

Guide to

# San Francisco's Civic Center



## Welcome to the Civic Center!

San Francisco's National Historic District Civic Center is the product the reformist City Beautiful movement which was popular in American cities at the end of the 19th Century. The plan was to locate in grand public buildings around a plaza the important governmental functions as well as arts, educational and cultural institutions to instill civic pride and personal improvement.

San Francisco conceived of its grand Civic Center after the devastation of great Earthquake and Fire which had destroyed its City Hall. It was only when Congress designated it as the host city for the Panama Pacific International Exposition to be held in 1915 did work begin in earnest.

The new City Hall was one of the first buildings completed on the Plaza. Others, including the War Memorial Opera house, were completed into the 1930s. These buildings comprise the largest assemblage of neoclassical public buildings in the country outside of Washington, DC.

While every other city in the country long ago abandoned the City Beautiful movement and its civic center plans, these ideas retain a life in modern San Francisco as witnessed by the new Court House and Main Library at the Plaza, and the conversion of the Old Main Library into the home of the Asian Arts Museum.



1880, City Hall, Portsmouth Square



1905, City Hall, present location



1906, City Hall after earthquake



Today, City Hall

## Visitor Information Center

What speaks 12 languages and always has the scoop on what's happening in San Francisco? The answer is San Francisco's Visitor Information Center, located on the lower level of Hallidie Plaza, next door to the cable car turntable at Powell and Market streets, 900 Market Street.

Dial 415-391-2001 for the English version of a three-minute rundown on local events. Visitors can also listen to the hotline in

French (415/391-2003)      German (415/391-2004)

Spanish (415/391-2122)      Italian (415/391-2002)

Japanese (415/391-2101)

The VIC is open Monday through Friday 9am-5pm, Saturday, Sunday and holidays 9am-3pm, Pacific Standard Time. Telephone inquiries may be made from 8:30am to 5pm Pacific Standard Time, Monday through Friday by calling 415-391-2000 or 415-392-0328 (TDD).

**Look for lodging, plan an outing, find a restaurant! Go to:**

<http://www.onlyinsanfrancisco.com>

## Public Transportation

The Civic Center is easily accessible by public transportation. Use Civic Center stop from BART train or MUNI buses and trams. For more public-transportation options, check out the Take Transit Planner at [www.511.org](http://www.511.org), or call 511 from any local phone.

Underground public parking is available at the Civic Center Plaza garage, 355 McAllister St. (at Larkin St.)

City Car Share  
953 Mission St., Suite 131  
415/995-8588

## City Hall

1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place  
For groups 8 or more: 415/554-6139  
[www.sfgov.org/site/cityhall](http://www.sfgov.org/site/cityhall)

Temporary art exhibits Mon. – Fri.  
8:00am – 8:00pm in South Light  
Court and ground floor corridor.  
Titles and content change regularly.



- City Hall was built in 1915 as a palace for the people. It is the crown jewel of one of the finest ensembles of classical American Architecture.
- The ornate dome resting atop the 500,000 square foot structure is one of the tallest in the U.S.
- There are ten acres of Tennessee pink marble and 50,000 blocks of limestone lining the walls and floors.
- There are approximately 2,000 weddings in City Hall a year. Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio were married here in 1954.
- In 1978, City Hall and the entire Civic Center was designated as a National Historic Landmark.
- In 1989, the Loma Prieta Earthquake severely damaged the building. San Francisco voters spent \$300 million to restore the building.
- To protect against future earthquakes, an innovative base isolator system was installed below each support pillar. The entire building is now separated from the ground and can sway up to 27 inches in any direction as a unit.
- The South Light Court features a variety of interesting historical and community exhibits. The ground floor hosts a rotating exhibit operated by the San Francisco Arts Commission.

## Possible Itinerary:

There are so many things to see and do in the civic center you can make a whole day of it!

Go to breakfast at one of the many cafes in the **Hayes Valley Shopping District** and do some window shopping while you're there. Head over to City Hall for a tour of its beautiful rotunda and visit the public art gallery.

Cross the plaza to the **Asian Art Museum** and take in its incredible selection of artifacts. Visit the **Main Library** to browse around its fascinating rotating exhibitions; while you're at it, you can check your email or go online for free!

Getting hungry? Walk over to **Careme**, the California Culinary Institute's restaurant and witness the students' and chefs' magic first-hand. Now the afternoon is open for a tour of the **SF Performing Arts Library Museum**, or **the Art Institute**, or more shopping of course!

Dinner is easy, since there are all kinds of world class restaurants within walking distance. After dinner, you have an incredible selection of world class entertainment: music at the beautiful **War Memorial Performing Arts Center**, home of the Symphony, Opera, or Ballet; or local theater, girls chorus, rock concerts...you get the idea!



**Madama Butterfly simulcast in  
Civic Center Plaza**

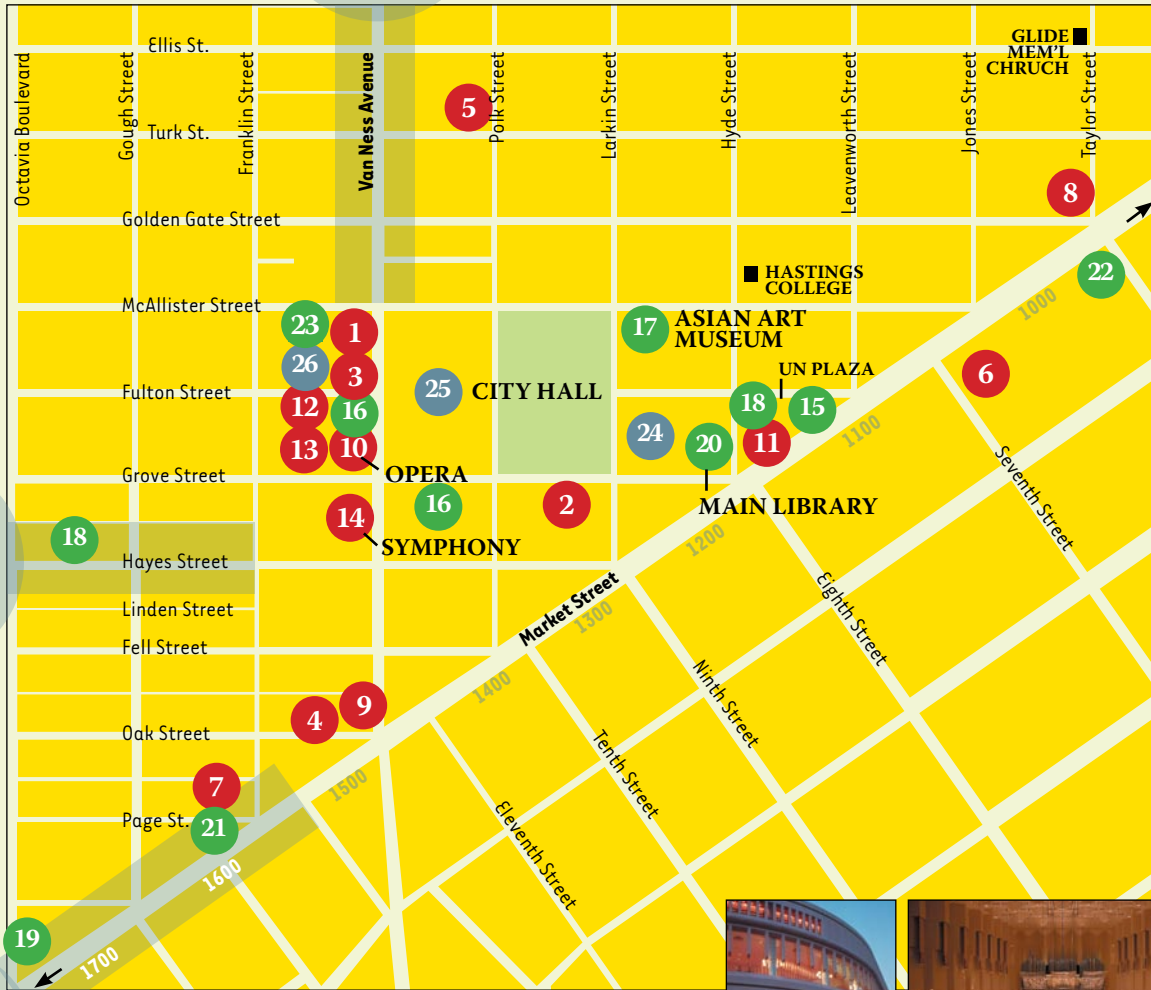
*Photo: Drew Altizer*

# Civic Center Area

- ENTERTAINMENT
- GALLERIES, MUSEUMS &...
- WALKING TOURS

**Van Ness Street  
Restaurants  
& Shops**

*Tomasson's Giselle*  
Photo: Lloyd Englert



**Hayes Street  
Galleries &  
Shops**

**Market Street  
Shops &  
Restaurants**

*Davies Symphony Hall*  
Photo: Terrence McCarthy

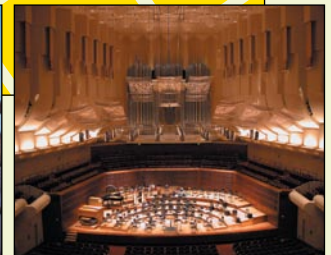


Photo: James Baldocchi

## ENTERTAINMENT

### 1 San Francisco Ballet

War Memorial Opera House, 301 Van Ness Ave. (at Grove St.) 415/865-2000; [www.sfballet.org](http://www.sfballet.org)  
Under the direction of Helgi Tomasson, America's oldest professional ballet company has achieved an international reputation as one of the preeminent ballet companies in the world.

### 2 Bill Graham Civic Auditorium

99 Grove St, 415/421-TIXS;  
[www.billgrahamcivic.com](http://www.billgrahamcivic.com)  
Walk of Fame at entrance includes Carlos Santana and Jerry Garcia.

San Francisco  
Arts Commission  
Gallery



### 3 City Arts & Lectures

Herbst Theatre, 401 Van Ness Ave.  
415/392-4400; [www.cityarts.net](http://www.cityarts.net)  
Events with leading figures in the world of art and ideas.

### 4 San Francisco Conservatory of Music

50 Oak St., 415/503.6275;  
[www.sfcm.edu](http://www.sfcm.edu)  
Featuring a broad cross-section of new and traditional music performed by students, faculty, alumni, and distinguished visiting artists.



Photo: Rory McNamara

### 5 California Culinary Academy

625 Polk St., 415/216-4329; [www.baychef.com](http://www.baychef.com)  
Elegant Carême Room; Tues-Fri lunch seating 11:30am-1pm; dinner seating 6pm-8pm.  
Watch culinary students and chef instructors in action with views into various production kitchens and demonstration classrooms.

### 6 Alonzo King's Lines Ballet/San Francisco Dance Center

26 7th St., 415/863-3040;  
[www.linesballet.org](http://www.linesballet.org) for schedule of drop-in classes  
An international dance company based in San Francisco that performs contemporary ballets choreographed by Alonzo King to critical acclaim in the US and abroad. Dance Center offers open classes for all levels.

### 7 San Francisco Girls Chorus

Kanbar Performing Arts Center, 44 Page St.  
415/392-4400; [www.sfgirlschorus.org](http://www.sfgirlschorus.org)  
A regional center founded in 1978, for music education and choral training for girls and young women ages 7-18.

### 8 Golden Gate Theatre

1 Taylor St., 415/551-2000; [www.shnsf.com](http://www.shnsf.com)  
The preeminent theatrical entertainment company in San Francisco presents the Best of Broadway series featuring world premieres and current hits, fresh from Broadway.

### 9 New Conservatory Theatre Center

25 Van Ness Ave., 415/861-8972; [www.nctcsf.org](http://www.nctcsf.org)  
Twenty five years of innovative high-quality gay theatre.

### 10 San Francisco Opera

War Memorial Opera House, 301 Van Ness Ave.  
415/864-3330; [www.sfopera.com](http://www.sfopera.com)  
Founded in 1923, one of the world's most acclaimed opera companies, and the second largest in North America.

### 11 Orpheum Theatre

1192 Market St., 415/551-2000; [www.shnsf.com](http://www.shnsf.com)  
The preeminent theatrical entertainment company in San Francisco presents the Best of Broadway series, featuring world premieres and current hits, fresh from Broadway.

### 12 Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra

Herbst Theatre, 401 Van Ness Ave.  
415/252-1288; [www.philharmonia.org](http://www.philharmonia.org)  
Dedicated to historically-informed performance of baroque, classical and early romantic music on original instruments.

### 13 San Francisco Performances

Herbst Theatre, 401 Van Ness Ave., and Davies Symphony Hall, 201 Van Ness Ave.  
415/392-2545; [www.performances.org](http://www.performances.org)  
Bay Area's leading independent presenter of chamber music, vocal and instrumental recitals, jazz and contemporary dance.

### 14 San Francisco Symphony

Louise M. Davies Symphony Hall, 201 Van Ness Ave. (at Grove St.) 415/864-6000; [www.sfsymphony.org](http://www.sfsymphony.org)  
Founded in 1911, this Grammy Award-winning, world-renowned orchestra is directed by Michael Tilson Thomas.

## MUSEUMS, GALLERIES, & MORE

### 15 The Art Institute of California-San Francisco

1170 Market St., 415/865-0198  
[www.aicasf.artinstitutes.edu](http://www.aicasf.artinstitutes.edu) for schedule of public exhibitions

A leader in career-oriented education in the fields of design, media arts, and fashion.

### 16 San Francisco Arts Commission Gallery

401 Van Ness Ave. also window installations at 155 Grove St., and City Hall  
415/554-6080; [www.sfacgallery.org](http://www.sfacgallery.org)  
Wed – Sat 12pm - 5pm.

The city's exhibition program supports a wide variety of artist's projects.



*Asian Art Museum*

### 17 Asian Art Museum

200 Larkin St.  
415/581-3500; [www.asianart.org](http://www.asianart.org)  
Tues – Sun 10am to 5pm; Thurs until 9pm.  
Free first Tuesdays of every month.

One of the largest museums in the Western world devoted exclusively to Asian art; 15,000 treasures spanning 6,000 years of history.

### 18 Heart of the City Farmer's Market

United Nations Plaza, Market (btwn. 7th and 8th St.)  
415/558-9455, Wed 7am-5:30pm; Sun 7am-5pm.  
Fresh produce and more.



*Photo: Laura O. Bergman*

### 19 LGBT Center

1800 Market St., 415/865-5555  
[www.sfcenter.org](http://www.sfcenter.org);  
Mon-Fri 12pm-10pm; Sat 9am-10pm.

Lighthouse for the gay, lesbian, transgender community: part meeting place, part event space, part support-group destination.

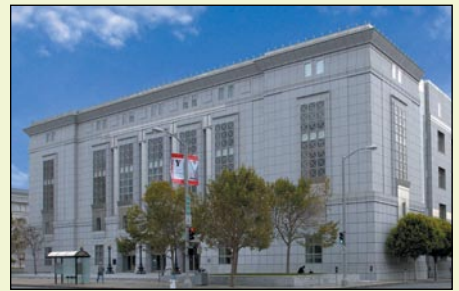
### 20 San Francisco Main Library

100 Larkin St.  
415/557-4400; [www.sfpl.org](http://www.sfpl.org)  
Mon 10am-6pm; Tues-Thurs 9am-8pm;  
Sat 10am-6pm; Sun 12-5pm.

Extensive collections, wide variety of free public programs, classes and exhibits. Children's performances, scholarly lectures and film and video presentations. Free Internet access. History of San Francisco exhibit on sixth floor.

*Main Library*

*Photo: Michael Allen Jones*



### 21 Linc Art Gallery

1632C Market St.  
415/503-1981; [www.lincart.com](http://www.lincart.com)  
Tues-Sat 12pm-6pm.

Contemporary, mostly local paintings, sculpture and photography.

### 22 Luggage Store Gallery

1007 Market St. (at 6th St.)  
415/255-5971; [www.luggagestoregallery.org](http://www.luggagestoregallery.org)  
Wed-Sat 12pm-5pm.

Art gallery and experimental music venue.

### 23 San Francisco Performing Arts Library and Museum (SF PALM)

Veterans Building, 401 Van Ness Ave., 4th Floor  
415/255-4800; [www.sfpalm.org](http://www.sfpalm.org); guided tours available. Library Hours Wed-Fri 11am-5pm; Sat 1pm-5pm; Exhibition Hours Tues-Fri 11am-5pm; Sat 1pm-5pm.

Two million books, photographs, programs, newspaper clippings, audio and video tapes from the Gold Rush to the present. Free admission.

## WALKING TOURS

### 24 San Francisco City Guides

Main Library, 100 Larkin St.

415/557-4266; [www.sfcityguides.org](http://www.sfcityguides.org) for schedule

Free walking tours of Civic Center seven days a week year round spotlighting San Francisco history, architecture, legends and lore. Ghost Walk in October.

### 25 City Hall

1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place

415/554-6139 for groups 8 or more;

[www.sfgov.org/site/cityhall](http://www.sfgov.org/site/cityhall)

Free public tours, Mon – Fri 10am, 12noon, 2pm.

City Hall Docent Tour Kiosk, Main Floor.

### 26 War Memorial Performing Arts Center:

**Herbst Theatre, Louise M. Davies**

**Symphony Hall, Opera House,**

**Veterans Building**

201 to 401 Van Ness Ave. (between Grove and McAllister Sts.) 415/552-8338, [www.sfwmpac.org](http://www.sfwmpac.org)

Tours each Monday (except holidays) leave from Symphony Hall Box Office on the hour, 10am to 2pm.

Complex covers 7.5 acres. Site of the 1945 United Nations Charter Signing. Resident companies are the San Francisco Ballet, San Francisco Opera, San Francisco Symphony and the SF Performing Arts Library and Museum (SF PALM), as well as City Arts & Lectures, San Francisco Performances, and Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra.

*Art Institute and Market Street's vintage trolley "F" line.*



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To discover the most comprehensive listing of events  
visit

**SFARTS**.ORG

Your Guide to San Francisco Arts and Culture