



Eat your way
across the bay



“San Francisco is, without a doubt, this country’s finest place for people who care about food,” says Ruth Reichl, Editor in Chief of Gourmet magazine. The American publication has been an authority on all things culinary for over 50 years, so Ruth should know.

San Francisco is now even more accessible for New Zealanders with direct flights to the city. No visit to San Francisco is complete without a trip to Chinatown. One of the best ways to get a taste of this neighbourhood is to take a walking tour. Wok Wiz Tours takes you on a daily stroll with delicious tastings. There are different length tours available and you can book on line at www.wokwiz.com.

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There’s no end of choices when it comes to cafes and restaurants, but two perennial favourites that no one would dispute are Zuni Café and Chez Panisse. Zuni is centrally located and serves everything from Wild Nettle & Mushroom Pizza through to nourishing chicken dishes. The cuisine is consistently outstanding and the atmosphere electric. Its expanse of windows overlooking Market Street gives the place a sense of space despite the fact that it’s always packed. It really does embody the best of San Francisco.



Chez Panisse, some 36 years on, is still regarded as one of America’s best restaurants. Founded and still run by Alice Waters, a pioneer of organic food, Chez Panisse serves uncomplicated meals where ingredients are the heroes. Upstairs you can dine à la carte in the café for lunch or dinner, Monday-Saturday. The menu is market inspired, so it changes daily. On the ground level you can enjoy the restaurant, which has a fixed menu of three-four courses. Monday’s menu is quite rustic, whereas the weekend’s menu is more elaborate. You need to book well in advance. It’s about a nine block walk from the BART station if you’re coming from the centre of town.



If you have a day or two to spare, immerse yourself in a food and wine experience by taking the trip north to the Napa Valley, where a short drive from the centre of town lands you in California's wine country. Hire a car (there are plenty of pick-ups downtown) and just over an hour later you can be shopping in Dean & DeLuca's. Yes, the famous New York deli has a sizeable outlet in the heart of the Napa. Feast your senses on local produce and fabulous preserves, as well as fresh bread, cheese and much more. There are 1,400 wines for sale along with a vast array of kitchenware.



One key reason to make the drive into the Napa Valley though is to visit Copia, the American Centre for wine, food and the arts. Brought to life through the generous donation of renowned winemaker Robert Mondavi and his wife, Copia is a 80,000 square foot building housing galleries, a theatre, a demonstration kitchen, café, museum gift shop, a gourmet dining room named for honorary trustee Julia Child, and three and a half acres of landscaped, organic, edible gardens. Enjoy wandering through the seasonal plantings of vegetables, fruits, herbs and flowers, laid out potager style – it is a sensory experience. There is always something interesting to observe in the changing displays and the permanent exhibition is a must see. Called Forks in the Road, it explores the history and tradition of American food through film clips, interactive displays and other media. Open Wednesday through to Monday, 10am – 5pm, it's the perfect place to stop for morning or afternoon tea.

When you're in the Napa, it's going to be hard to look past a meal at either of Thomas Keller's famous restaurants – Bouchon and The French Laundry. Both are in Yountville, close to Copia. The French Laundry is a formal dining affair and offers two outstanding menus which change daily; a Chef's nine course tasting menu and a Vegetarian option of the same. Both menus are priced at US\$240 each, including service charges. Dining at The French Laundry is a truly memorable experience and with only sixteen tables in the intimate dining room, you need to plan ahead as reservations are taken two months in advance. Try booking through OpenTable.com which operates a table reservation service. Bouchon on the other hand is classic French bistro fare: Soupe à la Oignon, Steak Frites, Profiteroles, Crème Caramel, to name but a few.

In addition to the plethora of eating establishments in the wider San Francisco region, there are great bakeries, famous chocolate shops, enticing kitchenware shops and endless bookstores to keep your heart racing. And if you want to really savour the city with those-in-the-know, book into a behind the scenes tour with local operator Local Tastes of the City Tours - www.localtastesofthecitytours.com. San Francisco is truly the culinary epicentre of America and well worth a visit on an empty stomach. ★

Zuni Café

1658 Market Street.
Reservations: +001 (415) 552 2522. Closed Monday.
www.zunicafe.com

Chez Panisse

1517 Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley.
Restaurant Reservations: +001 (510) 548 5525.
Closed Sunday. www.chezpanisse.com

Dean & DeLuca

607 South St. Helena Highway, St. Helena.
Phone: +001 (707) 967 9980. Open seven days until 8pm.
www.deananddeluca.com

Copia

500 First Street, Napa.
Phone: +001 (707) 259 1600. Open Wednesday - Monday 10am to 5pm.
www.copia.org

The French Laundry

6640 Washington Street, Yountville.
Dinner seven nights a week, lunch Friday-Sunday.
Phone: +001 (707) 944 2380
www.frenchlaundry.com

Bouchon

6534 Washington Street, Yountville.
Open seven days for lunch and dinner.
Phone: +001 (707) 944 8037
www.frenchlaundry.com