



San Francisco

ebook Edition

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THE AUTHORS

Alison Bing

Over 15 years in San Francisco, Alison has done everything you're supposed to do in the city and many things you're not, including falling in love on the 7 Haight bus and gorging on Mission burritos before Berlioz symphonies. Alison holds degrees in art history and international diplomacy – respectable diplomatic credentials she regularly undermines with opinionated culture commentary for radio, newspapers, foodie magazines, and books, including Lonely Planet's *California, USA*, *Coastal California*, *California Trips*, *San Francisco* and *San Francisco Encounter*.

Alison coauthored the Neighborhoods and Excursions chapters, and wrote the Shopping and Eating chapters.

ALISON'S TOP SAN FRANCISCO DAY

Roll out of bed and down Haight St for a coffee. Check out what's new/old in vintage fashion, what classic CD someone's ex vindictively sold at [Amoeba Music](#), and what favorite author is reading at the [Booksmith](#). Then head to [Golden Gate Park](#) to find the most aggressive blooms in the Dahlia Garden and the fiercest mask in the Oceania wing of the [Museum of Modern Art](#). Follow Andy Goldsworthy's simulated earthquake cracks in the sidewalk back out to the sunshine, and wander up to Clement St for dim sum and a browse at [Green Apple Books](#) and [Park Life](#). Hit [Genki](#) for tapioca bubble tea before hopping the Downtown-bound 38 Geary. [Troll Gallery Paule Anglim](#) for shows by local and international artists before heading to Mission St for a peek at [Catharine Clark Gallery](#), Yerba Buena Center for the [Arts](#) and the latest photography show at SFMOMA [Click here](#). When a growling stomach threatens to drown out gallery conversation, take BART to 24th St and [La Taqueria](#) for the perfect *pollo asada* burrito with chipotle salsa. Wash this down with a happy hour *mojito* at [Medjool Sky Terrace](#), watching the sun restore glamour to faded Mission cinema marquees. Window-shop up Valencia St to the [Roxie](#) for a film or documentary. Discuss at length over salted caramel ice cream from [Bi-Rite Creamery](#) before calling it a night. Early

risers get the Early Girl tomatoes at the farmers market [Click here](#).

John A Vlahides

John A Vlahides lives in San Francisco. He co-hosts the TV series *Lonely Planet: Roads Less Traveled*, on National Geographic Adventure. He is also co-founder of the California travel site [71miles.com](#). John studied cooking in Paris with the same chefs who trained Julia Child and is a former luxury-hotel concierge and member of the prestigious Les Clefs d'Or, the international union of the world's elite concierges. He spends free time singing with the San Francisco Symphony, sunning on the nude beach beneath the Golden Gate Bridge, skiing the Sierra Nevada and touring California on his motorcycle.

John coauthored the Neighborhoods and Excursions chapters and wrote the Drinking, Nightlife, Arts, Sports & Activities, GLBT and Sleeping chapters.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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GETTING STARTED

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Sherpas probably won't be necessary, but you should still come prepared for high adventure in the hills of San Francisco. With 43 hills stretching the imagination and the calf muscles, this town will leave you breathless – keep a few bucks handy for the cable car. Otherwise, you don't need all that much cash to have a good time here: there are free events, street fairs, concerts and parades throughout the year, and plenty of cheap eats and boutique bargains to go around. But if you're here to splurge, San Francisco's top-notch dining establishments, art galleries and hotel-top bars will lighten your load as surely as Miss Piggot and her thieving barmaids did to their customers nightly during the Gold Rush – only these days, you're less likely to wake up on a ship bound for Argentina with a skipper barking at you to swab the decks.

Red velvet ropes and black-tie dress aren't San Francisco's style: entry to SF's hottest restaurants, clubs and events is almost always open to all on a first-come, first-served basis, though a feather boa may come in handy. You'll want to reserve ahead online, especially in summer, for film festivals and theater, or dinner in the city's trendiest restaurants. With so much to do, the challenge is not overbooking; this is one city where spontaneity is well rewarded.

WHEN TO GO

Little-known fact: the Summer of Love actually kicked off here in January of 1967, and once you've spent a chilly summer's day in San Francisco you'll understand how the hippies might've gotten confused even without the help of hallucinogens. Entire June days are spent shivering in a fog bank, with temperatures hovering around 55°F. Determined picnickers huddle over their barbecue grills in Golden Gate Park, while just across the bay, tanned Berkeley locals are rocking their Birkenstocks without socks. It would hardly seem fair,

except for the many street fairs and nonstop parades that make San Francisco in summer the place to be, and worth the high-season hotel rates.

Early fall is the best of all possible worlds in San Francisco, when summer really arrives (never mind the calendar), neighborhood street fairs are still in full swing, California seasonal cuisine is at its flavor-bursting best and hotel rates unaccountably drop. By October Wine Country cools off enough at night to appreciate a peppery zinfandel and a Calistoga mud bath. Most of the year the consistent San Francisco forecast makes easy money for local meteorologists: a high of about 55°F to 70°F during the day, with fog burning off in the morning and rolling back into town in the late afternoon. Tote a sweater or coat at all times or you'll be forced to commit the ultimate San Francisco fashion crime and sheepishly sport one of those \$12 fleece pullovers with the Golden Gate Bridge embroidered on it.

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FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Professional paraders, raging exhibitionists and homecoming queens of all kinds won't want to miss the glut of annual street fairs that kicks off with Pride month (known elsewhere as June) and ends with the gleeful partying skeletons of Día de los Muertos in November. However, if you must come in the rainier, chillier months from December through to March don't despair, because there's still plenty to celebrate, both indoors and out: dance-along Nutcracker Suites, tiny-tot kung-fu classes marching in adorably inept formation in the Lunar New Year parades, throngs rocking Astroturf jackets at public art gallery openings, and the improbable incessant blooming of Golden Gate Park. Not-to-be-missed events are listed below.

January

DINE ABOUT TOWN

www.sfdineabouttown.com

Over 100 of San Francisco's best restaurants offer set-price lunch and dinner specials with local seasonal treats, including Dungeness crab cakes galore.

February

INDEPENDENT FILM FESTIVAL

 415-820-3907; www.sfindie.com

Cinephiles binge on over 100 indie films, documentaries, animated films and short films over two weeks in early February.

NOISE POP

www.noisepop.com

Winter blues be gone: discover your new favorite indie band and catch rockumentary premieres, crafty concert gear and rockin' gallery openings at get-to-know-you venues; third week of February.

LUNAR NEW YEAR PARADE

 415-986-1370; www.chineseparade.com

Chase through town the 200ft dragon, lion dancers, toddler kung-fu classes and frozen-smile runners-up for the Miss Chinatown title, as lucky red envelopes and fireworks fall from the sky like a February drizzle.

March

ST PATRICK'S DAY PARADE

 415-661-2700; www.sfstpatricksdayparade.com

Since 1851, the luck and libations of the Irish have been liberally enjoyed in SF in mid-March. Renegade paraders ditch the official route and leap on booze trolleys with revelers whose entire vocabulary seems suddenly reduced to 'Erin Go Bragh!' and 'Woo-hoo!'

ANARCHIST BOOK FAIR

<http://sfbookfair.wordpress.com>

Rise up and read freely at Golden Gate Park's County Fair Building on the third weekend in March. Meet radical comic book artists, swap DIY tips for organic farming and web design, and find inspiration for your own manifesto.

ASIAN AMERICAN FILM FESTIVAL

 415-863-0814; www.asianamericanmedia.org

Two-hundred filmmakers debut features and documentaries at [Sundance Kabuki Cinema](#) during the third week in March.

April

PERPETUAL INDULGENCE IN THE PARK

☎ 415-820-9697; www.thesisters.org

Easter Sunday is all indulgence, all day in [Mission Dolores Park](#): there's an Easter-egg hunt in the morning for the kiddies, followed by a bitchin' Bonnet Contest and the Hunky Jesus Contest, for those who prefer their messiahs with some muscle tone.

CHERRY BLOSSOM FESTIVAL

☎ 415-563-2313; www.nccbf.org

Japantown blooms and booms with *taiko* drums, homegrown hip-hop, shrines and sunshine in mid-April. Foodies are drawn here from a 10-block radius by April breezes carrying the scent of food-stall yakitori, tempura, and *gyoza* (dumplings).

SAN FRANCISCO INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL

☎ 415-561-5000; www.sffs.org

The nation's oldest film festival is still looking stellar after more than 50 years, with two weeks of star-studded premieres from the end of April to early May. Get tickets early and pace yourself: the longest-running film fest in the country is a marathon event, with 325 films (from countries as disparate as Denmark and Iran), 200 directors, and sundry actors and cinephile crowds subsisting almost entirely on popcorn at the Sundance Kabuki Cinema HQ [Click here](#).

May

CINCO DE MAYO

☎ 415-256-3005; www.sfcincodemayo.com

On the first weekend of May, Mexican independence and Chicano pride come to Civic Center and Mission Dolores Park, complete with fantastic Aztec feather headdresses, gleaming lowriders, revolutionary speeches, chipotle chili beer and much more. *iQue viva!*

KABOOM!

www.kfog.com/kaboom; Pier 30/32

KFOG radio station gets the jump on July 4, with fireworks choreographed to the Ramones,

kids' activities and headliners like Los Lonely Boys supported by Scottish singer-songwriter sensation KT Tunstall. Take public transit to avoid traffic before and after the fireworks, which attract crowds up to 350,000 on the second Saturday of May. Tickets cost \$20.

BAY TO BREAKERS

☎ 415-359-2800; www.baytobreakers.com

Many run costumed, others naked, some scared from Embarcadero to Ocean Beach on the third Sunday in May. Around 65,000 people run the race – though a few runners dressed as salmon run upstream from the finish line to the beginning. Race registration costs \$44 to \$48.

CARNAVAL

☎ 415-826-1401; www.carnavalsf.com

Brazilian, or just faking it with a wax and a tan? Get head-dressed to impress and shake your tail feathers in the Mission on the last weekend of May, and brave the inevitable fog – you might be surprised where it's possible to get goose bumps.

June

NORTH BEACH STREET FAIR

☎ 415-989-6426; <http://sfnorthbeach.org/nbfestival>

Swing dancing, pizza-tossing and sidewalk drawings worthy of Leonardo have taken over the streets of North Beach mid-June for 50 years and counting. Get your pets blessed by a priest and sample juicy Italian sausages hot off the grill – *che bella*.

HAIGHT ASHBURY STREET FAIR

☎ 415-661-8025; www.haightashburystreetfair.org

Free music on two stages, macramé and tie-dye galore, and plenty of dubious brownies surreptitiously for sale: all that's missing is the free love. Takes place every mid-June since 1978, when Harvey Milk helped make the first Haight fair happen.

GAY & LESBIAN FILM FESTIVAL

☎ 415-703-8650; www.frameline.org

Here, queer and ready for a premiere for three decades, yet it doesn't look a day over 29. This is the oldest GLBT film fest anywhere and, as regular crowds of 60,000 will tell you,

consistently the best. Over two weeks in the second half of June, more than 225 films launch new talents from more than 25 countries, drawing celebs like Rosie O'Donnell and John Waters, and raucous crowds that talk back to the screen.

PINK SATURDAY & DYKE MARCH

www.sfpride.org, www.dykemarch.org

Around 50,000 LBGT women parade from Dolores to Castro Sts, kicking off SF's largest all-ages street party on the last Saturday of June. Party admission is free to all, though donations are collected by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence to defray Port-a-Potty and cleanup costs.

PRIDE PARADE

☎ 415-864-0831; www.sfpride.org

Come out wherever you are: SF goes wild for GLBT pride on the last Sunday of June, with half a million people, seven stages, tons of glitter and ounces of bikinis. The crowd roars for newlyweds, PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays), men and women in uniform and, let's be honest, pretty much anyone tossing beads or candy their way – so get out there and join the parade.

July

INDEPENDENCE DAY

July 4 explodes with fireworks even in summer fog, celebrating San Francisco's dedication to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness no matter the climate – economic, political or meteorological.

MISSION CREEK MUSIC & ARTS FESTIVAL

www.mcmf.org

The city finally breaks a summer sweat in mid-July thanks to 150-plus Bay Area bands as well as art shows and dance premieres at several ideal venues, including Café du [Nord/Swedish American Hall](#), [Rickshaw Stop](#) and Adobe Books & [Backroom Gallery](#), plus free shows in McLaren Park.

AIDS WALK

www.aidswalk.net/sanfran

Until AIDS takes a hike, you can: this 10km fundraiser benefits 43 AIDS organizations and happens on the third Sunday in July. When San Francisco was hit by the AIDS epidemic more than 20 years ago, the city wiped away its tears and took to the streets, raising \$65 million to date to fight the pandemic and support those living with HIV. Hundreds of thousands of walkers are treated to free ice cream, live music and applause from passersby along the route.

August

SAN FRANCISCO JEWISH FILM FESTIVAL

☎ 415-621-0556; www.sfjff.org

The world's premier Jewish film festival will leave you *kvelling* (welling up with pride) at the end of July/early August at the [Castro Theatre](#) and other venues around the bay. Expect the unexpected from this festival, from Muslim-Jewish love stories from Kazakhstan to documentaries directed by Natalie Portman.

September

FRINGE FESTIVAL

www.sffringe.org

More outrageous theatrical antics in SF than usual hit the stage in late September, at discounted prices. Book ahead, or chance it at the Exit Theater's [Click here](#) box office.

ARAB FILM FEST

☎ 415-564-1100; www.aff.org

[The Roxie Cinema](#) shows Middle Eastern films in the second week of September, including 7 features and shorts. For over a decade, this showcase has explored a world of ideas, from feminism to fishing, in ground-breaking new cinema from Lebanon to Morocco.

OPERA IN THE PARK

☎ 415-864-3330

Opera divas sing their hearts out gratis at Sharon Meadow in [Golden Gate Park](#) on the first Sunday of the opera season (the second Sunday in September), just as they did in SF after the 1906 earthquake to lift the city's spirits – and more than a century later, a heartfelt aria still

begins fall with a grace note.

FOLSOM STREET FAIR

☎ 415-777-3247; www.folsomstreetfair.com

Work those leather chaps and enjoy public spankings for local charities on the last weekend of September. To answer the obvious question in advance: yes, people do actually get pierced and tattooed down there, but it's probably best not to stare unless you're prepared to strip down and compare.

SF SHAKESPEARE FESTIVAL

☎ 415-422-2221; www.sfshakes.org

The play's the thing in the Presidio, outdoors and free of charge on sunny September weekends. Kids' summer workshops are also held for junior Juliets and budding Bards, culminating in performances throughout the Bay Area.

October

CASTRO STREET FAIR

☎ 415-841-1824; www.castrostreetfair.org

Drag royalty rules the stage, punk rockers fill the mosh pit and rainbow flags fly above the fray on the first weekend of October.

LITQUAKE

☎ 415-750-1497 www.litquake.org

Stranger-than-fiction literary events take place in the second week of October, with bestselling and cult-hit authors spilling true stories at lunch readings and trade secrets over drinks at the legendary Lit Crawl.

HARDLY STRICTLY BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL

www.strictlybluegrass.com

The west goes wild for free bluegrass and rock with a twang in [Golden Gate Park](#), with three days and three stages of bluegrass legends on the first weekend of October. Recent headliners include Emmylou Harris, Billy Bragg, Nick Lowe and the legendary Earl Scruggs.

SF JAZZ FESTIVAL

☎ 415-788-7353; www.sfjazz.org

Horns and minds are blown from late September to late November in SF as jazz greats share the bill with newcomers, from Brazilian bossa chanteuse Gal Costa and jazz-tap impresario Savion Glover to jazz ukelele upstart Jake Shimabukuro and powerhouse drummer Cindy Blackman.

LOVEVOLUTION

www.sflovevolution.org

The first weekend of September, all you need is love – that, and over 100 DJs Downtown. Join the parade of art cars and surreal floats, or join the psychedelic dance party at Civic Center that makes Burning Man look like a dress rehearsal.

ALTERNATIVE PRESS EXPO

www.comic-con.org/ape

Meet the demented masterminds behind your favorite cult-hit comics, and score original Chris Ware sketches and Lark Pien books prepublication, as well as precious signed, limited-edition handmade comic books by the Bay Area's next Daniel Clowes, Adrian Tomine or R. Crumb.

November

DÍA DE LOS MUERTOS (DAY OF THE DEAD)

☎ 415-821-1155; www.dayofthedeadsf.org; November 2

Zombie brides, Aztec dancers in full feather regalia and dancing skeletons party like there's no tomorrow, leading the parade of happy mourners down 24th St and paying their respects to community altars to the dead along the way.

TRANNY FEST

www.trannyfest.com

Cross-dress and transgress with the best on the first weekend in November, with a film festival and all-star performances; tickets cost \$8.

GREEN FESTIVAL

www.greenfestivals.org

The lights may be low-watt fluorescents, but the bright ideas are positively blinding in mid-November at this landmark three-day showcase for the latest in green cuisine, technology and sustainable thinking. Events include workshops and talks with 150 eco-luminaries, such as Alice Waters, performances by the likes of Chuck D, eco-fashion shows, organic beer and wine tastings, and 400 leading green businesses. Tickets cost \$15 per day or \$25 for all three days; proceeds support SF food banks and pioneering fair-trade nonprofit Global Exchange.

UN-THANKSGIVING DAY

Un-make colonial history at the Alcatraz sunrise ceremony with Native leaders and supporters, held on the third Thursday of November every year since 1975. The celebration commemorates the 19-month Native occupation of Alcatraz, and pays homage to indigenous traditions around the bay and beyond.

December

CELEBRATION OF CRAFTSWOMEN

☎ 415-431-1180; www.celebrationofcraftswomen.org

Get crafty with unique handmade gifts in support of a worthy cause at this Women's [Buildin](#) fundraiser, held on the last weekend of November/first weekend of December.

DANCE ALONG NUTCRACKER

☎ 415-255-1355; www.sflgfb.org/show.html

Do you tutu? Dance to the *Nutcracker Suite*, performed with booty-shaking verve by the Lesbian/Gay Freedom Band at the Yerba Buena Center for the [Arts](#) on the first weekend of December.

KUNG PAO KOSHER COMEDY

www.koshercomedy.com

A cherished SF holiday tradition: Jewish comedy on Christmas at a Chinese restaurant. Tickets cost \$42 with cocktails and egg rolls, or \$62 with dinner, featuring kosher walnut prawns and Kung Pao chicken.

COSTS & MONEY

The cost of living in San Francisco is high, though in general you get what you pay for – inventive, fresh cuisine, stimulating cultural events, fine art and strong drink. But many of the best things about San Francisco are gratis: natural beauty, street festivals, park strolls, gallery openings and idle conversation. Others are damn near free, and you'll only have to part with a few bucks for a steaming bowl of Vietnamese noodles, a vintage fashion statement, tickets to take the N-Judah metro line all the way to the beach, or happy hour in Mission dive bars. With some resourcefulness you can live well beyond your means here, with set-price lunches, same-day or standing-room-only tickets to the theater or opera, and killer sales racks at chi-chi boutiques – see the [Eating](#), [Arts](#) and [Shopping](#) chapters for details

HOW MUCH?

Cup of coffee \$1.30 (small American drip coffee)

Gallon of gas \$2.79 to \$3.45 (find the cheapest gas stations at www.sanfrangasprices.com)

Burrito \$5 to \$7 (even a cent more is cause for foodie uprisings)

Movie ticket \$11 to \$13 (look for bargain matinees and double features)

Pint of local microbrew draft beer \$3.50 to \$5 (plus \$1 for SF's signature sassy bartenders)

Liter of bottled water \$1.69 (which locals seldom pay, because SF's tap water comes from Yosemite and is better than bottled)

Cable-car ride \$5 (one-way adult, or \$10 all day)

Souvenir T-shirt \$12 (comes with mockery by locals gratis)

Spirits & speech Free (offer only good for San Francisco)

Love A bargain at any price (just ask the hippies)

In case you haven't already heard from some San Franciscan kvetching about the astronomical price of local real estate, accommodation will be your biggest cost in SF. Hostels and B&Bs are best to keep your rates under \$100 – be wary of hotels listed 'in the theater district' that are actually deep in the hard heart of the Tenderloin and function as live-

hotels for the city's transient population. Splashing out for a five-star hotel will get you beautiful views and kind of an inconvenient perch atop Nob Hill, so opt for a smart boutique hotel if you want to be in the center of the action.

ADVANCE PLANNING

Two months before you go Book your reservations at [Chez Panisse](#) or [French Laundry](#) and start walking – you'll want to work up an appetite and enough stamina to handle SoMa gallery crawls by day and Mission bar-hopping by night.

Three weeks before you go Book your cruise to [Alcatraz](#) and a Chinatown Alleyway Tour or [Precita Eyes Mission Mural Tour](#). Sign up for classes to get into the swing of things at [Circus Center Trapeze](#) and get properly sloshed at [Cav Wine Bar](#).

One week before you go Relax: it's not too late to get tickets for the [American Conservatory Theater](#) or [San Francisco Symphony](#) matinees, find out who's playing at SF's hot music venues at [www.sfbg.com](#) and score tickets online at TIX [Bay Area](#). For the pick of this week's events, check out <http://laughingsquid.com/squidlist/events>, [www.thrillist.com](#) and <http://sf.flavorpill.net>.

One day before you go See what San Franciscans are buzzing about at [www.sfgate.com](#) and [www.sfbg.com](#), find out at [www.indybay.org/sf](#) if there's an upcoming protest worth shouting about, and look into [www.somalit.com/newsletter.html](#) for literary events where you can suavely schmooze with your favorite authors. Join SF shenanigans already in progress at <http://sfbay.craigslist.org/act>, from citywide treasure hunts to cross-dressing cheerleader squads.

Unless you have places to be and biotech business deals to broker, car rental isn't usually worth the price and mental taxation. Basic rental starts at around \$48 per day without insurance, plus there are gas prices to consider. Metered street parking often runs \$4 for a couple of hours (when you can even find it, let alone free street parking), and \$30 fines will haunt you if you arrive even a few minutes past your limit. Overnight parking is often \$30 unless you can get it validated by your hotel. By comparison, an average taxi fare runs \$15 and a Muni ticket costs \$2, but a car may be handy for excursions along the coast and around Wine Country.

Check out [Click here](#) for more on money, [Click here](#) for taxes, and the inside front cover

INTERNET RESOURCES

To take SF by storm, do what the locals do: go online to these indispensable sites to find out what's happening where.

[www.7×7.com](http://www.7x7.com) The newest, trendiest restaurants, bars, boutiques and more.

www.cookhereandnow.com Free local and seasonal food events and weekly updates on what's in season in SF.

www.craigslist.org Find a job, apartment rental, a German-speaking poker party, free furniture or that hottie you spied on the 22 Fillmore bus via Missed Connections.

www.dailycandy.com The latest hot spots for drinking, shopping, seeing and being seen.

www.flavorpill.com The flavor of the week in SF movie premieres, art openings, music lectures and more.

www.indybay.org Left Coast news, protest listings, fundraisers and causes galore.

www.laughingsquid.com/squidlist/events Fair warning about bizarre, offbeat events happening around the Bay Area daily.

www.sfbg.com *San Francisco Bay Guardian's* website offers hot tips on local theater, art events, movies and sex habits.

www.sf.eater.com The lowdown on the SF food and nightlife scene: restaurant openings, drinking deals and juicy gossip on SF star chefs.

www.sfgate.com The online version of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, with news and comprehensive event listings.

www.sfist.com Blog with irreverent take on San Francisco news and politics.

www.somalit.com/newsletter.html LitGuide covers events, workshops and the last word on the SF literary scene.

www.stretcher.org Art reviews, interviews and more.

www.thebaybridged.com Music podcast featuring local talents and event listings.

www.thedelimagazine.com/sf Tasty tidbits about the Bay Area indie-rock scene.

www.thrillist.com Blog on the new and now in SF: bars, bands, shops, restaurants,

events.

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BACKGROUND

HISTORY

COWBOYS ON A MISSION

'GOLD! GOLD! GOLD!'

OUTCASTS AMONG OUTCASTS

RAILROADS & RIOTS

KEEPING THE WEST WILD

DOUBLE DISASTER

THE SHOW MUST GO ON

THE LEFT COAST

BEATS: FREE SPEECH, FREE SPIRITS

FLOWER POWER

PRIDE

SAN FRANCISCO 3.0

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HISTORY

COWBOYS ON A MISSION

San Francisco is one dinner party where most of the guests arrived rather rudely late. When Spanish cowboys brought 340 horses, 302 head of cattle and 160 mules to graze here in 1776, the area we know as San Francisco already had a standing dinner date with local Native Americans that went back over 14,300 years. Early California cuisine included shellfish, bear meat, edible flowers and acorn-flour bread, and when the seasons changed, the Native Ohlone moved their dinner venue further up or down the coast. The arrival of unexpected guests Captain Juan Bautista de Anza, Father Francisco Palou and their livestock met with no apparent resistance initially, until the Spaniards began to demand more than dinner.

The new arrivals expected the locals to build them a mission, and to take over its management within 10 years. In exchange, the Ohlone were allowed one meager meal a day which didn't always materialize, and a place in God's kingdom – which came much sooner than expected for many, due to the smallpox the Spanish brought with them. Introduced diseases decimated the Ohlone population by almost three-quarters during the 50 years of Spanish rule in California.

While some Ohlone managed to escape the short life of obligatory construction work and prayer, others were caught, returned to the adobe barracks and punished. By 1845, the 670 local converts seemed much less keen on managing the mission than expected by optimistic Spanish priests, and scandalized their captors with the local custom of wearing nothing under traditional fur capes. The mission settlement never really prospered. The sandy, scrubby fields were difficult to farm, fleas were a constant irritation, and the 20 soldiers who manned the local Presidio army encampment were allotted only one scanty shipment of provisions per year. The mass graves of Ohlone under the Misión San Francisco de Asís give a tragic note of truth to what is today its more common name: Mission Dolores (Mission of the Sorrow). [Click here](#)).

Spain wasn't especially sorry to hand over the troublesome settlement to the new

independent nation of Mexico, but Mexico soon made this colony a profitable venture with bustling hide and tallow trade at Yerba Buena Cove, where the Financial District now stands. Yankee trappers arrived to make their fortunes, and the trading post became a desirable destination for freed African Americans after Mexico outlawed slavery in Alto California.

Meanwhile, US-Mexico relations steadily deteriorated, made worse by rumors that Mexico was entertaining a British buy-out offer to take California off its hands. News was slow to arrive from Washington, DC, and Mexico City, leaving locals in a state of wary uncertainty. US commodore Thomas Catesby Jones actually invaded Monterey on the assumption that the US and Mexico were at war; two days later he realized his mistake, hastily apologized and returned to his ships. The Mexican-American War broke out for real in 1846, and dragged on for two years before ending with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. This treaty formally ceded California and the present-day southwestern states to the USA – a loss that was initially reckoned by missionizing Church fathers in souls, but within months could be counted in ingots.

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‘GOLD! GOLD! GOLD!’

Say what you will about Sam Brannan: the man knew how to sell a story. In 1848, the real-estate speculator and Mormon tabloid publisher of the *California Star* published sensational news of a find 120 miles from San Francisco at Sutter’s Mill, where sawmill employees had taken to gold-panning duty after flakes had surfaced downstream. Brannan had his reasons for publishing what was then pure speculation as fact: he was hoping it would excite some interest back East in some swampland he was trying to sell, not to mention scooping rival San Francisco newspaper the *Californian*. San Franciscans ignored Brannan’s bluster at first, preoccupied with news of the handover of California to the US from Mexico. To prove his point, Brannan traveled to Sutter’s Fort, where news of the find was verified under conditions of strict secrecy. Brannan kept his word for about a day. Upon his arrival, he ran through the San Francisco streets, brandishing a vial of gold flakes and shouting, ‘Gold! Gold! Gold on the American River!’

But Brannan’s plan backfired. Within weeks San Francisco’s population shrank to 200, and every able-bodied individual headed to the hills to pan for gold. Both newspapers folded because there was no one around to read, write or print them. Good thing Brannan had a backup plan.

he'd bought every available shovel, pick and pan, and opened a general store near Sutter Fort. Within its first 70 days, Brannan & Co had sold a whopping \$36,000 in equipment about \$949,000 in today's terms. Initially Brannan charged big-spending Mormon buyers a special tax he claimed was for the church. But, when Mormon founder Brigham Young reportedly requested a cut for the church, Brannan retorted that he'd like a receipt from God.

Luckily for Brannan's profit margins, other newspapers around the world weren't too scrupulous about getting their facts straight either, hastily publishing stories of 'gold mountains' near San Francisco. Within months, boatloads of prospectors arrived from Europe, Australia and China, and another 40,000 prospectors trudged through snow and mud overland, eager to scoop up their fortunes on the hillsides. Sailors in sight of San Francisco abandoned ship and swam ashore, emptying damp pockets at mining supply stores. Prices for mining supplies shot up tenfold, and Brannan was raking in \$150,000 a month, almost \$1 million in today's terms. Food wasn't cheap, either: a dozen eggs could cost as much as \$10 in San Francisco in 1849, the equivalent of \$272 today.

A tent city rose up along San Francisco's waterfront comparable in size to the actual city. By 1850, the year California was fast-tracked for admission as the 31st state in the Union, San Francisco's population had shot up from 800 a year earlier to an estimated 25,000. But for all the new money in town, it wasn't exactly easy living. The fleas were still a problem and the rats were getting worse – but at least there were plenty of distractions.

Most of the early prospectors (called '49ers, after their arrival date) were men under the age of 40, and to keep them entertained – and fleece the gullible out of their earnings – some 500 saloons, 20 theaters and numerous venues of ill repute opened in the space of just five years. Miners with dreams of a millionaire's welcome back home usually had to wait for weeks in San Francisco for a departing ship, giving them plenty of time to blow all their earnings in the city's casinos and bordellos.

A buck might procure whiskey, opium or one of the women frolicking on swings rigged from saloon ceilings – publicly revealing they weren't wearing bloomers, 150 years before Britney Spears. At the gaming tables, luck literally was a lady: women card dealers were known to deal winning hands to those who engaged their back-room services. In 1850 a visiting French journalist (and noted brothel expert) Albert Benard de Russailh reported 'There are also some honest women in San Francisco, but not very many.'

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OUTCASTS AMONG OUTCASTS

Con men, visionaries, crackpots, adventurers, fugitives and anyone with nothing to lose: there was a place for everyone in San Francisco in 1849. For a couple of flush years, Chinese, Peruvians, Hawaiians, Australians, Chileans, Native Americans, Irish and Mexicans panned for gold side by side, boozed together and slept in close quarters. But as gold became harder to find, backstabbing became more common – sometimes literally.

‘Gold fever’ was a malady with extreme symptoms. Take for example Joshua Norton: he arrived in 1849 from South Africa with \$40,000, made a fortune, lost it all through speculation, and disappeared. In 1859 he returned to San Francisco a changed man, wearing theatrical gold-braided military attire and grandly proclaiming himself ‘Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico.’ San Francisco newspapers published Emperor Norton’s proclamations over 21 years, including decrees dissolving the Democratic and Republican parties, commanding the building of suspension bridges spanning the bay (considered one of his craziest ideas), and outlawing use of the term ‘Frisco’ upon penalty of a \$25 fine (payable to the Emperor, naturally). Police saluted him in the streets, and some local establishments accepted banknotes issued by the ‘Imperial Government of Norton.’ When the Emperor adopted stray dog Bummer departed for that great doghouse in the sky, Mark Twain wrote the epitaph: ‘He died full of years, and honor, and disease, and fleas.’

As Emperor Norton learned the hard way, prospectors who did best arrived early and got out quick. Those who stayed too long either lost fortunes searching for the next nugget or became targets of resentment. Successful Peruvians and Chileans were harassed and denied renewals to their mining claims, and most left California by 1855. Native Californian laborers who had helped the ’49ers strike it rich were also denied the right to hold claims.

Even though San Francisco earned its notoriety with freewheeling lawlessness, Australian newcomers were singled out as criminals, whether or not they actually hailed from penal colonies. From 1851 to 1856, San Francisco’s self-appointed ‘Vigilance Committee’ tried, convicted and hung suspect ‘Sydney Ducks’ in hour-long proceedings that came to be known as ‘kangaroo trials.’ The *San Francisco Herald* caricatured the Australian waterfront neighborhood called Sydney-Town with undisguised venom: ‘The upper part of Pacific Street after dark, is crowded by thieves, gamblers, low women, drunken sailors, and similar characters, who resort to the grogeries that line the street, and there spend the night in the most hideous orgies. Every grog shop is provided with a fiddle, from which some half-

drunken creature tortures execrable sounds, called by way of compliment, music.’ Australia
boarding houses were torched six times by arsonists from 1849 to 1851, so when gold was
found in Australia in 1851, many were ready to head home; Australians who stayed were
promptly blamed for the ensuing California gold panic.

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RAILROADS & RIOTS

Along with Australians, Chinese – the most populous group in California by 1860 – were at
the receiving end of misplaced resentment. Frozen out of mining claims, many Chinese
instead opened service-based businesses that survived when all-or-nothing mining ventures
went bust – incurring further antipathy among miners. In 1870, San Francisco became the
first US city to pass ordinances restricting housing and employment options for anyone born
in China.

SPEAK OF THE DEVIL

Go ahead and call Ambrose Bierce a cynic: you might be too if you’d reported on Barbary
Coast shenanigans for more than a decade, ditched your newspaper job to seek and
quite find your fortune as a prospector in Deadwood, and worked as a lobbyist for
Machiavellian San Francisco mining magnate George Hearst. Bierce’s satirical 1868–1911
columns yielded his 1911 book *The Devil’s Dictionary*, where he provided disambiguation
for key terms as used in San Francisco. To wit:

- **acquaintance**, *n*: a person whom we know well enough to borrow from, but not well enough to lend to.
- **brandy**, *n*: a cordial composed of one part thunder-and-lightning, one part remorse, two parts bloody murder, one part death-hell-and-the-grave and four parts clarified Satan.
- **bride**, *n*: a woman with a fine prospect of happiness behind her.
- **impunity**, *n*: wealth.
- **telephone**, *n*: an invention of the devil which abrogates some of the advantages of making a disagreeable person keep his distance.
- **tenacity**, *n*: a certain quality of the human hand in its relation to the coin of the realm.
- **vote**, *n*: the instrument and symbol of a freeman’s power to make a fool of himself and

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