

Favorite San Francisco Haunts

North Beach:

Sotto Mare: 552 Grant Street

This place, run by an Italian family, has THE BEST sand dabs and, for a very reasonable price. It is TINY, and does not accept reservations except for 3 or more. If you are a party of two, you will be seated at the counter, which is fun, too, as you get to watch clothes-pinned orders zipped down a wire into the kitchen. You can get out of here for about \$50.00 for two people if you share a bottle of Pinot Grigio, a Caesar Salad, one order of sand dabs (one is more than enough to share; they come on a large platter; if there are no fresh sand dabs that day, try the rex sole); and, a side of spaghetti, aglio, olio. The last time we sent friends here, they saw Tony Bennett & his wife. He was in SF to sing the National Anthem at the Giant's game.

Generally, there is a wait of about 45 minutes so, what we do, is we go in and leave our name and tell them we are going down the street for a cocktail. They'll give you a plastic lobster "buzzer" which has a range of two blocks, so you can wander around Grant Street a bit. We like to go to Sodini's for a cocktail while we wait. It is just a couple of doors up the street on the same side of the street (510 Grant Street). The restaurant is cozy with its candlelight, but we like the food at Sotto Mare better, although the cocktails are good here and there is usually an "interesting" crowd!

Original Joe's - Corner of Union and Stockton streets. This is one of San Francisco's most beloved Italian restaurants. It was originally on Taylor Street, deep in the Tenderloin, where you had to put your life in jeopardy to get their famous hamburger, Italian sausage and eggs and other outstanding dishes. This was a spot where wheeler-dealers, actors, judges, prosecutors, cops, defense lawyers, street criminals and a whole assortment of characters would all come together in a "little Switzerland" atmosphere to enjoy great food with great portions at great prices. Then there was a fire and they closed for many years. Now they have reopened in this new location where much of the same crowd (maybe no more street criminals/ now white collar types) but definitely San Francisco's finest all mingle and enjoy great food. The owners have done an amazing job of keeping much of the original look of the old place.

On a historical note, prior to Original Joes, this site was occupied by Flor d'Italia, the restaurant where Nate Cohen founded the American Board of Criminal Lawyers.

Firenze by Night – located in the heart of North Beach at 1429 Stockton Street, is known for its Gnocchi, but all the food is great. It's a casual place with one wall covered by a mural of Florence. Tell Sergio, the owner (gray hair in a pony tail) that James sent you!!!! A nice place for dinner and then a walk around North Beach after.

Nob Hill:

Actually, on the slopes of Nob Hill, the corner of Washington & Pacific Streets, to be precise, is Venticello. This is a relaxed, neighborhood restaurant with really good food and it is walking distance from Nob Hill (a nice way to see some sights!)

A great place for an after-dinner drink is The Big Four, located in the Huntington Hotel on the corner of California and Taylor streets (kitty-corner from Grace Cathedral and

across the street from Huntington Park). The hotel was recently purchased and re-decorated, with less-than rave reviews, but the Bar has, mercifully, been left pretty much as it was before. The name alludes to the four big railroad men who made a fortune in SF in the 19th century. Some nice memorabilia remains. A lot of locals come here as well as a lot of people who just return on each visit to SF.

Financial District:

On Bush Street, between Stockton and Montgomery, is the “French” quarter of SF. Notre Dame des Victoires (566 Bush Street) is a little jewel-box of a church and, if you are inclined to go to Mass but don't want to be lectured at the sermon, go to the French Mass at 10:30AM. The priest is all worked up, but you can't make out what he's saying, so, all in all, it is a pleasant experience. (Head to Old St. Mary's on the corner of Grant and California Streets, if you want your sermon in Chinese!)

After Mass, Café de la Presse on the corner of Grant and Bush is nice for Brunch on a weekend or, a bowl of latte & French pastry if you don't want a big breakfast. This café is directly across the street from the Gates of Chinatown where you can stroll for an hour or two.

If you're hungry after that, lunch at Le Central (453 Bush Street) is fun. It's SF's oldest French bistro and, while open for dinner, tends to be livelier at lunchtime.

In an alley down the street on the same side as Le Central is Café Claude (7 Claude Lane). This is a romantic little place, but reservations are a must for dinner.

Across Bush Street from Café Claude is Café Bastille (22 Belden Place). This place actually offers “al fresco” dining in the Alley for the strong of heart. Downstairs, inside, the place reminds you of the Bastille Metro station in Paris. So, if you've ever dreamed of dining in a Paris Metro station, this is the place for you!! Again, this tends to be livelier at lunch than dinner. No reservations required for lunch. And, there are several other restaurants in the Alley you can try.

For dim sum, our absolute favorite place is Yank Sing (49 Stevenson Street). This is off an alley from Market Street, so you'll need a map, although it is quite easy to find. This place is terrific for lunch, although really busy, so reservations are recommended. A relatively new restaurant to hit the scene is The Cavalier (360 Jessie Street ~~ also an alley, off 5th Street, near Mission Street). This is a British-themed restaurant and breakfast, lunch and dinner are all fun, although it can be a little pricey at dinner. Reservations for lunch or dinner are recommended.

If you're in the mood for a romantic restaurant with good French food and not too-expensively priced, we really like Fringale (570 Fourth Street). Reservations are necessary and parking is difficult, so best to taxi there.

Of course, right at ground zero in the tenderloin is one of our oldest, long-time favorites, John's Grill (63 Ellis Street), famous for being the place where Dashiell Hammett wrote parts of *The Maltese Falcon* while working as a Pinkerton guard in the Flood Building next door. Tell them James Campbell sent you and ask to be seated downstairs; the "Maltese Falcon" room upstairs is also fine, but you get a better "crowd-viewing" downstairs.

If you'd like an interesting cocktail before or after dinner, check out Bourbon and Branch (501 Jones Street). It occupies the site of a former Speakeasy & you'll need to double-check their website or call them before you go because you usually need to know the "password" for the day in order to get in. It is a really unusual, historic and fun place.

Speaking of historic, the "original cold day" restaurant in SF is Tadich Grill (240 California Street). They've only recently changed from their "cash only" policy to now accepting credit cards, though AmEx is not one of them. No reservations are accepted; you show up, give your name, order a drink and stand patiently against the wall. The California Street cable car line is just in front of Tadich, so if you'd like to take it up to Nob Hill, you can visit Grace Cathedral and contemplate while you walk its maze. Across from Grace Cathedral is Huntington Park where you can usually watch oldsters doing "tai chi", if that is something that appeals.

If the Hyde Street or Bay Street cable car lines aren't too long, and you're in the mood for a really good Irish coffee and eggs benedict, The Buena Vista Café (2765 Hyde St.) is great. Legend has it that the Irish Coffee was invented here. No reservations here; everyone shares their table with whomever else wanders in. This is also a fun place to go on a cold & foggy night just for a warm-up with an Irish coffee and cable car ride back home.

Ferry Plaza at the foot of Market Street on the Bay is a lovely place to stroll with small stands, restaurants and shops conceived for the ferry commuters but now enjoyed by all. If you want to take a ferry to Sausalito or Jack London Square (in Oakland), here's the place to do it. Otherwise, just go to one of the Bayside cafes and enjoy some oysters, chowder, wine and the passing ships. Note: You cannot get a ferry to Alcatraz here; you have to head further west on The Embarcadero to Pier 39. And, it is best to reserve tix for an Alcatraz tour before you even arrive in SF.

Ferry Plaza is located on what is known as the Embarcadero and, here, you can proceed westward to Pier 39,

Fisherman's Wharf and Ghirardelli Square. It's a bit of a walk, so you might want to grab one of the "bicycle cabs" or the F line Street car.

A word about the F line: This runs all the way from the wharf, up Market Street, to the Castro. So, if you'd like an inexpensive overview of the City, this is the way to do it.

The streetcars on this line are from all over the world and there are signs outside the car telling you its city of origin.

Kokkari (200 Jackson Street) - Greek, but very lively and upscale. Power players of the City are always seen here. Roasted meats from an open fire pit and fresh fish is always

topping the list. It has a rustic feel to it but is very refined. Amazing all around. If you want to go do not wait to make a reservation.

Alioto No. 8 at Fisherman's Wharf is often mistaken for a tourist trap (and there will be lots of them there), but this actually is "old school" San Francisco Sicilian seafood. All fresh and literally right off the boat. No better view of the fishing boats at the wharf and the Golden Gate Bridge than from this restaurant. An excellent wine list as well. For an appetizer, try the duo of spicy & regular calamari.

Bix - downtown, 56 Gold Street (another alley, this time off Montgomery St). Retro - feels like a 40's-supper club atmosphere. You just might see Humphrey Bogart's ghost hanging out here by the piano.

HERE COME THE THREE BIGGEST NAMES WITH THE THREE BIGGEST PRICE TAGS. THESE PLACES ARE A BIG NIGHT OUT SO BRING YOUR SAVINGS ACCOUNT. ALL HAVE SUPERB WINE LISTS, WHICH WILL ACCOUNT FOR MORE THAN DOUBLE YOUR FOOD COSTS. BUT -- THIS IS BIG A NIGHT OUT!

Boulevard - 1 Mission Street. One of San Francisco's best restaurants, power brokers and visiting celebs are always on the reservation list. Excellent food by Chef Nancy Oakes with upscale French nouveau-feel decor.

Gary Danko - 800 North Point at Hyde Street/right off the Hyde Street cable car line. Foodies declare this the gastronomic star of the City. It is just simply wonderful. Reservations are probably already unavailable.

La Folie - 2316 Polk Street. This is our favorite of the above. Truly a big city -New York/Paris feel to this jewel box of a place. It is one of the last grande dames of haute cuisine remaining. Chef Roland Passot is a master. He not only slaves daily in his kitchen to bring the absolute best to each day of his cooking, but he will also take the time to personally greet each guest during the evening. Dollar for dollar, I cannot imagine a better dinner anywhere. Just elegant! It is expensive, but you will have a delightful meal to remember for a lifetime. Reservations are absolutely necessary but can be obtained with reasonable notice.

NOW BACK TO REALITY

Gitane - 6 Claude Lane right off Bush Street at Kearny. This is strictly Spanish Gypsy atmosphere, very romantic with excellent dishes that are all meant to share. Dinner only. Reservations required.

Harris' - 2100 Van Ness. Classic old school steaks aged to perfection from their own ranch in the Central Valley. Classic setting and they will ask you to wear a coat and tie (the men ofcourse). Beautiful and healthy cocktails as well.

House of Prime Rib - 1906 Van Ness. This is one of the first places in America that serve the prime rib off the joint cart. The carts are from the 40's and your meat is hand carved right at your table. Always a favorite if prime rib is your thing. You should make a reservation because it is always packed. You will have a wonderful dinner in a pleasant surrounding.

Water Bar - 399 Embarcadero. Spectacular view of the bay and the Bay Bridge. Excellent seafood, very upbeat atmosphere and lots of glamor. Great for drinks at the bar or dinner.

NOW, for JAMES' CHINESE RECOMMENDATIONS:

With the exception of The Empress of China, which has a top floor view overlooking Chinatown, and Hakassan, which is high tech modern, all are just great, simple, Chinese food places. How can you come to San Francisco and not have Chinese food??

R & G Lounge - 631 Kearny Street. Stop! Do not let them put you in the basement; you want to go upstairs, even if you have to wait, which you will. And do not go without eating the salt and pepper crab. Everything on the menu is excellent and the attention is to the seafood.

Henry's Hunan - in an ally at 110 Natoma Street. Everything here is great. My recommendations: No.9 Glass Noodles with Ground Pork \$7.75/ No.33 Henry's Special \$11.95/No. 37 Chicken with Black Bean Sauce \$8.95 and an order of steamed rice \$1.25. OK you see I love this place.

I have others but Linda will not let me put them on the list!

All this eating may put you in the mood for a littlesightseeing. Really, as with all cities, the best way to "see" it, is to "walk" it. The general neighborhoods are: Union Square (for shopping); North Beach (for a little Italian flavor); Chinatown; the Financial District; the Embarcadero; the Marina; the Castro, and the waterfront.

If the Giants are playing, AT&T Park is really beautiful. If you don't want to take in a game, it's a nice place to walk around and look at. There are restaurants around in the area and it's close to The Embarcadero and Market Street.

If museums are your thing, there is the Asian Art Museum at Civic Center, the De Young Museum in Golden Gate Park and the Legion of Honor Museum in Lincoln Park. Also, the Walt Disney Family Museum in the Presidio is really amazing. Not only is the site itself beautiful, the exhibit is really inspiring. Contrary to what one might think by the name, this is not really a museum for very young children; but, it is terrific for those who are young at heart!!!!

If you have a car and want to drive to the west coast edge of San Francisco, head out to The Cliff House (Land's End and Ocean Blvd.) This historic spot is near the site of the

historic Sutro Baths and has a rugged beauty to it. There are a couple of restaurants and cafes here, and reservations are recommended.

Finally, if you want an easy overview of the City, there are numerous “hop-on-off” buses which take you all over the place. You can catch them at Union Square and also just in front of the Café de la Presse. If you’re travelling with young ones, there are motorized scooters that fit two people that let you zip around; these are found down near the wharf.

Have a great time and let us know when you find a terrific place we don’t know about!!!!

James