

A rollercoaster in all but name.



Close to the Fillmore, you can smell the history.



We're not lost, we're lone wolves.



Alcatraz. Book in advance and give yourself a day to see it properly.

HAIGHT ASHBURY – HOME OF THE FLOWER PEOPLE



The location is nothing special, an intersection between two roads, Haight and Ashbury. But the district in south west San Francisco was immortalised in many songs, books and films from the late Sixties hippie era.

When the first wave of Kerouac-cool beat dudes rode into Frisco in the early Sixties they set up camp further north. As the decade progressed the new wave of dropouts, unable to afford to hang with the beats, made the unloved, relatively quiet Haight area their home.

Bands like the Grateful Dead and Jefferson Airplane were part of the Haight scene and Janis Joplin lived close by too.

By the end of the Sixties it was all over – the hippie dream evolved into protest and narcotics. These days it's a place on the map – somewhere that matters, but the



outside appearance means little. You get a sense that what made it special was the people and the spirit. A dream for an idealistic generation that could never sustain reality.



Boudin's bakery. Crabs and teddies made of bread.

I can't think of many places I've woken up that are as beautiful as San Francisco in the sunshine. Our hotel, slap bang in the middle of town is a lovely mix of friendly, bohemian and luxurious. Today is a rest day – 16 hours to make the most of it. There won't be time for Alcatraz or fancy designer shopping (phew), but I do want to see the Fillmore, a legendary music venue and the psychedelic hippy sleaze of Haight Ashbury.

Sleaze is good. Middle class foreign sleaze is better, especially when you're old enough to accept you have probably become middle class. I might have been just three-years-old in 1967's summer of love, but hometown Dewsbury was always 20 years behind the times. We were still enjoying flares, Frank Zappa and kaftans in 1982 so I feel a distant kinship with this place.

But first we'll be needing a bus. San Francisco is simple to get around. Buy a one day pass for \$14 and use anything you like with a driver. Americans like a queue even more than we do, but haven't yet got the hang of it. Arriving at the front becomes an opportunity for a very long discussion, going through all the options – the same options printed clearly on the board they've been looking at in the queue. The couple in front of us are hilarious.

"How much for a one day pass?"
"That'll be \$14 ma'am."
"How much for a two day pass?"
"That'll be \$21 ma'am."
"How much for a three day pass?"
"That'll be \$28 ma'am."
"What do I get for \$1750?"
"You get a one day pass and \$3.50 change ma'am."

What was that noise? Must be my will-to-live crashing to the floor.

It's not frustrating, it's funny. Unintentional street theatre. We buck the system by simply asking for what we want and handing over the money before leaping on the next bendy bus for a tour of downtown Frisco.



14 hangovers leaving town, 13 more are lost already.



Cheesy, but brilliant – you have to ride the trams.

Everyone on the bus is friendly. Everyone seems to either know or want to get to know each other. I like this place. Haight is actually a crossroads between Haight St and Ashbury St. The surrounding area has that half original, half pastiche feel about it. Like Brighton... on magic mushrooms, but warmer and much less pretentious. The shops are a mix of cheap hippy tat and expensive hippy tat, but they're different and punctuated with plenty of cafes, bars and coffee shops. Like most such places it's a draw for the homeless and there are dozens of down-at-heel kids, clutching blankets and friendly pit-bulls. Brian (which seems an odd name for a scuzzy Californian dude) has a refreshing approach. The sign on the floor says, "Let's be honest, I just want a beer". I don't have a beer but I hand over a big squidgy Danish pastry which he shares with his hound.

Lunch is in the Amish health food tapas bar (obviously) and then it's back into town to catch the tram to Fisherman's Wharf.

Which is where we came in. The final descent to the coast is spectacular – worth the trip on its own, but, for me, Fisherman's Wharf is disappointing. Too cheesy, too touristy and, if you don't eat, ahem, fish, not too easy to find a decent meal in either. Pier 39 is where it all happens, but not for me. Chain restaurants and tourist tat. The seals on the pontoons are lovely to watch, but the rest of it disappoints. So we head back to town, find a busy bar and watch football with the locals.

One day can never be enough in a place like this. As a taster, it's been invaluable. I want to come back... soon.



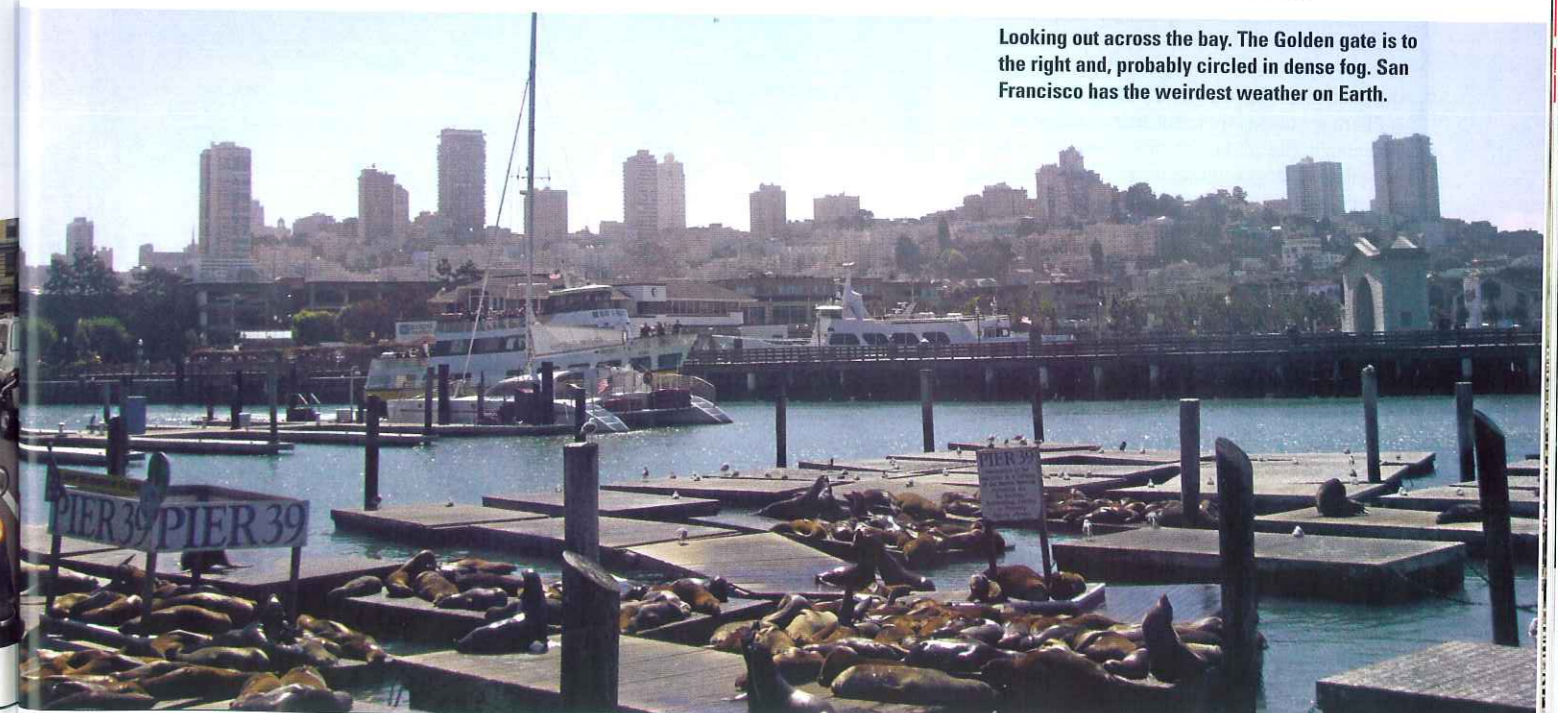
Even the gulls are laid back.



Seals on Pier 39 are as tame as they come.



San Fran's architecture is an emotional mix of old and new – familiar and special.



Looking out across the bay. The Golden gate is to the right and, probably circled in dense fog. San Francisco has the weirdest weather on Earth.