

traveller

Penguins,
puzzles and
Phillip Island

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YOUR GUIDE TO THE PERFECT DESTINATION

Daily Telegraph



Shroud of San Fran... dense fog billows over the US city's majestic Golden Gate Bridge

Drifting with a fog on the bay

It's easy to get around San Francisco's sights, writes PATRICK WHITELEY

San Francisco sunshine can energise a weary traveller even after a 14-hour flight. The brilliant blue skies have an X-factor, and when that famous white fog drifts in, it adds further charisma to one of the world's most famous cities.

It has always been a popular gateway to the US and later this month Qantas will start flying three times a week from Sydney to its American sister city.

This year is also the 100th anniversary of the major earthquake, which forced the city to be rebuilt into what it is today.

There are a lot of interesting similarities between San Francisco and Sydney. It has a notorious convict history, the locals are obsessed with real estate prices and its eccentrics are celebrated.

San Francisco is a compact city, about 120sq km, which makes getting around swift and cheap.

The city with the Golden Gate Bridge has also been voted in the top three US cities for honeymooning, shopping, dining out and public transport.

San Francisco also shares a similar goldrush history to our own. In the 1850s, there was "gold in them thar hills" and the fever to get rich quick spread across to China, attracting thousands of immigrants. The legacy is a famous Chinatown, with great restaurants and exciting street life.

About 100 years after the goldrush, writers of the beat generation moved there followed by the hippies of the Summer of Love who moved into Haight-Ashbury.

Because of its popularity, San Francisco has more than 32,000 hotel rooms, from \$A452 (\$US400)

NEED TO KNOW

Getting there: Qantas is to begin direct services to San Francisco from Sydney on March 29, three times a week. United Airlines and Air New Zealand also fly from Sydney to San Francisco.

Fares: Qantas from \$1919 (including taxes) from April 1 to June 16, on sale until midnight March 15. Book online at qantas.com

Stay: The Orchard Hotel, near Union Square, is a new boutique hotel. Double rooms from \$A210 a night (minimum three nights).

Details: sanfrancisco.com

a night first-class hotels to budget inns for under \$135 (\$US100).

Taxis are inexpensive but you'll want to first ride a cable car (tram). These rattling contraptions are fun, and you are encouraged to stand on the running boards and hold on tightly.

It costs about \$10 (\$US7.50) for a one-way ride, and takes about 20 minutes from the downtown area to Fisherman's Wharf, the city's most popular area.

Fisherman's Wharf is not the most attractive part of the city but you'll go there anyway. It's a bit like Darling Harbour with a lot more tacky souvenir shops.

The Wharf area does have its good points. A seafood chowder (again about \$10) in a sourdough bowl is strongly recommended.

A big bread roll is hollowed out, the chowder poured in. Find a place to sit and scoop out this thick soup with a plastic spoon.

The chowder mixes with the

bread and is cheap and cheerful. You can munch away while gazing at the Golden Gate Bridge and Alcatraz, two of the US's most famous landmarks.

Ferries to Alcatraz operate from Fisherman's Wharf and it costs \$27 (\$US20) for the 10-minute ferry ride and entry to the island. Half that amount rents a headset for an audio tour of the prison. Check out the cells of gangsters Al Capone, Machine Gun Kelly and Robert "The Birdman" Stroud and get a feel of what it was like to be incarcerated in the Rock.

A quick stroll through the prison takes about an hour but you could easily stretch an Alcatraz visit to four hours, if you watched all the movies playing in the museum, took a guided tour and took a long walk all around this apparently haunted island.

Back at Fisherman's Wharf I was keen to see more of the sights and climbed aboard a Go Car.

These yellow scooter-like three-wheeled vehicles are fitted with GPS and actually talk to you as you drive around, pointing out places of interest, such as the high school OJ Simpson went to and the barracks where actor/president Ronald Reagan was billeted during his World War II service.

The open car guides you along different routes, telling the occupant to "take a right at these lights". One of the sights it will take you by is that engineering marvel, the Golden Gate Bridge.

It was completed in 1937, five years after the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and is worshipped by residents as a work of art.

Probably the best way to see this engineering masterpiece is from the air.

San Francisco Helicopter Tours and Charters offer a flight over the city and on a clear day the pilot will fly under the bridge. A 20-minute flight costs about \$160 (\$US117).

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