

SAN FRANCISCO in 12 Hours

In this melting pot of a city, there is always something to do

By CHARUKESI RAMADURAI

San Francisco is where the young and restless go to fulfil their dreams. The city—and the Bay Area around it—which is considered the startup capital of the world carries a youthful buzz. This is quite apt, given that San Francisco was the epicentre of the 1848 Gold Rush that got thousands of hopefuls pouring in. This made the city cosmopolitan and liberal, and this ethos is still evident. There are little pockets which different ethnic and social communities have made their hubs, like Chinatown (Chinese), North Beach (Italians), Mission (Latinos) and Castro (LGBT community). Previously, it was owned by the Spanish and then the Mexicans before being taken over by the US in 1846. Today, San Francisco is one of the most interesting and pedestrian-friendly cities in the US. So put on your walking shoes and get the best out of 'Frisco in a day.

7 am

First thing in the morning, make your way to Chinatown. This is a great time to see the area slowly come to life, minus the jostling of locals and visitors. Once you've had your fill of the street shops, walk towards Little

Saigon (less than 2 km away) to Hai Ky Mi Gia, a popular breakfast destination that serves over 30 varieties of steaming soup bowls. If you happen to be in the city on a Saturday, there is only one thing to do next—the weekly farmer's market at Ferry Plaza, which begins at 8 am.

It's open on Tuesdays and Thursdays too from 10 am, but the weekend is the best time to visit.

9 am

Ride the historic tramcar (known locally as the trolley car) from Fisherman's Wharf to Castro district if you are



The Golden Gate Bridge (below) is the quintessential San Francisco icon; Chinatown, a hub of the Chinese people, is best explored on foot in the mornings



Clockwise from left: A ride in the tramcar for a glimpse of the wall art in the city; Lombard Street is known as the world's crookedest street; Pier 39 has a carnival vibe to it; and a pair of giant legs at Haight Street



interested in stunning wall art or curious about the vibe of the country's gay capital. Look out for the F Line, and be sure to get on it early in the day, before the queues start snaking for miles. If you want a hop-on-hop-off experience, take the Powell/Hyde or Powell/Mason lines from Fishermen's Wharf.

This way, you get to check off touristy attractions like Lombard Street, known as the world's crookedest street, and the North Beach area.

11 am

One of the quintessential San Fran experiences is a pilgrimage to the City Lights bookstore, a rendezvous for literary minds living in and visiting the city since 1953. City Lights is also an independent publisher, which takes pride in its "commitment to free intellectual inquiry". Once you have browsed at the ground level, walk downstairs into the basement for more books and comfortable old chairs in which to sit and read them for hours. And don't miss the cheerful artwork on the exteriors as you walk out of the store.

1 pm

The Haight-Ashbury neighbourhood is a straight throwback to the times (late 1960s) when San Francisco was the heart of the Flower Power movement. To those with incurable imagination, the faint smell of grass still seems to linger in the air, combined with the heady fragrance of incense from shops with names like Love of Ganesha selling spiritual

kitsch. Keep your eyes peeled for the pair of giant legs clad in fishnet stockings and red stilettos, leaning out of the upper floor window of Piedmont Boutique on Haight Street. The other highlights of this area are the old Victorian homes dotting the side lanes, locally known as Painted Ladies, for their bright facades. Stop for a quick pizza lunch at 'Escape from New York' that boasts of some of the most unique toppings combinations (my personal favourite is You Say Potato, with roasted potato slices and roasted garlic cloves in pesto sauce).

4 pm

Get to the Golden Gate Bridge, the San Francisco icon familiar to everyone from a million picture postcards, early in the evening before the fog envelopes it. After a couple of selfies, head to the Golden Gate Park, lush and buzzing with some special event or another (flower shows, marathons, live music) through the year. The Park holds a multitude of attractions like the Conservatory of Flowers and the California Academy of Sciences. The latter is way more fun than it sounds, with its interactive exhibits,



including a planetarium and a living rainforest complete with birds and butterflies.

7 pm

Despite what people say about this being a tourist trap, Fishermen's Wharf is easily one of the more atmospheric neighbourhoods in town. The key attraction here is Pier 39, with its carnival vibe in the evenings. With dozens of shops and restaurants set around an open courtyard, Pier 39 is also a good place to catch distant views of the San Fran skyline and Alcatraz Island. Start with the Sea Lion Center and the Aquarium of the Bay, and then move on to the carousel and musicians on the courtyard. A meal at one of the specialty seafood restaurants here is a great way to end your day. **FL**

In this series, we give you a tasting tour of some of the most exciting cities of the world.