

Bound for the Bay Area? Here are 10 tips to know before you go

By [Christopher Reynolds](#) Staff Writer Jan. 21, 2022 6 AM PT

Can we agree that California isn't going back to normal anytime soon? Omicron won't let us.

But plenty of us continue to visit the Bay Area, while the rest of the world mostly has been shying away. Here are a few ideas, tips and updates for anyone headed to San Francisco, Oakland or Berkeley.

Before you go, though: Check individual destinations for updates on masking and vaccination requirements, and bear in mind that everything is subject to change as the pandemic evolves.

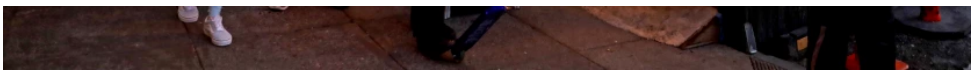
San Francisco

1. Dress to dine outdoors

A lot of us have wondered about the outdoor dining options that have multiplied during the pandemic, including "parklets," those improvised eating areas in spots that once were parking places, perfect for those not yet comfortable with eating in enclosed spaces. Have any been made permanent? In San Francisco the answer is yes.

The county Board of Supervisors voted in July 2021 to make the parklet program permanent. Of course, there are plenty of strings attached (not to mention the fluctuating anxieties of the pandemic), but this changes the dining picture dramatically. Since San Francisco began its parklet program in March 2020, more than 2,100 permits have been issued for in-street dining, sidewalk tables and similar outdoor arrangements.





Outdoor diners at Tony's Pizza Napoletana in San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood in March 2021.

(Gary Coronado / Los Angeles Times)

2. There's a new show in town

For more than four decades, San Francisco's goofiest, most tourist-friendly live show was "Beach Blanket Babylon," a silly, song-heavy, [fancy-hat-intensive](#) romp that reliably filled Club Fugazi in North Beach until closing in 2019.

Now comes a potential successor in the same space: "[Dear San Francisco: A High-Flying Love Story](#)," which opened in October. It was put together by a modern circus collective known as the 7 Fingers, which calls the production "an acrobatic love letter" to the city. It dips into local history with video projections, shadow play, juggling, hoop diving, hand balancing and [Korean plank](#) (also known as teeterboard).

The co-artistic directors of the show (and the 7 Fingers) are Shana Carroll and Gypsy Snider, both of whom grew up in the Bay Area. The show, about 90 minutes without intermission, is set to run through at least March 31. Seats are \$35 to \$99, depending on night and location.



"Dear San Francisco: A High-Flying Love Story" opened in October.

(Kevin Berne)



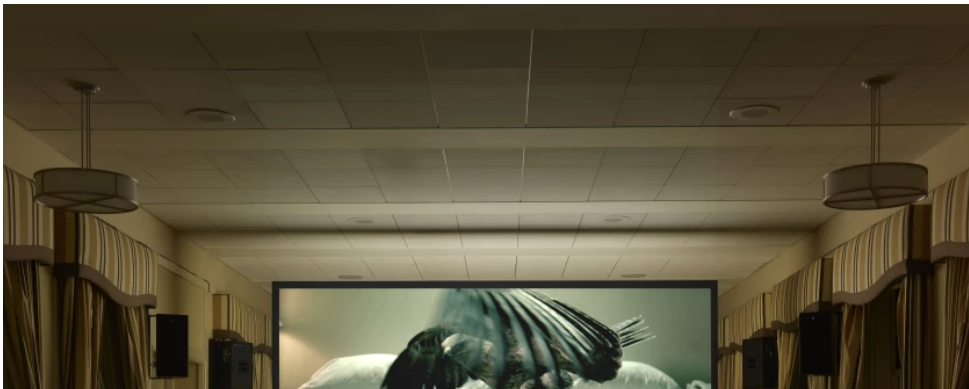
The show, about 90 minutes without intermission, was put together by a modern circus collective known as the 7 Fingers.

(Kevin Berne)

3. Don't miss this free art exhibit

Doug Aiken, Ólafur Eliasson and 25 other artists are part of a For-Site Foundation immersive art exhibition called "[Lands End](#)" that will be up through March 27. The show, staged at the historic seaside Cliff House building (the restaurant is idle) at 1090 Point Lobos Ave., explores climate change and the health of the planet. Admission is free but advance, time-specific reservations are required. (Also required: proof of vaccination.) Only 49 people are allowed in the building at a time.

By the way, the National Park Service is looking for a [new restaurateur](#) to take over the Cliff House (which closed in 2020) and the cafe at the Lands End Lookout Visitor Center, raising hopes that food service (fancy at Cliff House, casual at the cafe) might return before the end of 2022.





The "Lands End" exhibit will be up through March 27.

(Doug Aitken)



The show explores climate change and the health of the planet.

(Doug Aitken)

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4. Where to breakfast

In San Francisco, I've long relied on [Café de la Presse](#), between Union Square and Chinatown, for a solid breakfast and pleasant people-watching.

(The Chinatown gate is across the street.) But for months, Café de la Presse cut back its schedule and was serving only lunch and dinner. Now — as of Jan. 18 — [breakfast is back](#), offered Tuesday through Sunday, 8 a.m.-11 a.m. There's also brunch on Saturdays and Sundays, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Or consider the alternative I adopted while Cafe de la Presse was unavailable: the unfussy [Roxanne Café](#) on Powell, which has indoor and outdoor tables and does breakfast all day. Also, you'll see cable cars rumbling past outside.



Customers dine at Cafe de la Presse earlier this month.

(Christina House / Los Angeles Times)

5. Check before you go

Many San Francisco lodgings are still closed, including two in handy locations that I've used often. One of the still-closed spots is the Sir Francis Drake Hotel, half a block from Union Square. It was sold early in 2021. "The landmark will reopen soon," its website has been saying for months. We'll see.

The other "temporarily closed" favorite lodging of mine is the [San Remo Hotel](#), a European-style pension (shared bathrooms down the hall) in North Beach that's been a budget travelers' haven for decades. One alternative with similarly low prices: the [Green Tortoise Hostel](#), also in North Beach, which reopened in August requiring proof of vaccination for dorm guests and masks in all public areas.





The boarded entrance to the Sir Francis Drake Hotel in 2020.

(Jeff Chiu / Associated Press)

Oakland

6. History on tap

In Oakland, you can explore [Jack London Square's](#) outdoor Sunday farmers market (9 a.m.–2 p.m.) and maker's market (11 a.m.–4 p.m.). And [Heinold's First and Last Chance Saloon](#) (which goes back to 1884) continues to offer drinks and history. (Yes, Jack London tippled there.)

Berkeley

7. Check on Chez Panisse

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In Berkeley, there may be better eating soon. But you can't eat in [Chez Panisse](#) until the restaurant and cafe's dining rooms reopen, probably in the last week of January or first week in February, "barring any prohibitive circumstances." You also can't order takeout in January because the famed restaurant is shut "to prepare the building and make necessary repairs to the kitchen."





Kitchen activity at Chez Panisse in 2019.

(Liz Hafalia / San Francisco Chronicle via Getty Images)

8. A worthy substitute

In the same neighborhood, you might browse the [Cheese Board Collective](#) across the street (open Tuesday through Saturday), where there are outdoor tables and sometimes an accordion player near the door. The Cheese Board's Pizzeria is open for dinner Thursday through Saturday.

9. Lodgings in Berkeley

If you're considering an overnight stay in Berkeley and haven't been there lately, the French Hotel changed names a few years ago. It's now the [SenS Hotel and Vanne Bistro](#), with 18 guest rooms on three levels, a short walk from the Cal campus.

10. And where to dine

The city boosters at Visit Berkeley have come up with a list of [more than 75](#) Berkeley restaurants with outdoor seating.