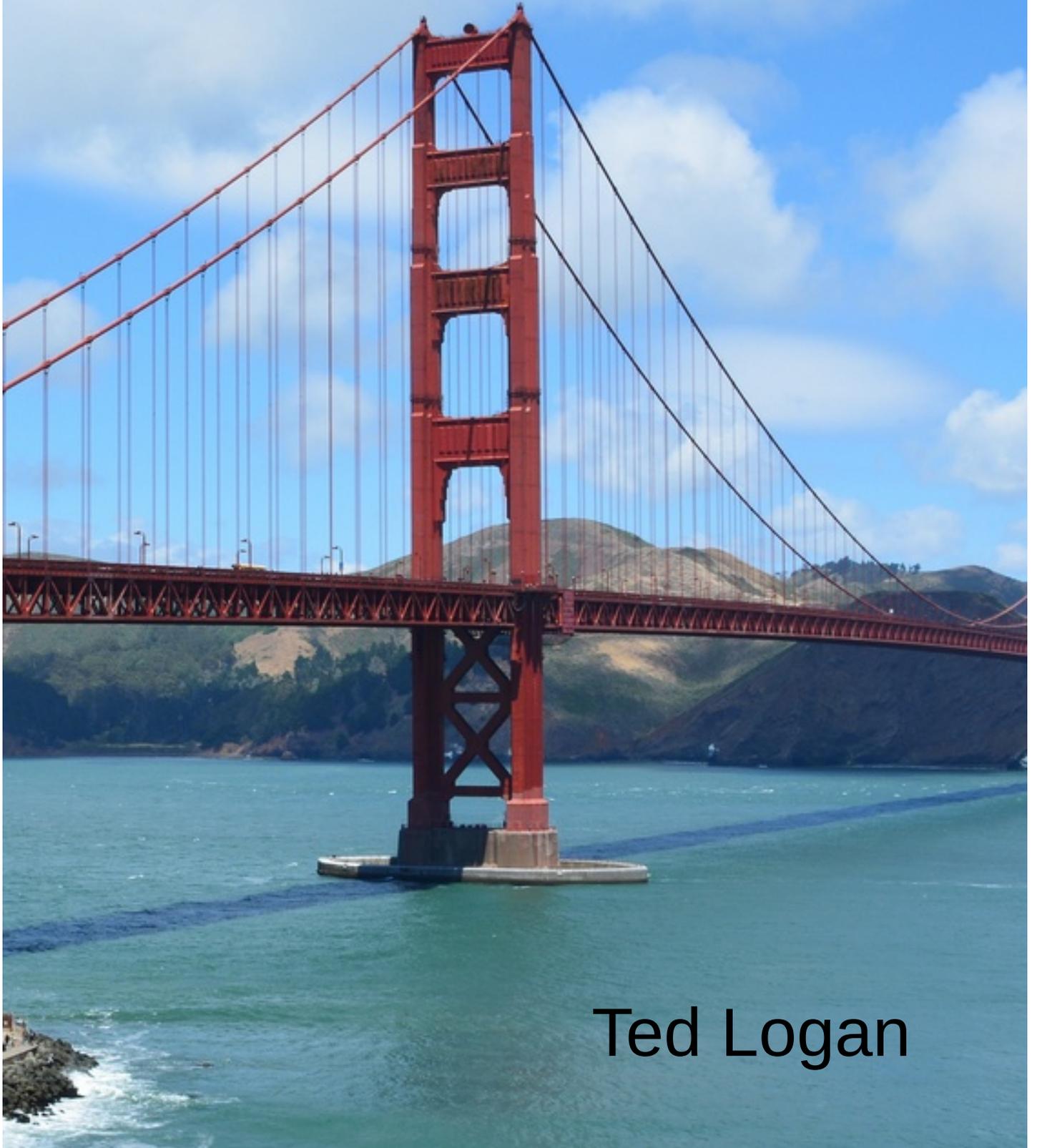


# Subjective Guide to San Francisco



Ted Logan

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by

Ted Logan

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*This book is for my family, in  
hopes that we will get out of the  
house for Christmas.*



# Introduction

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Living in San Francisco is a bit like living in Disneyland. Most days massive cruise ships dock at the Embarcadero and disgorge thousands of wide-eyed tourists, who step off the gangways blinking in the early-morning sun (or, more often, fog), clutching their backpacks and cameras and vaguely-worded glossy tourist brochures, and make their way into the city. They board chartered tour buses to take them on pre-packaged tours around the city, and shuffle down the Embarcadero to catch a ferry to Alcatraz or Sausalito. They stand at Pier 39 and listen to the sea lions and watch Karl the Fog blow in under the Golden Gate Bridge in the afternoon, then buy branded tourist hoodies because they're cold and they forgot to bring their own wrap.

I see the tourists every morning when I run along the Embarcadero, from my office near the Bay Bridge to Aquatic Park three miles away. I smile when I see them, quietly welcoming them to my city, hoping they enjoy their visit to the city I love.

(On my morning runs, the tourists are easy to avoid: they're slow, and tend to move in regular patterns up and down the Embarcadero. The commuters, though, are more troublesome: they move in packs, crossing the sidewalk in front of the Ferry Building together, scurrying perpendicular to my path, forcing me to weave around them because there are more of them than me and they have strength in numbers.)

This is my subjective guide to the things I've seen and enjoyed in nearly two years living in the City by the Bay (and a small number of things I haven't quite made it to yet). This is not an exhaustive guide of the things to see in the city (I have guidebooks – and the Internet – for that), but a collection of my thoughts on things I've seen and enjoyed. Much of this is drawn from blog posts I've written

describing my travels, in the time-honored tradition of repackaging shorter serialized works into a single longer work (a tradition that goes back longer than “blogs” or even the Internet).

I have divided this guide into sections according to my interest. Engineering comes first (which, I hope, should be obvious, since it’s my obsession as well as my profession), followed by military sites built to protect the harbor, science, architecture, walking, art, hiking, and a few other random things that didn’t fit neatly into any other category.

# Engineering

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I like big bridges,<sup>1</sup> and San Francisco has two of the world's most beautiful bridges. San Francisco also has museums dedicated to the city's cable cars and trolleys – and Sausalito has an amazing scale model of the entire bay and delta. (The Transbay Tube is also an impressive feat of engineering, but impossible to see while one is riding a BART train through the darkened underwater tunnel at 79 miles per hour.)

## Golden Gate Bridge

San Francisco is filled with places to see the world's most beautiful bridge.<sup>2</sup> Some of my favorites are where the bridge sneaks up when driving somewhere else – especially driving north on 19<sup>th</sup> Avenue around Rivera Street, when the road crests a gentle hill and suddenly the bridge is visible in the distance, framed between the houses and apartments crowding the road, above the shocking deep green of Golden Gate Park, and below the golden brown of the Marin Headlands.

My favorite place to view the Golden Gate Bridge is from the Marin Headlands just north of the bridge. Conzelman Road departs from US 101 and climbs precipitously on the headlands above the Golden Gate, giving dramatic views of the bridge, especially in the fog, and the city beyond.

The further west one goes in the headlands the longer the angle gets. This is where one finds the views of San Francisco right behind the bridge, as if the city were over the bridge's shoulder.

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1 And I cannot lie.

2 This is a self-evident objective fact; no citation is necessary.



On the south side of the bridge is the Golden Gate Bridge Welcome Center, including an interactive model of the bridge (set up and maintained by the Exploratorium), a gift shop, a large model of chief engineer Joseph Strauss, stunning views of the bridge, and throngs of tourists.

## **Bay Bridge**

The Bay Bridge, connecting San Francisco and Oakland, is a beautiful bridge, and while it is not quite the world's most beautiful bridge, it is definitely in the top five world-wide, probably even in the top three.<sup>3</sup>

The western span, composed of two suspension spans linked by an anchorage in the middle of the bay, is lit up starting at dusk in a variety of animated patterns. The western span is easily visible from any point on the waterfront, especially at Pier 14,<sup>4</sup> stretching out into the bay just south of the Ferry Building.

The view from the rooftop terrace on my office building is nice too.

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<sup>3</sup> This, too, is an objective fact; as above, no citation is necessary.

<sup>4</sup> Pier 14 is also the site of a political football, being the pier where Kate Steinle was shot and killed in 2015.



The eastern span, a new-fangled self-anchored suspension bridge, opened in 2013 to replace the original steel cantilever bridge.



The old eastern span has been demolished, leaving an uninterrupted view of the New Bay Bridge from any reasonable vantage point in the Port of Oakland, or from the ferry to Alameda. The new eastern span of the bridge includes a bike path<sup>5</sup> along the southern edge which goes from an industrial parking lot to a narrow road on Yerba Buena Island. At some point in the future some relevant government authorities hope to connect the bike path to something else, though at the moment they have no idea how they might do that.

(One might arguably refer to the bridge as a “bridge complex” made up of four different sections: two traditional suspension bridges making up the western section, the self-anchoring suspension bridge, and the viaduct leading up to the eastern span from Oakland.)

The Exploratorium’s interactive model of the western span of the Bay Bridge is on the far corner of the museum’s pier, in full view of the bridge.

## **Cable Car Museum**

This building serves as the powerhouse that pulls the cables that make San Francisco’s famous cable cars go. It also houses some exhibits on the history of the cable cars in the city.

## **San Francisco Railway Museum**

I have not been to this small museum near the Ferry Building. It allegedly contains exhibits about the streetcars that ran up and down Market Street.

## **Oakland Middle Harbor Shoreline Park**

This park is built along the shoreline along the restored Oakland Middle Harbor, nestled between the Inner Harbor (where smallish container ships dock) and the Outer Harbor (where the really massive container ships dock). The shoreline is nice; the views of the bay, the city skyline, and the shipping channel are neat; and there’s an observation tower with a great view of the ships being loaded and unloaded at the container dock at the Inner Harbor, immediately opposite the perimeter fence.

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5 <https://jaeger.festing.org/changelog/1688.html>

## Sutro Baths

Local immigrant, engineer, and entrepreneur Adolph Sutro built an elaborate public bathhouse along the Pacific Ocean in 1896.<sup>6</sup> The derelict ruins burned under mysterious circumstances while being dismantled in 1966. Today the concrete foundation remains as a monument to history.

The Park Service operates the Lands End Overlook, immediately above the ruins, with more history of the baths. It's worth a visit too.<sup>7</sup>

## Bay Model Visitor Center



This scale model of the San Francisco Bay and Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta was built in the 1950s by the US Army Corps of Engineers at their regional headquarters in Sausalito. It was used to determine how the bay would react to dredging and other changes to the bay, and also to study the effects of salt-water mixing in the bay and the spread of oil spills and other disasters. The delta model was added later and included a discussion of the impact of building levees to drain

<sup>6</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sutro\\_Baths](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sutro_Baths)

<sup>7</sup> *Cityscapes* p. 88

wetlands to become farmland. The entire model was used until it was replaced by a computer model in 2000.

When we visited in May I wrote:

The model was amazing. Seeing it was like visiting a temple or museum: it's not strictly my field of engineering, but I recognized the importance of the model and the effort that went into conceiving and designing and building and maintaining it. I walked all around the model in a state of slack-jawed amazement, trying to observe every detail. I couldn't believe what I was seeing, and I couldn't believe why I hadn't visited the model already.<sup>8</sup>

## Computer History Museum

The museum, down the peninsula in Mountain View, traces the history of computing from mechanical computation engines through punch cards, early analog computers, tube-based digital computers, through microchips and very-large-scale integration (and whatever we're doing now with billions of transistors on a chip with feature sizes measured in single-digit nanometers). It hits all of my nostalgia moments from the 1980s and 1990s in personal computing and includes a couple of choice artifacts from Google, including their first server rack, built out of Lego.<sup>9</sup>

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8 <https://jaeger.festing.org/changelog/1727.html>

9 *The Geek Atlas: 128 Places where Science & Technology Come Alive*, p. 331

# Military

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San Francisco has been an important West Coast port for centuries. The shoreline is littered with the remains of batteries from various generations in various stages of decay, built to defend the bay as new technologies emerged, and then abandoned as they became obsolete. Most of the fortifications are preserved by the National Park Service as part of Golden Gate National Recreation Area

## Nike Missile Site SF-88L



At the end of the Second World War, the world changed abruptly with the advent of nuclear weapons, coupled with intercontinental strategic bombers capable of delivering them. The battleship was obsolete, as were the weapons designed to defend against one. A single hydrogen bomb detonated above San Francisco Bay could wipe out the entire Bay Area. The artillery batteries built around San Francisco Bay were decommissioned, replaced by a brand-new weapon: the Nike Ajax guided surface-to-air missile,<sup>10</sup> capable of shooting down a strategic bomber 37 miles away.

The Nike Ajax was quickly deployed across the United States, only to be quickly replaced by an even-more-powerful weapon: the Nike Hercules, a dual-stage missile that could be armed with a small nuclear warhead, in addition to a conventional high-explosive warhead. Both warheads were surrounded by substantial amounts of shrapnel; the missile was designed to destroy an entire squadron of Soviet bombers flying in formation before they could get close enough to drop their weapons, either from the overpressure created by the explosion, the shrapnel unleashed from the warhead.<sup>11</sup>



10 <https://www.nps.gov/goga/learn/historyculture/cold-war.htm>

11 <https://jaeger.festing.org/changelog/1692.html>

The Army built dozens dozens of Nike batteries around the United States. They survive today in various stages of decay. San Francisco had 13;<sup>12</sup> the Nike Ajax battery at Fort Funston has been paved over and converted into a parking lot. The battery at SF-88L, in the Marin Headlands north of the Golden Gate Bridge, is the only one that's open for guided tours.

## Fort Point

Fort Point is a beautiful brick fort nestled under the Golden Gate Bridge. It was built between 1853 and 1861 as part of the “Third System” of coastal defenses, the only such fort on the West Coast, only to become obsolete with the advent of ironclad steamships and rifled artillery in the Civil War.<sup>13</sup> When the Golden Gate Bridge was built in the 1930s, chief engineer Joseph Strauss designed the arched southern approach to the bridge to preserve the fort below.

## Battery Townsley



Nestled in the Marin Headlands north of the Golden Gate Bridge, Battery Townsley is one example of the last generation of coastal shore defense batteries

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12 <http://acme.com/jef/nike/>

13 <https://www.nps.gov/goga/learn/historyculture/fort-point.htm>

to come into service prior to the Second World War. (It was, arguably, already obsolete when it was built; but like many questions about defensive fortifications never tested in battle this remains an interesting counter-factual.) It fired 16-inch armor-piercing shells out to 25 miles; its first test shot landed somewhere over the horizon.

Various examples of these batteries still exist (including Battery Davis in Fort Funston, much closer to my house), but Battery Townsley is the only battery to open the interior spaces for tours – even if it’s only one Sunday afternoon a month.<sup>14</sup>

## Fort Funston



Fort Funston<sup>15</sup> was one of the coastal fortifications built in the run-up to World War II, and features Battery Davis, built as one of the prototypes for the (at the time) state-of-the-art casemate fortifications built around twin 16-inch guns with an effective range of more than 44,000 yards (26 miles), almost far enough to shell the Farallon Islands from the shore. Like the rest of the fortifications built during that period on the west coast, the guns were never fired against a hostile

14 <https://jaeger.festing.org/changelog/1724.html>

15 <https://www.nps.gov/goga/planyourvisit/fortfunston.htm>

target, and were replaced after the war by an underground Nike Ajax surface-to-air missile battery – which is now used as the parking lot.

On my first visit in April 2016, I wrote:

I walked from the parking lot to what remains of the casemate, a massive concrete edifice designed to protect the gun and its crew from aerial bombardment, now covered in sand and overgrown with beach shrubs. The casemate gave me a respite from the crowds of dogs and their owners overrunning the park; it seemed that every dog in San Francisco must be there (I later confirmed that there were few other dog parks in this part of the city). Despite the dogs I enjoyed the coastal headlands and the bluffs overlooking the beach, and I knew I would return.<sup>16</sup>

Fort Funston is a short drive from my home. During the week it's one of the few places in the city that allows dogs, so the main trails are overrun by dog-walkers.

## **USS *Hornet* Museum**

I have not been here (it's in Alameda,<sup>17</sup> which I now consider to be far away, on the other side of the bay) but it looks like it would be interesting.

## **SS *Jeremiah O'Brien***

SS *Jeremiah O'Brien* is a liberty ship built as a merchant bulk carrier to replace the staggering losses inflicted by U-Boats on the Atlantic merchant fleet, and to keep the American war machine operating by supplying the necessary equipment and food. Liberty ships were built in ridiculous numbers to spam the North Atlantic with more ships than could be sunk.<sup>18</sup> *O'Brien* was placed in the “mothball fleet” of reserve ships after the war in Suisun Bay, and rescued in 1979 to become a museum ship at Fisherman's Wharf. She is maintained in operating condition and sails around the bay several times a year.

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16 <https://jaeger.festing.org/changelog/1681.html>

17 Where they keep the nuclear wessles (or at least, where they did keep the nuclear wessles in the 1980s).

18 <https://jaeger.festing.org/changelog/1723.html>



The unguided tour gives free reign of almost all of the ship, from the cavernous engine room with a massive oil-fired triple-expansion steam engine (used, with some visual effects, as the engine room in *Titanic*), to the bulk cargo holds, to the crew quarters, to the deck guns in front and back providing a bit of defensive armament. (The ship's regular crew were civilians, but the guns were operated by Navy crew, who slept in a separate bunk house towards the stern.)

Two cargo holds were open on my visit, showing a documentary about the ship and presenting a small museum exhibit about merchant shipping across the North Atlantic and the convoy system used to try to protect ships from attack by U-Boats. The centerpiece of the museum was an elaborate diorama of the Normandy beaches in the week after D-Day, showing the temporary docks set up to take supplies and soldiers onto shore. Jeremiah O'Brien was one of the ships that participated in the invasion, and shuttled supplies back and forth between England and France in the weeks after the invasion.

## USS Pampanito



USS *Pampanito* is a *Balao*-class diesel attack submarine from World War II, deployed for lengthy independent operations against Japanese shipping. It is now preserved as a museum ship at Fisherman's Wharf. The quick tour, with an audio guide, runs down the main corridor of the boat.

When I visited with Calvin in March, I wrote:

I had trouble imagining the boat with a full compliment of crew, all taking up each other's space (which would make my crowded open-office-plan workspace seem roomy by comparison). Calvin and I had the boat to ourselves as we worked our way forward, but I imagine it would be considerably more crowded with 80 people on board.

The tour focused on the boat itself, and didn't try to put its operation into the broader strategic context. How important was the US Navy's submarine fleet to the war? What strategic decisions influenced how the fleet was used? What rules of engagement did the fleet operate under – in particular, did they engage in unrestricted submarine warfare? (Is unrestricted submarine warfare a war crime?)<sup>19</sup>

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19 <https://jaeger.festing.org/changelog/1723.html>



# Science

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## **Exploratorium**

I remember visiting the Exploratorium as a child, back when it was located in the Palace of Fine Arts. While I was away, the hands-on science museum moved into a new space on Pier 15, keeping many of the exhibits I remember (in particular the forced-perspective house), and building many more. It's perfect for Calvin, but a little above Julian's pay-grade.

## **California Academy of Sciences**

This is San Francisco's natural history museum, located in Golden Gate Park on the Music Concourse across from the de Young Museum. It features a planetarium, an indoor tropical rain forest in a large bubble, and a large aquarium in the basement, all under a living roof. (Julian did not care for the jellyfish.)



# Architecture

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San Francisco residents embraced NIMBYism as a way of life in the middle of the twentieth century and never looked back.<sup>20</sup> This has left much of the city's original single-family housing stock in place – not just the Painted Ladies on Alamo Square but also the 1950s Mission houses that dominate the southern part of the city. But deprived the city of land to build new icons. (Those iconic Victorians, though, are now subdivided into four or five tiny apartments, and the less said about their kitchens the better.)

All of this means the city's contributions to modern architecture are thin, but we do have some buildings to gawk at, mostly from street level or elsewhere around the city. (With the exception of Coit Tower, San Francisco does not have any building-top observation decks.) For more on San Francisco's architecture, see *Cityscapes 2* by John King.

## Salesforce Tower

This 62-story tower, at 1<sup>st</sup> and Mission in SoMa, is the tallest building in San Francisco, edging out Transamerica. (It's not yet occupied, so if one were inclined to engage in superlative creep one could say that Transamerica is still the tallest *occupied* building in San Francisco.) It's destined to be the centerpiece of the Transbay Terminal reconstruction. I can see Salesforce from pretty much anywhere in the Bay Area, so I think it's safe to say the top floor will have an *amazing* view.

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<sup>20</sup> Surprisingly, decreasing the supply of housing when demand stays constant increases its price, and establishing rent and eviction control reduces supply further, continuing to drive up market rates. The housing economy's steadfast refusal to submit to the city government's socialist will has left generations of social elites scratching their heads; but I digress.



## PG&E Headquarters

This 34-story tower was completed in 1971 next to PG&E's historic headquarters building. The building's roof includes a peregrine falcon nest with a webcam.<sup>21</sup> It's notable mostly for our family history with the building.

## PG&E Mission Substation

This utilitarian industrial building, at the corner of Mission and 8<sup>th</sup>, is graced with two striking bas-reliefs representing Power and Light.<sup>22</sup>

## PG&E Embarcadero Substation

This utilitarian industrial building, at the corner of Folsom and Fremont in SoMa, hid behind the Embarcadero Freeway until the freeway's demise in 1991 exposed the substation's retro Brutalist stylings to anyone who appreciates stark 1970s architecture.<sup>23</sup>

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21 [https://www.pge.com/en\\_US/residential/in-your-community/local-environment/peregrine-falcons/peregrine-falcons.page](https://www.pge.com/en_US/residential/in-your-community/local-environment/peregrine-falcons/peregrine-falcons.page)

22 <https://www.architecturalrecord.com/articles/11496-pge-mission-substation>

23 *Cityscapes* p. 7

## Millennium Tower

This condo tower, at Mission and Fremont in SoMa, completed in 2008, is slowly sinking. The 58-story tower has dropped by 17 inches, and is leaning 14 inches in the direction of Salesforce Tower. The developers blame aggressive dewatering at the transbay terminal development next door.<sup>24</sup> (The developers of Salesforce Tower, across the street, pointed out that *they* built their tower on piles that went down to bedrock; the Millennium Tower developers shot back that no one else did in San Francisco until Salesforce.) Millionaire condo owners are upset that their condos are falling in value, and they've filed lawsuits against everyone they can get their hands on, guaranteeing the whole thing will be tied up in the courts for years, if not decades.

## Ferry Building



The Ferry Building witnessed the rise, fall, and rebirth of San Francisco's waterfront like no other building. It was built at the end of the nineteenth century as a ferry terminal when ferries were the only way to get across the bay. It

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24 <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Millennium-Tower-keeps-on-sinking-but-there-may-11297935.php>

survived the earthquake in 1906, only to fall victim to changing times when the Bay Bridge opened in 1937 and cross-bay ferries dwindled and were eventually discontinued. It suffered further from the rise of the Embarcadero Freeway, being converted into office space on the wrong side of the elevated freeway.

The Ferry Building's fortunes rose in the aftermath of the Loma Prieta Earthquake in 1989. With the Bay Bridge closed for a month, and BART's Transbay Tube under inspection, East Bay commuters turned to the newly-restarted ferries. The ferries proved sufficiently popular that they were retained after the Bay Bridge was repaired and reopened, and the Ferry Building was restored to its original glory as the centerpiece of a new plaza at the end of Market Street. Today the Ferry Building hosts ferries around the bay; a new Solari board shows upcoming departures. The main hall has been restored and now holds a shopping arcade. In back of the building is a statue of Gandhi.

## **Embarcadero Center**

This series of bold towers work their way west from the Ferry Building. After dark, in the fog, Embarcadero Center looks like it belongs in *Blade Runner*.

## **Hyatt Regency San Francisco**

This is a luxury business hotel in a fantastic Brutalist building. The giant open lobby is open to the public, and is decorated for the holidays. According to the Internet (which, as we know, is *always* right about these things, and never engages in any superlative creep of any kind), the lobby is the world's largest hotel lobby (by volume, I presume).

## **Transamerica Pyramid**

This distinctive building in the Financial District has become a symbol of San Francisco, and was the tallest building in the city for decades until being unseated by Salesforce Tower. At least one of my guidebooks thinks there might be a small visitor's center at ground level, so I should figure out if that's true.

## 555 California



This distinctive black building was the tallest building in San Francisco for three years when it was built in 1969 until the Transamerica Pyramid was built 1972. It was built as the Bank of America building, then renamed when the bank moved its headquarters elsewhere. The black stone sculpture in the plaza in front of the building retains the epithet “the banker’s heart”. When we visited in 2013, each branch on the trees in the plaza had been individually wrapped in lights.

## Landmark Building

This brick building on the corner of Market and Spear was built in 1917 as the headquarters for the Southern Pacific Railway, whose name still graces the facade. It has been redeveloped into a multi-building complex spanning the entire block, including a large enclosed atrium. There is a small Autodesk exhibit at their offices somewhere in the Landmark Building that I mean to visit.

## Coit Tower

This reinforced concrete tower was built in the 1930s as part of the estate of Lillie Hitchcock Coit to beautify the city of San Francisco. (Any resemblance to fire

nozzles is, allegedly, coincidental.) The ground floor holds elaborate Social Realistic murals depicting California at the time. The tower sits on top of Telegraph Hill, and the tower is best accessed by the stairs that lead up the hill.

## **Rincon Center**

This Art Deco post office building was redeveloped in the 1980s as an office tower, maintaining the original facade on Mission Street – and the striking Social Realistic murals in the lobby.<sup>25</sup> (The new Post Office facility in the complex, around the corner on Steuart Street, references the Art Deco original in its fixtures and styling.) It's worth a quick visit to see the WPA murals in the lobby, and if you visit, step into the 1980s atrium to see the more-modern murals there, still charmingly anachronistic in their own right.

## **Castro Theatre**

This historic 1920s theater in San Francisco's famous Castro neighborhood plays an eclectic collection of classic and new movies. On holidays they tend to host musical sing-alongs.<sup>26</sup>

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25 <https://www.atlasobscura.com/places/rincon-center-murals>

26 <http://www.castrotheatre.com/coming-soon.html>

# Walking

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San Francisco's hills are covered in streets, and when the streets get too steep they get replaced by stairs. The guidebook *Urban Trails San Francisco* by Alexandra Kenin does an amazing job of stitching together these stairs into cohesive routes, including salient details like public transportation and access to restrooms. Here are my favorite places to walk in San Francisco.

## Twin Peaks Summit

Twin Peaks is a curious twin-summitted hill near the geographical center of the city, with Sutro Tower, a distinctive three-legged television tower, sprouting from the hill's shoulder.

I stepped up to the wall at the edge of the observation platform and gazed out onto the city of San Francisco spread out below me. To the north I could see the towers of the Golden Gate Bridge peeking in and out of the fog. I could see the massive wooded bulk of Golden Gate Park, with its panhandle sticking out to the east. I'd studied this terrain on the map, and driven around on the ground, but this was the first time I'd seen it from above. To the east the hill descended through the Mission and the buildings started growing from three- and four-story apartments into thirty- and forty-story high-rise office towers. I could look straight down Market Street, from the giant rainbow flag marking the Castro to the Ferry Building and the bay, framed by the high-rise buildings on either side.

It was there, on top of Twin Peaks, with the wind whipping through my hair, the cloud ceiling a hundred feet above my head, that I fell in love with San Francisco, and I knew I'd made a good choice moving here.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> <https://jaeger.festing.org/changelog/1681.html>



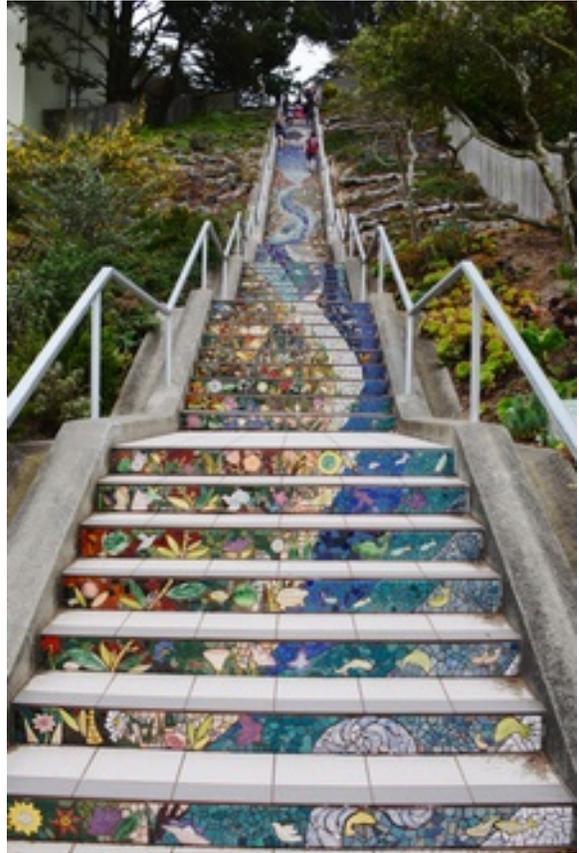
## Mission Dolores Park

This park, in the heart of the Mission, is the neighborhood's back yard. It's packed on weekends. It features a great playground, great views of the city, and lots of grass to see and be seen on.



## 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue Tiled Steps

San Francisco is filled with stairs, and these stairs are some of the best. The steps, climbing several blocks, are tiled with an elaborate mosaic, and lead to a commanding view of the Sunset District, Golden Gate Park, and the Pacific Ocean.



## Lands End Labyrinth

On the bluffs below the Richmond District, near the Legion of Honor and Sutro Baths, with a commanding view of the Golden Gate Bridge and the Marin Headlands, is a labyrinth made out of stones set onto the ground.

Probably not the best place for small children who might go wandering near the cliff edge.

## Embarcadero (with Embarcadero Plaza)

In the 1950s, as freeways marched across America, San Francisco was cut off from its historic waterfront by the double-decker Embarcadero Freeway. Community opposition kept the freeway from completing its planned course, and it was eventually demolished in 1992 in the aftermath of the Loma Prieta earthquake. Freed from its chains, the Embarcadero was redeveloped into one of the world's finest waterfront boulevards. Refurbished streetcars run the length of the waterfront, carrying tourists and locals from the Caltrain station past the Ferry Building to Fisherman's Wharf.

The centerpiece of the Embarcadero is the plaza in front of the Ferry Building, formerly known as Justin Herman Plaza until the Board of Supervisors decided to

remove the name of the city's long-term redevelopment chief from the plaza.<sup>28</sup> On weekends it sports pop-up vendors selling things to tourists. Tucked along the side of the plaza is the defiantly-ugly Vaillancourt Fountain, which probably lost its context when the freeway was torn down.

## Cayuga Playground

This quirky neighborhood playground is best known for its curious collection of wooden sculptures. (It's also on the very end of Cayuga Avenue, the first street we lived on when we moved to San Francisco.) It's a few blocks walk from our house.

## Mount Davidson Cross

Mount Davidson is San Francisco's highest point, at 928 feet. (This is almost disappointingly low considering how famously-hilly San Francisco is, but it's still higher than the highest points in five states, the District of Columbia, and all of the United States Minor Outlying Islands.<sup>29</sup>) The east slope of the hill is grassy, and the west slope is densely wooded, giving it an affect not entirely unlike Chairman Mao. The view to the east closely resembles the view from Twin Peaks, not far away. At the hill's summit stands a large reinforced concrete cross, originally built in 1933. Maintaining a giant Christian symbol on city land proved to be an Establishment



Clause violation; in 1997 the city sold the cross, along with the land it sits on, to the Council of Armenian-American Organizations of Northern California,

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28 <http://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/SF-supervisors-want-Justin-Herman-Plaza-to-get-a-12210332.php>

29 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_U.S.\\_states\\_and\\_territories\\_by\\_elevation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_U.S._states_and_territories_by_elevation); the states with highest points lower than Mount Davidson are Florida (345 feet), Delaware (447 feet), Louisiana (535 feet), Mississippi (807 feet), and Rhode Island (811 feet)

reinterpreting the cross as a monument to the Armenian Genocide.<sup>30</sup> It's lit up on Easter and April 24th (Armenian Genocide Memorial Day).

## **San Francisco Botanical Garden**

I haven't been here for at least twenty years but I do recall visiting the well-laid-out botanical garden in Golden Gate Park as a child.

## **Japanese Tea Garden**

I have visited the Japanese Tea Garden in the past decade. It's relatively small in size but large in garden.

## **Point Bonita Lighthouse**

I have not been to this lighthouse, which is perched on the end of a point of land jutting out into the Golden Gate from the Marin Headlands. It's open for a couple of hours on weekends.

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30 <http://moundavidsoncross.org/about>



# Art

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I spent my European vacation ignoring art museums in the cities I visited because they would be inaccessible to my children -- but also to the extent that it also honored the Ian Visits rule – don't visit museums in cities you visit that you could visit in your own city.<sup>31</sup> The unstated corollary, though, is that I should visit art museums in my own city, especially since San Francisco has a collection of first-rate art museums.

## de Young Museum

This museum, in Golden Gate Park, features a collection of American art from the colonial period through the twentieth century. When I visited in September this year, I wrote:

The building itself is a work of art -- the original building was damaged in the Loma Prieta Earthquake, and was rebuilt in a striking copper-clad triangle with an angular observation tower overlooking the park and the western part of the city. (I spotted the observation tower while visiting San Francisco in 2005.) We spent most of our time in the American art collection, arranged chronologically starting with the colonial era. The collection spent a fair amount of wall space on late-nineteenth-century landscape romanticism (reacting to the industrialization of American life and the closing of the west as a frontier), then dove headlong into impressionism and surrealism.<sup>32</sup>

The \$10 ticket also provides same-day entry to the Legion of Honor.

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31 <https://www.ianvisits.co.uk/blog/visitor-guide-to-london/top-10-museums-for-tourists-visiting-london/>

32 <https://jaeger.festing.org/changelog/1753.html>

## **Legion of Honor**

The painting that captivated Kim Novak's attention in *Vertigo* was painted for the movie, but the museum is real. I have not been there (art museums are still relatively inaccessible for my children) but it seems as if it ought to be interesting. In front of the museum is a monument to the original western terminus of the Lincoln Highway. The \$10 ticket also provides same-day entry to the de Young Museum.

## **SFMOMA**

San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art reopened last year after a stunning redevelopment project. Most of its art is kind of weird, but I'm pretty sure that's the point.

## **Asian Art Museum**

I have not been to this museum in Civic Center, but it's on my list of places to visit, even though I need to pay full admission. (It's ok, I can probably manage.)

# Hiking

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Having spent most of my life in Colorado, I've had to readjust my expectations for what constitutes a hike. (California has plenty of rugged alpine scenery too, but it's not accessible as a day-trip from San Francisco.) My dividing line between what constitutes a "hike" and a "walk" in this guide is somewhat arbitrary, except that I expect a "hike" will take longer. Here are some of the finest hikes I've found around San Francisco.

## Muir Woods National Monument

Muir Woods protects the finest strands of old-growth redwoods in the Bay Area. A short loop trail circles the valley floor, with several longer loops heading out from there.<sup>33</sup> If one can't get into Muir Woods, the nearby Dipsea Trail makes a good alternative.

It's crowded on weekends (and we have not managed to get out of the house early enough in the morning to visit the monument). In 2018 the Park Service is planning on creating a reservation system to reduce crowding.

## Mount Tam

No one in the Bay Area can pronounce (or spell) this mountain's full name, Mount Tamalpais, so we shorten it to "Mount Tam". At 2,576 feet, the mountain is Marin County's highest point. The slightly-higher west peak is covered with radar domes, leaving the east peak to hikers. There are a variety of routes through the mountain's eponymous state park, though there is a parking lot disappointingly close to the summit.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> *101 Great Hikes of the San Francisco Bay Area* p. 173 and p. 177

<sup>34</sup> *101 Great Hikes of the San Francisco Bay Area* p. 157

## **Mount Diablo**

Like its neighbor Mount Tam, Mount Diablo is a county highpoint (Contra Costa County, in the East Bay), is surrounded by an eponymous state park, and has a road leading near the summit. Unlike its neighbor, it's taller (3,849 feet), and I can see it from my house. My guidebook gives a 10-mile lollipop loop leading to the summit; one can also reach the summit from less ambitious routes.<sup>35</sup>

## **San Bruno Mountain**

San Bruno Mountain dominates the southern approaches to San Francisco, clearly dividing San Francisco from the rest of the Peninsula. Its sides are lined with suburban tract housing, and its top is covered in radio antennas, blinking softly in the night. There are a number of trails looping around the mountain, including a 3.1-mile loop trail to the summit, and a longer out-and-back trail along the ridge east of the summit.<sup>36</sup>

## **Salamander Flat**

As a kid, growing up in Redwood City, Wunderlich Park was a popular destination for weekend hikes – especially Salamander Flat. The park has a variety of trails winding up and down the hillside making looping hikes easy.<sup>37</sup> It was probably here where I developed an appreciation for looping trails under the theory that one should never go back the same way one came.

## **Palo Alto Baylands**

The City of Palo Alto maintains one of the last best-preserved sections of tidal marshes in the San Francisco Bay with a nature center, a boardwalk leading out into the bay, and fifteen miles of trails. (There's also a dump that's been covered in dirt so it looks like a hill.) I remember visiting Baylands as a kid, though the Duck Pond is larger in my memory than it now appears to be.

I am told that the preserve is popular with migratory birds, which may be of interest to bird-bazes.

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35 *101 Great Hikes of the San Francisco Bay Area* p. 257

36 *101 Great Hikes of the San Francisco Bay Area* p. 311

37 *101 Great Hikes of the San Francisco Bay Area* p. 338

## Hill 88

Hill 88 is the informal name for the top of the hill that was leveled out to form the command-and-control center for SF-88. (In Army Air Artillery parlance, it became SF-88C.) The site originally held the tracking radar for the Nike launch site in the valley below, and now holds a bunch of decaying concrete block buildings that originally held the command-and-control and utility offices for the launch site, and reinforced concrete pylons where tracking radar antennas once stood. Climbing the hill makes a nice several-mile loop hike.<sup>38</sup>



When I visited the site in August 2016, I wrote:

At just under a thousand feet above sea level, Hill 88 gave a commanding view of the launch site across the valley. A low cloud cover hung over the bay, giving the sky a gray cast. The road leading up to the top of the hill narrowed as a chain-link fence, topped with barbed wire, converged on the road as it led up to the guard station at the entry gate.

The entry gate was abandoned and cracked open, revealing a derelict guard station painted in an incongruously bright lime green. All of the buildings on the site were painted the same color. (I imagine this was

an anti-graffiti effort by the Park Service, though the buildings were still covered in dramatic designs.)

I was especially interested in the antenna pylons, built out of reinforced concrete. According to the pictures I saw in the visitor's center, they originally held large domes protecting the tracking radar antennas – one radar to track the attacking bombers, and another radar to track and guide the missile fired at them.

I was struck by the mundane concrete block construction – unlike the older artillery installations littering the coast, there was no real attempt to armor any of the buildings because there was no practical way they could be armored against a nuclear attack. This site seemed current in a way that the other artillery installations weren't – while this site was decommissioned before I was born, the Cold War was very much underway when I was born and for the first ten years of my life.<sup>39</sup>

## Sweeney Ridge

Sweeney Ridge forms the northernmost portion of the Santa Cruz Mountains separating the Pacific Ocean from San Francisco Bay. On a clear day the ridge offers a great view of the ocean, the bay, and of the departure path from runways 28L and 28R at SFO. (Visit in the afternoon when the widebody jets leave SFO for destinations in Asia.) The ridge features a monument where Spanish explorer Gaspar de Portolà became the first European to see San Francisco Bay in 1769. North of the monument is the ruins of Nike missile control site SF-51C. (The corresponding launch site is a few miles north at Milagra Ridge.) Several trailheads serve the ridge, providing a variety of out-and-back hikes.<sup>40</sup>

## Devil's Slide

For decades, a short stretch of Highway 1 just south of Pacifica on the way to Half Moon Bay, perched precariously on the cliffs above the Pacific Ocean, was locked in a perpetual cycle of landslide and rebuild until Caltrans opened the Tom Lantos Tunnels in 2013.<sup>41</sup> The old roadbed was reopened as 1.3-mile walking and bicycling path with amazing views of the cliffs and the ocean.

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39 <https://jaeger.festing.org/changelog/1698.html>

40 *101 Great Hikes of the San Francisco Bay Area* p. 315

41 Following the lessons learned from the Caldecott Tunnel fire in 1982, the single-lane tunnel has a full shoulder, allowing emergency access inside the tunnel.

## **Ano Nuevo State Beach**

Half-way between San Francisco and Monterey, this small state beach boasts an impressive year-round habitat for elephant seals. December is mating season: bull seals battle each other for mating privileges, and cows come ashore to deliver their pups. The park offers guided walks to see the seals.<sup>42</sup>

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42 [http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=29375](http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=29375)



# Honorable Mention

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Here are a couple of random things that didn't fit neatly into the other categories.

## **San Francisco Maritime National History Park**

The Park Service operates this history part next to Fisherman's Wharf, attracting tourists to the restored museum ships docked at Hyde Street Pier. When I was in fourth grade, I spent a night on the schooner *C. A. Thayer*, pretending I was away on a sailing ship. The pier also features square-rigger *Balclutha* (currently under restoration in Alameda); *Eureka*, a car and passenger ferry that sailed across San Francisco Bay before the bridges were built; and a pair of tugboats. The park operates a visitor's center across the street, showcasing the maritime history of San Francisco; and a museum a few blocks away overlooking Aquatic Park.

## **Musée Mécanique**

This quirky exhibit at Fisherman's Wharf collects old coin-operated animatronics from the early twentieth century. Some are amusing, some are weird, and some are in terribly bad taste by modern standards – one can pay a quarter to see animatronic opium den, with figures swaying back and forth in their drug-induced haze.

## **Mission San Francisco**

Mission San Francisco de Asís, also known as Mission Dolores, was built on a small creek in 1776 and served as the core of the Spanish mission in what is now San Francisco. The adobe chapel is the oldest surviving structure in San Francisco. The mission gives its name to the neighborhood, and nearby Dolores Park.

## Wave Organ

Located on the end of a jetty in the Marina District, between Fort Mason and Crissy Field, this acoustic sculpture uses 25 PVC pipes at various levels to resonate with the impact of waves. It sounds best at high tide.

## Rocket Boat

From my office window, overlooking San Francisco Bay and the Bay Bridge, I can see a variety of traffic going back and forth on the water – container ships, tankers, Coast Guard cutters, NOAA research vessels, naval auxiliaries, ferries, and a wide variety of small sail boats and sea kayaks. At least one of my coworkers seems to have a tab open to [marinetraffic.com](http://marinetraffic.com) at any given time so we can double-check what a particular ship is. Sometimes we see random tall ships sailing around the bay.



The most distinctive boat, though, is Rocket Boat – a large speedboat operated by one of the ferry companies with a bunch of seats on top for tourists to take a thrill ride across the bay. Rocket Boat's signature move is spinning doughnuts under the Bay Bridge – gunning the engine, then throwing the rudder so the boat spins

more-or-less around its own axis. From my office, perched above the waterfront, I can see Rocket Boat almost every day.

I took Calvin on Rocket Boat last summer, departing from Fisherman's Wharf and making a high-speed tour of the bay, and he thought it was great fun.<sup>43</sup>

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43 <https://jaeger.festing.org/changelog/1732.html>



# Bibliography

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In addition to the Internet at large (especially Wikipedia) as cited in the footnotes, these guidebooks and reference books helped inform my knowledge of San Francisco. I have all of these books in hard-copy in my living room for easy reference.

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