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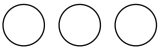
How to spend the perfect day in San Francisco's SoMa district

The downtown neighborhood is frequented by tech workers, culture hounds and baseball fans — what's its secret?



Christina Mueller, Special to SFGATE

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This view from a vehicle crossing the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge shows the San Francisco skyline. Some of the prominent buildings featured here are the Salesforce Tower, Transamerica Pyramid and Ferry Building.

Michael Lee/Getty Images

San Francisco's South of Market district (aka SoMa) is not as famous as Fisherman's Wharf, Nob Hill, Chinatown or Haight-Ashbury, but it should be.

A cultural, sports and culinary hub, the SoMa district and surrounding area lays claim to numerous museums and famous restaurants. Some of the city's most notable architectural and cultural landmarks call the neighborhood home, including Salesforce Tower, Salesforce Park and Oracle Park, where the San Francisco Giants play.

The San Francisco neighborhood is frequented by tech workers, culture hounds and baseball fans. If you haven't visited SoMa before or it's been a minute, keep reading to learn more about the neighborhood and for a list of the best things to see, do and eat while you're there.

Why is it called SoMa?

SoMa is a big neighborhood, stretching from the Embarcadero and waterfront docks that line the San Francisco Bay, past 10th Street to the Mission. Bordered by Market Street to the north and the waters of Mission Bay to the south, SoMa often acts as an

umbrella for other downtown bite-size neighborhoods that have a style and identity all their own, like [East Cut \(also known as Rincon Hill\)](#), South Park, [Yerba Buena](#) and South Beach.

Like other San Francisco neighborhoods, SoMa mixes business with living. Work, eat, play, stay — as the neighborhood has changed, so have the opportunities to explore this side of San Francisco.



Located in Yerba Buena Gardens, San Francisco's Children's Creativity Museum is a yes-please-touch, hands-on destination for kids and their families.
Children's Creativity Museum via Yelp

Things to do in SoMa

The soul of SoMa might just be Yerba Buena. A swath of green amidst the neighborhood's high-rise hotels and office buildings, [Yerba Buena Gardens](#) is a public space perfect for hanging out in the sun and watching the world go by. The gardens can be interactive, too: Listen to the murmuring waterfall at the [Martin Luther King Memorial](#). Stroll the Esplanade to discover a butterfly garden and reflection garden. Go to the Children's Creativity Museum and then take a ride on the refurbished 1906 carousel or go ice skating or bowling. And, check out what's on at the outdoor stage, which hosts live music, dance, theater and circus performances [every May through October](#).

If the Gardens are the neighborhood's soul, Yerba Center for the Arts, the Gardens' cultural anchor, serves as its conscience. At the theater and galleries, arts of all kinds — film, civic engagement, public life and performance — are skeins in the “come together” fabric of Yerba Buena's San Francisco community.

The Gardens and Center for the Arts are flanked by [fun things to do in San Francisco](#). To the east, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art ([SFMOMA](#)), one of the largest modern art museums in the country, beckons with seven floors of contemporary art. One block west of the Gardens is [the Metreon shopping mall](#), with more than a dozen restaurants and an [IMAX movie theater](#). While the neighborhood often feels hip, if an event is going on at nearby [Moscone Center](#), crowds of badge-wearing conferencegoers may shift the neighborhood's vibe to something a bit more buttoned-down.



Little Skillet, near Oracle Park in San Francisco's SoMa district, is known for its Southern-accented cuisine and its sophisticated bar menu.

Little Skillet via Yelp

Things to do in SoMa near Oracle Park

For something completely different, walk down Third Street to Oracle Park to catch the [San Francisco Giants](#), San Francisco's hometown baseball team, in action. Oracle Park also hosts other events, including a [free live simulcast of the San Francisco Opera every autumn](#) and [concerts](#) throughout the year.

South Beach, the bite-sized SoMa neighborhood that includes Oracle Park, is home to numerous hotels, restaurants and bars that cater to local residents as well as fans in town for games. Open since 1955, [Red's Java House](#) pre-dates the building of Oracle Park by several decades and is known for its cheeseburger and a beer special and retro, dockside spirit. Nearby, soul food favorite [Little Skillet](#) serves up platters of fried chicken and waffles and a mean catfish po' boy sandwich. Breweries, like [21st Amendment](#) and [Black Hammer Brewing](#) helped kick the San Francisco beer scene into high gear.

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Where to chill out in SoMa

SoMa features a different experience on each block. Though many of the former low-rise, industrial buildings are now high-rise apartment buildings, the hum of commerce is unchanged — except now a lot of that work is being done behind laptops in coffee shops, not on factory floors. [Caffe Centro](#) may be the original “I'm working from home today” coffee shop, but [Blue Bottle](#) and [Golden Goat Coffee](#) spin latte art to new levels. Back on Third Street, the traffic will remind you that you've left the oasis behind.

Along the Embarcadero, the bow and arrow sculpture known as [Cupid's Span](#) is a photo stop for epic shots of the sculpture with the [Bay Bridge](#) or the San Francisco downtown skyline in the background. Walk about a block to reach [the Ferry Building](#). The [on-site farmer's market](#), open Tuesdays, Thursday and Saturdays, is just one of the many culinary delights – including coffee shops, [restaurants](#), bakeries and patisseries, a chocolatier, butcher shops and more – to experience at this [landmark building](#). One part wine shop, one part wine bar, the [Ferry Plaza Wine Merchant's](#) patio is a must see-and-be-seen outdoor hangout for locals and serious wine fans.

Nearby, on [the fourth floor of the Salesforce Transit Center](#), another oasis awaits: Salesforce Park. Ride up the gondola to lush gardenscapes, experience a fountain powered by the buses running underneath your feet, take a yoga class or sip a beer from the onsite beer garden.



Bar Agricole on Mission Street in San Francisco's SoMa neighborhood puts an emphasis on how they sustainably source ingredients in their food and beverage offerings.
Eric Wolfinger

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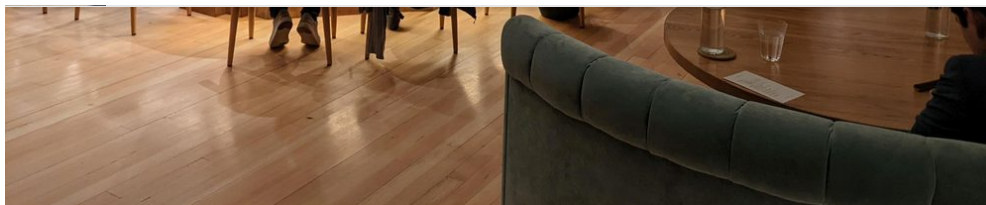
Where to eat and drink in SoMa

Aside from the aforementioned brewpubs, burger joints and coffee houses, SoMa restaurants and bars deliver great cocktails and food to boot. Wet your whistle with an Against the Wind cocktail before diving into shared plates of pork belly bao and sriracha deviled eggs at the [Alchemist Bar & Lounge](#). Single-origin spirits and a transparent supply chain are part of the flavor experience at [Bar Agricole](#), where biodynamic brandy and Curaçao enliven a Nicky Finn cocktail. The bar at [KAIYO Rooftop](#) offers great views and Nikkei cuisine. Bring a sweater just in case [the fog](#) rolls in.

[The Pawn Shop](#) speakeasy, a hidden tapas bar [in an old pawn shop](#), is hard to spot from the street. Though you can make a reservation via the usual channels, to actually enter this “immersive dining experience,” you’ll need to interact with the Pawn Master via the old-fashioned telephone by the door. Your Master will then invite you in to be seated for a meal of Spanish tapas, cocktails and wine – that is, depending on what you’ve brought to trade with them. (Seriously, you are expected to bring something. But don’t worry, whatever you do will be fine.) Located a few blocks away on the second floor, [AFICI](#) is also hard to see from the street but the new American cuisine from chef Eric Upper is worth seeking out for stunning flavors.



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The open kitchen at San Francisco's [Birdsong](#), awarded two stars by Michelin, allows guests seated at the bar to witness the culinary alchemy.

Michael U. via Yelp

If Michelin stars are your thing, SoMa is riddled with them. [Two-Michelin Birdsong](#) is about a block from the Pawn Shop on Mission Street. Its prix fixe menus invite you on a two hour [“Discovery”](#) or a three hour [“Journey”](#) of the flavors of the Pacific Northwest. Two-Michelin Californios will expand your notion of Mexican cuisine, while three-star Benu serves refined dishes that blend European and Asian flavors (foie gras xiao long bao, anyone?). Wood-fire cooking is at the heart of the cooking at two-Michelin [Saison](#), near [Oracle Park](#), while next door, and also from chef Josh Skenes, [Angler](#) focuses on wood-fired seafood, earning one Michelin star. And, though it is too new to receive a rating, [Aphotic](#) seafood restaurant hails from the same league as the stars with a focus on sustainability and local seafood.



SAP's new office on Townsend Street in San Francisco's SoMa neighborhood. The German software giant is trying to plug in to SF's tech scene with the new space, which will be open to 3,500 Bay Area employees. Screenshot via Google Street View

Is SoMa safe?

While overall crime is decreasing, it's common to hear reports of and complaints about property crimes and retail theft. And while there's been a lot of coverage about a hollowed-out downtown core and musings about whether San Francisco will enter a "doom loop" – a framing some have criticized as too narrow and overwrought – some tech businesses are actually moving into SoMa.

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