



SAN FRANCISCO & SURROUNDS

the beat goes on



(main pic) Miles of potential as North Pacific winter swells unload south of the city.
(inset) Fort Point under the Golden Gate.

TEXT AND PHOTOS: MOONWALKER

San Francisco is completely schizo. Unless you've had your head in the sand you'll know it was the cradle of the flower power movement in the '60s, but there's more to this place, way more. It also housed the heaviest law-breakers in the land in island isolation on Alcatraz, was a port of sin (known as "Sodom by the sea" during the mid 1800s California Gold Rush) and was leveled by an earthquake in 1906 – seen by the moral guardians of the time saw as the righteous hand of God at work. And here we are a hundred odd years down the track and it's become the world hub of gay pride. Go figure.

But really, it was the '60s when it all went down and San Fran became the liberal, free-thinking centre of America as it's known

today. The father of LSD, Timothy Leary, addressed a gathering of 30,000 hippies in Golden Gate Park in '67 (known as the "Human Be-In" – zany wordsmithing there, must have been a hippy eureka moment when someone came up with that one through the ganja haze) and told them to "turn on, tune in, drop out".

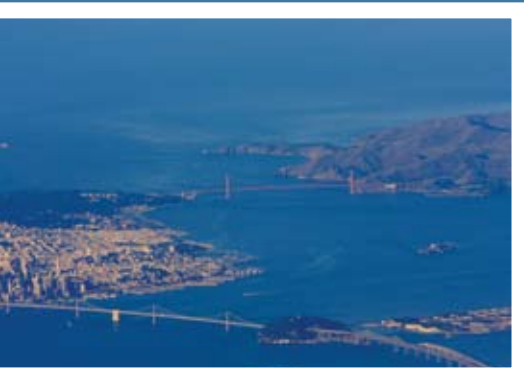
The other well-known daddy-o's before the paisley invasion were the beatnik generation. Think bongos, bad poetry and long-winded talks on existentialism. In short, the beatniks wanted to be completely disassociated from the system while the hippies wanted to break it down and rebuild it with their own utopian vision – free hash, free love, the abolition of money, with Joplin, Hendrix, the Doors and the Grateful Dead

playing 24/7. Or if that wasn't possible, pop a pill, drop a tab and hear the holy trinity in full song with God on drums in your own expanding/exploding/melting mind.

So, with all this radical free-thought having gone every which-way you'd be forgiven for thinking the place is a city full of freaks. It is, or was . . . depending on who you talk to.

For example; sitting on the tram, the man in the business suit on your right is off to a men's-group teepee-workshop-retreat for the weekend, while the guy across from you with dreads, threads, piercings and sandals is checking stock prices on his Blackberry.

Two lines of thought that are helpful when visiting San Francisco; want nothing, expect everything.



And just when you think there's no solid middle ground in San Francisco, you meet its surfers. As a group, are surfers not among the more down to earth, genuine characters of this world? Frankly, yes. And no matter what colour, creed or language, we all have bonds in common. Sure we have our own skewed version of normality (getting up before dawn to throw yourself into waves isn't everyone's idea of a good time) but damn it, we like it!

In San Francisco the ocean is very much a part of the city. It surges under the bridges, past trendy eateries and shops. And such is the power of the winter swells that they can easily wrap towards the city and into the seemingly calm waters of The Bay. Foggy days, sharks, pounding swells, frigid water and a bustling city are perhaps not the best ingredients for a pleasant surfing environment ("The coldest winter I ever saw was the summer I spent in San Francisco"

wrote Mark Twain). But nonetheless, surfing is alive and well in San Fran and surrounds – and no frills, no hype is how they like it.

FORT POINT

Nowhere is this more evident than at the city's most iconic structure, the Golden Gate Bridge. Under the southern section there's a chunky left known as Fort Point, named after the adjacent fort that used to guard The Bay. Now don't get over excited about it, it's a fun wave but it's fickle, crowded, has a hell of a rip and a none-too-welcoming local crew. It is however, a world-class setting.

"Things are a little hemmed in at Fort Point", says Tait Cowan, a local surfer and owner of The Log Shop. "You'll be sitting on top of each other, so guys who are trying to figure it out get pushed out of the way and into The Bay pretty quickly. The tides really move through there, and it's so easy to get sucked under the bridge and disappear around the bend. And did I mention the rocks? Yeah, there are a lot of rocks on the takeoff as well as halfway along the wave. But at the same time you're sitting under The Bridge, it's amazing!"

OCEAN BEACH.

Not ten minutes from Fort Point is Ocean Beach, an open beachbreak that's exposed to the full force of North Pacific winter storms and inexplicably holds great shaped waves up to gargantuan size. You simply

roll down one of the many hills in the city and bam! Full view, front row seat at a genuine heart-in-mouth wave. The closest comparison would be the thumping Puerto Escondido in Mexico - only Ocean Beach is a lot colder and a much longer paddle. The coastline itself is bordering on bleak and looks like many of the other windswept beaches in Central California dotted with rubber-clad surfers. That's until you catch sight of their boards; pretty much every one a seven-foot-plus pintail gun. And when you look out to sea you know why, these slabs of water aren't to be taken lightly. In these conditions there are no kooks, because the kooks would die!

Before having the opportunity to paddle into one of these waves you have to make the paddle out. On a good swell a 30-minute slog is average and getting washed back to the beach twice isn't uncommon.

Says Tait, "It's the sort of spot you pull up to, have a look at and think it's four feet or so. 'No big deal' you'd reckon, but you soon find out it's actually eight, shifty as hell with currents pulling you in all directions. People get humbled there every day. But it does get epic."

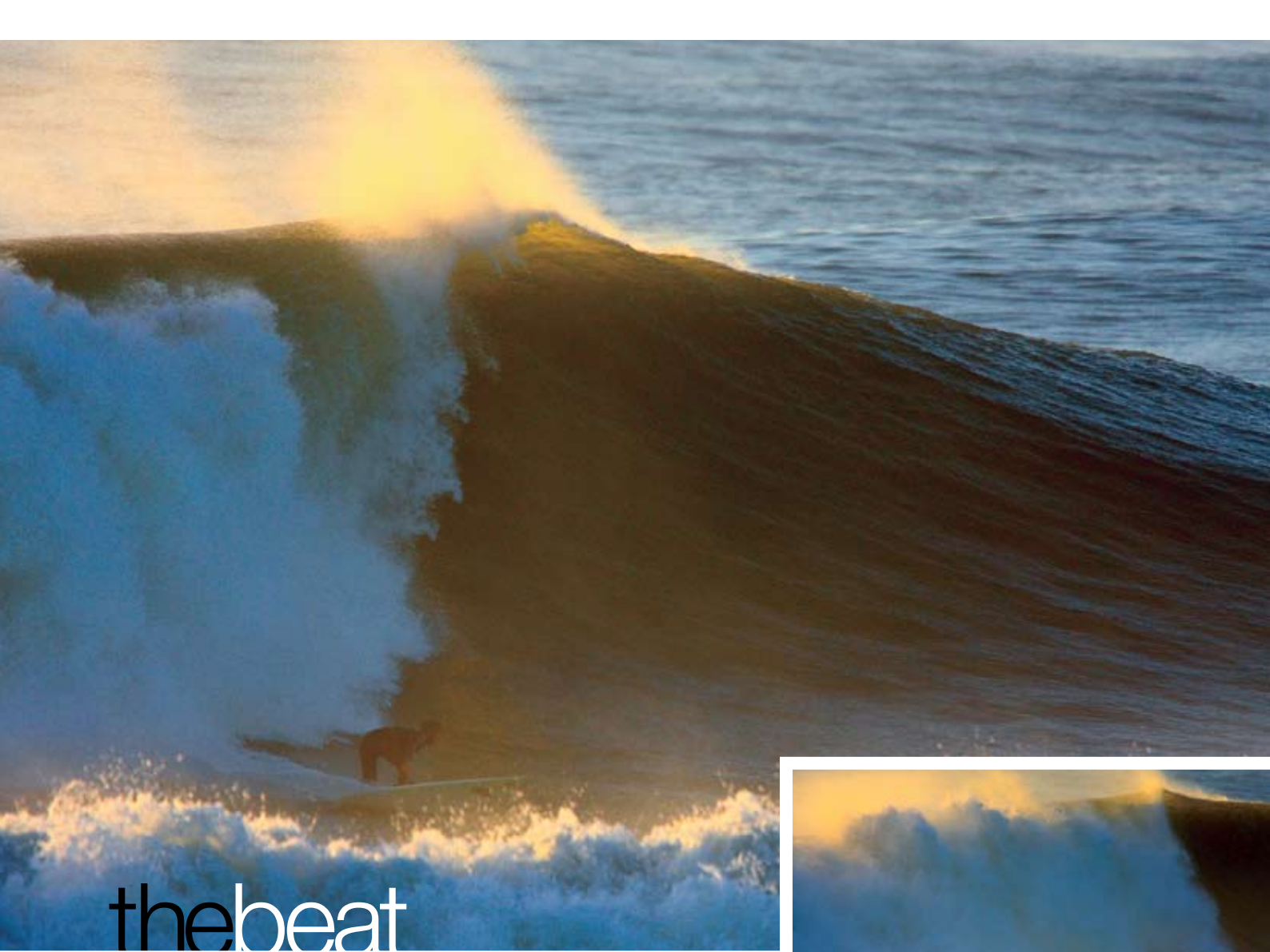
At Ocean Beach, some of the most gutsy underground surfers in the northern hemisphere pull into some of the heaviest beachbreak barrels imaginable . . . while just over the hill there's Silicon Valley, the centre of world computer development and general geekness. Talk about contrasts.

(above) The city, the Bay Bridge, the Golden Gate and Alcatraz. (opposite and below) Ocean Beach in all its glory.

"What fetched me instantly (and thousands of other newcomers with me) was the subtle but unmistakable sense of escape from the United States."

– H.L. Mencken, writer





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PACIFICA

Heading south of the city there's a real wild edge to the place with mountains, swathes of forests and a wealth of beaches to explore. If you want waves to yourself, you're in the right neighbourhood. To say this area is incredibly beautiful is a huge understatement. It's this part of California that inspired literary legends Jack Kerouac and John Steinbeck to write *Dharma Bums* and *Cannery Row*, respectively.

About 20 minutes out is the beachside community of Pacifica, home to the very congenial and enthusiastic folk from Pedro Point Surf Club and a go-to spot for beginners and those wanting something a

bit mellower. Although, it can be a different story at the northern end of the beach when conditions get wild and woolly.

"Pacifica's more of a small town USA type of thing," says Tait. "The surf is pretty consistent and in the summer it's often foggy but there are fun waves. In the winter though, it's big, thick, and the sand moves constantly, so you never quite know what you're going to get. The main beach is very accessible, right off the freeway. Everyone just pulls into the parking lot and heads straight out. Around here it's just a great way of life – we're close enough to the craziness but just far enough away. It's interesting here, there are some amazing

characters, whether they're chefs, artists, or, well . . . there's Dick Keating. He's the man as far as 'legend' status goes. Dick's 66, and I'll paddle out with him tomorrow and he'll be paddling pace-for-pace with me. I'll be on a 9'0" and he'll be on a 6'4", taking off just as deep and hitting it just as hard. There are many talented surfers, and not just young guns. Just to name a couple, there's Greg Gubser who rides everything and shreds and Greg Cochran who's more surf-stoked than any grom I know! And not many people are aware of this but Michael Ho was born here and began surfing at Pacifica before his family moved to Hawaii."

(below) For a change of pace, Pacifica. (bottom) Greg "The Hammer" Gubser carving the northern end of Pacifica.





(above) Steve Thomas and a sublime piece of surfing. (below) The cradle of the counter culture is still counter punching.

ROCKIN' IN SAN FRANCISCO, A BRIEF HISTORY OF A GOLDEN ERA

December 10, 1965: The Warlocks become The Grateful Dead, and debut with the new name at the Fillmore Auditorium for the Mime Troupe Appeal Party. This unofficially marks the beginning of the San Francisco Rock Era.

August 29, 1966: Beatlemania swept San Francisco as the Fab Four perform at Candlestick Park. It is the Beatle's last scheduled appearance together.

September 30, 1966: A three-day "Acid Test" opens at San Francisco State College Commons. The Grateful Dead perform.

October 6, 1966: California Legislature outlaws sale and possession of LSD. A "Love Pageant" is staged in Golden Gate Park, with Big Brother, The Dead and the Electric Chamber Orkustra headlining.

November 20, 1966: Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee fundraiser at the Fillmore with the James Cotton Chicago Blues Band.

December 17, 1966: Benefit for Legalization of Marijuana (LEMAR) at California Hall. Country Joe and the Fish entertain.

January 14, 1967: "Human Be-In" at the Polo Grounds, Golden Gate Park. Speakers

include Jerry Rubin, Allen Ginsberg and Timothy Leary. Participants are urged to bring food to share, flowers, beads, costumes, feathers, bells, cymbals and flags.

March 5, 1967: Warren Hinckle III, editor of *Ramparts* magazine, hosts a "Rockdance Environment Happening" benefit in honor of the CIA (Citizens for Interplanetary Activity) at California Hall. Participants include the S.F. League for Sexual Freedom and the San Francisco Mime Troupe.

October 2, 1967: San Francisco police raid the Grateful Dead's Haight-Ashbury house. Hippies block the intersection of Haight and Ashbury streets to celebrate the "Death of Hip".

October 14, 1968: 27 soldiers protest the Vietnam War and are charged with mutiny at the Presidio of San Francisco.

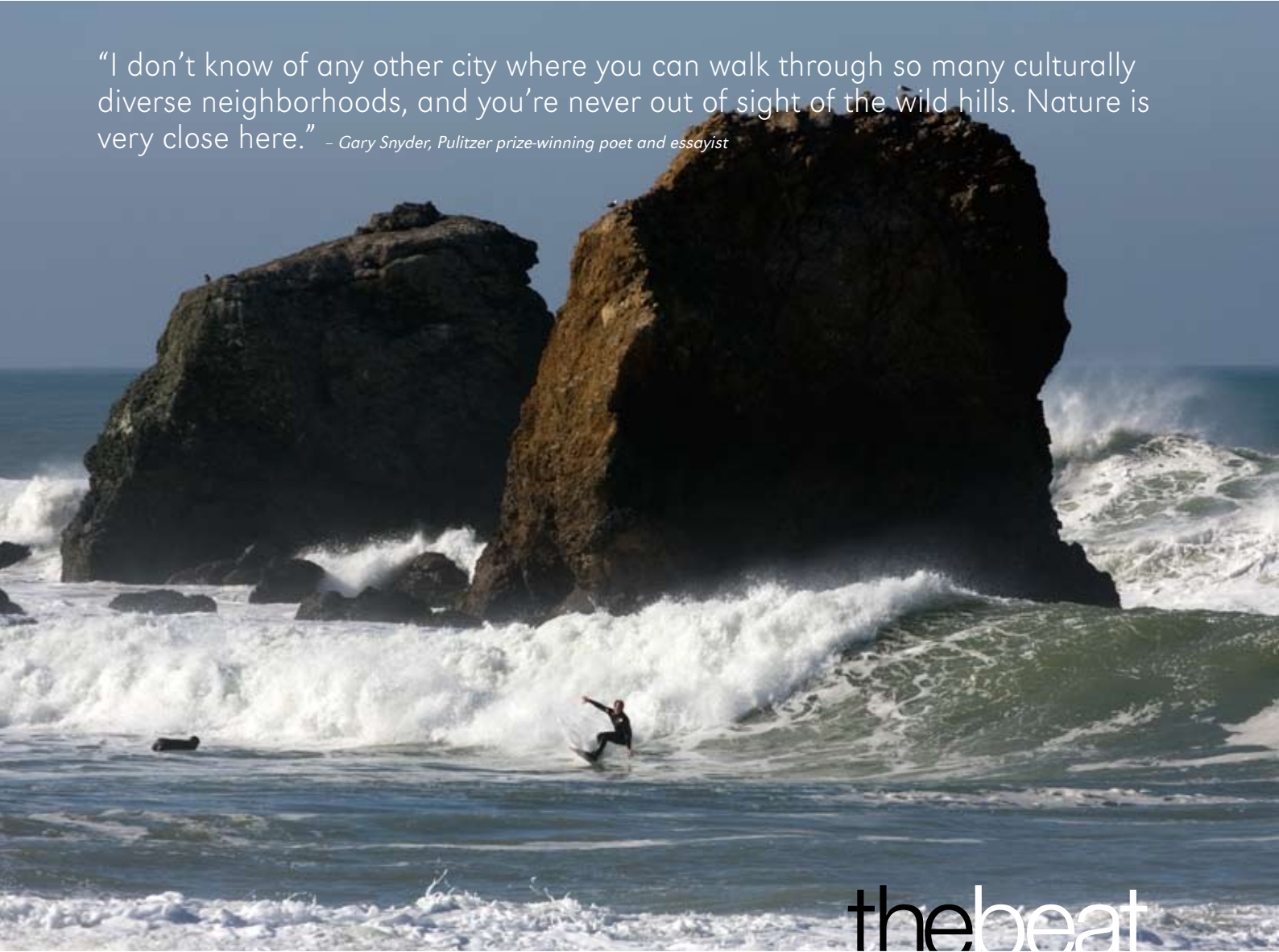
November 20, 1969: American Indians seize and occupy Alcatraz Island.

December 6, 1969: The Rolling Stones appear at the Altamont Speedway for a free concert after being denied use of Golden Gate Park. The Hells Angels supply security. One person is murdered during the show, three others die accidentally. This unofficially marks the end of the San Francisco Rock era.



'They're frauds, the whole goddamn culture. They bitch about brainwashing from their parents and they do the same damn thing. I've never known a one of those people who would tolerate any way of life but their own.'" - Janis Joplin

“I don’t know of any other city where you can walk through so many culturally diverse neighborhoods, and you’re never out of sight of the wild hills. Nature is very close here.” – Gary Snyder, Pulitzer prize-winning poet and essayist



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DICK KEATING

Not familiar with the name? Well not many are. A quiet, well-spoken fellow, a pedigreed surfer, Keating's a commercial fisherman and someone who truly values the ocean as both playground and provider. He's spent time in big waves both in California and Hawaii and was one of only 24 surfers worldwide to be invited to compete in the '67 Duke Kahanamoku Invitational at Sunset Beach. He started surfing at the age of eight, using tennis shoes for booties and hauling a paddleboard down the beach - turning it 180 degrees in the sand then walking to the other end of the board and repeating until he hit the water.

For years he was sponsored by Jack O'Neill (even having his own board model) and was regarded by his peers as the best surfer north of Santa Barbara.

And the reason you may not of heard of Mr. Keating? Well, while there was a plethora of surf photos, movies and articles coming out of Southern California during the '50s and '60s, Central and Northern California were largely ignored. Had Dick been based further south he could have been as familiar a name as Corky Carrol or perhaps even Miki Dora - incidentally, both of whom he beat at the Duke contest.

THEN AND NOW

"I was born here, and grew up in the 'old time' surfer days and I've gotten to experience everything from hollow boards to where we're at now. So I feel it's kinda special having that all in the background," says Dick. "My uncle had gone to Oahu for a swimming event where he and Duke Kahanamoku met and became firm friends.

I think it was in '36, he hung out with all the beach boys and he came back with this idea of surfing over here.

"These days surfing is everywhere, but to learn to surf around here you've got to be rugged, you really need to have that tenacity to stick with it. But for me there's no place like home! I've been to amazing places overseas and really enjoyed them but this little scene I have right here, living on the ocean I've commercially fished for 30 years, I love it, just that constant and direct involvement with the ocean. I haven't found that anywhere else . . . at least in my income level anyway!

"And as for the surf, conditions are always best with the winter juice - I always look forward to that time of the year. There are multiple waves from the little ones out front here to massive reefbreaks. It's kinda hard to leave that."

(below) Dick Keating at home - on the verandah with Greg Cochran and indoors with '67 Duke poster. (bottom) Pedro Point Surf Club President Greg Cochran. (opposite page, top) Steve Thomas in the thick of it. (bottom) Lifetime local Tait Cowan.





BEACHSIDE VOX POPS:

What is it you like about surfing in San Francisco and surrounds?



Andrew Middleditch

I grew up surfing Southern California and although you get cleaner conditions there more often, the fall and winter here are awesome. At some spots it can be like surfing in the wilderness – heavier waves, fewer crowds and a much better adrenalin rush.



Tait Cowan

It's an amazingly low-key place to be. You're nowhere near the LA glitz and glamour and loud logos and bleached blond hair are replaced by black wetsuits and people just surfing because they love it.



Philip Salz

We get lots of barrels and we get lots of barrels by ourselves. You can easily surf in the morning before working in the city. It gets a little cold but that's a small price to pay.



Buzzy Bonneau

It's always different, every time we get a storm the sandbars shift. One week it'll be amazing at the south of the beach, next week there'll be a killer bank in the middle. So unless you're really on it and committed you can easily miss it. So yeah, a lot of really good, empty beachbreak waves.



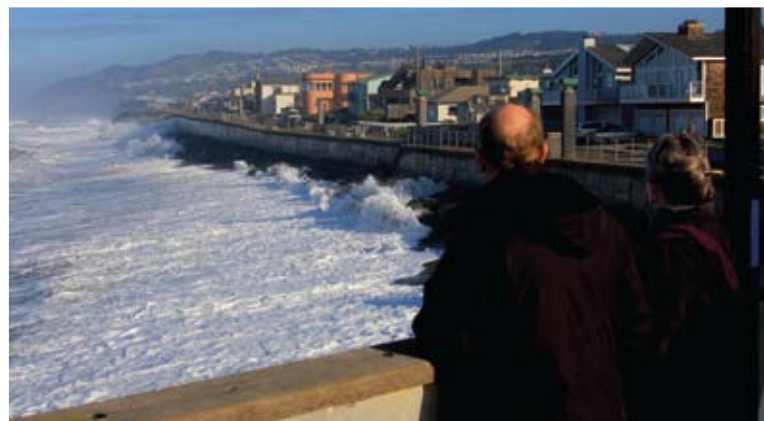
Jay Nelson

There's a good art scene here, uncrowded surf. I'm from LA originally and the surf here is a lot less crowded, especially when it's bigger. It's a unique place with friendly people.



Steve Thomas

The people are great and the surfers are dedicated. You have to be pretty die-hard as conditions aren't usually for the faint of heart. I like being a part of that.



(opposite page) Tait Cowan and an inviting left at one of the countless breaks along San Fran's surrounds.

(top) Fancy the right? A peak marches through at Sharp Park.

(above left) Inviting lines (it's not always gnarly).

(above right) Winter storm surge.

LIKE NO OTHER

San Francisco and its surrounds are impossible to define, and as an outsider I'm sure as hell not in a position to do so with any real authority. But it is easy to tell that it's not a city that follows trends, it creates them.

Many cities claim they have everything, San Fran really does: A bustling metropolis with wilderness on the doorstep, a rich arts and culture scene, and some damn good surf.

FOR THOSE WHO COME

Approx. fares (AU\$, Return incl. tax – supplied by Flight Centre):

Air New Zealand:

Brisbane / Sydney / Melbourne \$2545.00
Perth \$2636.00

Qantas:

Brisbane / Melbourne \$2933.00
Sydney \$2755.00
Perth \$2895.00

Best Time: April/May and October/November. In the middle of summer, the city is crowded with tourists and fog can make it quite cool. In the winter, there can be high winds and rain – but great surf. In general, temperatures will be moderate in April/May and October, dropping off quickly in November, and the skies will be clear.

Accommodation: It's a city fer' chrisakes there are places to stay everywhere! Check

out www.holidaycity.com, they offer up a good variety of hotel listings from US\$50.00 to US\$200.00 plus per night.

Things To Do and See:

1. That orange bridge – whatever angle you gaze upon it you're guaranteed to go "ooh" and "ahh" a lot.
2. Alcatraz Island – take the kids, threaten to leave them there.
3. Fisherman's Wharf – huge variety of great restaurants and spectacular views over the Bay. Satisfy the foodie within.
4. Haight and Ashbury Streets – take a walk, browse through Amoeba Records, kick a hippy.
5. Exploratorium – an interactive museum dedicated to art and science.
6. Aquarium of the Bay – one of the best aquariums in North America. Maybe best not to go there before surfing. *