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## Taking A Self-Guided Tour of San Francisco Chinatown

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On my Christmas tree every year I carefully hang my favorite ornament, a beautifully small, silvery, segmented fish. It looks very Chinese and this makes perfect sense since I purchased it in a fascinating little shop during a visit to San Francisco's famous Chinatown.

### Touring San Francisco Chinatown

The port of entry for early Chinese immigrants from the 1850s to the 1900s who were looking for a better life, the area was the one geographical region deeded by the city government and private property owners which allowed Chinese persons to inherit and inhabit dwellings within the city.

Many Chinese found jobs working for large companies seeking a source of labor, most famously as part of the Transcontinental Railroad. Other immigrants worked as mine workers or independent prospectors hoping to strike it rich during the 1849 California Gold Rush.

These Chinese immigrants played an important role in the history of San Francisco and helped to open the American west.

An enclave which has continued to retain its own customs, languages, churches, and identity, Chinatown is also a complete community. With two hospitals, many parks and squares, a post office and other official buildings, in addition to temples, herbal shops, and pagoda designs, it's truly a unique place to visit.

It's important to remember that Chinatown is not only a tourist attraction but also home for thousands of Chinese immigrants and citizens.

A virtual Mecca for shoppers, Chinatown is also the perfect place for a wonderful meal and a great destination for strolling, people watching and admiring the beautiful architecture of the area.

San Francisco Chinatown is the largest Chinese community outside of Asia and the oldest Chinatown in North America. It's also one of the top tourist attractions in San Francisco, so



prepare to deal with crowds and try to plan a visit during the week instead of the weekend.

Chinatown is located in downtown San Francisco and consists of 24 square blocks. Over 100,000 people reside in those 24 blocks so the area is constantly bustling. There is parking available but you can also take public transportation to the area; just be prepared to a lot of walking.

Be sure to walk up Grant Avenue where you will find the famous Dragon Gate at the intersection of Bush Street and Grant Avenue. Beautifully ornate and the unofficial entrance to Chinatown, it's a great place to take photos. St. Mary's Square is the area where most tourists gravitate as it has stores, restaurants and mini-malls which cater to tourists but Stockton Street has a more authentic Chinese look and feel and will be much less crowded.

One of the few open spaces in Chinatown which may not be quite as crowded is Portsmouth Square. A replica of the Goddess of Democracy used in the Tiananmen Square protest made of bronze was built in 1999 and stands in the square.

Definitely plan to have a meal while you are visiting Chinatown – one of the most popular items is Dim Sum, small bite size meat dumplings which are delicious. Then stop in the Golden Gate Fortune Cookie Factory, where they make 20,000 cookies a day and you can pick up a bag.

And don't forget the most important thing to do in Chinatown – shop! Look for jade, unique Chinese kites, handmade wooden items and unique herbal remedies.

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