



Around the Bay Area

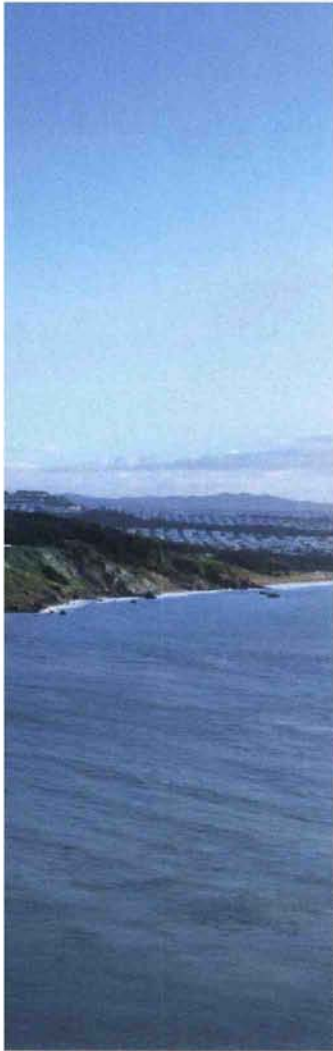
Delightful day trips in Northern California | By Christine Delsol

As I stand at San Francisco's scenic Twin Peaks lookout, the Bay Area appears to unfold before me. I see Market Street run into the heart of the city's downtown, highlighted by the Transamerica Pyramid and the 555 California Street building.

To the east, I can see the Bay Bridge as it crosses Treasure Island and, in the distance, the glassy bay waters and the East Bay hills. A quarter-turn to the north reveals the Art Deco towers of the Golden Gate Bridge peeking out above the green swath of the Presidio park.

By traveling the city's legendary 49-Mile Scenic Drive, I've arrived at this viewpoint, the area's second-





VICTOR MANTZ / ISTOCKPHOTO

highest location and the source of a most unique perspective. As a native Californian, I learned early on that this kind of day tour can be an excellent way to enjoy one of the world's great destinations.

The following are a few tours that offer visitors to the Bay Area an entertaining experience and a chance to see this famous region from a different perspective.

SAN FRANCISCO'S SCENIC DRIVE

Blue-and-white street signs bearing a seagull's image lead the way along San Francisco's 49-Mile Scenic Drive. Created in 1938 to showcase the city's sights to

crowds streaming in for the 1939-1940 Golden Gate International Exposition on Treasure Island, the route remains a great way to see why this city is so irresistible.

Those driving the route can pick up a city guide, which includes a 49-Mile Scenic Drive map, at the Visitor Information Center (Hallidie Plaza, Powell and Market streets). Though the loop takes about four hours to complete without stops, it is wiser to allow more time for exploration.

The route starts in San Francisco's downtown core, where you can find a collection of landmark public buildings such as City Hall, which has the tallest dome in the United States, and the Beaux Arts War Memorial Opera House. The route also includes popular areas such as Chinatown, Fisherman's Wharf, Nob Hill, North Beach and Union Square.

Taking one of the many walking tours of Chinatown is a wonderful way to get acquainted with this fascinating area's ornate architecture, rich history and bustling shops. The tours often include stops at the Chinatown Gateway, the Golden Gate Fortune Cookie Factory and Portsmouth Square, which is considered the heart of the district. Eating at one of the area's many restaurants is a culinary experience not to be missed.

To the north of Chinatown, visitors will find historic Fisherman's Wharf. There is always something exciting to see at this waterfront area, which is home to fine seafood restaurants, tour boats to Alcatraz Island and plenty of lounging sea lions. The wharf's Ghirardelli Square, the former location of the Ghirardelli chocolate factory, is now a popular retail and dining destination. Make sure to stop at the Aquarium of the Bay on Pier 39 and tour the nearby World War II-era vessels, the SS *Jeremiah O'Brien* Liberty Ship and the USS *Pampanito* submarine.

From the waterfront, the scenic drive travels west, arriving at the Presidio, a sprawling former U.S. Army base that is



SAN BRAY / ALAMY

Left: The Golden Gate Bridge is one of the iconic images of San Francisco. Above: Diners enjoy a meal at an outdoor Ferry Building restaurant on San Francisco's historic waterfront.

now a nearly 1,500-acre park. The lands of the Presidio range from beachfront to the bluffs at the southern end of the Golden Gate Bridge, and everywhere are jaw-dropping views of the San Francisco Bay.

Since the Presidio was vacated by the U.S. Army in 1994, the Presidio has become a unique public park within the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. It combines trails and nature areas with a public golf course and a select number of developments, including the new \$350 million headquarters for Lucas Films Ltd. and the Industrial Light & Magic Company, which were founded by *Star Wars* creator George Lucas and recently sold to The Walt Disney Company. The complex includes a lobby museum and 17-acre park that are open to the public.

The Presidio is also home to the Walt Disney Family Museum, where you can view early drawings, movies and a large model of Disneyland, as well as enjoy interactive exhibits.

After emerging from the Presidio, stop at Lincoln Park's Legion of Honor art museum on a bluff overlooking the Golden



Gate Bridge. The museum is housed in an impressive Beaux Arts-style building and includes a collection of art that spans more than 4,000 years. Its most famous pieces include rare replicas of Auguste Rodin sculptures, including *The Thinker*, and original works by Monet, Picasso, Rembrandt and van Gogh.

A few miles farther is the Sutro Historic Landscape District, site of the Sutro Baths. The popular public baths were originally completed in 1896, but burned in 1966. The foundations of the public baths are still visible in this park area that offers walking trails and great views of the coastline. Make

OTHER BAY AREA ATTRACTIONS

SAN JOSE

This noted high-tech hub is home to the Tech Museum, a science and technology center. The museum offers fun and engaging exhibits to help visitors understand how technology has changed their lives and will affect their futures.

OAKLAND

In the East Bay city of Oakland, visitors will want to linger at the Jack London Square. Named for the famous author and former area resident, the square is adjacent to a natural estuary and part of a vibrant waterfront scene. It offers dining, shopping and numerous activities. Also, make sure to visit the Oakland Museum of California, which features art, history and natural science exhibits that celebrate the many facets of California. The museum contains more than 1.8 million objects that tell the history of California.

BERKELEY

Known as the home of the University of California, Berkeley, the city is also renowned for being one of the centers of the farm-to-table "California Cuisine" movement launched by Alice Waters, the owner of the restaurant Chez Panisse.

sure to stop at the nearby Cliff House, which includes historic pictures of the area and two restaurants that treat patrons to wondrous views of the rocky Pacific coast while they are enjoying fresh seafood.

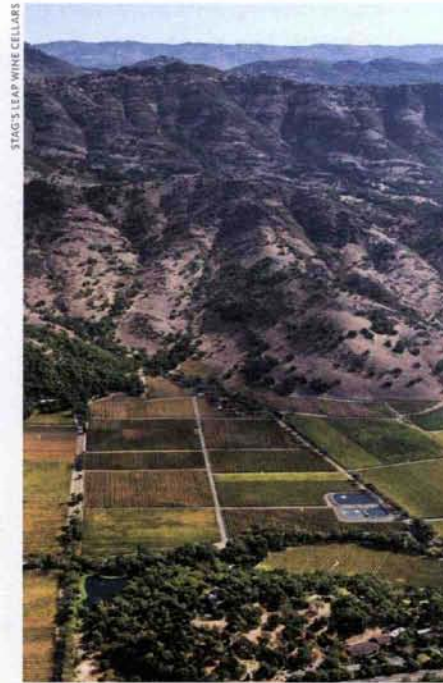
The loop continues along the Great Highway on the city's western edge, offering access to sandy beaches before entering Golden Gate Park, a 1,000-plus-acre area that features gardens and museums, including the California Academy of Sciences. The renowned complex, known for its environmentally sensitive construction, is home to an aquarium, natural history museum and planetarium. The park is also the location of the M.H. de Young Memorial Museum. Named for Michael H. de Young, the co-founder of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the museum and the Legion of Honor make up the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. The de Young is the first American stop for the exhibit "Girl with a Pearl Earring: Dutch Paintings from the Mauritshuis." The exhibit will be on display through June 2 and features 35 paintings from the 17th century period known as the Dutch Golden Age.

After leaving Golden Gate Park and skirting Mount Sutro, the loop winds to the top of Twin Peaks for a breathtaking panoramic view. After leaving the Twin Peaks area and entering the Mission District, stop at Mission Dolores.

The chapel at the mission is the oldest intact building of its kind in the state of California. The route back downtown takes you past AT&T Park, the home of the World Series Champion San Francisco Giants. Don't miss the 14-foot statue of Willie Mays, an amazingly lifelike representation of the living legend who is still a frequent presence at the park.

WINE COUNTRY'S BACK ROADS

An essential Bay Area day trip is a tour of California's famous wine country. Located about an hour north of San Francisco, in Napa and Sonoma counties, the area is one



Above Left: The Tech Museum in San Jose offers fun, hands-on exhibits that explain the impact of technology on our lives. Above: The picturesque Stag's Leap Wine Cellars in Napa Valley is one of the region's most famous wineries.

of the nation's most-respected wine regions. It is also a place known for excellent food, resorts, and scenery that is reminiscent of France's Bordeaux region.

The town of Napa is a gateway to more than 550 wineries that can be found throughout the area. It is no exaggeration to say that great wineries and tasting rooms await you at virtually every turn. With mountain ranges on either side, Napa Valley is a tranquil land of rolling hills, vineyards and expansive estates.

One favorite stop is Stag's Leap Wine Cellars, located on a knoll in the middle of Napa Valley and surrounded by vineyards. The winery's unassuming farmhouse greets visitors with a flower-draped stone

arcade that leads to a wine cave carved into a hillside. Stag's Leap helped put California on the international wine map when the winery's 1973 S.L.V. Cabernet Sauvignon, the first vintage produced from the winery's three-year-old vineyard, took top honors at the Paris Wine Tasting of 1976, besting Château Mouton Rothschild and other vaunted Bordeaux brands.

Scores of other wineries, including those by industry stars such as Robert Mondavi and Francis Ford Coppola, offer various activities and are within a short distance. For those in the mood for a picnic, stop at Clos Du Val or the more rustic Rutherford Hill Winery. Rutherford's Mumm Napa winery pairs wine with tours of its fine-art photography gallery. The winery maintains a permanent Ansel Adams exhibition and displays rotating shows that focus on the work of local and international photographers. Interested in a gondola ride? Visitors can board an aerial tramcar near Calistoga and ride in style up the hillside to the grand Sterling Vineyards winery.

Staying overnight in one of Calistoga's hot springs resorts allows you to linger in this historic downtown, tour local wineries, and enjoy the healthy delights of a volcanic-ash and spring-water mud bath that leaves skin feeling as soft as a newborn's. Calistoga is also hot-air balloon central. Visitors can join Calistoga Balloons and ride with the breeze, enjoying a bird's-eye view of the valley.

Make sure to touch bases with such classic Napa Valley stops as the town of St. Helena, home to the Culinary Institute of America's western campus in the castlelike former Christian Brothers winery. Farther down the road is the famous town of Yountville, a little burg that is home to a number of excellent restaurants, including The French Laundry, judged by the Michelin Guide's restaurant reviewers to be among the world's finest.

To the west of Napa Valley and the Mayacamas Mountains, wine lovers will find Sonoma County, home to more than 370 wineries, redwood forests and breath-

taking coastal parks. In the town of Sonoma are located numerous historic wineries, such as Gundlach Bundschu and Buena Vista, two of the state's oldest.

The Buena Vista Winery was founded in 1857 and Jacob Gundlach first purchased land for a vineyard a year later. The Gundlach Bundschu winery is now managed by the sixth generation of the Bundschu family. Another Sonoma must-see is the Ravenswood Winery, where the owners pride themselves on creating a fun atmosphere and full-bodied wines.

North of Sonoma are various charming small towns, such as Glen Ellen and Kenwood, that offer boutique inns and wonderful wineries. The area also includes the Jack London State Historic Park, where visitors can tour a museum devoted to the famous writer's life and stroll the property where he lived until his death in 1916.

Farther up the valley in the town of Santa Rosa, visitors will find the Charles M. Schulz Museum and Research Center. The museum is dedicated to preserving,

displaying and interpreting the works of the *Peanuts* comic strip creator. It offers insights into Schulz's life, his influences and his art. Displays include examples of the comic strip over time to give a sense of its development.

West of Santa Rosa is the Russian River Valley, an area renowned for its Pinot Noir wines and scenic beauty. The valley is home to a number of family-owned operations, including the UPTick Vineyards, which has a tasting room in Windsor. Along the River Road, visitors should stop at the well-known Martinelli Winery & Vineyards and Korbel Champagne Cellars.

Those looking for a chance to enjoy the outdoors will want to explore the Armstrong Redwoods State National Reserve, located about seven miles north of Korbel Champagne Cellars. The paths of this reserve meander among ancient redwoods that are between 500 and 1,000 years old and stand up to 250 feet tall. The reserve includes a visitor center, large outdoor amphitheater, self-guided nature trails and various picnic facilities.

A return to the Bay Area along the coast leads through Bodega Bay, where director Alfred Hitchcock filmed the 1963 suspense classic *The Birds*. Closer to San Francisco, visitors will find Marin County's picturesque Point Reyes National Seashore, Mount Tamalpais State Park and Muir Woods National Monument, a 559-acre park that is part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area and home to six miles of paths that wind among groves of redwoods.

From Muir Woods, there is no better way to end an adventure in the San Francisco area than crossing the Golden Gate Bridge on your way back to the City by the Bay. ▲

Christine Delsol is a San Francisco-based writer.

GETTING THERE



Alaska Airlines serves the Bay Area with daily flights to San Francisco, Oakland, San Jose and Santa Rosa. To book a reservation, go to alaskaair.com or call 800-ALASKAAIR.