

# How to Feel Like a San Francisco Family

San Francisco has always had a way of calling me back. Although I spent most of my life in a whirlwind of travel, it was punctuated by stays in this glorious part of the world. I was born not far from the city limits, and my parents often brought my brother and me into town. We moved to Puerto Rico when I was still young and, after that, to Brazil and then Uruguay. When we returned to the U.S. years later it was to Southern California; but because my parents retained a fondness for San Francisco, we visited the city regularly.

Perhaps it was inevitable that I would attend college in the Bay Area, so that weekends could be spent exploring San Francisco with roommates and friends. Upon graduating, I was off again: I worked at a newspaper in Brazil, wrote for the Associated Press in Germany, earned a graduate degree in New York, and was then based there while I worked to promote investment overseas. In between travel to far corners of the earth, I met my soon-to-be husband, a nomad like myself. Although we moved to Seattle, my international job kept the frequent flier miles multiplying—until the birth of our first daughter, when all the travel came to a screeching halt.

Then it happened. San Francisco harkened again. My husband's work brought us here, where our second daughter was born a few months later. Five years after that, our son was born. And here we are: eight years, and three kids, later we are a certified San Francisco family—going to every birthday party venue in town; trekking out to the beach in summer, bundled up in jeans and jackets against the fog; loading up the kids' bikes in the car on weekends to take them somewhere flat to ride; buying our organic greens at the Farmer's Market; and considering steamed pork buns, shrimp dumplings, and stuffed crab claws (in other words, dim sum) a fine meal for breakfast.

Through all the travel, the Bay Area had always been my spiritual home, if not my real one. Now San Francisco is my family's true residence, one that welcomed us from the moment we arrived. It helps that the city is used to taking in people from all over the globe. Most of the San Franciscans we know seem to have started life somewhere else, although we're always impressed when we meet someone who actually grew up here. The city is so rich with history, culture, and little-known secrets that it's a treat to pick the brains of a lifelong resident. It's been especially exciting to begin writing guidebooks about San Francisco, giving me a terrific excuse to look a little deeper and learn a little more about the wonderful offerings here.

I've made an effort to provide some insights in this book that will make your family's stay in San Francisco more rewarding and memorable. Visits to the city's most famous attractions will certainly be enjoyable, but I hope that you take the time to stray off the beaten path—if even just a little. When in Fisherman's Wharf, consider skipping the T-shirt shops and candy vendors of PIER 39 and heading instead to the Hyde Street Pier, where you can get a real sense of the city's seafaring past (while the kids climb all over antique ships). In Chinatown, go ahead and check out the colorful tourist stores on

Grant Street, but don't miss the exotic and authentic grocers on Stockton Street. And although I know that cashew chicken at the big restaurant in the middle of Chinatown sounds appetizing, consider ordering dim sum out in the Richmond District instead.

One of the terrific things about San Francisco is that a whole lot of the sights and activities that appeal to tourists in general will appeal to families specifically. What kid doesn't enjoy a ride on a cable car? And although everyone loves a stroll along Crissy Field, younger ones will be especially delighted playing on the grassy hills and sandy beaches. Not to mention the ferry ride to Alcatraz Island, which is perfect family fare. Certainly, not every kid will be thrilled by a trip to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA), but a terrific children's center is just across the street. For every adult attraction you ante up, I'll see you three that are fabulous with kids. In fact, having little ones is a great excuse to visit the Exploratorium, the California Academy of Sciences, and the San Francisco Zoo—all of which are first-rate.

So get started planning your trip. This chapter is a good place to begin; in it, I suggest some of our all-time favorite San Francisco family experiences, in addition to the best hotels and dining spots.

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## 1 FROMMER'S FAVORITE SAN FRANCISCO EXPERIENCES

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- **Shopping at the Ferry Plaza Farmer's Market:** Perhaps you haven't had a chance lately to stop and smell the roses, admire the tomatoes, or compare the peaches. If that's the case, hop on the F-Market streetcar to the Ferry Building and take a stroll around the best outdoor market in the Bay Area. It's a Saturday morning ritual for a great many San Franciscans who come down with their baskets and carefully select the season's finest from organic farmers and local purveyors of fresh sausages, free-range meats, olive oils, honey, and baked goods. The farmers offer tastes of their wares, so your kids may discover what freshly picked-at-their-peak fruits taste like—a revelation if they've never had a perfectly ripe pear or apricot. Don't eat breakfast first; along with coffee drinks and a huge array of morning breads, pastries, and sweets from the very nicest bakeries, local restaurants serve specialties that taste even better eaten with a view of the bay. A more limited farmers' market is also open on Tuesdays. See p. 161.
- **Eating Shrimp Dumplings for Breakfast:** If crab claws, pork buns, and steamed dumplings aren't your idea of Sunday brunch, it's time to branch out from omelets and pancakes. One of our favorite weekend morning activities is gathering with friends at a large table with a lazy Susan in the middle, while servers bring trays laden with bite-sized Chinese delicacies. If you're planning on staying downtown, Yank Sing is the place to go (One Rincon Center, 101 Spear St., at Mission St.; ☎ 415/781-1111). If you're planning a walk at Land's End, consider hopping on the 38-Geary bus and trekking out to Ton Kiang (5821 Geary Blvd., between 22nd and 23rd aves.; ☎ 415/752-4440) for a hearty pre-hike brunch. Just get there early, as tables fill up fast. See p. 124 and p. 152.
- **Strolling through Chinatown:** Just steps away from Union Square, you can enter another world—one decorated by bright red, green, and gold banners. The knickknack shops, traditional herbalists, vendors of ceremonial papers



To Half Moon Bay ↓

## San Francisco Timeline

**1776** Spain leads the first colonizers to the area and establishes the Presidio of San Francisco and Mission Dolores, founding Yerba Buena (San Francisco).

**1821** Mexico declares independence from Spain, and Yerba Buena remains under Mexican rule.

**1846** Captain John Montgomery plants the U.S. flag into present-day Portsmouth Square to claim Yerba Buena for the United States. Yerba Buena is renamed San Francisco.

**1848** James Marshall discovers gold at Sutter's Mill. Newspaperman Sam Brannan publicizes the discovery, and the Gold Rush begins.

**1848** Domingo Ghirardelli sails to San Francisco to join his partner, James Lick, and begin what is to become the city's most famous chocolate factory.

**1849** Isadore Boudin, an experienced French baker, introduces the ordinary sourdough yeast used by miners to a French-style loaf of bread and creates San Francisco sourdough bread.

**1868** The *Daily Morning Chronicle*, later the *San Francisco Chronicle*, begins publishing.

**1873** Andrew Hallidie, inspired by an accident he witnesses when a team of horses slips on a rainy San Francisco hill, invents the cable car.

**1887** George Hearst purchases a small daily newspaper, the *San Francisco Examiner*, to promote his race for the U.S. Senate. His son, William Randolph Hearst, turns it into a very successful tabloid.

**1892** The "Ellis Island of the West," Angel Island, opens, initially, as a quarantine station.

**1906** On April 18 at 5:12am, a major earthquake rocks San Francisco and starts more than 50 fires, which burn uncontrollably for 3 days. Two-thirds of the city is destroyed, 250,000 people are left homeless, and more than 675 are dead or missing.

**1927** Modern-age hockey dawns for the Bay Area with the creation of the California Hockey League.

and incense, and grocery stores teeming with live frogs, crabs, and other wriggly seafood are all a visual and cultural treat. A stop by the Golden Gate Fortune Cookie Company just adds to the fun. See chapter 8 for a self-guided walking tour of the neighborhood.

- **Hanging Out at Crissy Field:** What better way to spend the day than to slow down and take in the views of the

Golden Gate Bridge and the city from the Bay Area's newest national park? Kids can run around on the hills, check out the gift shop, pile up rocks, or play in the sand. Buy some nice sandwiches at the Warming Hut and enjoy a picnic at one of the many bayside picnic tables. See p. 160.

- **Riding Bikes down the Embarcadero:** The boulevard is wide and the street is

**1934** Alcatraz Island becomes a federal prison.

**1936** The San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge opens on November 12. It remains one of the largest bridges in the world and carries more than 270,000 vehicles each day—more traffic than any other toll bridge.

**1937** The Golden Gate Bridge opens to pedestrian traffic on May 26 and to automobile traffic on May 27.

**1945** The charter establishing the United Nations is signed in San Francisco's Herbst Theater.

**1960** Candlestick Park opens for baseball and football. The last baseball game takes place in 1999.

**1965** Jefferson Airplane opens at the Matrix, a club, on Fillmore.

**1978** PIER 39 is built. One of San Francisco's most popular attractions, it gets more than 10 million visitors each year.

**1989** On October 17 at 5:04pm, right before the start of the World Series between the Oakland A's and the San Francisco Giants, a 7.1 magnitude earthquake hits the Bay Area. One person dies at Candlestick Park from a heart attack.

**2000** Pacific Bell Park (now AT&T Park), the home to the San Francisco Giants, opens.

**2004** San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom issues more than 4,000 same-sex marriage licenses, which are later annulled by the state's Supreme Court. (That court legalized same-sex marriage in 2008, but it was defeated by a state-wide ballot proposition the same year).

**2006** Thousands of residents line the streets before dawn on April 18 to mark the 100-year anniversary of "The Great Quake," falling silent at 5:12am. Eleven survivors of the original quake attend the event.

**2008** The Castro Theatre hosts the world premiere of *Milk*, a film about San Francisco politician Harvey Milk, starring Sean Penn, who wins an Oscar for the role.

flat, making the Embarcadero an easy family ride. Start at the Bike Hut (see chapter 9) and cruise down the street past the piers, stopping by the Ferry Building to buy picnic food. Walk the bikes down Pier 7 and see if anyone's caught a fish or crab at the end of the pier. Continue toward PIER 39 and Fisherman's Wharf. It may become too crowded to pedal here, but once you

reach the Hyde Street Pier, space opens up. Keep going until you get to Aquatic Park, where you can stop to eat your pre-packed lunch.

- **Boating on Stow Lake:** Pile into one of the rowboats, or pedal boats and circle this man-made lake as many times as you can. Relax as you admire the trees and revel in the laughter of the kids as they attempt to keep the craft from

bumping into other boats or landing on the bank. See chapter 9 for more information on this and other outdoor family adventures.

- **Checking Out the Scene at the Maritime National Historical Park:** Young kids will love exploring the antique ships of the Hyde Street Pier (p. 170), running around on the grass at Victorian Park, and gaping at the crazy swimmers in Aquatic Park who brave the Bay's chilly waters. All the while, grown-ups can marvel at the lovely scenery. Then everyone can grab a snack from the San Francisco Crepe Cart in The Cannery (p. 132), and perhaps listen to some music from a local performer.
- **Hanging Out in Golden Gate Park:** You don't need an agenda to fritter away the hours around San Francisco's most famous park. The antique carousel is a big draw, as is the Koret Children's Quarter, a world-class playground. The Japanese Tea Garden is so composed and elegant you'll want to meditate there, but the kids will prefer stepping over the stone walkways and scaling the Drum Bridge. Budding botanists will appreciate the dahlia garden outside the Conservatory of Flowers and will especially enjoy ogling the carnivorous plants inside. The de Young Museum tower affords super city views and the *Three Gems* structure in the sculpture garden is a great place to chill out for a moment. On Sundays, the park is closed to traffic; near 6th Avenue and Fulton Street, be sure to look for the skate dancers, who put on a fine show. See p. 173.
- **Traveling through the jungle and the heavens at the California Academy of Sciences:** This Golden Gate Park attraction deserves its own heading. Opened in late 2008 in a new award-winning home, the world's most eco-friendly museum will inspire the botanist, marine biologist, or astronomer in your

child. Breathe in the moist air of the world's rainforests, soak up the scenery atop the living roof, fawn over the fishes of the Steinhart Aquarium, and experience space travel in the Planetarium. See p. 178.

- **Taking the Ferry to Marin:** Bundle up and catch a Blue and Gold Ferry (p. 185) from Pier 41 to Sausalito or Tiburon. You can take bikes on the boats if you like, but both villages are petite and walkable. The ride is glorious. Remain outside for the full effect of the wind and salt spray. On a clear day, you'll have trouble deciding where to look; the scenery ahead is as thrilling as the view behind you. Sausalito is very touristy, but the stores are fun for window shopping. Tiburon is even more upscale than Sausalito. It won't take long to tour the village; leave someone behind to claim a table at Guaymas, at 5 Main St., where drinks and passable Mexican food on the sunny deck make this trip a little vacation within your vacation.
- **Trekking Along the Land's End Trail:** Provided your child won't run off ahead of you, as the trail runs along a steep cliff, there's hardly a more beautiful place to walk in San Francisco. Start at the trail head on Camino del Mar, parking next to picturesque Lincoln Park, which is dotted with majestic Monterey Cypress trees. Head west on the trail toward the Cliff House, pausing to admire the view from the "other" side of the Golden Gate Bridge, the sweeping Pacific Ocean, and the Marin Headlands to the north. See p. 186.
- **Cheering the Home Team at AT&T Park:** You don't even need to be a baseball fan to derive a lot of pleasure from an afternoon or evening at this gem of a baseball stadium (p. 265). Bleacher seats go on sale at the park on game days, but if you prefer something fancier, you can usually get good seats online from season ticket holders if

nothing's available at Giants Dugout Stores or at the park ticket booth. Kids will have a field day playing at the Coca-Cola Fan Lot playground and chowing down on the notable food concessions. Transportation is a breeze

on the N-Judah streetcar; it deposits you at the front gate. American League partisans have the option of taking BART (the local commuter train) across the bay to the Oakland Coliseum.

## 2 THE BEST HOTEL BETS

- **Best All-Around Family Hotels:** The **Argonaut** (495 Jefferson St.; ☎ 866/415-0704 or 415/563-0800) is my hands-down favorite in this category. It's a charming hotel in a family-friendly neck of the woods. Several kid-friendly attractions are either next door or less than a block away: grassy Victorian Park, the Aquatic Park beach, the Hyde Street Pier, the cable car turnaround, and The Cannery. The whimsical lobby and its adjacent National Maritime Visitors Center will appeal to kids as well. The double queen rooms are well suited to families, and the in-house restaurant serves kids' meals in a beach pail. What more could you want? See p. 89. The warm and friendly **Serrano Hotel** (405 Taylor St.; ☎ 866/289-6561 or 415/885-2500) gives kids a toy upon check-in, offers kid-sized animal print robes for use during their stay, and has a game library available to guests. See p. 76. The **Handlery Union Square** (351 Geary St.; ☎ 800/843-4343 or 415/781-7800) also gets my vote, mainly for its outdoor, heated pool. See p. 78.
- **Best Amenities for Kids:** The **St. Regis** (125 3rd St.; ☎ 415/284-4000) offers kids their own bathrobes, toys from the SFMOMA gift shop, cookies with their name on them, and special items in the minibar—provided parents call the concierge beforehand. See p. 87. The **Four Seasons** (757 Market St.; ☎ 415/633-3000) supplies cookies and milk on arrival for kids 6 and under and root beer and popcorn for those 7 and up. Kids staying in their own rooms get a specially stocked minibar, and bathrobes are supplied in sizes to fit the whole family. The concierge will also send up other family items—from cribs to board games—on request. See p. 86. Older kids will appreciate the “gaming suites” in Japantown's **Hotel Tomo** (1800 Sutter St.; ☎ 877/738-7477 or 415/921-4000), which have the latest Sony PlayStation, Wii, and a 6-foot LCD projection screen. See p. 99.
- **Best Suites:** The **Hotel Beresford Arms** (701 Post St.; ☎ 800/533-6533 or 415/673-2600) has 60 Jacuzzi suites, half of which have full kitchens and half of which have kitchenettes. The guest rooms and bathrooms also offer plenty of floor space and all beds are queen beds. See p. 82. In Japantown, the **Hotel Kabuki** (1625 Post St.; ☎ 800/533-4567 or 415/922-3200) has family suites for the price of one-room junior suites, but with *shoji* screens that separate the kids in their own area, complete with Japanese futons on tatami mats. See p. 99. The homey suites at the **Cow Hollow Motor Inn & Suites** (2190 Lombard St.; ☎ 415/921-5800) contain two bathrooms, two bedrooms, and a kitchen—and must be booked far in advance. For value and space, these offer the sweetest suite deal in town. See p. 97.
- **Best Indoor Pool:** You have to supervise your kids at every hotel pool, but if



your kids don't need you to swim with them, you can work out on the poolside cardio equipment at the **Hotel Nikko**, at 222 Mason St. (☎ 800/248-3308 or 415/394-1111). If you'd prefer to take it easy, the lounge chairs and Japanese hot tub, all under an attractive glass ceiling, are a relaxing alternative. See p. 69. The elegant infinity pool at the **St. Regis** (125 3rd St.; ☎ 415/284-4000) is so inviting, parents will want to go for a swim even when the kids have had enough. See p. 87. **The San Francisco Marriot** (55 4th St.; ☎ 415/896-1600) has an indoor pool, which isn't elegant, but is big, clean, and open from 6am to 11pm. See p. 87.

- **Best Outdoor Pool:** As you might have guessed, the competitors for this honor are few. Around Union Square, the award goes to the **Handlery** (351 Geary St.; ☎ 800/843-4343 or 415/781-7800) for a small, heated pool in a pleasant patio. See p. 78. Among Fisherman's Wharf hotels, the **Hyatt at Fisherman's Wharf** (555 N. Point St.; ☎ 800/223-1234 or 415/563-1234) fields far and away the nicest pool. See p. 90. The **Hotel Del Sol** (3100 Webster St.; ☎ 877/433-5765 or 415/921-5520) wins for the best poolside decor, with palm trees and a hammock, but the pool itself is minuscule. See p. 97.
- **Best In-House Entertainment:** The Top of the Mark at the **Mark Hopkins InterContinental** (1 Nob Hill; ☎ 800/662-6455 or 415/392-3434) is terrific for drinks, views, or weekend dinner and dancing. If the kids are old enough to leave tucked in bed in a room downstairs, you'll have the pleasure of going out for a nice evening without venturing far from your temporary home. See p. 95. At the **Hotel Bijou** (111 Mason St.; ☎ 800/771-1022 or 415/771-1200) a tiny in-house movie theater shows a nightly double billing of filmed-in—San Francisco movies, so

you can round out your day of sightseeing with a low-key evening activity. See p. 80. If you want to do something silly with the kids, take them to the Tonga Room at the **Fairmont Hotel** (950 Mason St.; ☎ 800/441-1414 or 415/772-5000) for appetizers and a mild tropical storm. See p. 94.

- **Best Lobby:** If the kids are into fairy tales, the **Fairmont Hotel** (950 Mason St.; ☎ 800/441-1414 or 415/772-5000) will leave them waiting for Princess Aurora to arrive. See p. 94. A close contender is the **Palace Hotel** (2 New Montgomery St., at Market St.; ☎ 415/546-5089); the ceiling of its historic Garden Court consists of 80,000 panes of glass. See p. 86. For the most stunning lobby in town, the truly opulent, yet tasteful, Art Deco-inspired **Four Seasons** (757 Market St.; ☎ 415/633-3000) tops the list. See p. 86.
- **Best If You Have a Car:** For stays around Union Square, the **Galleria Park Hotel** (191 Sutter St.; ☎ 800/792-9639 or 415/781-3060) is built over a parking garage, so it won't take long to retrieve yours. Like all downtown hotels, parking charges are nuts—\$30 per day is average—so it's not economical to park here, just convenient. See p. 72. One car per room gets free indoor parking at the **Cow Hollow Motor Inn & Suites** (2190 Lombard St.; ☎ 415/921-5800). See p. 97. A spot for your car also comes courtesy of the **Hotel Del Sol** (3100 Webster St.; ☎ 877/433-5765 or 415/921-5520; p. 97) or the **Marina Motel** (2576 Lombard St.; ☎ 800/346-6118 or 415/921-9406; p. 98).
- **Best If You Brought the Dog:** The **Hotel Monaco** (501 Geary St.; ☎ 800/214-4220 or 415/292-0100) has packages for pooches that rival anything other hotels have for kids. I don't know if there's an underlying message there.



See p. 73. A sister property, the **Serrano Hotel** (405 Taylor St.; ☎ 866/289-6561 or 415/885-2500), will walk your dog by appointment and stocks gourmet pet food, treats, and comfy bedding. See p. 76. The **Hotel Vitale** (8 Mission St.; ☎ 888/890-8688 or 415/278-3700; p. 92) and the **St. Regis** (125 3rd St.; ☎ 415/284-4000; p. 87) also welcome pets, and the **Larkspur Hotel** (524 Sutter St.; ☎ 800/919-9779 or 415/421-2865; p. 81) keeps a bowl of dog treats in the lobby.

- **Best for Walkers:** Steps from Chinatown and the Financial District, and still close to Union Square, the **Hotel Triton** (342 Grant Ave.; ☎ 800/800-1299 or 415/394-0500) is terrific for anyone who wants to get up and explore downtown. See p. 73. If you prefer to stroll along the water, try the **Hotel Vitale** (8 Mission St.; ☎ 888/890-8688 or 415/278-3700; p. 92) or the **Harbor Court Hotel** (165 Steuart St.; ☎ 866/792-8263 or 415/882-1330; p. 93), both of which are across the street from the Embarcadero promenade, one of the best places in the city for a stroll. The **Argonaut Hotel** (495 Jefferson St.; ☎ 866/415-0704 or 415/563-0800) is next to one of the loveliest walking paths in town, which starts at Aquatic Park, runs through woody Fort Mason, and takes you along the scenic Marina waterfront. See p. 89.
- **Most Environmental:** The **Orchard Garden Hotel** (466 Bush St.; ☎ 888/717-2881 or 415/399-9807) is the first California Hotel to be certified for eco-friendly new construction by the U.S. Green Building Council. See p. 75. Its sister property, the **Orchard Hotel** (665 Bush St.; ☎ 888/717-2881 or 415/362-8878), is also an environmentally friendly option. See p. 75.
- **Best Views:** Most of the guest rooms at the **Hotel Vitale** (8 Mission St.; ☎ 888/890-8688 or 415/278-3700) look out

onto the bay, while the “Circular” suites offer nearly 180 degrees of windows. See p. 92. Most of the hotels atop Nob Hill offer fine vistas, but the **Mark Hopkins InterContinental** (1 Nob Hill; ☎ 800/662-6455 or 415/392-3434) gets the top honors in this category. See p. 95.

- **Best Hotel Food:** The **Grand Cafe** and **Petit Cafe** in the **Hotel Monaco** (501 Geary St.; ☎ 800/214-4220 or 415/292-0100) provide first-class dining just an elevator ride away. See p. 73. **Cortez** in the **Hotel Adagio** (550 Geary Blvd.; ☎ 800/228-8830 or 415/775-5000) offers excellent cuisine, but while the evening *tapas* menu may be too sophisticated and pricey for a family meal, breakfasts are well executed. See p. 79. **Ponzu** in the **Serrano Hotel** (405 Taylor St.; ☎ 866/289-6561 or 415/885-2500) has a great menu of pan-Asian cuisine. See p. 76. The best hotel restaurant for kids has to be **Puccini & Pinetti**, where kids can design their own pizzas. It’s next to the **Hotel Abri** (127 Ellis St.; ☎ 866/778-6169 or 415/392-8800). See p. 79. **The Dining Room at the Ritz-Carlton** (600 Stockton St.; ☎ 800/241-3333 or 415/296-7465) is one of the most highly rated restaurants in town. See p. 96.
- **If Price Is No Object:** For extreme luxury and pampering, top honors go to the **St. Regis** (125 3rd St.; ☎ 415/284-4000). See p. 87. The **Four Seasons** (757 Market St.; ☎ 415/633-3000) is a close second. See p. 86. If you prefer more traditional opulence, the **Ritz-Carlton** (600 Stockton St.; ☎ 800/241-3333 or 415/296-7465) provides a sumptuous hotel experience. See p. 96.
- **If Price Is the Deal Breaker:** The most charming budget option near Union Square is the **Golden Gate Hotel** (775 Bush St.; ☎ 800/835-1118 or 415/392-3702). Rooms are small but clean and

bright, and breakfast is part of the package. See p. 81. If you are planning to stay for a few days, the **Halcyon Hotel** (649 Jones St.; ☎ 800/627-2396 or 415/929-8033) offers safe, comfortable rooms with money-saving kitchenettes. See p. 82. For a family of three willing to share showers and store stuff in lockers, a private room at **Hostelling International San Francisco, Fisherman's Wharf** (Fort Mason, Building 240; ☎ 415/771-7277) can be had for as little as \$60, and comes with a bay view, continental breakfast, use of a kitchen, and free parking. Rates for a family of four start at \$80. See p. 82. My advice is to get away from the tourist zones altogether and book a room at **Hotel Tomo** (1800 Sutter St.; ☎ 877/738-7477 or 415/921-4000), the newest, brightest accommodation you can get for not a lot of money. See p. 99.

- **Best for Baby:** Call the **Four Seasons** (757 Market St.; ☎ 415/633-3000) and tell them you're arriving with a baby. They'll set you up with a fully outfitted crib, a diaper storage unit, diapers, wipes, baby shampoo, baby lotion, and so on. See p. 86. **The Laurel Inn** (444 Presidio Ave.; ☎ 800/552-8735 or 415/567-8467) is another top pick for travelers with babies or toddlers, not just for the kitchenettes but also for the neighborhood, which is teeming with families. See p. 100.
- **Best for Toddlers:** When you've got a 2- or 3-year-old in tow, nothing comes in handier than a nearby park. You'll find a small one across the street from **The Huntington Hotel** (1075 California St.; ☎ 800/227-4683 or 415/474-5400). Also, if you snag one of the Huntington's rooms with a full kitchen, you'll be all set when the little tyke wakes up at 5am demanding breakfast. See p. 95. The **Marina Motel** (2576 Lombard St.; ☎ 800/346-6118 or 415/921-9406) is close to two great

playgrounds: Moscone and Cow Hollow. Even if you can't snag a unit with a kitchen, all rooms have refrigerators. See p. 98. If you'll be racing back to the hotel for your toddler's nap every afternoon, the **Serrano Hotel** (405 Taylor St.; ☎ 866/289-6561 or 415/885-2500), conveniently located near Union Square, is a good choice. It also keeps complimentary cribs, strollers, and booster seats on hand. See p. 76.

- **Best for Teens:** The **Hotel Triton** (342 Grant Ave.; ☎ 800/800-1299 or 415/394-0500) will wake up the most disaffected teenager with rock 'n' roll in the lobby and a design palette that has "groovy" written all over it. Rooms are small so you won't be sharing, but that's good for the kid who needs some space. See p. 73. The **W Hotel** lobby and bar (181 3rd St.; ☎ 888/625-5140 or 415/777-5300) is a whirlwind of activity that can be fascinating for teens. The clientele considers itself pretty hip. The location, across from Yerba Buena Center, means instant recreation for the kids at the Metreon. See p. 88.
- **Best for Large Families:** The **Hyatt at Fisherman's Wharf** (555 N. Point St.; ☎ 800/223-1234 or 415/563-1234) can set you up in connecting double/doubles and on request will provide a fridge. Even better, coin-op washers and dryers are on every floor, which, if you can get the kids to do a load, will make your return home calmer. See p. 90. The absolute best hotel for big or extended families is **The Laurel Inn** (444 Presidio Ave.; ☎ 800/552-8735 or 415/567-8467), because you can request interconnecting rooms with two double beds and one of the kitchenette units, creating your own custom suite. See p. 100.
- **Best for Long Stays:** Around the Marina, the **Cow Hollow Motor Inn & Suites** (2190 Lombard St.; ☎ 415/921-5800) provides apartment-style

## Fun Facts San Francisco Firsts

- 1847** *The California Star*, a four-page weekly, becomes the first newspaper published in San Francisco.
- 1848** The first public school in California opens in San Francisco.
- 1852** The first legal execution in San Francisco takes place on Russian Hill.
- 1860** The first Pony Express rider begins a trip from Missouri to San Francisco. The 2,000-mile journey takes 10 days.
- 1880** The world's first motion picture premieres at the San Francisco Art Association Hall.
- 1888** The poem "Casey at the Bat" by Ernest L. Thayer is published for the first time in the *San Francisco Examiner* newspaper.
- 1911** The San Francisco Symphony plays its first season.
- 1912** Women in San Francisco vote for the first time.
- 1937** Harold Wobber becomes the first person to commit suicide by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge.
- 1944** San Francisco Ballet produces the first full-length dance production of *The Nutcracker* in the United States.
- 1952** The Bay Area Educational Television company is founded, eventually becoming KQED, one of the first public broadcasting companies in America.
- 1964** The Condor Club in North Beach becomes the country's first topless dance bar.
- 1965** The band formerly known as The Warlocks plays for the first time as The Grateful Dead at San Francisco's Fillmore Auditorium.
- 1977** Harvey Milk is elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, becoming the first openly gay man to be elected to major public office in the United States.

suites with full kitchens and discounts for stays longer than 5 days. See p. 97. The kitchen units at the **Marina Motel** (2576 Lombard St.; ☎ 800/346-6118 or 415/921-9406) are available to those staying 7 nights or more. See p. 98.

The **Halcyon Hotel** (649 Jones St.; ☎ 800/627-2396 or 415/929-8033) also offers bare-boned, but inexpensive, rooms with kitchenettes designed for guests staying for a week at a time. See p. 82.

## 3 THE BEST DINING BETS

- **Best Burger:** At \$7 for a cheeseburger, the burgers at **Burger Joint** (700 Haight St.; ☎ 415/864-3833 and 807 Valencia St.; ☎ 415/824-3494) don't come cheap. Considering they're made with only the finest ingredients, including naturally raised Niman Ranch beef, they're worth every penny. See p. 142.

**Taylor's Refresher** (1 Ferry Bldg.; ☎ 866/328-3663) comes in a close second, with burgers made from all-natural, local beef, topped with a tasty "secret sauce" and garnished with lettuce and tomatoes fresh from the Farmer's Market. See p. 125.

- **Best Milkshake:** It's close, but I'm giving this one to **Taylor's Refresher**. Both it and **Burger Joint** (see "Best Burger," above) use San Francisco's luscious Double Rainbow ice cream for their first-rate strawberry, vanilla, and chocolate shakes. But in the summer Taylor's branches out with a to-die-for blueberry shake. See p. 125 and p. 142.
- **Best for Breakfast:** For its inventive omelets, terrific pancakes, and fresh-baked breads, **Ella's** (500 Presidio Ave.; ☎ 415/441-5669) takes the prize in the early meal category. See p. 139. Of course, while in San Francisco, you could always branch out and have dim sum for breakfast (see "Best Dim Sum," below), which I highly recommend.
- **Best Children's Menu:** Kids aren't limited to chicken fingers and fries at friendly **Puccini & Pinetti** (129 Ellis St.; ☎ 415/392-5500). The children's menu includes a salad, fruit, soup, and spaghetti, along with the irresistible make-your-own-pizza option. See p. 108.
- **Best Decor:** Step into **Ana Mandara** (891 Beach St.; ☎ 415/771-6800) and step into Vietnam—complete with tropical foliage, a facade of a Vietnamese home, and Indochinese artifacts. See p. 129.
- **Best Views:** Perched atop a bluff over the open ocean, the **Cliff House Bistro** (1090 Point Lobos Ave.; ☎ 415/386-3330) affords a vista that will take your breath away. See p. 149. If you can't make it out to the Sunset District, try **McCormick & Kuleto's** (900 North Point St.; ☎ 415/929-1730) in Ghirardelli Square for a view of the San Francisco Bay, Alcatraz Island, and the

historic ships of the Hyde Street Pier. See p. 130.

- **Best If You Have a Sitter: Fleur de Lys** (777 Sutter St.; ☎ 415/673-7779; p. 107) is one of the best, and most romantic, restaurants in the state. **Del-fina** (3621 18th St.; ☎ 415/552-4055) offers consistently good Italian food in a lively, hip setting; after dinner, you'll be steps away from the bars and nightlife of the Mission District.
- **Best for a Nice Dinner with Older Kids: A16** (2355 Chestnut St.; ☎ 415/771-2216) has terrific wood-fired pizzas and an enticing Italian menu, but the hopping vibe will be best appreciated by older kids. See p. 134. Another great spot to take older children is **Town Hall** (342 Howard St.; ☎ 415/908-3900). They'll appreciate the inventive all-American menu and the sophisticated, but lively, dining scene. See p. 113.
- **Best for a Nice Dinner with the Grandparents:** We regularly take grandparents to **Antica Trattoria** (2400 Polk St.; ☎ 415/928-5797). The uncomplicated Tuscan cuisine is top quality, and the elegant, but unpretentious, ambience is perfect for relaxed dinner conversation. Another place many older patrons appreciate is **McCormick & Kuleto's** (900 North Point St.; ☎ 415/929-1730), with its well-prepared classic dishes and stellar view. See p. 140 and p. 130.
- **Best for Big Groups:** If the whole family is in town, head on over to **Kokkari Estiatorio** (200 Jackson St.; ☎ 415/981-0983). The spacious dining room in back can fit even the largest parties, and private dining rooms are also a possibility. The delightful Greek menu includes appetizers that are perfect for sharing and main courses to please every taste. See p. 121.
- **Best Pizza:** For Neapolitan wood-oven-fired pizza that tastes good even

- without cheese, you can't beat **A16** (2355 Chestnut St.; ☎ 415/771-2216). See p. 134. The thin-crust pizzas at **Pizzeria Delfina** (3611 18th St.; ☎ 415/437-6800) include six mouth-watering standards and two tempting daily specials—all worth ordering. See p. 146. For a true-blue slice of American-style cheesy pizza that kids love, **ZA Pizza** (1919 Hyde St.; ☎ 415/771-3100) takes the cake—or, pie, as it were. See p. 141.
- **Best Barbecue:** No whining and no deconstructing the barbecue sauce: you're not in Kansas City, Dorothy. In San Francisco, we think **Memphis Minnie's** (576 Haight St.; ☎ 415/864-7675) does a fine job of smoking brisket and ribs. The slaw is good, too. See p. 144.
  - **Best Vegetarian:** You can't beat **Greens** (Building A, Fort Mason; ☎ 415/771-6222) for excellent meatless cuisine—not to mention a lovely, airy dining room and fabulous views. See p. 133. Greens offers vegan dishes as well, but for those wishing to avoid any animal products whatsoever, **Millennium** (580 Geary St.; ☎ 415/345-3900) is the choice. See p. 108. If that's not earthy enough for you, try the all-raw menu at **Café Gratitude** (1336 9th Ave.; ☎ 415/683-1346).
  - **Best Bakery:** **Tartine** (600 Guerrero St.; ☎ 415/487-2600) actually has to advertise when its bread comes out of the oven (after 4pm, by the way). Otherwise, folks would be hanging around all day to get a loaf of walnut bread, which sells out immediately. See p. 148.
  - **Best Cafe:** Not that kids really dig hanging out at cafes, but our kids (and plenty of other customers' kids) love the croissants at **Boulangers de Polk** (2310 Polk St.; ☎ 415/345-1107). They munch happily while parents sip café au lait and people watch from the sidewalk tables. See p. 140.
  - **Best Chinese in Chinatown:** The **R&G Lounge** gets my nod because of its authentic and refreshingly different menu (631 Kearny St.; ☎ 415/982-7877). See p. 120.
  - **Best Chinese Not in Chinatown:** In offering an out-of-Chinatown choice, I'm going to make a plug for **Dragon Well** (2142 Chestnut St.; ☎ 415/474-6888), which offers Chinese food that has been "California-ized," with an emphasis on very fresh, high-quality ingredients and a lot less grease. See p. 136.
  - **Best Dim Sum:** San Franciscans seem to be equally divided as to where to get the best dim sum. Many insist it's to be found at **Ton Kiang** in the Richmond District (5821 Geary Blvd.; ☎ 415/387-8273). See p. 152. If you just can't head out that way during your stay, rest assured. It's a bit more expensive than Ton Kiang, but I'm also a big fan of **Yank Sing** (101 Spear St., in the Rincon Center; ☎ 415/957-9300). See p. 124. To help familiarize your kids with dim sum, check out the box "Kids' Guide to Dim Sum," below.
  - **Best Thai:** By far our favorite is **Osha Thai Restaurant** (2033 Union St., ☎ 415/567-6742). Just thinking about their *pad see ew* noodles makes my mouth water. See p. 137.
  - **Best Ethnic Restaurant for Kids:** If the arched ceilings, hand-painted Arabesque plates, and delectable Moroccan menu at **Aziza** (5800 Geary Blvd.; ☎ 415/752-2222) aren't exotic enough, head into the back room, which is full of North African-styled sofas and cushions. Better yet, wait until 7pm on weekends, when the belly dancer arrives. See p. 149.
  - **Best Italian:** For a terrific family meal, **Trattoria Contadina** (1800 Mason St.; ☎ 415/982-5728) offers hearty pastas and a friendly ma-and-pa atmosphere. See p. 127. For truly exceptional Italian

## Kids' Guide to Dim Sum

For some reason, the whole communal aspect of dim sum seems to make my kids more adventurous. Waiters come with plates of food and everyone seated decides whether or not to go for it. When a plate is placed in the middle of the table, you're all in on the fun of trying it together. Of course, it helps that we've figured out what we think our kids will like and have learned to avoid anything that could truly shock them. I'm passing this knowledge on to you with a list of dim sum that most first-timers will definitely enjoy. And if you see fresh-steamed asparagus, snow pea shoots, or any other vegetables being offered, order them as well. They are all excellent.

- **Har gau:** Shrimp dumplings encased in a translucent wrapper and steamed
- **Siu mai:** Rectangles of pork and shrimp in a sheer noodle wrapper
- **Gau choi gau:** Chives, alone or with shrimp or scallops
- **Jun jui kau:** Rice pearl balls with seasoned ground pork and rice
- **Law mai gai:** Sticky rice with bits of meat and mushrooms wrapped in a lotus leaf
- **Char siu bau:** Steamed pork buns—bits of barbecued meat in a doughy roll
- **Guk char siu ban:** Baked pork buns—bits of barbecued meat in a glazed roll
- **Chun guen:** Spring rolls—smaller, less crowded versions of egg rolls
- **Gau ji:** Pot stickers—a thick, crescent-shaped dough filled with ground pork

cuisine, you can do no better than **Antica Trattoria** (2400 Polk St.; ☎ 415/928-5797). See p. 140.

- **Best Fish:** At **Great Eastern** (649 Jackson St.; ☎ 415/986-2500) your dinner gets plucked from the fish tanks in the back of the dining room, so there's no question the fish is fresh. See p. 118. The longtime favorite of city hall movers and shakers, **Hayes Street Grill** (320 Hayes St.; ☎ 415/863-5545) uses the Bay Area's finest purveyors of fish, meat, and produce and puts out bright, simple plates of recognizable food. See p. 132.
- **Best Mexican: Mamacita** (2317 Chestnut St.; ☎ 415/346-8494) serves ultra-fresh, flavorful Mexican specialties and makes an excellent guacamole. See p. 135. For inexpensive Mexican food with a view, you could do no better than **Mijita** (One Ferry Building, No. 44; ☎ 415/399-0814; p. 161), created by one of SF's most renowned chefs. See p. 125. For a humble but terrific burrito, head down to the Mission to **La Corneta Taqueria** (2731 Mission St.; ☎ 415/643-7001). See p. 147.
- **Best Ice Cream:** And the winner is . . . **Mitchell's** (688 San Jose Ave.; ☎ 415/648-2300) for creamy, luscious ice creams in flavors both exotic (baby coconut, sweet corn) and comforting (Mexican chocolate, vanilla). See p. 147.
- **Best Afternoon Tea:** Treat the kids to a special child-friendly tea menu at the **Fairmont Hotel's Laurel Court** (950 Mason St.; ☎ 415/772-5259). See

p. 118. Closer in tone to an English village teashop is **Lovejoy's Tea Room** (1351 Church St.; ☎ 415/648-5895), often filled with ladies having a tête-à-tête and little girls practicing to be big girls. See p. 148.

- **Best Outdoor Dining:** The very best outdoor dining area belongs to the **Park Chalet** (1000 Great Hwy.; ☎ 415/386-8439), which opens onto an expansive garden at the western edge of Golden Gate Park. In fact, with glass walls and a glass ceiling, the whole

restaurant feels like you're outdoors. See p. 150. A much smaller outdoor dining area next to a pleasant lawn can be found at **Town's End** (2 Townsend St.; ☎ 415/512-0749). See p. 123.

- **Best Delivery:** For basic Italian at terrific prices delivered to your hotel or home, **Pasta Pomodoro** (1875 Union St. and other locations; ☎ 415/771-7900) is a very good thing. Its salads and fresh vegetables really round out a meal. See p. 137.