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How To Visit Alcatraz Island, San Francisco

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By Jan Ross

If you are taking the ferry out to Alcatraz Island in May and you are envisioning a lovely, spring day on the water, I hate to disillusion you but forget that vision right now. Spring in San Francisco, although absolutely beautiful with clear blue skies and not much fog, is cold – especially when you are out on the bay where the breeze is especially breezy.

Just take a warm jacket if you want to be comfortable, *please!*

How to visit Alcatraz Island



There is also a perfectly warm inside area of the ferry which is where you will want to be unless you have a photo-obsessed individual with you who insists on perching on the windy top deck of the ferry. (Yes I'm talking from experience.)

However, once you arrive and warm up your numb fingers and toes, you will truly enjoy a tour of Alcatraz Island. The former prison on the rocky, inhospitable island in the middle of the cold bay has lots of history and plenty of interesting stories. Any place you have a prison, you are going to have inmates trying to escape, and that was certainly the case here.

Purchase your tickets online or at the ticket office at Pier 33 at Fisherman's Wharf but be sure to get there early as the lines to board are always long.

As Alcatraz Island is a National Park, the ferry system is the only way to actually set foot on the island although you can take numerous cruises of the bay that will take you around

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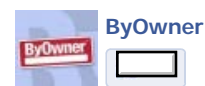
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the island.

The ferries run every half hour throughout the day up into the evening and there is also a night tour available which is the one I suggest. You will have plenty of time to tour the island during daylight, and then cruising back as the lights of the city come on and the sun sets is truly incomparable.

You do not have to leave on the next ferry from the island once you arrive but can stay as long as you want and just catch the next available ferry.

One of the best things about Alcatraz is the excellent audio tours. Be sure to get the headphones and take the narrated walking tour as it's truly fascinating, then spend some time just strolling around on your own.

The narrated tour is timed to explain exactly what you are looking at and listening to the history of this place is really fascinating. Just be sure to notice the warning signs as you walk around on your own because there are several areas where tourists are not allowed, mainly because of safety issues.

Official information: <http://www.alcatrazcruises.com/>

Hours: Daily, starting at 9:00 with the last, night cruise leaving at 4:20.

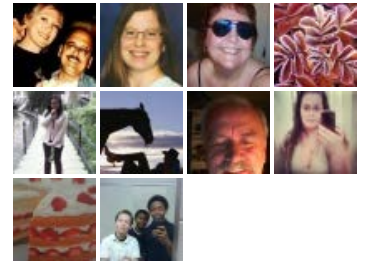
Fees: Vary from \$28 to \$60, depending on which tour you choose.

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