

## **An Opinionated Mini-Guide to San Francisco's Restaurants and Bookstores**

### **Nob Hill**

You can walk the labyrinth – a good metaphor for life, writing, becoming a successful author -- indoors or out, at Grace Cathedral to soothe your mind. Grace is one of the most beautiful churches in America. Peet's Café in Grace Cathedral, on California between Taylor and Jones, is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and serves pastries, sandwiches, and coffee. The Cathedral also has a gift shop.

For a special treat, head for the Day Spa at the Huntington Hotel across the street from Grace at the corner of California and Taylor and luxuriate in the swimming pool after your massage or other pampering fantasy.

### **Food on the Hill**

Good restaurants are busy, especially on weekends, so call to reserve or if they don't take reservations, find out how long the wait will be and if they can put your name on the list for tables. Here are seven places to eat within four blocks of the hotel:

The famous Top of the Mark in the hotel serves breakfast, lunch, and drinks, and has great views.

Rue Lepic is an intimate neighborhood fixture at the corner of Pine and Mason that serves classic, medium-priced French dinners, 474-6070.

Nob Hill Café at 1152 Taylor Street between Sacramento and Clay is a cozy, affordable neighborhood trattoria open for lunch and dinner until 10. It doesn't take reservations, but you can call 776-6500.

The same people own Venticello Ristorante, a block past the Nob Hill Café at 1257 Taylor at the corner of Washington Street which serves excellent Northern Italian food in a romantic setting. 922-2545.

Stroll through the luxurious lobby of the Fairmont, a block away at the corner of California & Mason, and check out the photos of the city after the great shake of '06. The Laurel Court in the lobby is open every day for all meals. Caffè Centro, the coffee shop in the hotel, is on the garage level at the corner of California & Powell, open from 6:30 to 6 daily.

The Big Four at the Huntington Hotel, 771-1140, known for its dinners featuring game and is filled with San Francisco Victoriana. Reservations will be difficult but you can always sit in the bar section and enjoy the chicken pot pie or a hamburger.

### **Union Square**

Union Square is the heart of one of the greatest concentration of stores in country, if not the world. They are all within a quarter of a mile from the square so you can get to all of them on foot. (Take the cable car or a cab to get back up the hill.)

Scala's Bistro, in the Sir Francis Drake Hotel on Powell, is one of the city's most popular restaurants. It's open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, 395-8555.

Sears, a breakfast place on Powell between Sutter and Post, is known for its 18 tiny pancakes.

Postrio has creative California cuisine in a beautiful setting. 545 Post, between Mason and Taylor in the Prescott Hotel, 776-7825.

Farallon at 450 Post between Mason and Powell has a vaulted tile ceiling, jellyfish chandeliers, and top-of-the-line seafood. You'll hear each other better in the room with the bar. 956-6969.

Campton Place, across the Square on Stockton in the Campton Place Hotel between Post and Sutter Streets serves pricey but top-rated food served in a beautiful room that looks like it belongs on Madison Avenue in the 60s. 955-5555.

The skylight and art deco design make The Grand Café in the Monaco Hotel at Geary and Taylor one of the loveliest lunch and dinner rooms in the city for good, reasonably priced French bistro fare. 292-0101.

The busy, popular Cheesecake Factory on the top floor of Macy's overlooks Union Square and has an outdoor terrace and ordinary, affordable, large portions of food, including cheese cake.

### **The Latin Quarter**

The popular Café de la Presse, 249-0900, at the corner of Bush and Grant, is a little outpost of France across the street from the gateway to Chinatown. It's a fine spot to stop before or after browsing on Grant Avenue. From 8 to 4, you can have breakfast including a great *café au lait*. It's also open for lunch, brunch, and dinner and also just for coffee, and sells French newspapers and magazines. The café is the heart of the city's Latin Quarter, which is dotted with French restaurants. Half way up the hill on Bush is Notre Dames des Victoires, the French church.

Café Claude, 392-3505, and Gitane, both on Claude Lane, off Bush at Kearney, are both open for lunch and dinner. Café Claude also offers occasional jazz concerts.

Plouf, 986-6491, is one of 5 chic restaurants on Belden Alley, between Bush and Pine, Kearny and Montgomery. All are open for lunch and dinner. We like Plouf for its 6 different kinds of mussels.

### **Chinatown**

If you're walking or taking the \$5 cable-car ride the four blocks down the hill to Grant Avenue, Chinatown's Main Street, you have two easy choices.

For sushi, try Sushi Rock, one block to the right on Grant at the corner of Pine Street. They also serve tempura, udon, and katsu, but we always sample a few of the more than 60 special sushi rolls. 11—11, 399-0882.

Two better, reasonably priced places we like deeper in Chinatown are the R & G Lounge at 631 Kearney between Clay and Sacramento, 982-7877, and the Great Eastern at 649 Jackson, between Kearney and Grant Avenue which specializes in seafood. 986-2500.

Dim Sum are traditional Cantonese dumplings with meat, fish, and vegetables inside them that come in a wide variety of shapes. Unfortunately, the best place for dim sum is **South of Market Street** at: Yank Sing, at Spear & Mission, one block south of Market serves the best selection of nouvelle and classic dim sum in the world. 957-9300. It's in the old main post office building, which has murals depicting the city's history.

## **North Beach**

The heart of this traditionally Italian neighborhood is Columbus Avenue between Montgomery and Filbert Streets, and Grant Avenue between Columbus and Union.

Among the reminders of the Beat era in the 50s are the landmark City Lights Bookstore on Columbus between Pacific and Broadway, Vesuvio's bar across Jack Kerouac Alley from the bookstore, and Café Trieste at the corner of Grant and Vallejo. To get a feeling for the history of the era, visit the beat museum has on the north side of Broadway between Columbus and Montgomery.

Our favorite coffee house: Café Puccini on Columbus between Vallejo and Green, which has Mozart's Clarinet Concerto on the jukebox and great soups and pastas as well as coffee and pastries. It also opens at 7 for breakfast.

One of the most romantic restaurants in town is Café Jacqueline, 1454 Grant near Union which only serves souffles. Our favorites: garlic lobster and dark chocolate. 981-5565.

The best breakfast in North Beach is at Mama's overlooking Washington Square Park, 1701 Stockton, They open at 8, and there are no reservations so be there at 7:45 or earlier on weekends if you can or plan to wait. 362-6421.

## **The Ferry Building**

You can hop on a cable car across the street from Grace and visit Aquatic Park, Ghirardelli Square, and the Cannery. If you head downtown on the California Street car, it will end two blocks from the Ferry Building at the foot of Market Street, a bustling haven for foodies that has gift shops and top-quality food stores where you can sample some of the best produce, meat, and fish that Northern California produces. The outdoor farmer's market is open on Tuesday and Saturday mornings. There's a branch of Book Passage bookstore next to a Peet's coffee bar, a Mexican restaurant, and a pricey nouvelle Vietnamese restaurant called The Slanted Door, 861-8031, and the MarketBar, 414-1100, for simpler but tasty California fare.

At the Ferry Building, you can take a ferry to Sausalito, Tiburon, Larkspur, Vallejo, and Alameda.

## **Fisherman's Wharf**

Scoma's (771-4383) and Alioto's (673-0183) both have views of the fishing boats. Here's where you can go whale watching or spend a day fishing. At Pier 39 you can take ferries for Tiburon and Alcatraz or go for a bay cruise. If you're going to Tiburon for lunch, reserve a table with a view at Guaymas, a nouvelle Mexican place next to the ferry. After lunch, you can wander the tiny village then cruise home.

## **Ghirardelli Square**

A very nicely redesigned chocolate factory with gift shops The Ghirardelli ice cream parlor serves, shakes, cones, and old-fashioned sundaes, and shows how chocolate is made.

McCormick & Kuleto's, 929-1730, is the perfect place for a Crab Louis, the best selection of fresh fish and oysters in the city, and great sourdough bread. Elizabeth's favorite dish: a Hangtown Fry -- an omelet with eggs, oysters, and bacon, the three most

expensive items during the Gold Rush. Ask for table #2 or another window table. The restaurant has some of the best views in any restaurant.

### **Russian Hill**

Our favorite French restaurant is in a chic area of Polk Street between Broadway and Union. At La Folie (2316 Polk between Green and Union, ), Roland Passot and his wife preside over a tres cher but excellent slice of Lyon. 776-5577.

Two steep blocks up Union at Hyde is Zarzuela, the best tapas place in town and reasonably priced for dinner. Friendly staff. No reservations. 356-0800.

The Hyde Street Bistro 1515 Hyde is a pricey new French favorite nearby. 356-0800. Both Zarzuela and The Hyde Street Bistro are on the cable car line to Aquatic Park.

### **Union Street**

Union Street is an enjoyable street to walk between Gough and Fillmore Streets.

Perry's, a bar and restaurant that will make New Yorkers feel at home, has excellent hamburgers and cottage fries, 1944 Union between Laguna and Buchanan. 922-9022.

### **Fillmore Street**

The six-block stretch of Fillmore Street between Post and Clay is Main Street for the upscale Pacific Heights neighborhood. Our favorite place to eat is Ten-Ichi, 2235 Fillmore near the Clay Theater between Sacramento and Clay has sushi and a full Japanese menu. 346-3477.

The coffee, pastries, hot chocolate, and the biggest selection of chocolate bars we've ever seen make Bittersweet between California and Sacramento one on the best ways to get your iron.

Browser Books between California and Sacramento is a cozy, endearing neighborhood bookstore that looks the part.

Yoshi's is the best place for jazz. There's also a really fine Japanese-fusion restaurant downstairs. 655-5600

### **Japantown**

The Japan Center is more commercial than cultural but the display of flower arrangements in the windows of the ikebana school are worth seeing. Japantown has many restaurants. Our favorite is Isobune for its unique salad sushi that arrives on boats, 1737 Post between Steiner and Buchanan. 563-1030, no reservations. Come early or late or plan to wait. Kinokuniya is a large, interesting Japanese and English bookstore on the second floor at the western end of the Center.

### **The Mission**

As the name suggests, The Mission District got its name because it has one of the state's 21 missions that were placed one day apart for travelers. It has been home to the city's Hispanic community since then and is now the city's East Village, a hotspot for creative people that has seen an explosion of fine restaurants as well as literary events. The corner of 16<sup>th</sup> Street and Valencia is a good a place to start exploring. Dave Eggers' Pirate Shop is at 826 Valencia.

Ti Couz, between Valencia and Guerrero on 16<sup>th</sup> Street, 252-7373 is a popular, reasonably priced place for crepes.

Mission Street between 16<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> Street and 24<sup>th</sup> Street between Mission and Potrero are the main streets of the city's Hispanic community. If you want a treat, visit one of the Mexican bakeries.

### **Noe Valley**

This is Michael's favorite village in the city, home to many of the city's creative people. Stroll from Sanchez to Diamond on 24<sup>th</sup> Street, check out the Victorians as you stroll, and you'll want to look for an apartment. On Castro off 24<sup>th</sup> Street is the small but friendly Cover to Cover bookstore.

### **The Castro**

From Sanchez to Castro Street along Market Street, and from Castro and 17<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> is the heart of the city's gay and lesbian community. It's always full of life and home to the landmark Castro Theater. There's a Books, Inc. store at 2275 Market between Sanchez and Noe. And A Different Light Bookstore, on Castro, is close to where Harvey Milk's camera store was located.

### **The Haight**

From Masonic to Stanyan, the spirit of '67 is alive and well in the liveliest street in town. A haven for young people creatively dressed and coiffed, with many restaurants and used clothing shops. Our three favorite stops: The first two are on the same block: Cha Cha Cha, 1801 Haight, 386-5758, nouvelle Hispanic small plates; no reservations; Amoeba Records, which has the best selection of used CDs and DVDs in town. The Booksmith at 1644 Haight gives good browse.

### **The Richmond District**

The first ten blocks of Clement Street have more different kinds of restaurants than anywhere else we know of. Green Apple (506 Clement between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenues) has used as well as new books and CDs and is a pleasure to browse in.

A block away, at the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> & Clement is Toy Boat, a coffee shop filled with old and new toys.

Ton Kiang, between 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> (5821 Geary, 387-8273), has outstanding dim sum and is equally good food for dinner. One of their taste treats is the traditional Hakka garlicky green sauce they bring to the table.

At the corner of 22<sup>nd</sup> and Geary is a Russian delicatessen worth checking out. It's a one-stop spot for buying a picnic.

The Palace of the Legion of Honor is a lovely museum in a spectacular setting next to a golf course. Enter at 33<sup>rd</sup> Avenue and Clement Street. Ask Mike why you have to wear two pairs of pants when you play there.

### **Seeing the City**

If you enjoy walking, you will enjoy strolling through the city's varied, picturesque neighborhoods. The city is laid out as in grids with streets divided by hundreds, the 100 block, the 200 block, etc. It's easy to find a coffee shop or restaurant, and many of these

neighborhoods have excellent independent bookstores. Wear rubber-soled shoes and bring a sweater. Many of the establishments below have websites.

If you want to drive around the city, just follow the 49-Mile Drive Seagull signs at street corners.

Grayline has bus tours of the city and the Bay Area.

**For More Info**

*Zagat's* is the best guide to the city's restaurants. Practically all of the places in Elizabeth's book *Fun Places to Go with Children in Northern California* are for adults as well. It's one of the most beautiful regions in America so we hope you'll find time to see as much of it as you can.

Happy Trails!

Elizabeth and Mike

415-673-0939