

Suggested Itinerary: San Francisco, California Wine Country & Yosemite National Park

San Francisco – bursting with colourful culture, cutting-edge cuisine and wonderfully diverse people – would be well worth a trip all by itself, but when it’s combined with the amazing attractions and stunning natural landscapes nearby, California’s beautiful City by the Bay becomes a can’t-miss destination.

San Francisco

Suggested: 3 days

It’s certainly possible to walk up and down San Francisco’s famous hilly streets, but why not hop aboard a cable car instead? You’ll rest your legs and see the sights while enjoying one of the city’s iconic experiences. Take a ferry to Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay to get an up-close look at the notorious federal penitentiary (now part of the National Park Service), as well as marine wildlife, nesting sea birds and Civil War-era buildings. Back in the city, spend time at Fisherman’s Wharf, a waterfront neighbourhood and visitor destination that includes seafood restaurants, Pier 39 with its sea lions, Madame Tussauds Wax Museum and many other attractions. Climb up Telegraph Hill to take in panoramic city views from the top of Coit Tower, and stroll down winding Lombard Street. If time allows, join a free walking tour across the Golden Gate Bridge. Dine on delicious ethnic cuisine in some of the city’s diverse neighbourhoods, including Chinatown, the largest Chinatown outside of Asia.

Muir Wood National Monument

Suggested: 1 - 2 days

Fifteen miles (24 km) north of the city, Muir Woods National Monument is literally a monument to trees – specifically an old-growth forest of coastal redwoods, which are between 600 and 800 years old and stand up to 250 feet (76 metres) tall. Six miles (10 km) of paved trails lead through Pinchot Grove and Cathedral Grove and along Redwood Creek. Plan your visit for a weekday and arrive in early morning to experience the forest at its quietest and most magical.

Napa and Sonoma Valleys

Suggested: 3 days

Less than two hours northeast of Muir Woods, visitors will arrive at Napa and Sonoma valleys. Together, these twin valleys make up California's most famous wine country – making them popular destinations for wine and food lovers. Book a tour and enjoy wine tastings and dinners in wine caves or outside among the vines. At some of the smaller wineries, the person serving the wine might well be the vintner. Guided or self-guided bike tours on quiet country roads through the rolling hills enhance this pastoral experience for adventurous travellers. This area also offers excellent hiking and zip line tours through coastal redwoods.

Yosemite National Park

Suggested: 2 – 4 days

From Napa and Sonoma, drive about three and a half hours southeast to reach Yosemite National Park. The iconic landscapes and rock formations that Ansel Adams famously photographed are even more breath-taking in person. Discover deep valleys, gorgeous flower-filled meadows, giant sequoias and the granite faces of El Capitan and Half Dome. Hike to the base of Bridalveil Fall or any of the park's other towering falls (peak water flow is in spring), or go backpacking, rock climbing or mountain biking surrounded by the stunning landscapes of the High Sierra.

Monterey County

Suggested: 2 - 3 days

A three-hour drive west from Yosemite will bring you to another can't-miss California experience - Highway One in Big Sur, a rugged stretch of the central coast between Carmel and San Simeon. Take the time to soak up the views that reveal themselves around every corner and stop at the many state parks to go hiking and beachcombing. Carmel-by-the-Sea is a storybook town lined with small galleries, charming boutiques and whimsical homes. Stop in Monterey to visit its famous aquarium and dine on seafood in Cannery Row before heading back to San Francisco by way of San Jose, the centre of Silicon Valley and home to The Tech Museum of Innovation.

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