

San Francisco

JANET HARDY-GOULD

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SAN FRANCISCO

A good place for a city? Perhaps not. The weather changes quickly, and often cold white fog comes in over the bridge. There are about seventy hills (forty-three of them with names), and some of them are very steep. There is water on three sides of the city; the views are good, but getting in and out of the city is not always easy. And earthquakes bring fire, and sometimes death . . .

But millions of people come to San Francisco every year. They come to walk around the city and ride on the cable cars. They visit the neighbourhood of the hippies, and eat wonderful food from the sea. San Francisco is not the same as other cities – and that is why they love it.

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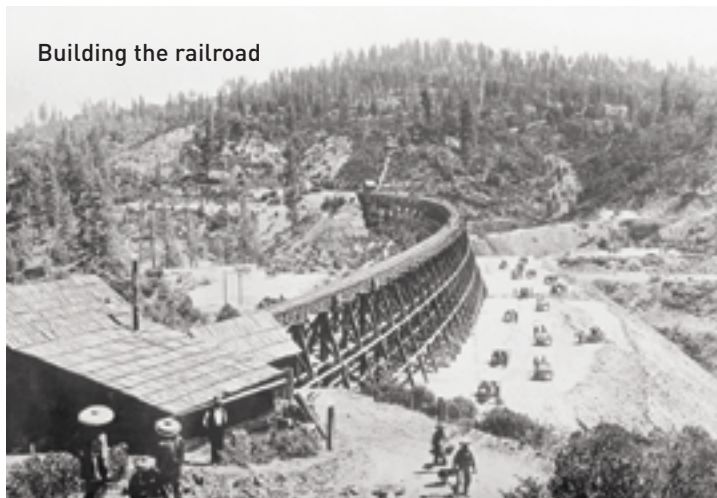
1 The city of hills

Every year, about sixteen million visitors come to San Francisco on the west coast of the United States. Most people arrive in this wonderful city in California by car, bus, or plane. But some take the train and go across the country on the famous old railroad.

You can get on a train in New York on the east coast and travel to the city of Chicago. From there, you can make one of the world's most exciting train journeys – from the window, you can see fast rivers, red mountains, big green trees, and many wild animals.

At first, you go past the towns and villages of Iowa and Nebraska, next through the big Rocky Mountains, then across the open country of Utah, and in the end through the mountains of the famous Sierra Nevada. Three days after you leave New York, you arrive in the city of San Francisco – a wonderful finish to a beautiful journey!

Building the railroad



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This railroad across the United States first opened in 1869. It carried thousands of people to San Francisco, and the city became bigger every year. Men and women began to call this exciting place ‘The Paris of the West’. These early visitors travelled to San Francisco because they wanted to make money and have a new life. But why do millions of people come to this city today?

Many visitors are interested in the famous places there – they want to walk across the wonderful Golden Gate Bridge, sit in the beautiful Golden Gate Park or visit the island prison of Alcatraz.

But they also want to see the nice views. San Francisco is nearly an island – it has water on three sides. There is the Pacific Ocean on the west side, San Francisco Bay on the east side and the Golden Gate with its famous bridge on the north side. The city is smaller than other American cities – it only has 800,000 people. But many people live in towns like Oakland, thirteen kilometres away, and come to work in San Francisco every day.

There are about seventy hills in San Francisco, so it is a very good place for photographers. You can stand on a hill and take wonderful pictures of San Francisco with the blue water behind it. But you need to be very quick with your camera because the weather often changes here. One minute you can see big blue skies, and the next minute there is only the famous white fog – this moves quickly across the city from the sea.

A lot of visitors love San Francisco because it does not feel like a big city. The hills break the town into different parts – these are called neighbourhoods.

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Every neighbourhood has its coffee shops, restaurants, and little supermarkets. Forty-three of the hills have names, and some of the neighbourhoods take their names from them. For example, in the downtown part in the east of the city there is Nob Hill, Russian Hill, and Telegraph Hill.

Over the years, many families from across the world moved to the city. Today, some of these neighbourhoods have a lot of people and shops from one country. For example, there is the famous Chinatown with its wonderful Chinese restaurants or the newer Japantown with its Japanese food shops and bookshops.

Many men and women come to the city because it is an open, free place too. In neighbourhoods like the Mission, many people like to meet and talk about new ideas. When you sit in one of the coffee shops there, you sometimes hear people talk interestingly about new and different things.



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The bridge in the fog



Last of all, visitors come because they learn about the city from hundreds of films and books. For example, the writer Jack London was born in San Francisco in 1876. He was from a family of workers, but he later became famous for his exciting books *The Call of the Wild* and *White Fang*. In some of his stories, like *Martin Eden*, you can learn about the lives of people in old San Francisco.

The writer Dashiell Hammett lived in the city in the 1920s. He wrote wonderful detective stories – often with the famous San Francisco fog in them. Perhaps the best of these is *The Maltese Falcon*. It became an important Hollywood film in 1941 with Humphrey Bogart.

Some later books were very different from these earlier stories. For example, *The Joy Luck Club* by Amy Tan is about four families in the Chinatown neighbourhood. It looks at the lives of older Chinese women and their Chinese-American daughters.

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Of course, many visitors remember the films too. Who can forget *Vertigo* by Alfred Hitchcock? In this 1958 film, a San Francisco detective is watching a young woman and she suddenly jumps from under the Golden Gate Bridge into the cold water. The detective does not like tall buildings or bridges but he quickly jumps down and helps her.

Many books and films use the San Francisco fog, but one film famously uses the big hills of the city. This was the 1968 film *Bullitt* with Steve McQueen. It has a very long car chase up and down the hills – it is one of the most exciting car chases in the world of film!

When you say the words ‘San Francisco’, something interesting often happens. People begin to sing! They sing something called ‘I Left My Heart in San Francisco’. The singer Tony Bennett first sang this in the famous Fairmont Hotel in the city in the 1960s.

Most visitors know a lot of stories about San Francisco today from the cinema, TV, and radio. But how much do they know about the early days of the city?

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