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## Leave your heart, not your wallet

**By Kristin Jackson**

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Whether you're going to San Francisco for a weekend or a week, here are some ways to save money:

**Flights:** Check airfares to Oakland as well as San Francisco; Oakland flights sometimes can be cheaper, and the airport is just across the Bay Bridge from San Francisco.

**Ground transport :** BART trains (Bay Area Rapid Transit) serve both airports; BART has a station in the San Francisco International Airport. At Oakland International Airport, an AirBART shuttle bus takes travelers to the Coliseum/Oakland Airport station. It's about a half-hour ride from either airport to downtown. The one-way fare from San Francisco airport to the downtown Powell Street station is \$5.15; from the Coliseum/Oakland Airport, it's \$3.35. More information: [www.bart.gov/](http://www.bart.gov/) (click on Airport Connections).

**Car rentals :** Don't rent a car. Hotel parking can cost \$30 a night or more in the city center, and street parking is tough to find during the day. Public transit is excellent — and you can walk almost anywhere in the heart of the city. If you want to take a daytrip out of town, or explore farther-flung neighborhoods, rent a car just for a day.

**Getting around:** Walk. Take BART, city buses, cable cars (maybe just once, since it's \$5 per ride) and the vintage F-line streetcars that connect the Union Square area, Ferry Building and Fisherman's Wharf. Many companies offer bus/van tours of the city and farther-flung sights; hotels have brochures.

**Where to stay :** Hotels are the big budget-buster, and San Francisco has many \$250-plus a night fancy ones. Some ways to find better deals:

- **Comparison-shop:** Go to the Web site of the San Francisco Convention and Visitors Bureau, [www.onlyinsanfrancisco.com](http://www.onlyinsanfrancisco.com). Plug in your dates, and you'll get a list of available hotels and nightly rates, including what are billed as "hot deals." If you're flexible on timing, play around with various dates; depending on the hotel, prices can be higher on weekends or if a big convention is in town.

- **Youth hostels:** San Francisco has three hostels affiliated with Hostelling International, the major worldwide hostel group. Everyone is welcome at hostels, not just young backpackers.

Two hostels are near Union Square; the third is just west of Fisherman's Wharf in Fort Mason, a waterfront former military base that's now home to nonprofit groups. All three hostels have dorm and

private rooms. They're nothing fancy, but the price is right. A bunk in a shared room begins around \$23 a night (\$3 more per night if you're not a Hostelling International member); private rooms begin at about \$60 (more for rooms with a private bathroom). The hostels have self-catering kitchens and TV lounges/common rooms. More information: <http://sfhostels.com/> or 888-464-4872. Annual HI membership is \$28.

• **C-Two Hotels:** This small chain has six hotels in central San Francisco, mostly around Union Square, which it bills as affordable boutique hotels. Seasonal specials available on its Web site, at the Adante Hotel for example, start at around \$100 a night (plus taxes) in early October. Rooms at La Luna Inn, its newest hotel, are roughly the same rate; it's a recently refurbished 1960s-motel-style building near the Presidio. See [www.ctwohotels.com/](http://www.ctwohotels.com/).

A good source of travelers' opinions on C-Two hotels (and hotels worldwide) is TripAdvisor, [www.tripadvisor.com](http://www.tripadvisor.com). Search by hotel name, and you'll find individuals' comments about their stays.

• **Grosvenor Suites:** For families or people who like elbow room, this 19-floor apartment-hotel on Nob Hill is a good option. I stayed there for a few nights in July and would have been happy to stay for a month. The comfortable suite had a bedroom with two queen beds, a living room with a sofa bed and a spacious kitchenette (which lets you save money by eating in).

Try for a high-floor room; the views stretch from downtown high-rises to Alcatraz Island and the ocean. In fall, rates for a one-bedroom suite average around \$195 a night, but there's a \$20 online rebate for the first night and \$25 for following nights; there's also a free continental breakfast. [www.grosvenorsuites.com](http://www.grosvenorsuites.com) or 415-421-1899.

• **Kimpton Hotels:** For something fancier, the Kimpton chain — which runs Seattle's Alexis Hotel and others — has 11 hotels in San Francisco, most in sleekly restored, historic buildings.

I've stayed at its Hotel Palomar, a great location near Union Square shopping action and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Rates often are above \$200 a night, but watch for specials sometimes posted on its Web site, [www.kimptonhotels.com](http://www.kimptonhotels.com). The Palomar, with its stylish restaurant, lobby and room, was much fancier than Grosvenor Suites, but I preferred the space and views of the Grosvenor.

**City Pass :** The San Francisco City Pass gives admission to selected museums and also includes a bay cruise and a seven-day transit pass (for buses, cable cars and streetcars). It's economical if you go to at least several museums; it includes the excellent San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Exploratorium, a kid-friendly science center. It costs \$49 for an adult; \$39 for a youth. [www.citypass.com](http://www.citypass.com) or 888-330-5008.

**Boat tours :** The big tour boats of the Blue & Gold Fleet offer an hour-long bay cruise from Fisherman's Wharf to Golden Gate Bridge and back for about \$18. Small boats cover the same route for less.

I hopped aboard the Bass-Tub, a fishboat that offers bay tours when it's not doing fishing charters. It cost \$10 per person for the hour ride; only a dozen of us were aboard on a foggy afternoon.

Find it ([www.basstub.net](http://www.basstub.net) or 415-456-9055) and other fish/tour boats at the small-boat dock by Jefferson and Jones Streets in the Fisherman's Wharf area.

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