

San Francisco And The Bay Area

A Short History

Europeans discovered and explored the San Francisco Bay Area and its islands in 1542, but they were preceded 20,000 years earlier by the native people indigenous to the area. Before the arrival of Spanish and Portuguese explorers, over 10,000 *Oholones* lived in the area and were a mobile society of hunters.



The European community was settled in 1776, when the Spanish founded a mission named *Francis of Assisi*, and a fort to guard the entrance to San Francisco Bay. But it was the *Gold Rush* which in 1848 gave the city a period of rapid growth, increasing the population in one year from 1,000 to 25,000.

Since 1850 the building of the first transcontinental railroad attracted thousands of workers, especially from China. It was completed in 1869 and by 1900 San Francisco had more than 340,000 inhabitants. On April 18th, 1906, an earthquake shook the city and caused a fire that raged for three days, destroying almost all of San Francisco's downtown, but the city was quickly rebuilt.

The city was again badly damaged by an earthquake in 1989.

The City Area

The port of San Francisco is one of the largest in the nation and the city is served by an international airport and by two major transport systems: the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) which links the city with Oakland across the Bay, and the MUNI. Also, the City is very famous for its cable cars, called *trolleys*.

The handsome *Golden Gate Bridge*, the symbol of San Francisco, has a central channel span of 1280 m and joins the city with Marin County to the north.

The central part of the city lies on a series of hills, and *Market Street* is the principal street which runs diagonally to the southwest, bisecting the city.

Highlights

Alcatraz Island: placed in the middle of the Bay, this former prison features spectacular views of the City and attracts hundreds of visitors each day.

Home to the largest urban population of Chinese people outside China, *Chinatown* offers a beautiful display of architecture, food markets, and souvenir shops. The main tourist street is Grant Avenue, but Stockton Street is the real Chinatown!

And finally, admire the *Transamerican Pyramid*, the tallest building in San Francisco easily recognizable from everywhere in and around the City.

Now answer these questions:

1. Who were the first inhabitants of the SF Bay area?
2. What kind of tribe were the *Oholones* and where did they live?
3. Where did the city get its name from?
4. What was the main reason for the population boom in 1848?
5. What happened in San Francisco in 1989 and in 1906?
6. What are the BART and the MUNI?
7. Which are the main characteristics of San Francisco? Explain.
8. What is Chinatown and why is the one in SF the largest outside China? Explain.
9. Which is universally known as the symbol of the City?
10. Imagine you live in San Francisco and an Italian friend comes to visit you; invite him/her to the city highlights and explain what's peculiar in them.