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5 Reasons to Stay in Sausalito on Your Next Trip to the San Francisco Bay

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Have you thought about staying outside the city on your next trip to San Francisco?

Imagine. After a hectic day sightseeing, shopping and museum hopping, you jump on the ferry (or a private water taxi), cross the glorious bay and leave the noisy urban world behind. As the city lights begin to twinkle, you take in the dramatic skyline, a view you never see from a city hotel. Then, a mere 25 minutes later and steps from the dock in Sausalito, you kick back on your private deck -- right on the water! As day gives way to evening, the pelicans honk, the seals bark, and the waves lap against the pilings.

Sounds like a plan, right? Well, read on. Here are five reasons why the memories of your next trip to San Francisco could include some that take place on the Marin County side of the Golden Gate Bridge. Guess what else? No rental car necessary.

1. THE INN ABOVE TIDE

At [The Inn Above Tide](#), right on the bay in Sausalito, all 31 rooms and suites have picture postcard views of San Francisco, Alcatraz, Angel Island and the new Oakland Bridge with its nighttime light show.



photo: Andrea R. Vaucher

The family-run hotel has service is as fine as at any San Francisco 5-star property. Owner Kass Green, a map-maker (her area and adventure maps are in the rooms) who went to Berkeley when it was intellectual-hippie ground zero, and her brother have exponentially expanded their father's vision of a quaint, waterside retreat. Now this seemingly simple, shingled inn has all the luxury bells and whistles such as deep soaking tubs, many with

views; the best bedding and linens; fireplaces; teak deck furniture and a continental breakfast (also served in-room) with local and organic delicacies like [Cowgirl Creamery](#) cheeses, flaky croissants and homemade granola - everything to get you going and keep you going all day. Here the staff says "yes" to every request, and, if you do rent a car (Napa anyone?), you can park right in the heart of Sausalito in the hotel courtyard.



photo: Andrea. R. Vaucher

2. FERRY FUN TRIP

The ferry from Sausalito to San Francisco is just steps from the hotel (triple-pane windows mean you get the amusing visual without the roar), runs all day and the quick, fun trip leaves you at the historic [Ferry Building](#), which never gets old if you love to eat. Here it's an all day/every day farmers market of sorts where you can buy every edible goody imaginable from Blue Bottle Coffee to [Rancho Gordo](#) heirloom beans (if you haven't tried them order online NOW!) to those Cowgirl Creamery cheeses (my favorite: Red Hawk) to take out from celebrity Vietnamese chef Charles Phan's Out the Door (Phan's upscale restaurant, the [Slanted Door](#), is also in the building.)



photo: Andrea R. Vaucher

Located right at the foot of Market Street, this historic monument, with its clock tower modeled after the 12th century one in Seville, Spain, is easily accessible to and from all parts of the city. And at the end of a fun-filled albeit busy day, taking a boat back across the bay is the perfect way to decompress; we bought wine and cheese and great bread from Acme and splurged on a water taxi, which afforded an up-close-and-personal view of Alcatraz.

3. SAUSALITO DINING: SIMPLE TO SOPHISTICATED

The restaurants of Sausalito rival those of San Francisco. [Sushi Ran](#) sources its fish daily both locally and from Tokyo's Tsukiji market and creates Japanese/Pacific rim fusion dishes you certainly won't find at your local sushi joint. The innovation coming out of this kitchen has earned the restaurant a Michelin star - no surprise with stunners like fiddlehead fern tempura, kimchee brussel sprouts, soft shell crawfish rolls, Vietnamese shaking beef and - my favorite - smoked Hamachi tataki. If Mexican food was not at the top of my list, it's only because I had yet to eat at [Copita](#), whose chef -- cookbook author and TV celebrity, Joanne Weir -- gives Rick Bayless a run for his money. I loved her ceviches, the street-style corn-on-the-cob, the tangy mole. Weir kept everybody happy by bringing out an array of tequila drinks with sassy names like Barb Wire and Smoking Gun. Her dessert cocktail -- a simple combo of tequila and chocolate ice cream -- had everyone oohing and aahing. At [Le Garage](#), an authentic French bistro in an old auto repair shop on the water, I ate a memorable *moules frites* (mussels with French fries) as the cute French waiters joked with each other in Parisian slang. And the patio at [Bar Bocce](#), with its fire pit and beach side bocce court, is a great choice for lunch, with a good assortment of pizzas and salads.

4. THE MARIN HEADLANDS

The views of the Golden Gate Bridge from the Marin Headlands take your breath away: as you hike you might find yourself above the bridge one minute, then so close to it you feel like you can stretch out your arm and touch it. Part of the 80,000 acre Golden Gate National Recreation Area, the headlands is a 2,100-acre unspoiled expanse of immense biological diversity inhabited by many endangered species of fish, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies and birds. Once home to the Native American Coast Miwok tribe and later a strategic site for WWII military fortifications and top-secret Cold War initiatives, now the Marin Headlands is tranquility personified, perfect for a drive (there's a 12 mile driving loop), a hike, or hanging out and appreciating nature's bounty and balm.



photo: Andrea R. Vaucher

Wildlife abounds here and in the fall, thousands of hawks, falcons, eagles, vultures and other raptors funnel into the headlands and over Hawk Hill, searching for the warm thermals that provide a lift they don't get flying over water. Perhaps the most endangered species are the marine mammals, especially the seal and sea lion pups that are abandoned on the beaches as global warming and other oceanic calamities force their mothers further out to sea in search of food. Fortunately, the [Marine Mammal Center](#), a 40-year-old non-profit staffed mostly by devoted volunteers, is dedicated to the rescue and rehabilitation of these sick and injured mammals and its state-of-the-art research center leads the effort to promote global conservation of our oceans and its denizens.

5. THE GREAT OUTDOORS

Sure, if you stay at the [Four Seasons Hotel](#) on Market Street you can work out at the Equinox Sports Club right in the same building, but if you stay at Inn Above Tide, you can test yourself with exciting outdoor exercise options you won't get to do at home. Grab one of the hotel's fleet of brand new Marin bikes and head north along the water to Mill Valley (following, of course, owner Kass Green's bike path map.) Green also mapped one of the tougher exercise challenges in town, a butt-blasting Step Walk that will take you up and down the hills behind town and introduce you to the various Sausalito neighborhoods and history. How about checking out the famous Sausalito houseboats from a stand-up paddleboard or kayak? [Sea Trek](#) has been leading adventures for over 30 years, guiding paddlers under the Golden Gate Bridge (views of Alcatraz, Angel Island and the Marin Headlands coast), around the Bay under the full moon or to Angel Island where you picnic before paddling back across the bay.

The next time you want to spend a few days in the Bay Area do it the chill way -- don't stay in San Francisco. Instead, choose Sausalito, the Marin County town that's part Mediterranean village, part upscale hippie enclave and totally fun and fabulous.