

A San Francisco Treat

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By Todd Wessell | on December 06, 2017

Story and Photos

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The puff of air that brushed my face was a refreshing reminder that the cool waters of the Pacific Ocean were only a short distance away. A tiny, white bulldog stands guard in front of one of the dozens of shops that line Haight Street. He barks only once when a stranger walks by. The late morning sunshine lights up rows of well-kept Victorian and Edwardian homes half a block away. People of all ages, their hair both long in Rastafarian-style and short up to the bone, are decked out in attire that includes everything from tie-dye shirts to beaded necklaces.

It was only a matter of time, however, that the sense of smell took over thanks in part to the gentle breeze. Somewhere, somehow, someone had lit-up a joint. How fitting, as we stood at the corner of Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco. The elevated square clock next to the street sign said 4:20 even though that time was five hours away. Locals, however, know 4:20 as the "international time for smoking weed." The clock's hands haven't moved in years. It was clear that someone got an early start.

Since its founding in the 18th century, San Francisco has become famous for a lot of things: The 1906 earthquake, the Golden Gate Bridge, fog off the ocean, Alcatraz, and Fisherman's Wharf.

It's also known as the birthplace of the global counter-culture movement whose purpose was to replace much of the stodgy mainstream conservatism of the 1950s. Primarily young people interested in issues like social justice, anti-war and a society of peace and love, challenged authority and exercised their right to exist in the way they wanted.



A good way to get a quick and convenient overview of San Francisco, that includes a ride over the Golden Gate Bridge, is on a Big Bus tour.



The corner of Haight and Ashbury streets in San Francisco

Fueled by these new ideas, an exciting musical scene, and ways of looking at the world through a different lens, the "Summer of Love"

took root in the early months of 1967. It opened the doors to many societal and cultural changes that even included the launching of the women's equal rights movement. America and the world would never be the same. With San Francisco its epicenter, the wave quickly spread eastward to the campus of the University of California-Berkeley, south to the surfing community of Santa Cruz, and well beyond. There was no stopping the movement that Timothy Leary coined during a speech at Golden Gate Park as a time to "Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out."

Throughout 2017 and into 2018, San Francisco's prestige as one of the world's great cities is heightened with the Summer of Love 50th anniversary celebration. There were and still are exhibitions that showcase the creativity of that time such as the thousands of psychedelic, wildly colorful posters promoting benefit concerts, famous black and white photography of the hippies and others who personally experienced the scene, and the music of Janis Joplin, the Grateful Dead and Jimi Hendrix. One exhibition marking the anniversary is at the University of California-Berkeley's Bancroft Library. Featured through Jan. 2 are rare and unique collections documenting the Bay Area's counterculture of 1967. Another exhibition, "Love on Haight" at the University Santa Cruz, highlights special collections of publications, posters and photography of the Summer of Love and the Grateful Dead, all housed in an area named "Dead Central".

There's no better way, however, to become acquainted with the Summer of Love than by actually visiting the City by the Bay and its many surrounding communities that stretch south to Santa Cruz and east to Berkeley.

One of the best ways to learn about that time in history is by taking a Haight Ashbury Flower Power Walking Tour. The guide, decked out in "flowers in your hair" dress, tells in detail what the Haight-Ashbury scene was like and where counter-culture heroes like Jerry Garcia and



Always a popular spot to visit in San Francisco is Fisherman's Wharf.



Scenes of the Summer of Love and the 1960s Peace movement are apparent throughout Berkeley and the University of California, including stops where students can lock their bikes.

Janis Joplin lived and became known to the world. It was also home for a while to one of the most notorious murderers in history, Charles Manson, who dreamed of becoming a rock star.

Our guide also explains that one of the most familiar sites along Haight Street — two protruding female legs hovering above the sidewalk — was once the home of guitarist Jimi Hendrix.

“How did the hippies get their name,” someone asks. Our guide replies that African Americans who moved into the San Francisco area years earlier brought Jazz music with them and they were commonly called “hipsters.” The hipsters later named the young people of the mid-60s “hippies.”

By the time 1967 rolled around, a sense of community had emerged in the neighborhoods of Haight-Ashbury where people took care of one another especially in times of trouble where the use of mind-altering drugs was becoming prominent. That led to the opening of free health care clinics, many of which remain today.

For anyone who lived during the 1960s, the name Berkeley at the University of California brings back memories of protest, liberalism, civil rights and in some cases violence. The beautiful campus, some 13 miles east of San Francisco, was in the thick of things during the 1967 Summer of Love with the celebration of diversity and cross culturalism both on campus and at nearby People’s Park where many gatherings and protests in the name of change for the good took place.

“It has its own authentic vibe and energy,” mentions Al Geyer, the 65-ish high-energy owner of Annapurna, one of the last remaining head shops in Berkeley. His tiny store near the college campus is crammed with posters, lights and unusual smoking devices. Al’s seen a lot in the 48 years he’s owned the shop.

“I feel like we’re ambassadors to Berkeley,” Al says. “We represent open-mindedness. We’re not flashy.” At that moment, a scraggly-looking middle-aged man with a gray ponytail comes in and asks, “Do you sell rolling papers?” “Of course,” replies Al.

“Years ago we use to shock people with what we sold. Today, you can’t shock anybody.” Al



The expansive University of California-Berkeley’s campus is a compilation of open spaces, wide sidewalks and beautiful structures including the Sather clock tower.



This unusual scene of two female legs hanging over sidewalk along Haight Street in San Francisco marks the location where the late rock n roll guitarist Jimi Hendrix once lived.

adds that Berkeley offers an alternative to San Francisco in that it's cheaper to pay for a hotel room and has plenty of great restaurants and places to visit including the college campus where something is going on all the time. He also likes to remind everyone who comes into his store to not forget to order a Top Dog hot dog around the corner on Durant Street across from the college campus.

It's graduation day at Berkeley as hundreds of students dressed in their caps and gowns stroll with their friends and parents along the campus' wide promenades. In some of the dorm room windows, there are signs that display the message "#resist" — a reminder that this university is still a place where change and independent thought is widely embraced.

Across the Bay in San Francisco, life goes on as throngs of visitors immerse themselves into this city of delight by experiencing Fisherman's Wharf and dining at one of its best restaurants, the Hard Rock Cafe at Pier 39. A double-decker bus tour of the city is well worth the time and expense as it includes a drive over the Golden Gate Bridge.

By the beginning of 1968, the Summer of Love had begun to fizzle as tour buses and curiosity seekers filled the sidewalks and streets replacing the hippies and musicians who pursued the love for freedom in other places.

But, said our Haight-Ashbury guide, "The Summer of Love still lives today," as we glanced at a three-wheeled motorized vehicle parked along the curb and decked out with flowers and peace signs.

"There are a lot of hippies still here. Many are retired having lived their lives as doctors and lawyers. You can do that and still be a hippie."

IF YOU GO

- To get to north central California, regular daily flights to San Francisco and San Jose are available out of O'Hare Airport every day.
- Enjoy a walk down Telegraph Avenue, a place of many restaurants and shops and a gateway to the University of California-Berkeley campus.
- A popular and convenient place to stay in Berkeley is The Hotel Durant, literally a few



Al Geyer, who considers himself an ambassador for Berkeley, has operated a popular head shop in the University of California town for more than four decades.



feet from the college campus. 510-845-8981

- A Haight-Ashbury Flower Power Walking Tour will provide unique insight into the famous hippie district. 415-553-8542.
- Fisherman's Wharf and PIER 39 where the Hard Rock Cafe is situated in the middle of activity. 415-956-2013.
- Great place to stay in San Francisco is the InterContinental Mark Hopkins, 999 California St. 415-392-3434.
- See San Francisco's highlights via a variety of daytime and nighttime tours provided by Big Bus. 415-433-1657.
- A San Francisco City Pass allows access to numerous popular and educational sights such as riding cable cars, visiting the De Young Museum and Legion of Honor and the Aquarium by the Bay. 888-330-5008.
- For more information about Berkeley, visit www.visitberkeley.com; and for San Francisco, www.sftravel.com.