

created by a car mechanic. Under cover of night, with only the stars to guide him, Eduardo Aguilera, inspired by the French Chartres Labyrinth, picked up rocks from Ocean Beach, climbed up a steep dirt path and quietly laid his stones in a pattern. He worked after sundown to avoid park rangers who didn't support his dream. Today, park rangers gladly direct tourists to the labyrinth on the edge of land. parksconservancy.org/content/lands-end-labyrinth.

San Francisco Maritime Historical Park – Who ever heard of a park with schooners, a pier, a beach and an art deco bathhouse? San Francisco has such a park and it's a great place to watch the polar bears – swimmers who brave the frigid waters sans wetsuits. Each year, they race from Alcatraz to Aquatic Park. nps.gov/saft/index.htm.



Mineral Spring, Alum Rock

Discovering all these hidden places in plain sight will keep your child so busy, they may forget about green time. You will never know until you try.

South Bay CORIFEROUS HOT SPRINGS RUINS

San Jose's Alum Rock Park was designated as a public park by the California State Legislature in 1872 and credited as being California's first city park. People would travel from around the country to soak in the park's famous mineral water pools that 19th century doctors claimed were good for various ailments.

While the pools are long gone and the park has been largely restored to nature, you can still explore

these old stone grottoes and smell the sulfur from these natural springs along the Penitencia Creek and Mineral Springs Loop trails. 15350 Penitencia Creek Road, San Jose. bit.ly/2OdTGaX.

LUPE THE MAMMOTH

One of the strangest things a Bay Area dog has ever stuck her nose into on a walk is probably the fossilized remains of a 12,500-year-old Columbian mammoth. In 2005, a local man and his Labrador Retriever were walking near Mineta San Jose Airport when the pup sniffed at what looked like a bone sticking out of the soil. It turned out to be part of a mammoth which roamed the Santa Clara Valley during the Pleistocene era, the most complete remains of any mammoth ever found in this area. Scientists named the fossil "Lupe" for her location near the Guadalupe River.

To honor this curious piece of natural history, artists constructed a galvanized steel sculpture of Lupe along a public trail near where her fossil was discovered. Guadalupe River Trail near Trimble Road, San Jose. bit.ly/2OdU6y3.

BEARDED IRISES HIGH ABOVE THE BAY

For six weeks in April and May, Nola and Gary Prevost open up their private hilltop ranch and flower garden to visitors. Nola's Iris Garden is one of the country's largest iris viewing gardens, with more than 2,000 varieties of the flower, some rare and hard-to-find. Families are welcome to come up during the bloom season to enjoy the color and views of the neighboring hills and the valley below. The roaming cats, chickens and farm gear on the periphery remind you that this is not an immaculately manicured public park, but rather,

someone's home open to the public for free as a labor of love. If you see a flower you like, you can order it from Nola on her website. 4195 Sierra Road, San Jose. walking-p-bar.com/shopsite.

CONCRETE COURAGE

The three curvy, concrete slides built into the hill at Brigadoon Park are a fun and free retro thrill ride for kids – and fearless adults. Bring an old flattened cardboard box to sit on and (pro-tip) wear long pants. The slides have a rubberized landing at the base, and there are children's play structures and picnic tables nearby. Brigadoon Way and Maloney Drive, San Jose. bit.ly/3ea2qxt.

ON THE TRAIL OF CALIFORNIA HISTORY

Did you know we have a National Park site right on the outskirts of San Jose? The Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail is part of a 1,200-mile, federally designated route stretching from Arizona to the San Francisco Bay, marking the path traveled by a Spanish officer to settle in San Jose and San Francisco. Over the course of eight months from 1775 to 1776, Anza led 240 people (more than a third were children) on foot and on horseback.

The 4.1-mile Arrowhead Trail was designated by the U.S. National Park Service as an official interpretive site for the National Historic Trail. The trail offers broad views of the valley that Anza's team encountered and features educational signage that tells the story of this momentous journey. Coyote Valley Open Space Preserve, Arrowhead Trail, Morgan Hill. openspaceauthority.org/visitors/preserves/coyotevalley.html.

GHOST TOWN BY THE BAY

Did you know there is also a ghost town right on the edge of the San Francisco Bay? For almost a hundred years, the town of Drawbridge between Alviso and Fremont was a popular weekend getaway for duck hunters, fishermen and sun-seeking San Franciscans. At its peak, the town had 90 cabins, hotels and saloons all perched on wooden stilts to raise them out of the marshy ground. The community started to decline in the 1900s due to unsustainable hunting practices and environmental destruction. In the 1970s, the last remaining residents moved out and the land was permanently protected as part of the Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge. This landscape is now slowly returning to nature, providing crucial habitat for endangered and threatened wildlife.

It's not legal to hike all the way out to Drawbridge, but you can get pretty close and see the town's last few remaining buildings by taking the Mallard Slough Spur Trail until it ends. Along the way you'll see tons of bird life and the native plants and animals of this coastal salt marsh ecosystem. Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Mallard Slough Spur Trail, Alviso. bit.ly/309900c.

GHOST TOWN IN THE HILLS

During the Gold Rush, the largest quicksilver mine in the U.S. was located just south of San Jose in the hills above the village of New Almaden.

Quicksilver was used to separate gold or silver from crushed ore, and the success of California's Gold Rush was due in large part to the abundance of this resource at the New Almaden Mine.

Today, you can hike around Almaden Quicksilver County Park and see the remnants of this long-abandoned company town. At one point there were 4,000 miners living in these hills, and you can see some of the last remaining buildings in the hills and along the trails. In the nearby community of New Almaden, you can see 19th-century mine era houses and Casa Grande (now the New Almaden Quicksilver Mining Museum, temporarily closed



Nola's Iris Garden

at publication), which once served as the mine manager's residence. In the Hacienda Cemetery, older kids may want to look for Santa Clara County's strangest grave – that of Bert Barrett's arm, which was accidentally shot off in a hunting accident and buried per local law of the time. (Bert survived and lived another 61 years). sccgov.org/sites/parks/parkfinder/pages/almadenpark.aspx. Downloadable historic trail guide: bit.ly/3kLxDwo.



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Unique

Bay Area

By Ruth Carlson and Cassie Kifer

Destinations

Check Out Offbeat Spots – From Hidden Staircases to Ghost Towns to Cemeteries

If, like many of us, you've exhausted the sites close to home during more than a year of pandemic restrictions, your family may be itching to discover something new. Luckily, there are lots of fun places to explore outdoors without traveling far. Bay Area writers Ruth Carlson and Cassie Kifer share their expert tips for offbeat outings from their books *Secret San Francisco: A Guide to the Weird, Wonderful and Obscure* (Jeep Press, 2019) and *Secret San Jose: A Guide to the Weird, Wonderful and Obscure* (Jeep Press, 2020). Most of these excursions are free and outdoors. Just remember to bring a mask, keep your distance and check websites for changes before heading out.

San Francisco

WALKWAYS TO HEAVEN

San Francisco is often called the most European city in America and like Europeans, we love to walk, especially those hidden, romantic, steep stairways that take us to places you can't see from a car or a bus. There are over 600 staircases scattered throughout the city. Some are lined with mosaic tiles of color and leading to landmarks. Climbing them is worth it for the fabled views. Here are a few storied ones:

Lincoln Park – In 2007, locals hired artist Aileen

Baar to design the neighborhood's broad steps. Her Beaux-Arts-inspired creation, with a floral motif, has been described as a colorful rug unrolling toward walkers. lincolnparksteps.org.

■ **16th Avenue and Moraga** – This mosaic tiled stairway with the theme "Flowing Sea to Stars" was a labor of love by neighbors. 16thavenuetiledsteps.com.

■ **Lyon Street** – With a Pacific Heights location, you'd expect a ritzy stairway, and it does not disappoint. Lined with manicured gardens, the steps overlook the bay, the gold dome atop the Palace

of Fine Arts and the red brick and stone mansions along "Billionaires Row." You'll also pass by one of the Hearts in San Francisco created by local artists to raise money for San Francisco General Hospital. Begin your walk at either end: Lyon Street/Broadway at the top or Lyon Street/Green Street at the bottom.

■ **Filbert Steps** – Listening to a serenade by the green parrots of Telegraph Hill, walkers pass by cottages with blooming gardens and what appears to be a cruise ship. Jutting out over the bay, the curved, white five-story building looks ready to sail. Fashioned in the Streamline Moderne style that was popular at the time, the apartment building is nicknamed the "Ocean Liner." Classic film buffs may recognize the building from the movie *Dark Passage*, where Humphrey Bogart's character Vincent Parry climbed the steps to the apartment of Irene Jansen, portrayed by Lauren Bacall. The current residents display a cutout of Bogie in the window. Keep walking to Coit Tower and peer in the windows to see frescos created in the Diego Rivera style. Begins at Filbert and Sansome streets or if you want to go downhill begin at Coit Tower.

PARK PROXIMITY

In San Francisco, parks are just 10 minutes from every home. They have never been more popular than during this pandemic. Check out the new open spaces but don't forget the old favorites ... They may have surprises for you.

■ **The Crane Cove Park** – The latest spot to observe the city's world-famous views, this greenspace linking Mission Bay and Dogpatch was formerly an industrial shipbuilding site. The name comes from two historic cranes that workers called Nick and Nora, the characters from *The Thin Man* movies of the 1930s and '40s. Picnic on the sandy beach or join those paddle boarding, kayaking and bicycling. sfport.com/crane-cove-park.

■ **Golden Gate Park** – Larger than New York's Central Park, this green gem, mostly closed to cars during the pandemic, has returned to its roots – a place for walkers and bicyclists to leisurely enjoy the scenery. Along the way, you'll come across a field of bison and two gigantic Dutch windmills. "The San Francisco Giants," as the Netherlands refers to them, were originally utilitarian.

Irrigation transformed Golden Gate Park from sand dunes to green grass, but it was exorbitantly expensive. Windmills powered by Pacific Ocean gusts seemed the perfect alternative; in 1903, the



Netherlands Queen Wilhelmina donated a Dutch windmill to the city that was joined by the Murphy windmill, named after the banker who paid for it. goldengatepark.com/windmills.html.

■ **Presidio** – While museums have mostly been closed during COVID, that hasn't stopped Bay Area residents from enjoying art. Outdoor installations are located all over San Francisco. Some of the most unusual are in the Presidio. Andy Goldsworthy transformed twigs, leaves and fallen trees into art that blends in with the environment. He connects eucalyptus logs to form "Wood Line," a serpentine path in an empty space. Unlike most museums, Goldsworthy encourages people to not only touch his art but walk on it. Balancing on the branches from a high vantage point, you can see another of his sculptures, "Spire," a triangle created from cypress trees cut down for reforestation.

Recently the Presidio announced a new trail, the Quartermaster, linking the forest to the Bay. Beginning at Chrissy Field, walkers can enjoy seven acres of tidal marshland that was previously inaccessible.

The Presidio also has attractions below ground. It's common knowledge that those who have served in the military are buried in the Presidio's cemeteries. But what about those who served the military Fido and Fluffy are resting in peace nearby in the Pet Cemetery surrounded by a white picket fence, Monterey pines and million-dollar views of the Golden Gate Bridge. presidio.gov.

■ **Lands End** – Near the former Cliff House, a walking trail along the bluffs overlooking abandoned ships leads to a hidden labyrinth