

# Bay Area Adventures

By **Kimberly Dijkstra** - May 3, 2019

## An eco-conscious vacation to San Francisco and Marin County



*The iconic Golden Gate Bridge connects San Francisco to Marin County. (Photo by Kimberly Dijkstra)*

San Francisco, the hilly city by the bay, has captured the hearts of many. Even Tony Bennett left his heart there among the cable cars and morning fog. Just beyond the bridge lies Marin County, a respite from city life with a charm and beauty all its own. Marin itself features in a song or two. The Bay Area has lots to offer as a vacation destination and is the perfect choice for the environmentally conscious.

San Franciscans prioritize sustainability in their daily lives and these practices extend into the hospitality industry. Many hotels boast eco-friendly practices, such as [Hotel Spero](#), which is so committed to sustainability, it launched on Earth Day last year. The renovation took careful steps to pay homage to former owner Lizzie Glide, a well-known San Francisco philanthropist and activist.



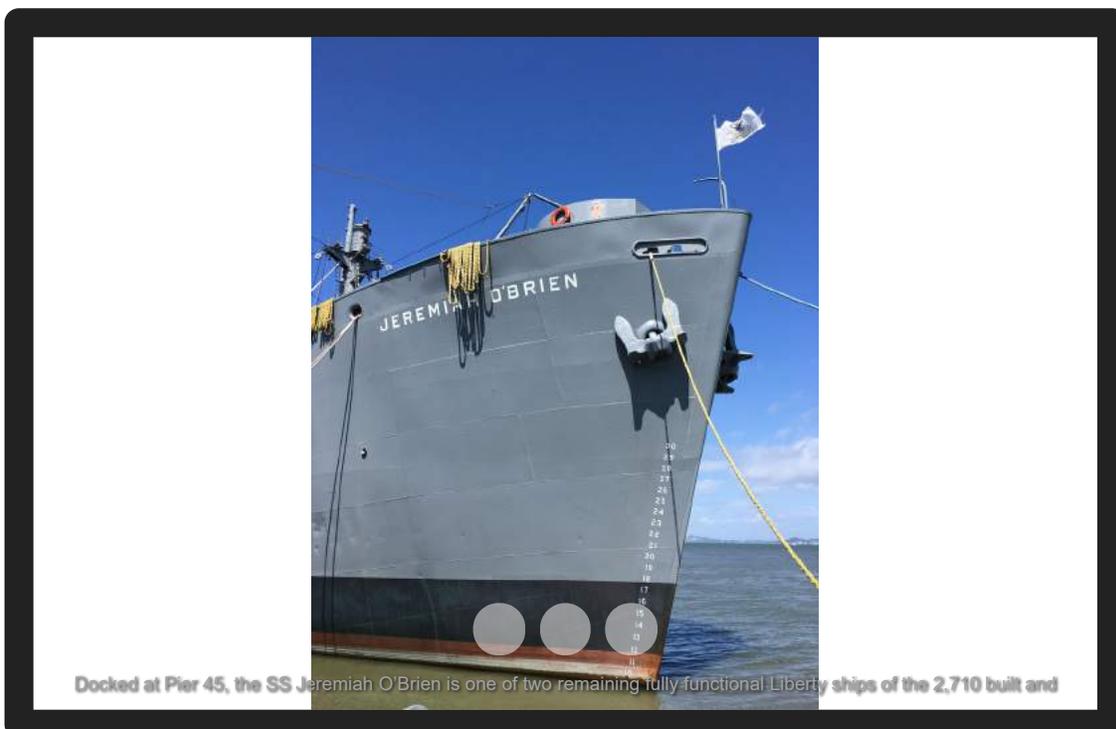
Guests receive a pencil embedded with forget-me-not seeds.



Hotel Spero strives to be Earth-friendly.

Hotel Spero, which is just steps from Union Square and located centrally to major attractions, invites guests to be a part of its mindfulness, philanthropy and environmental efforts, which ultimately makes your stay there more enjoyable. For example, the water filling station in the lobby helps minimize plastic bottle waste. The [BeeKind](#) products in every guestroom are made from all-natural ingredients, have recycled packaging and the company supports the Honey Bee Research Program at UC Davis. Guests will also find graphite pencils with forget-me-not seeds embedded that can be planted after the pencil is used.

Also, a discount is offered at [Jasper's Corner Tap & Kitchen](#), the hotel's restaurant, if you turn down housekeeping service during the duration of your visit. And luggage racks in each room double as 'giving racks,' where you can leave spare clothing behind to be donated to the [St. Anthony Foundation](#).



## Go Go Go

Lots of different things attract travelers to San Francisco. The Go Card ([smartdestinations.com](http://smartdestinations.com)) offers admission to nearly all of them including bus tours, cruises, museums, historic monuments and family activities. The [Aquarium of the Bay](#), located at historic Pier 39, is great for kids and pretty fun for adults as well. Home to more than 20,000 aquatic animals in 700,000 gallons of water, the aquarium works to protect and preserve the bay. It hosts shoreline cleanups and promotes green infrastructure projects. A walk through the aquarium, with all of the interactive opportunities it offers, is a walk through a living museum.

The Embarcadero, San Francisco's pleasant bayside walkway, has a wide variety of restaurants, parks, attractions and piers to enjoy as you travel by foot or by bike. Stop at Pier 45 for a tour of the [USS Pompanito](#), a World War II submarine that has been restored to its prime. An audio guide provides a glimpse of what life was like for sailors back in the day. More than 100,000 people visit the National Historic Landmark every year.

Across town in Golden Gate Park, one of this country's great urban parks, the [de Young Museum](#) stands as an integral part of San Francisco's art scene for the past century. The fine art museum has a Monet exhibition on display through May 27 and a Gauguin exhibition on through June 23. Its permanent collection includes paintings, sculptures, decorative arts, modern and contemporary art, and pieces by artists from all over the world and different time periods. One must-see piece is Salvador Dali's Portrait of Dorothy Spreckels Munn (1942)—the surreal painting glows in an unearthly manner.



*Alcatraz Island can only be reached by Alcatraz Cruises. (Photos by Kimberly Dijkstra)*

## Welcome to The Rock

Alcatraz Island, the former military fort and supermax prison, is known as The Rock due to its reputation for inhospitality. But you'd be surprised by how lush and inviting it truly is once you see it

up close.

Alcatraz Cruises ([www.alcatrazcruises.com](http://www.alcatrazcruises.com)) is the official cruise concessioner for the National Park Service, which operates the island. Tours depart every half hour from Pier 33 and it takes only about 12 minutes to cross the bay. Then you're free to roam around and explore. Head up to the cellhouse and pick up an audio guide for first-hand accounts from former prisoners and guards. While walking the hallways and cellblocks of the prison, you'll learn about the worst-of-the-worst convicts who were held there, as well as the well-known 1962 escape by Frank Morris and brothers John and Clarence Anglin.



*The cascading gardens are an unexpected highlight of Alcatraz Island.*

The history of the island is fascinating and well worth spending an afternoon hearing about. The real treat however is the beautiful gardens that cover every slope and terrace. Maintained by the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, National Park Service and Garden Conservancy since 2003, these ornamental beds breathe life into a seemingly lifeless landscape and attract a variety of seabirds.

Alcatraz Cruises has been using hybrid ferries for the past ten years. The Hornblower Hybrid is 40 percent more fuel efficient than standard passenger ferry vessels. In addition to many other energy efficient and sustainability practices, the cruise line recycles more than 70 percent of solid waste and provides recycling bins to passengers and the food available on board is primarily organic and purchased from local vendors.

To learn more about what San Francisco has to offer, visit [sftravel.com](http://sftravel.com).



*Drake's Bay (Photo by Dennis Anderson)*

## Over the Bridge

Once you've gotten your fill of the city, spend some time in Marin County and you will get a fuller experience of Northern California. Nature lovers, history enthusiasts and foodies will all love Marin, which has been at the forefront of the environmentalism movement for decades.

A stay in Olema is central to many points of interest in Marin. [Bear Valley Cottage](#) is a private guesthouse on the property of the former Bear Valley Inn that's large enough for a family and cozy enough for a couple with access to a lovely backyard and an electric car charger. Owners Amanda and Ken extend warm hospitality to guests as if they are family and eager to share their love of the area. Amanda recommends an excursion to nearby Chimney Rock to see wildflowers or take in a gorgeous sunset over the ocean.



*Play a game of giant Scrabble in the backyard at Bear Valley Cottage.*

The cottage sees a lot of return guests, including those with environmental sensitivities. Amanda uses 'clean' cleaning products and stocks the cottage with EO soaps and lotions, a local brand that uses natural organic ingredients. She had a greywater system installed for laundry and uses sulfite-free laundry detergent that, when it runs out into the garden, doubles as plant food for the hydrangeas. And she's so committed to sustainability, she also gives discounts for taking the bus, riding a bike and walking instead of driving a car.

## Punto de los Reyes

Less than a mile down the road is [Bear Valley Visitor Center](#), one of three visitor centers in Point Reyes National Seashore, a national park with beaches, rolling hills and meadows, forests, complex ecosystems and miles upon miles of hiking trails.

In the 1906 earthquake that destroyed much of San Francisco, the triangular peninsula of Point Reyes moved about 16 feet northwest up the California coast. In recent years, people have traveled from all over the world to see the famous fence that was split apart by the rupture. Bear Valley Visitor Center's self-guided Earthquake Trail is dotted with historic photos and interpretive panels about the San Andreas Fault leading up to a replica of the original fence.



*Follow the Chimney Rock trailhead to the ocean viewpoint known for its wildflowers. (Photo by Dennis Anderson)*

A destination for about 400,000 a year, the visitor center itself is filled with educational exhibits that highlight the geological history of the peninsula, the human history, the variety of animal habitats that the Park Service protects and sustainability messages.

The Point Reyes Lighthouse is also a major draw for tourists, for its historical value and for whale-watching during the first half of the year. Originally constructed in 1870, the lighthouse is currently undergoing a complete restoration, hopefully to be complete this summer.

About three miles north, Point Reyes Station serves as the commercial center of the area, with downtown eateries, a grocery store and shops of local artisans. [Station House Café](#) offers up locally sourced organic breakfast, lunch and dinner. Menu highlights include oysters on the half shell, the farmstead cheese plate, flank steak salad and macaroni & cheese.

Osteria Stellina and Cowgirl Creamery are also essential dining stops and don't miss the buffalo milk soft serve ice cream at Palace Market.



*Find a little slice of paradise at Heidrun Meadery. (Photo by Kimberly Dijkstra)*

## Get No Kick From Champagne? Try Mead

Travelers interested in wine tasting experiences must book a tasting at [Heidrun Meadery](#). The inviting tasting room welcomes visitors into the world of honey wine. Mead has a certain reputation for being the cloyingly sweet drink of choice for Vikings and Medieval townfolk, but Heidrun's founder Gordon Hull is turning that stereotype on its head with his dry and delicate Champagne-style meads.

The picturesque grounds of the former dairy farm are home to wildflowers and the honeybees that pollinate them. Heidrun creates varietals from this honey, as well as honey obtained from migratory beekeepers. Since no syrups or additional flavors are added, the unique flavor of each bottle comes directly from flower pollen the honey was harvested from.



For a one-of-a-kind experience, go for a tasting at Heidrun Meadery.

"We've found that the chemical composition of honey is largely dependent on the source of the flower nectar from which it is derived, and most of them differ slightly," Hull said. For example, a floral citrus flavor comes through the California Orange Blossom varietal while the Hawaiian Macadamia Nut Blossom can be characterized by the same richness of the macademia nut. Much eucalyptus can be found among Heidrun's wildflowers, giving that varietal a distinct herbal taste.

Since there's no aggressive farming involved and honey is a byproduct of pollination, Hull's mead business actually has a positive impact on the environment. Bees have seen a steep decline in population over recent years and need all the help they can get these days.

Each sparkling wine varietal is tied to a different location, whether it be Point Reyes itself or nearby Sonoma Mountain or Nopa (a neighborhood in San Francisco). Every bottle becomes an intimate souvenir of that place to share and enjoy even after you've left.

With its natural splendor and ideal climate, Marin has so much to offer. Learn more at [visitmarin.com](http://visitmarin.com).

For more about Marin County, see [Point Reyes National Seashore Is A Bay Area Treasure](#) and [Planning A Green Vacation](#)

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