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Gay San Francisco – the best gay hotels,
bars, clubs & more

ASSPORT

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San Francisco is an iconic city for the queer community as a pioneer and battle ground for LGBT rights. Filled with queer history, a free-spirited vibes and currently one of top tech hotspots in the country, it welcomes a mix of travelers and dwellers that help create its diverse, come-as-you-are, laidback attitude. Nowadays, its gay population per capita is one of the [highest in the world](#). Though it may be the most expensive city to live in in the US, it's certainly at least worth a visit – though surely, you'll want to stay!

General Tips

Surprisingly, San Francisco isn't even in the top 10 of the most populous US cities (it's ranked 13th), but its reputation and personality make it feel much larger. Still, the compact city only covers 47 square miles and has great public transit expelling the need for a car. Many San Franciscans walk, bike, car share and use public transit to get where they need to go. Download one of the [many transit apps](#) to help you navigate the Muni system (San Francisco Municipal Railway). San Francisco is a city of microclimates making predicting the weather nearly impossible. Still, the warmest months to visit tend to be September and October while the coldest are December and January. If you're looking to get spectacular views of the city skyline or the Golden Gate Bridge, be sure to note that June, July and August are the foggiest months. In fact, August is known locally as "Fogust".

Transportation & Airport Transfer

Though renting a car when visiting San Francisco might be convenient to get everywhere you want to be quickly, it is by no means necessary. The iconic cable cars dating back to 1873 are a national historic landmark and still in use today after restoration. The public transit system, known as Muni, is the best way to get around. Visitors can buy a [San Francisco all-Inclusive pass](#) which includes the Muni Bus Passport offering unlimited rides on cable cars, MUNI buses, vintage trolleys and Muni rail for three consecutive days. This pass also provides admission to the California Academy of Sciences, a Blue & Gold Fleet Bay Cruise, the Aquarium of the Bay and entrance to either the Exploratorium or the de Young Museum and Legion of Honor Museum. A CityPASS ticket booklet costs \$89 for adults. [Buy Pass →](#)



San Francisco's historic Muni F-line features restored streetcars from all over the world, including this bright yellow vehicle shown in the Castro District. San Francisco Travel Association photo by Scott Chernis Photography.

San Francisco is serviced by two main airports, San Francisco International Airport (SFO) and Oakland International Airport (OAK). Both can be [reached via BART](#), the Bay Area Rapid Transit system, which is the most cost-effective way to get from the airport to downtown and vice versa. It's about \$9 from downtown to SFO and about \$8 to OAK, one way. Direct airport transfers to your hotel are also available for under \$20 when purchased in advanced. [Book Transfer →](#)

Gay Hotels in San Francisco

Luxury

[Parc 55](#) – a fantastic downtown location with stunning city views and very accessible to the best destinations and attractions in San Francisco. This is a Hilton Hotel offering everything you'd expect in terms of style and service. It has a 24-hour fitness center, two restaurants and a coffee shop onsite. (rates start at \$350 – \$500)

[Cova Hotel](#) – an LGBT-owned boutique hotel in the heart of downtown. It offers an on-site restaurant, fitness center and complimentary shuttle service. Floor-to-ceiling windows give spectacular views of the city skyline from the room or views can be enjoyed from the rooftop terrace. (rates start at \$200 – \$250)

[Hotel Rex](#) – a boutique hotel around the corner from San Francisco's Union Square. This 1930s-style San Francisco hotel is filled with contemporary art and located in the Theater District. It features the [Library Bar](#) where you can enjoy books, cocktails, a bar and restaurant plus live jazz on Friday nights. Within walking distance are great restaurants, nightclubs, boutiques and galleries. (rates start from \$220 – \$350)

Mid Range

[Willows Inn](#) – a gay owned bed and breakfast in the Castro neighborhood of San Francisco. It has small and cozy rooms as well as two-bedroom suites. It has a European-style shared bath and a vanity sink in each room. In the morning, enjoy a continental breakfast and in the evening meet friends and relax with a complimentary cocktail in the sitting room. The Innkeepers will happily help guests decide on restaurants, nightclubs and entertainment. (rates start from \$130 – \$215)

[Parker Guest House](#) – this LGBT-owned guest house features newly renovated rooms, private baths in most rooms, continental breakfast, complimentary wine social and free wifi. Guests can enjoy several common areas including the front parlor, library with fireplace, sun room and the outdoor decks and gardens. Located near the Castro District, restaurants, pubs, parks and the Muni Metro are all nearby. (rates start from \$190 – \$290)

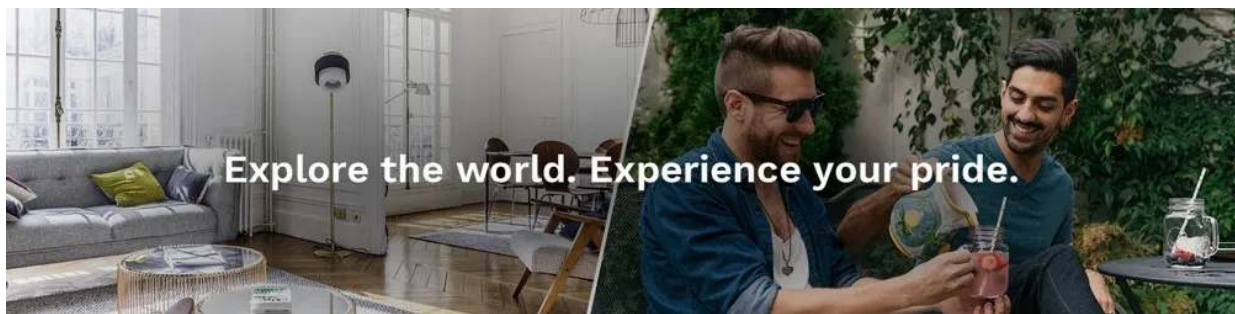
Budget

[Adelaide Hostel](#) – this hostel is two blocks from the center of Union Square in downtown San Francisco and about 20 minutes from the Castro by public transit. Guests enjoy free breakfast, dorm beds with privacy curtains or private rooms, free wifi and a large kitchen. (rates start from \$35 – \$140)

[European Hostel](#) – located in SoMa (South of Market) just 15 minutes from the Castro by public transit, this hostel features free wifi, a fully equipped kitchen plus a rooftop balcony and bar with views of downtown. Dorm rooms and private rooms are available. (rates start from \$30 – \$70)

Apartments

There are many sites for apartment rentals in San Francisco, with [AirBnB](#) probably being one of the most popular. Prices are generally comparable to budget hotels, especially if you're willing to get a room in a shared apartment.



There are even a few LGBT-oriented booking sites like [misterb&b](#) with listings from gay hosts for gay guests where you can either rent a whole apartment or a private room in a shared apartment. Understanding San Francisco's gay scene is much more easily done with the help of a local and apartment sharing is one of the best ways to meet someone living in the city who knows how things work, where and when are the best nights to go out, and what places to eat at and which to avoid.

Special Offer!

Sign up with [AirBnB](#) or [misterb&b](#) and you will receive a free \$25 credit to use on your first booking!

[Join AirBnB](#) [Join misterb&b](#)

Sightseeing & Activities in San Francisco

San Francisco has numerous activities and sights to keep visitors entertained depending on what sort of holiday you're looking to have. Some obvious ones are Alcatraz, the [Golden Gate Bridge](#), Golden Gate Park, views of the city from Twin Peaks and Fisherman's Wharf where sea lions can be seen at Pier 39. However, here are some of the other top highlights to consider when visiting the city. [Book tour →](#)

[Beaches](#) – the north end of Baker Beach is the gay, clothing-optional beach. It's known for great views of the Golden Gate Bridge (weather permitting of course). To get there take the #38 Geary Outbound and transfer to the #29 Sunset Bus. Near Baker Beach is Marshall's Beach which is also popular for gay and nude sunbathers. Again, it has excellent views of the bridge as well, but with a bit of a trek to get there. Take bus #30 North and get off at Golden Gate Bridge Toll Plaza. From there it's about a 15-minute walk.



Golden Gate Bridge.....duh! :-)

[Neighborhoods](#) – San Francisco is really just a collection of diverse, hip neighborhoods.

Check out Mission District for an artsy, trendy neighborhood with Latino flare. This is where the beautiful public graffiti art of the [Clarion Alley Mural Project](#) is located. Head to Haight-Ashbury for cafes, vintage shops and colorful architecture in this hipster scene. Find the gayborhood, Victorian homes, trendy shops and restaurants in the Castro. Lastly, in Chinatown you'll find Portsmouth Square which is the original public square dating back to the 1800s when the city was just a small Mexican town known as Yerba Buena.

[Painted Ladies & Alamos Square](#) – one of the most iconic views of San Francisco is this row of colorful Victorian homes at Hayes and Steiner Streets. You can admire the views of the downtown skyline behind these homes from Alamo Square Park which sits at the top of a hill.



Alamo Square

City Hall – the original building from 1899 was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake and this replacement was re-opened in 1915. This is the site of several movie scenes such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark* as well as historical moments including the 1978 assassinations of Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk.

Mission Dolores Park – located at 19th & Dolores Street, this park offers beautiful views of the city skyline and plenty of greenspace to enjoy a picnic and people watch. Park goers will enjoy the fact that this park tends to be in one of the sunnier microclimates of San Francisco.

[Big Bus Tours](#) – bus tours aren't always our favorite but admittedly, they are sometimes a good way to get a good overview of the city if you only have a single day for sightseeing. You can easily get to know the city quickly and jump on and off throughout the day to visit various sites of interest. Plus, the San Francisco Big Bus Tour will take you over the Golden Gate Bridge. You can buy tickets online for \$45. [Book tour →](#)

[Smart Destinations Explorer Pass](#) – If you plan to see a lot of sites and attractions while visiting San Francisco, consider this pass to save 50% on access to up to 5 out of 24 attractions. You can use it instantly with the free Go City Card app for 30 days. [Book tour →](#)



Japanese Garden at Golden Gate Park

Gay Tours in San Francisco

[Cruisin' the Castro](#) – This tour of San Francisco's famous Castro neighborhood has been around since 1989. You'll explore the historical, diverse and colorful sites of the Castro neighborhood, which is one of the largest LGBT communities in the world. They even offer food and wine tours, plus an easy pace with no large hills to climb! [Book tour →](#)

Shopping

Chestnut Street – a variety of sophisticated shops, boutiques, beauty outlets and restaurants among brand name retailers.

Chinatown – a place to find exotic gifts and souvenirs as well as apothecaries selling various teas plus lots of reasonably priced dining options.

Ferry Building – a high-end spot for a farmer’s market on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10am – 2pm and Saturdays 8am – 2pm plus specialty shops in the main hall sell breads, cheeses, meats, seafood and cookware.

Fillmore Street – a high-end selection of perfumeries, furniture designers, specialty beauty outlets, and restaurants.

Mission Street – where eclectic shoppers can find offbeat boutiques, discount fabric stores, vintage clothing and furniture stores.

Union Square – the main event for shoppers with nearly every major designer label including Levi’s, Macy’s, Neiman Marcus, Saks, Barneys and Banana Republic.

Union Street – not to be confused with Union Square, this street features small shops in Victorian architecture. You’ll also find many jewelry stores, goldsmiths and trendy boutiques here.

Restaurants and Cafes

The Castro – this neighborhood’s assorted foodie scene ranges from tapas to Mexican to classic American. For comfort food in the heart of the Castro District, [Finn Town Tavern](#) provides nightly dinner, fun signature drinks like “Show Girl” and “Drop Dead Diva” and most importantly, weekend brunch. Be sure to enjoy the libations during their Monday – Friday happy hour. For an order-at-the-counter, authentic Mexican treat try sopes, tostadas or horchata at [Tacorgasmico](#).



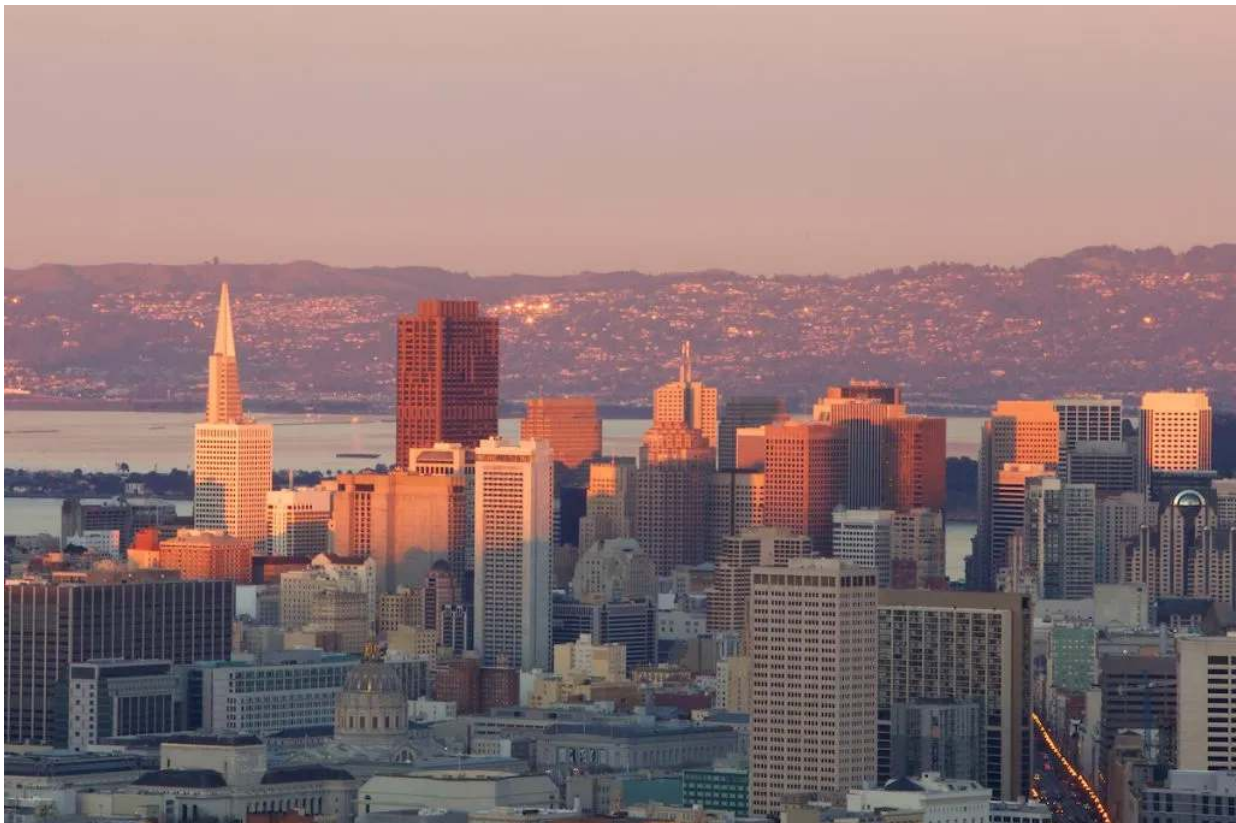
Delicious eats at [Finn Town Tavern](#) in the heart of the Castro – photo via Finn Town Tavern

Mission District – This neighborhood is known for its Central American culture and plethora of taquerías serving the local specialty, the Mission-style burrito. One recommendable taquería joint with great food and friendly staff is [El Toro Taquería](#) at 17th St. & Valencia or try [Taquería El Farolito](#) at Mission & 24th. [Mission District food tours](#) are also available to try a variety of eats from some of the best shops and restaurants.

Fishermans Wharf – though it's quite a touristy area, Fisherman's Wharf is still a great spot to find good seafood. Check out [Franciscan Crab Restaurant](#) for tender eats like Dungeness crab in season from early December to spring or enjoy oysters at [Fog Harbor Fish House](#).

Chinatown – this neighborhood has lots of great restaurants and varieties of food to choose from. Order up great dim sum at [Great Eastern](#) or devour the famous egg tarts from [Golden Gate Bakery](#). Check out [Chinatown food tours here](#) to get a culinary sampling for a variety of shops, vendors and restaurants.

North Beach – for a wide selection of Italian restaurants head to North Beach, San Francisco's "Little Italy". Scarf up a slice of pizza at [Tony's Pizza Napoletana](#) or leave plenty of room for the hearty servings of hamburgers, steaks, seafood and pastas at [Original Joe's](#).



San Francisco Skyline. San Francisco Travel Association photo by Scott Chernis Photography

San Francisco Gay Bars

San Francisco is considered an American gay mecca and at its heart beats the Castro District, one of the first gay neighborhoods. This gay neighborhood is located along Castro St. from Market St. to 19th St. and occupied by queer dance clubs and bars featuring numerous happy hours as well as quality restaurants and trendy shops.

[440 Castro](#) – a leather bar scene of mostly 30 and 40-somethings enjoying drink specials and cruising to a mix of house, electronica and pop music. Popular nights include Underwear Night on Mondays, \$2 Tuesdays for beer, and Wooden Nickel Wednesday for 2 for 1 cocktails.

[SF Eagle](#) – the San Francisco location of the popular leather dive bar. It has a great outdoor patio popular with muscle daddies, bears, pups, otters and the like on weekend afternoons. Regular events include Beer Bust Sundays and ROR:SHOK, a dark drag [party](#) on Fridays.

[Hi Tops](#) – this gay sports bar in the Castro is a great spot to throwback drinks while supporting your team. The bar menu has top-notch food served by a friendly staff to an attractive crowd. Wear your jocks, tube socks and gym shorts on Thursdays for Gym Class when bartenders serve \$2 whisky shots in their own jocks and gym shorts.

[Lookout Bar](#) – a hip venue with a great balcony that overlooks Market Street in the Castro. A good spot to catch up with friends over happy hour and on Sunday afternoons when it's quite popular.

[Oasis](#) – this venue by Drag legends D'Arcy Drollinger and Heklina presents drag shows, cabaret and theater productions to a mixed gay/lesbian crowd in SoMa.

[The Stud](#) – a cornerstone in the San Francisco gay bar scene, this dive-ish bar in SoMa has been around the block. Tuesdays are "Sing til it Hurts" karaoke and Fridays belong to Red Hots Burlesque, a queer burlesque show. The night here ends late with a special late-night license allowing doors stay open an hour later than other bars on Thursdays and Fridays.

San Francisco Gay Clubs and [Parties](#)

Clubs

[Badlands](#) – a popular and often crowded (and quite touristy) spot to dance to pop remixes in the Castro. This video/music bar attracts a younger crowd, offers daily 2 for 1 cocktails and has gogo dancers every Thursday. Go here to meet other tourists, but perhaps not the best place to meet the locals.

[Beaux Bar and Dance Club](#) – attracts a young crowd including twinkies and twink admirers to meet up in a swanky club scene. It's open every day and features a 2 for 1 happy hour and themed parties, such as Andrew Christian's Manimal Fridays and BIG TOP Sundays. The cool design, sound and lighting come together to create memorable, nighttime dance experience.

[The Cafe](#) – 20 and 30-somethings go to this club to dance at this spacious venue in the Castro. Weekly events include karaoke on Wednesdays, Picante (latin night) on Thursdays and RuPaul's Drag Race on Fridays.

[Q Bar](#) – this hip, clubby bar brings in younger party goers for dancing and cruising. A good spot for gogo dancers and happy hour any night of the week in the Castro.

Parties

[Daytime Realness](#) – a monthly Sunday afternoon patio party with drag and dancing at El Rio in the Mission. This crowd is mostly men of all ages and styles.

[JUNK](#) – every Thursday night at Powerhouse is underwear & gear night. Enter the "JUNK in your TRUNK" contest for a chance to win various prizes.

[Swagger Like Us](#) – for an underground queer club vibe, check this event out that gives new queer hip-hop artists, DJs and dancers a place to show off their skills. Their events are all over the city and described as "fashion forward, sleek, cool".

For the Ladies

[El Rio](#) – this lesbian-owned neighborhood bar brings in a mostly mixed crowd in the Mission District. It also hosts a popular monthly girls T-dance every fourth Saturday called Mango.

[UHAUL](#) – a dance party for the girls with sexy gogo gals happening twice a month. Every second Friday at Oasis and every third Friday at F8.



San Francisco Travel Association photo by Nader Khouri.

San Francisco Saunas & Cruising Bars

[Blow Buddies](#) – the name says it all. This sex club in SoMa is for all sexual deviants looking for fun from glory holes to jock straps to golden showers and even has a discreet outdoor area. This is a member- only sort of establishment, but out-of-towners are welcome.

[Eros](#) – a gay, two story sauna in the Castro with steam, sauna, showers, lockers, bunk beds and play areas. This hot spot gets busy at the standard times, right after work and when the bars and clubs close.

[Powerhouse](#) – a cruise bar in SoMa with a dark room, sexy videos and patio attracting a diverse crowd of friendly men looking for fun.

Get Events in San Francisco

[Folsom Street Fair](#) – this annual event held every September calls itself the world’s biggest leather event and draws in 400,000 fetish enthusiasts covering 13 city blocks. Attendees enjoy live music, dance areas playing EDM, 200 exhibitor booths with fetish gear and toys and public play stations. Just about anything goes here so if it’s not your scene, be warned, but if it is, enjoy!

[San Francisco Pride](#) – this gay pride event started back in 1970 and today it is the largest gathering of the queer community and its allies nationwide. The event, held annually during the last full weekend of June, has more than 200 parade contingents and exhibitors and over twenty community-run stages and venues like Homo Hip Hop to Gray Pride. Things get started on Saturday at the Civic Center Plaza downtown and the Parade occurs on Sunday morning.



The 40th Annual San Francisco Gay Pride Parade where the theme was “Forty and Fabulous” in San Francisco, Calif. on Sunday June 27, 2010. San Francisco Travel Association photo by Nader Khouri.

[Up Your Alley](#) – dubbed its “dirty little brother”, Up Your Alley is like the opening act to Folsom Street Fair’s main event. Located in the South of Market district, nearly 15,000 fetish enthusiasts and fans of BDSM come to enjoy the all-day event in July featuring more than 50 adult vendors. Those into rubber, sportswear, biker gear, skinheads, punks, and built, hairy men will love this event.

Day Trips from San Francisco

[Sausalito](#) – a popular day trip sits across the bay in the beautiful, seaside town known as Sausalito. In addition to amazing views of San Francisco, you’ll also find unique boutiques and art galleries and numerous restaurants and cafes along Bridgeway, Sausalito’s main street. To get there you can drive, bike or take public transportation across the Golden Gate Bridge. The [Big Bus Tours](#) will also take you to Sausalito. The small town hosts the Sausalito Art Festival each year over Labor Day Weekend in September. [Book tour →](#)

[Tiburon](#) – this cute, small town got its name from the local leopard sharks (tiburón meaning “shark” in Spanish). It can be reached via a quick ferry ride from San Francisco. Enjoy a meal at a nice cafe, ride a bike around the town or visit the Railroad and Ferry Depot Museum for a history of Tiburon as a railroad post. For fantastic views of the Golden Gate Bridge and Angel Island, go to Shoreline Park.