

Through the Golden Gate

Visitors can enjoy a more relaxed pace of life just across the famous bridge from San Francisco, says Ella Buchan

San Francisco's infamous fog seems to dissolve as you cross the Golden Gate bridge to Sausalito, revealing rolling green hills, redwood forests and quiet roads.

This pretty suburb has long been a favourite weekend destination for locals, who flock to its luxury hotels, spas and bayside town.

Less than an hour's drive from the international airport, it makes a great add-on to a trip to the big city - or simply a more peaceful

base for those who prefer to view the hustle and bustle from a safe distance.

Sausalito has a population of just 7,000, and clients looking for a relaxing break with plenty of adventure on the doorstep will revel in the picturesque town's wide green spaces and convenient facilities.

Sweeping views of the Golden Gate bridge, prison island Alcatraz across the bay and the San Francisco skyline make this a singularly beautiful destination.

► LAID-BACK LUXURY

The verdant hillsides and forests this side of the bay conceal hideaways made for relaxation, rejuvenation and romance.

Suggest clients book a treatment at Cavallo Point's popular spa, which boasts hot tubs and an outdoor pool with bath-warm water. Cavallo Point is located on a former military base, Fort Baker. The historic lodgings, arranged in a horseshoe around the green, are former officers' residences. These painstakingly

restored rooms are more like apartments, and ideal for families.

For a view with your room, an overnight stay in one of the resort's contemporary rooms, perched on the hillside, is a must - the Golden Gate bridge feels so close it threatens to burst through the huge windows.

Floor-to-ceiling windows at either end of the suite, a window seat and balcony fully exploit the stunning location. Rooms start at about £250 a night.

Nearby is Casa Madrona, [→](#)



LEFT: Wilbur Hot Springs

RIGHT: Redwood trees in Muir Woods

BELOW: Stinson Beach



→ a chic spa hotel by the marina. Accommodation is spread across its modern mansion, cosy but spacious hillside cottages and bayside rooms with balconies. Rooms start at about £270 a night, with an offer of three nights for the price of two.

For clients who want to truly get away from it all, perhaps after a hectic few days in San Francisco or a wine tour in the Napa Valley, Wilbur Hot Springs is a good recommendation. Set in 1,800 acres of private nature reserve, it is solar-powered and off the grid, and more of a sanctuary than a hotel. With its hiking and biking trails, volcanic mineral baths and a natural geyser named the 'Fountain of Life', guests are encouraged to soak, rest, eat, explore – and little else. Rooms start at about £140 a night, while a day pass for the hot springs is £35. Camping is available from April to October.

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▶ **BACK TO NATURE**

Poet George Sterling described San Francisco as his “cool, grey city of love”. In Sausalito, the dominant colour is green. The air is infused with pine and eucalyptus. Take a deep breath and you instantly feel healthier.

The redwood trees of Muir Woods are some of the tallest in the world. We got cricks in our necks gawping up at the towering trunks.

There is a famous tree you can actually drive a car through. The Chandelier Tree, 150 miles north of Sausalito in Leggett, is worth

the trek for clients embarking on a longer tour or road trip.

Closer to Sausalito is Muir Beach, a quiet cove and lagoon tucked into the coastline. It has a trail above with breathtaking views of the Pacific Ocean.

Suggest a ferry ride to Angel Island State Park, known as the ‘Jewel of the San Francisco Bay’ thanks to its rugged natural beauty. A Go San Francisco Card from Do Something Different (a day pass costs £39) covers the round-trip ferry fare plus admission to other attractions in San Francisco and Sausalito.

There is also the Marine Mammal Center where visitors can see rescued sea otters, seals and sea lions in rehabilitation.

For those who like a nice glass of wine with their nature, Attraction World has a Muir Woods and Wine Country Tour from £57. The full-day trip includes a tour of Sausalito

and the woods, followed by an afternoon of wine tasting.

▶ **GET ACTIVE**

Simply seeing the Golden Gate bridge in the flesh – or steel – is on many people’s wishlists. Pedalling over it is even more special, rewarding cyclists with views of the rusty red arch that can only be partially seen when peeking up through a car windscreen.

Bike and Roll has a half-day Golden Gate Tour incorporating Sausalito, bookable via Attraction World from £42, that showcases the best of both sides of the bridge.

Do Something Different offers self-guided cycle tours (from £19 for 24 hours’ rental) allowing clients staying in San Francisco to bike across the bridge to Sausalito and, should their legs start aching from all the pedalling, return via ferry. The opposite trip can also



→ be organised for those staying in Sausalito, or suggest clients hire bikes and catch the ferry back from Fisherman's Wharf.

Sausalito itself is perfect for exploring on two wheels, and there are several hire shops in the main town, including Sausalito Bike Rentals and Sausalito Bicycle Company. The roads are relatively quiet, and motorists are respectful of cyclists. A full day is recommended, to allow plenty of time for snapping pictures and gawping at the views.

The sparkling water of the bay seems to beckon you in, especially on sunny days. Sea Trek, at the Bay Model on Marinship Way, has kayak and paddleboard tours and rentals. For those looking for something unusual, try one of their stand-up paddle yoga classes. The challenge of keeping your balance in 'Warrior Two' is taken to a whole new level on moving water. However, only practised yogis should probably attempt the crab position.

Divers or those interested in getting their Padi certificate should head to Harbor Dive Centre, where there is also diving and snorkelling gear to rent, and boat trips for small groups.

WINE AND DINE

Sausalito's town centre could have been airlifted from the French Riviera. Colourful houses cling to the hillsides and the town's vintage shops, wine-tasting rooms and restaurants



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stretch languidly along the waterfront.

Making the most of the scenery is Cafe Piccolo, jutting out over the water. It serves pizza and local wines by the glass, and at sunset transforms into a busy nightspot, sometimes with live music.

No Name Bar has an unprepossessing exterior. The inside, with fading wooden furniture and posters on the walls, is pretty nondescript too. It's the crowd of locals - there for the live jazz,

beer and fun - packed into the tiny venue, who bring the place to life.

Cavallo Point has a Michelin-starred restaurant, Murray Circle, and decent bar meals in the cosy, low-lit Farley Bar. I tried the chicken butter lettuce cups, which come with a stack of leaves in which to wrap the tender satay chicken, pickled vegetables and crispy rice noodles, like super-healthy tacos. Also recommended are the crab burger and selection of local cheeses.

Wine enthusiasts, and anyone keen to taste and learn more about one of California's biggest draws, should pop into Real Napa's tasting room. Visitors can sit at the wood and copper bar and sip their way through the best offerings from Fotsch Vineyards, for just \$5. Those who arrived by bike might find the ride back a tad wobbly, though. **TW**



US Airtours offers five nights at Cavallo Point and flights with Virgin Atlantic from £1,369, travelling between January 1 and

March 13. The same trip staying at Casa Madrona Hotel & Spa costs from £1,299. usairtours.co.uk

North America Travel Service offers a four-night package from £1,745 in early October, including return flights from London, four nights in a historic room at Cavallo Point, a 20-minute helicopter sightseeing trip and a Segway tour of the Golden Gate Park. northamericatravelservice.co.uk

Virgin Holidays has 10 nights in California from £1,659, including flights from Heathrow on January 18, 2016, five nights at Holiday Inn Fisherman's Wharf and five nights at Casa Madrona, and car hire. vholsagents.co.uk



TOP: Sausalito waterfront

RIGHT: The Real Napa Vineyard