and thyme. On weekends, you may even find a "brunch pizza," topped with artichoke, pancetta, mushrooms, and poached egg. If the Dungeness crab benedict is on offer, you're in luck. Kids get their own menus and crayons. Once your little ones have polished off their cheese pizzas or corndogs, let them run around on the well-tended lawn while you finish your meals in peace. There'll be lots of other kids out there as well.

1000 Great Hwy (between Fulton St. and Lincoln Way). ☎ 415/386-8439. Highchairs, boosters, kids' menu. Reservations recommended weekends. Lunch main courses \$10–\$17; Dinner main course \$10–\$24; Kids menu \$5.25. AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 9am–10pm, Fri–Sat 9am–11pm. Muni: 5-Fulton, 31-Balboa, or 38-Geary buses, or N-Judah streetcar and transfer to 18–46th Ave. bus.

Pizzetta 211 ✨ *Finds* PIZZA When you arrive at this miniscule storefront on an otherwise residential street far from downtown you'll feel like you've come upon a hidden gem. You have. The cozy pizzeria, with but a handful of indoor and outdoor tables, serves up thin-crust, wood-oven-fired *pizzettas* from a weekly-changing menu. Whenever possible, organic produce, dairy, and grains are used to make delectable, crispy pizzas with inspired toppings like oven-dried San Marzano tomatoes, prosciutto, and local goat cheese, or roasted cauliflower, garlic, and bread crumbs. Salads and Italian desserts are also available. This is gourmet stuff, and the staff takes itself seriously, so at dinnertime remind the kids that normal pizzeria behavior does not apply—especially if you're seated indoors. A better option is to come for lunch after a morning hike at Land's End and sit outside.

211 23rd Ave. (at California St.). ☎ 415/379-9880. Individual pizzas \$9–\$13. No credit cards. Wed–Fri noon–2:30pm and 5–9pm; Sat–Sun noon–9pm. Muni: 1-California bus to 23rd Ave.

INEXPENSIVE

The Canvas Cafe/Gallery BREAKFAST/ECCLECTIC This loft-like space across the street from Golden Gate Park triples as an art gallery, lounge, and cafe. For local families, the operative word is cafe. Get there during daylight hours, and it's an optimal place to grab a bite before heading off to the Strybing Arboretum,

the Japanese Tea Garden, or other park attractions within close walking distance. After munching on oatmeal or toasted bagels for breakfast, kids can run around the large area as you sip your coffee. For lunch, choose from an assortment of salads, several cold or grilled sandwiches, focaccia pizzas, and even a few pasta entrees like macaroni and cheese and meat or veggie lasagna. While you await your meal, look around at the paintings and sculptures for sale. Another bonus: this is one of the few San Francisco cafes with its own parking lot.

1200 9th Ave. (at Lincoln Way). ☎ 415/504-0060. www.thecanvasgallery.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$6.35–\$8.70. AE, MC, V. Sun–Thurs 8am–midnight; Fri–Sat 8am–2am. Live music Thurs–Sun evenings. Muni: N-Judah streetcar to 9th Ave.; walk 2 blocks north towards the park.

Giorgio's Pizzeria ★ *Finds* PIZZA If you were to ask San Francisco parents to name the most family-friendly restaurant in town, most would probably say Giorgio's. This festive, boisterous pizzeria serves consistently good thin-crust pizza with traditional toppings like pepperoni or mushrooms and sausage, as well as a few pastas. Every Wednesday from 4 to 6pm is "Kids' Happy Hour": kids can order any mini pizza and make it themselves. Giorgio's also has deals for lunchtime children's parties, and there always seems to be one taking place.

151 Clement St. (at 3rd Ave.). ☎ 415/668-1266. www.giorgiospizza.com. Highchairs, boosters. Mini pizza \$7–\$10, large pizza \$13–\$19. MC, V. Daily 11:30am–11pm. Muni: 2-Clement, 3-Jackson, or 4-Sutter bus to 3rd Ave.; or 1-California bus to 3rd Ave. and walk 1 block south to Clement St.

Marnee Thai ★ *Finds* THAI Fortunately for out-of-town visitors, it's now no longer necessary to trek to the outer Sunset to try the best Thai food in San Francisco. Marnee Thai's new location is just steps away from Golden Gate Park, so you can easily come in for an early dinner after spending the afternoon visiting the Strybing Arboretum or Japanese Tea Garden. The spicy Angel wings (deep-fried chicken wings topped with chile, garlic, and sweet basil) are hugely popular and not too spicy for most kids. All the soups, curries, and noodle dishes are also fabulous. Be adventurous and skip the pad Thai; there are too many other wonderful dishes to try. If you're lucky, the wife's owner will pop by this new location when you're there. In addition to being very opinionated about what you should order, she'll gladly tell you your fortune, free of charge.

1243 9th Ave. (between Irving St. and Lincoln Way). ☎ 415/731-9999. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$8–\$14. AE, MC, V. Daily 11:30am–10pm. Muni: N-Judah streetcar to 9th Ave.; walk 2 blocks north towards the park.

Mel's Drive-In HAMBURGERS This popular diner/burger chain has a few locations throughout the city. See p. 132 for a full review.

3355 Geary Blvd. (between Parker Ave. and Stanyan St.). ☎ 415/387-2255. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$5–\$15. MC, V. Daily 6am–2am. Muni: 38-Geary bus to Parker Ave.

Park Chow ★ AMERICAN Just like Chow, its sister restaurant in the Castro, Park Chow balances good ingredients, a lively atmosphere, and amazing value to deliver a truly happy meal. Please see the Chow review on p. 144.

1240 9th Ave. (between Irving St. and Lincoln Way). ☎ 415/665-9912. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$5.95–\$11. MC, V. Mon–Thurs 11am–10pm; Fri 11am–11pm; Sat 10am–11pm; Sun 10am–10pm. Muni: N-Judah streetcar to 9th Ave.; walk 2 blocks north towards the park.

Pasta Pomodoro ITALIAN This chain, with locations around the city, serves good, basic Italian food at reasonable prices. See p. 133 for a full review.

816 Irving St. (at 9th Ave.). ☎ 415/566-0900. www.pastapomodoro.com. Highchairs, boosters. Main courses \$7.50–\$11. AE, MC, V. Daily 11am–11pm, from noon on Sun. Muni: N-Judah streetcar to 9th Ave.

Ton Kiang 🌟🌟 *(Finds)* CHINESE Hands down the best place for dim sum in San Francisco, Ton Kiang starts getting crowded about half an hour after the doors open on weekend mornings. So come during the week, arrive early, or, better yet, try to round up enough people—eight or more—to make a reservation. We’re always calling up friends at the last minute to join us because dim sum at Ton Kiang is best enjoyed with lots of people at a large, round table. Servers come by with freshly made batches of shrimp dumplings, pork buns, crisp-steamed vegetables, and other tiny treats, which they place on a big lazy Susan in the middle of the table. Save room for dessert—the walnut cookies, custard pancakes, and mango pudding are all divine. Something about the communal dining experience makes my kids more adventurous than usual, and there really isn’t an item our normally choosy eaters don’t like. That may explain why the upstairs dining room, where you’ll probably end up, is always packed with families. If you can think of any reason to head out this way—perhaps you’re off to the Legion of Honor or plan to walk on Ocean Beach—do so. **Tip:** They don’t have booster seats, so try stacking one chair on top of another.

5821 Geary Blvd (between 22nd and 23rd aves.). ☎ 415/387-8273. Highchairs. Reservations for parties of 8 or more. Dim sum \$2–\$5.50. AE, DC, DISC, MC, V. Mon–Sat 10:30am–10pm; Sun 9am–10pm. Muni: 38-Geary bus to 22nd Ave.

Toy Boat Dessert Cafe 🌟 ICE CREAM This corner cafe is a treat for the eyes and tummy. High shelves are filled with the owner’s own collectibles—among them tin wind-up toys, Pez dispensers, and the Pillsbury Doughboy—and some for-sale reproductions. Bagels and sandwiches are available to enjoy at one of the few booths and tables, but it’s the ice cream sundaes with all the trimmings that’ll rock your boat.

401 Clement St. (at 5th Ave.). ☎ 415/751-7505. Highchairs. Main courses from \$4.75. MC, V. Mon–Thurs 7:30am–11pm; Fri 7:30am–midnight; Sat 8:30am–midnight; Sun 8:30am–11pm. Muni: 2-Clement or 38-Geary to 5th Ave.; walk 1 block north to Clement St.