

THE SUNDAY TIMES

travel

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magazine

December 2017 £4.20

Ski!

Whatever your level, we've got your 35 FAQs answered

Festive Florence

Misty, magical & crowd-free at Christmas

India

The sights... The colours... The flavours... The know-how...
Our easy-breezy Total Guide has it all



Great Ocean Road

Epic drama (and cute koalas!) on Australia's iconic drive

Paris, Dubai, Bruges, San Francisco — and our favourite all-inclusives...



Best beds: San Francisco

Fun and funky, sleek and central or historic with heart — whatever your needs, we know where

to find a sleep to suit in the City by the Bay

The rocking one Hotel Zeppelin
PRICE Superior Queens start at £186, room only, but beds are huge (UK king-size), so there's no need to pay £405 for the King Suite (00 1 415 563 0303, viceroys-hotels.com/zeppelin).
LOCATION Three minutes to Union Square
THE VIBE Playfully 'vintage rock': you'll sip your drinks in the hippie-chic lounge beneath a mural depicting Grace Slick of '60s psychedelic rock band Jefferson Airplane.
ROOMS More rock fun upstairs: San Francisco band names are scrawled on bathroom wallpaper (Deer Hoof, The Donnas, Tuxedo); retro concert posters are framed on bedroom walls.
FOOD & DRINK Streetside bistro-bar Rambler segues into a quieter dining room serving American-Med cuisine and Neapolitan thin-crust, wood-fired pizzas.
BEST THING Pass on housekeeping for a day, and the hotel will make a donation to a dog-rehousing charity.
WORST THING The 'guest amenity fee' — you pay £20 even if you don't use the gym, internet, bottle of water or in-room coffee.
TRAVEL TIP Bag one of the (few) free bikes. It's first-come, first-served.

The neighbourhood one Kimpton Buchanan
PRICE From £192, room only — families will like the Standard Queens from £205, sleeping four in two generous beds (00 1 855 454 4644, thebuchananhotel.com).
LOCATION Sedate Japantown is essentially a single pedestrianised lane — Buchanan Street — lined with Japanese shops and cafes.
THE VIBE Calmly stylish — the wingback chairs in the lobby set the tone with the phrases sewn on them: 'I was born to be awesome, not perfect'.
ROOMS Nods to the neighbourhood — dyed-silk cushions and techie touches such as in-built USB chargers on bedside tables — make it feel as if you're in a Tokyo hotel.
FOOD & DRINK Mums restaurant dishes up homestyle Japanese fare. Its speciality is shabu-shabu — meat-and-veg hotpot.
BEST THING Traffic is light, unlike in many parts of the city, so you won't be awakened by car horns or noisy lorries.
WORST THING It's a 20-minute bus or taxi ride to most sights
TRAVEL TIP Head downstairs at 5pm for the free wine and sake hour, when you can pour yourself a drink and eat nibbles.

The romantic one Casa Madrona Hotel & Spa
PRICE The historic wing is charming but pricier (doubles from £491, room only). Save with a room in the modern part, from £420 (0800 048 2314, slh.com/hotels/casa-madrona-hotel-and-spa).
LOCATION By the water in Sausalito, half an hour by ferry (£18 return) from the city, its harbour filled with yachts and houseboats.
THE VIBE Discretion reigns, and you'll rarely see guests (Oscar winners, Silicon Valley execs) — except on the plant-filled patios.
ROOMS Four-poster beds and marble bathrooms
FOOD & DRINK Go next door to popular Poggio trattoria (poggiotrattonia.com) for an Italian-inspired breakfast — say, mascarpone, berries and honey on sourdough.
BEST THING Watching boats bobbing in the harbour from the bay-view rooms, you'll see why Otis Redding spent so long in Sausalito 'sittin' on the dock of the bay'.
WORST THING No bar — though that nudges you to head into Sausalito and socialise.
TRAVEL TIP Pick up a Clipper card (clippercard.com) at the Sausalito or San Francisco ferry terminal (or any Walgreens pharmacy): these cost £2 and save you 50 per cent on ferry rides.

WORDS: TAMI ZIN REYNOLDS, JILL STARLEY-GRANGER PHOTOGRAPHS: GETTY MAP: ROBERT LITTLEFORD

The arty one Tilden Hotel
PRICE Deluxe Queens from £153, room only. Got a car? Book the hotel's valet parking — at £15 a day, it's half what you'll pay elsewhere in the area (00 1 415 673 2332, tildenhôtel.com).
LOCATION Taylor Street, in the northern, gentrifying part of the Tenderloin neighbourhood, which is still down and out in parts.
THE VIBE It's in an artists' enclave, so has a bohemian air — local creatives roll up to free events here, and laze on the velvet-and-leather lobby sofas.
ROOMS Bedrooms suggest Victoriana with slatted wooden blinds; bathrooms nod to the hotel's early-20th-century heritage, with subway-tiled walls and exposed pipes.
FOOD & DRINK The Douglas Room is one of SF's best bars
BEST THING They'll create a cocktail to your specifications in the bar. Our spicy, lime-y concoction, fringed with cayenne salt, was a surprise. Spot-on.
WORST THING Eddy and Ellis Streets, immediately south of the hotel, have a reputation for being unsafe. Don't turn right when you exit the hotel.
TRAVEL TIP Book direct with the hotel (first find the best price elsewhere, then call to ask if they'll match it) and you'll get \$10 credit towards breakfast in the cafe or drinks in the bar.

The zen one Hotel Nikko
PRICE Queen rooms — from £202, room only — are very snug, so book a King, from £235. For about £70 more, plusher Imperials come with perks: free brekkie, evening wine, gym/pool access (00 1 415 394 1111, hotelnikkosf.com).
LOCATION In the heart of Downtown — two blocks from the shops of Union Square, one from the vintage cable cars that trundle up and down the city's hills to Fisherman's Wharf.
THE VIBE Sleek and switched on, but friendly with it
ROOMS Low-key luxe, with subtle Japanese motifs (cherry blossom on the walls, calligraphy brushstrokes in the carpets), and sensational skyline views from the higher floors. The best face east, towards the bay.
FOOD & DRINK Devour delicate sushi and black cod at fancy fusion restaurant Anzu (breakfast brings dim sum and avo on toast).
BEST THING The pool — for laps, or naps on cushioned loungers, California sunshine streaming through the glass roof. It's like basking alfresco — without the brisk bay breeze.
WORST THING Sneaky fees: £18 to use the pool and gym (free for Imperial rooms), £20 for that cuddly toy doggie they leave on your pillow. Grrr!
TRAVEL TIP Leave your hire car at Mason O'Farrell car park, opposite. It charges £25 a day — around half the hotel valet-parking fee.

Or try...

£110 San Remo Hotel

Because: It's a cute budget guesthouse right by the tourist hotspot Fisherman's Wharf. Doubles from £110, room only, with shared bathrooms (00 1 415 776 8688, sanremo-hotel.com).

£126 Queen Anne Hotel

Because: Victorian down to its toilet wallpaper, canopy beds and antiques, it's handy for the postcard Painted Ladies houses of Alamo Square Park. Doubles from £126, B&B (00 1 415 441 2828, queen-anne.com).

£290 Inn at the Presidio

Because: It's like being in a country retreat at this former officers' quarters building, set in the sprawling green Presidio Park, right in the city. Doubles from £290, B&B (00 1 415 800 7356, innatthe-presidio.com).

£358 Proper Hotel

Because: This designer newbie in a landmark flatiron building is a slick addition to the techy, increasingly trendy Mid-Market 'hood. Doubles from £358, room only (00 1 415 735 7777, properhotel.com).

Get me there

Virgin Atlantic (virgin-atlantic.com) flies non-stop to San Francisco from Heathrow from £498 return, and from Manchester from £456. BA (ba.com) flies from Heathrow from £498 return. For more about San Francisco, see sftravel.com and visitcalifornia.com/uk.

