



I've come to the Golden Gate Promenade looking for rubble. After all, during the restoration of San Francisco's coastal marshes, archaeologists found everything from U.S. Army quartermasters' cups to Ohlone arrowheads. So my eyes are glued to the ground.

But I can't help being distracted by the dramatic scenery at the mouth of the bay. Not to mention the people. From the daring surfers off Fort Point to the Crissy Field kite fliers, all the pleasure seekers in town seem to be out.

Indeed, the Marina District is one of the places where San Franciscans come to play. Bounded by the bay, the Presidio, Lombard Street, and Van Ness Avenue, the neighborhood actually has a marina, home to the Golden Gate and the St. Francis



Greens Restaurant offers a famed vegetarian menu that uses seasonal organic fare.

## THE MARINA

Visit a San Francisco enclave with sun and great views. BY CONSTANCE HALE

yacht clubs. The Marina Green overlooks the slips and is also a magnet for cyclists and skaters, volleyball teams, and Frisbee fanatics. A few blocks away on Chestnut Street, shoppers do their heavy lifting at Williams-Sonoma and the Gap. Culture vultures flock to Fort Mason, with its museums, galleries, and quirky theaters.

This northernmost edge of San Francisco did not always teem with energy. When Juan Bautista de Anza claimed the area for Spain in 1776, it was a vast expanse of sand dunes, marshes, and willow forests. More than a century later,

wanting to show that it had recovered from the catastrophes of 1906, the city filled 635 acres of wetlands with earthquake rubble on which to set the stage for the 1915 Panama-Pacific

International Exposition. Besides its flat landscape, the Marina's only legacy from that extravaganza is a replica of Bernard Maybeck's colonnaded Palace of Fine Arts, looming above a lagoon dotted with swans. (Other fauna often includes bridal parties that pose by the pond.)

Today the architecture throughout the Marina still has a great deal of retro charm. Deco decadence sets the mood along Chestnut Street, where young

professionals gather on the weekends. People-watching starts early on this main drag: By 10:30 there are long waits at popular breakfast spots such as Judy's Cafe.

If you'd prefer high culture, head to Fort Mason, home to nonprofits like the Mexican Museum, the San Francisco African American Historical & Cultural Society,

and the Museum of Craft & Folk Art. Or come back at night when the Magic Theatre, which launched playwright Sam Shepard's career, presents the emerging dramas it is known for, including the November premiere of *Triptych* by Irish novelist Edna O'Brien.

For a panorama of the bay, Alcatraz, and the Marin Headlands, go to the Marina



Visit the Palace of Fine Arts, site of the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Expo.

Green, where you can walk, jog, or bike along the newly refurbished Golden Gate Promenade. From the Marina, the promenade extends west through Crissy Field to Fort Point and east around Fort Mason toward the Maritime Museum. The Marina Green is also one of the most popular kite-flying spots in the city. Pick up a

kite at the Warming Hut café and bookstore, where organic and fresh foods are served.

Parking can be tough in this neighborhood, especially on weekends. At Fort Mason and Crissy Field, parking is free but limited. Or, instead, you can pay to park at the public Lombard Street



Lucca Delicatessen sells fresh pastas and picnic treats.

Garage, between Webster and Fillmore streets near the restaurant district.

Or check in to the Hotel Del Sol, a colorful and zany motor lodge where the decor is California beach house. A bonus: The courtyard features hammocks. (Ask for a room away from the stairwells and Lombard Street.)

For romance, try the Edward II Inn, a British-style bed-and-breakfast. Some rooms have kitchens.

It's hard to imagine cooking in, though, given the Marina's array of eateries. Francophiles will adore Boulange Marinette—with its breakfast brioche and savory tart—and its neighbor, Bistro Aix, with menu items such as mesclun salad and steak frites. At Isa, down the street, you can dine on spring-pea risotto with morels.

On the same block of Steiner, you'll find even more restaurants: Italian, Thai, and Asqew Grill, where you can feast on ginger-basil lamb shish kebabs; for the kids there's barbecued chicken and mashed potatoes.

## PLANNING YOUR TRIP

All phone numbers are area code 415 unless noted. Pick up AAA's Northern California & Nevada TourBook and San Francisco map. For more information, contact the **San Francisco Convention & Visitors Bureau**, 391-2000, [www.sfvistor.org](http://www.sfvistor.org).

### SLEEPS

**Edward II Inn & Suites**, 3155 Scott St. English country-style lodging \$82.50–\$235. 922-3000 or (800) 473-2846, [www.edwardii.com](http://www.edwardii.com).

**Hotel Del Sol**, 3100 Webster St. Colorful motor lodge. \$125–\$215. 921-5520 or (877) 433-5765, [www.thehoteldelsol.com](http://www.thehoteldelsol.com).

**Marina Inn**, 3110 Octavia St. No parking. \$65–\$135. 928-1000.

### San Francisco-Fisherman's Wharf

**Hostel**, Bldg. 240, Fort Mason. Includes parking. \$22.50 for a dorm room; \$73.50 for a private room. 771-7277 or (800) 909-4776, [www.norcalhostels.org](http://www.norcalhostels.org).

### EATS

**Asqew Grill**, 3348 Steiner St. Anything that can possibly be skewered. 931-9201.

**Bistro Aix**, 3340 Steiner St. Classic French, whether the soft-shell crab or prix fixe dinner. 202-0100.

**Boulange Marinette**, 3352 Steiner St. Baguettes, etc. 614-2941.

**Greens**, Bldg. A, Fort Mason. Gourmet vegetarian. 771-6222.

**The Grove**, 2250 Chestnut St. Light café fare. 474-4843.

**Isa**, 3324 Steiner St. Small plates, family-style ordering. 567-9588.

**Judy's Cafe**, 2268 Chestnut St. Home-style breakfasts. 922-4588.

**Lucca Delicatessen**, 2120 Chestnut St. All Italian. 921-7873.

**Mezéz**, 2373 Chestnut St. Family-owned Greek taverna. 409-7111.

**Warming Hut**, west end of Crissy Field. Organic and fresh foods. 9 a.m.–5 p.m. daily. 561-3040.

### THINGS TO SEE AND DO

**Fort Mason Center**, Fort Mason. 441-3400; monthly calendar of events at [www.fortmason.org](http://www.fortmason.org).

**Golden Gate Promenade**, a 3.1-mile walking path from Fort Mason to the Golden Gate Bridge. National Park Service, 561-4700.

**Magic Theatre**, Bldg. D, Fort Mason. Box office: 441-8822, [www.magictheatre.org](http://www.magictheatre.org).

**Palace of Fine Arts**, Bay and Lyon Sts. Beaux arts replica from 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition.

**Wave Organ**, San Francisco Marina Yacht Harbor, at the end of Yacht Rd.

When you want a gourmet picnic, stop by Lucca Delicatessen for sandwiches. But if the fog rolls in, try the hot chocolate at the Grove. Also homey is Mezéz, with its Greek small plates.

But the highlight of Marina dining has to be the prix fixe dinner at Greens on Saturday, where seasonal fare includes ravioli with asparagus, peas, and fava beans. Just as sublime is a view of the Golden Gate Bridge through the wall of windows.

It's this vista that will draw you to the Marina. For a perfect place to watch the boats come in, don't miss the Wave Organ at the end of the jetty. Its cracked amphitheater, made from salvaged materials, is pierced by a series of pipes that sound as the waves pound through.

Here's the rubble I came looking for—and more. ✨

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