

real weddings

SACRAMENTO TO THE SIERRA

May 2, 2017 – Emily Peter



The Westin St. Francis. Photo courtesy of the hotel.

San Francisco is a desirable destination for travelers near and far, but visitors can easily become overwhelmed by the fast pace of the city. How else do you expect over 850,000 people to fit in just under 49 square miles? People need to move and they like to move fast!

In order to get a true “City by the Bay” experience in just one weekend, travelers should try to hit the classic spots but shouldn’t fret about crowds: a.k.a. other tourists. Tip: Don’t go classic tourist with socks and sandals and your camera hanging around your neck. San Francisco is hip, so try to channel your inner Urban Outfitters model.

I recently packed up my suitcase and boyfriend and drove down to San Francisco for a quick weekend getaway. In the short time we were there, we packed full our itinerary with shopping, food and drinks and even learning! In my experience, there are no three things better than those when traveling.

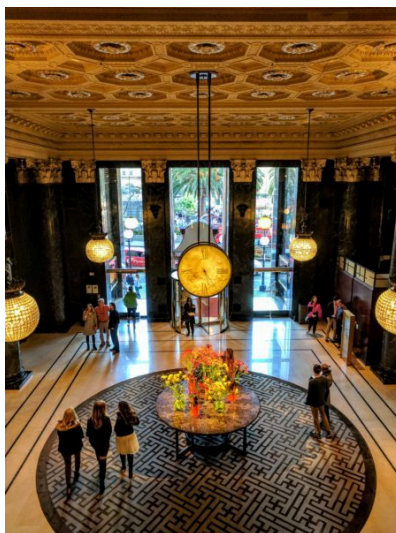
Our first stop was the Embarcadero Farmer’s Market in the Ferry Building. Located right on the water, the Ferry Building is one of San Francisco’s most famous landmarks undergoing restoration in 2003 to what you see now. Locals sell their goods – everything from coffee and ice cream to pottery and dried mushrooms. No, not *those* kinds of mushrooms (although I’m sure they’re not hard to find in this city). It’s often crowded, but it’s a great place to experience and purchase local offerings. A short walk under the Bay Bridge and you’ll hit AT&T Park – a beautiful ballpark that, with its bay views and great food, will satisfy even those who “don’t understand baseball.”



Ferry Building. Photo by Emily Peter.

We had to pass by the park, no baseball that day, but ventured on to 21st Amendment Brewery. I always promise my boyfriend good beer when we travel – and that’s exactly what is offered at 21st Amendment. If you haven’t tried their Hell Or High Watermelon wheat beer yet, you’re missing out. It is unbelievably refreshing, and even though you can pick up a 6-pack at the store, nothing beats a beer fresh out of the tap. Their Brew Free! Or Die IPA is a great pick for those who prefer more hops, and El Sully is a smooth Mexican-style lager.

By this time, our hotel was available for check-in and we were off to Union Square. The Westin St. Francis is smack-dab in the middle of Union Square and provides guests with gorgeous views and amazingly kind customer service. After admiring the 16th floor view from our room (that’s only halfway up the building if you’re counting), we headed downstairs to the Clock Bar. Serving an array of unique cocktails and a grand wine list, the Clock Bar is a sophisticated spin on the historical spot. Right outside the bar is an ornate Grandfather clock that folks used to use as a meeting spot. If you were told “meet me at the clock” you knew you were headed to the historic lobby.



Westin St. Francis Lobby. Photo by Emily Peter.



The infamous Clock Bar clock. Photo by Emily Peter.

Our evening continued, by trolley, to dinner down on Fishermen's Wharf. After getting off at Ghirardelli Square (foreshadowing, we'll end up there later), a short walk to the wharf led us to Scoma's on the water. The rather tiny building is always packed, and we were lucky enough to secure a table by the window. Watching the calm water and eating fresh fish transported us to a different San Francisco. We enjoyed our dinner and each other's company while admiring the quiet bay.



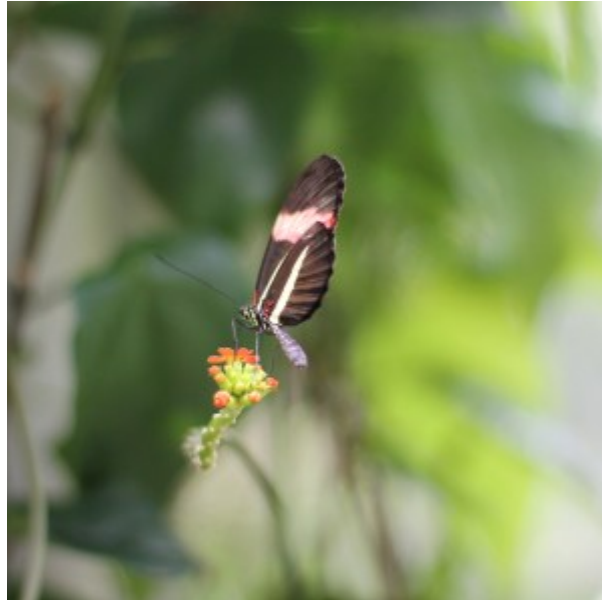
Dinner on the wharf. Photo by Emily Peter.

A quick walk up to Ghirardelli Square provided us with enough burned calories to feel as though we earned our sundae. Even with the hoards of tourists visiting "jerry-deli," we found our own cozy spot inside to devour our dessert. Our last stop before heading back to our much-anticipated comfy beds at the Westin St. Francis brought us to the Russian Hill District for drinks with friends. This intimate neighborhood is packed with trendy restaurants, unique shops and smiling faces. Definitely a recommendation for those looking for local businesses with charm.

After a restful night's sleep, we lounged around our room for a bit and enjoyed the breathtaking city view with a hot cup of coffee before venturing downstairs to The Oak Room Restaurant. The gorgeous wood paneled walls are reminiscent of the days when it housed men smoking cigars and playing dice. These days, breakfast and lunch are served daily. Their breakfast menu includes a hot buffet and many well-rounded dishes including a Scrambled Egg, Turkey and Cheddar Wrap, which my boyfriend chose. He said something about feeling bad about the ice cream the night before...I didn't share the same sentiment. I indulged in the Blueberry Orange Granola Pancakes, which were so flavorful and moist that I didn't see my boyfriend for the remainder of the meal. I kept my head down and, as politely as one can, shoveled delicious pancakes into my mouth. Once I finally left my paradise and rejoined the table, I saw that his plate was empty as well. The friendly wait staff continued to fill our coffee cups, and we then packed up our goods and headed to our last stop of the weekend – Golden Gate Park.

There are a multitude of activities at Golden Gate Park, too much for one day, but something for everyone. My only tip is to arrive early to find parking and beat huge crowds. The park includes the de Young Museum, walking trails (watch out for Segway tours), the Japanese Tea Gardens and California Academy of Sciences, which was our destination, among other attractions.

The Academy has a history dating back to 1853 when it started as a research center. Over time, exhibits were added, its location was moved (thanks again 1906 earthquake!) and it now houses an aquarium, planetarium, natural history museum, living rainforest and an ever-changing array of specialty programs. All ages are welcomed and encouraged to explore, as long as you're eager to learn, you'll enjoy and benefit from your time spent at the Academy. We spent about 3 hours and learned so much, yet still had more to learn. If our weekend was extended, we would have spent the entire day exploring, but our drive home was awaiting us.



California Academy of Sciences. Photo by Emily Peter.



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We chose to take the scenic route home, over the Golden Gate Bridge. If you have the time, and courage, take a walk over the bridge. You'll have your breath taken away not only by the height above the water (don't look down) but also by the absolutely incredible and almost all-inclusive view of San Francisco. The beauty and charm of the city is prominent; it's no wonder travelers from all over the world list it as a top destination.

For more info about the Westin St. Francis, visit westinstfrancis.com

Blog Post by Real Weddings Magazine's Associate Editor, Emily Peter.