

To get an authentic feel of the Golden Gate Bridge, stroll the sidewalk, even if only part of the way.
PHOTOS: REUTERS, COURTESY OF MIN WANG



Travel Black Book Singaporeans Living Abroad

The golden gateway



Who: Min Wang, 30, a senior account manager at a Dutch payment company. She has been based in San Francisco since November last year and also spends part of her time in Amsterdam because of her job.

San Francisco not only has great outdoors, but also boasts good wine and a variety of concerts and festivals

Ankita Varma

Destination: San Francisco is a technology hub, which means there are great communities and opportunities if you are interested in the industry.

California has one of the best outdoors. Hiking, camping and skiing are what most people who live here do on the weekends.

San Francisco residents are also big on yoga, meditation, mindfulness and self-development, which makes living and working here a big plus.

SEE

One of the most touristy things to do in San Francisco is to visit

Alcatraz Island (tinyurl.com/j5hk9ol). The fortress in the middle of San Francisco Bay was converted from a lighthouse station to a military prison in the 1870s and was home to the most notorious criminals in the early 20th century.

You can take a self-guided audio tour, which is narrated by former inmates and guards. Tours fill up fast, so it is best to book at least two weeks before your trip.

Many people take pictures of the Golden Gate bridge, but never walk on it. To get an authentic feel of this iconic landmark, stroll the sidewalk, even if you go out only part of the way.

Within the city, which is getting more gentrified by the day, there are many fun neighbourhoods to explore.

One of my favourite and one of the most popular neighbourhoods is the Mission district, an area that has Latino roots and a hipster vibe.

Although the rising rents have priced out many of the Latino families who originally lived there, the area still boasts some of the best coffee spots and restaurants.

The chic and industrially designed Tartine Manufactory (tartinemanufactory.com) is a great spot in the Mission, especially on Sundays, when one can people-watch the brunch crowd. Also, the buildings in the neighbourhood are covered with incredible murals.

If you are after good views, I recommend Baker beach. It makes for stunning pictures with the Golden Gate Bridge in the background.

It is one of the city's best beach spots, so head out there early; otherwise it can get very packed, especially on a nice, warm day.

EAT

Being as cosmopolitan as it is, San Francisco has a lot of good food.

One of my favourite places is a Japanese izakaya called Rintaro (izakayarintaro.com), which is in the Mission district.

It has a fabulous vibe and serves food using traditional Japanese cooking methods melded with Californian produce. Its interior features exposed wood and makes the space feel like a treehouse.

Recommended dishes include the mixed sashimi platter (US\$65 or S\$87) and chicken yakitori (US\$9), which is made using almost every part of the chicken and is available in different flavours.

Liholiho Yacht Club (liholihoyachtclub.com) is another of my favourite restaurants and has amazing Hawaiian fusion food and drinks. Prices range from under US\$20 for starters to US\$30 and up for mains.

Plow (eatatplow.com) is a restaurant I love for a good breakfast. It has a menu comprising farm-to-table American comfort food. I recommend the Lemon Ricotta Pancakes (US\$16), which are to die for.

PLAY

There is often a variety of concerts and festivals taking place in California. I recommend the International Ocean Film Festival (intloceanfilmfest.org) that takes place in San Francisco in March every year.

It inspires people to appreciate and care for the ocean by revealing its wonders through independent films.

It is also worthwhile to travel to wine country such as Napa Valley or Sonoma Valley if you have a few days to spare. Both areas have much to offer in the way of great wine, food and scenic views.

Napa County is about a two-hour drive and it is recommended that you set off earlier in the day to avoid being stuck in afternoon traffic.

Sonoma Valley is an hour away from the city, so it makes for a good day trip.

For nature lovers, Tomales Bay is a spectacular side trip to consider. It is about a 1½-hour drive away and makes for a good weekend trip.

Hiking and kayaking are recommended while you are there. You can also take photos of the many elk that roam the area.

SHOP

Although many people like to visit the outlet malls while in the United States, I recommend taking home other souvenirs.

Skip the brands that you can find back home and go shopping instead at one of the many farmers markets in San Francisco that offer fresh fruit, vegetables, cheese and bread.

Ferry Plaza Farmers Market (tinyurl.com/ya4an758) is one of the most popular and is open from 8am to 2pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and from 10am to 2pm on Saturdays, all year round.

If you make a trip to Napa Valley, I recommend taking home some of the great wines the region has to offer.

STAY

There are many beautiful places to stay at in San Francisco, but resist the urge to stay outside the city because of lower hotel prices.

It is best to suss out which areas you want to explore in the city, then choose your hotel based on that so you don't find yourself having to take a taxi or walk everywhere. San Francisco is a hilly city.

Fisherman's Wharf is sometimes considered the tourist centre of San Francisco.

Hotel-wise, it is where every major chain is.

Here, you will find the Hyatt, Marriott, Best Western, Holiday Inn, Radisson, Sheraton and Hilton. However, there are few privately owned or boutique hotels.

The Scarlet Huntington, Marines Memorial Club Hotel and The Westin St. Francis are some options if you are looking for a historic hotel.

They are housed in heritage buildings and offer old-world charm.

avarma@sph.com.sg



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GETTING THERE

Singapore Airlines and United Airlines fly directly between Singapore and San Francisco daily. The flight time is 15 hours.

If you prefer to break up your flight, you can choose airlines such as Cathay Pacific or Eva Air, which will get you to San Francisco in about 18 hours, including a layover.

TIPS

- San Francisco is good to visit all year round, though it is important to check the weather and pack accordingly. Even in the summer months, it can get foggy and cold, so be prepared with warm attire.

- Spending four to five nights is ideal as it gives you enough time to explore the city and take a side trip out to Napa Valley or Tomales Bay.

- San Francisco is relatively safe, but just like travelling in any big city, you need to be mindful of your surroundings and belongings. It is also best to take care when travelling alone at night. Instead of walking, take a taxi or rideshare.

- Street parking is impossible in most areas and many San Francisco hotels charge a high daily fee for parking. You can get around most of the tourist areas without a car, so consider not driving and spend your money on a nice and more conveniently located hotel instead.