

Top Three Routes to Run in San Francisco

By Warwick Ford

There are two things that make San Francisco a place where running outdoors is irresistible. The first is the set of scenic routes resulting from the city's location on the Pacific Ocean and the enormous natural harbor and associated waterways that constitute *the Bay*. The second is the weather. The monthly average maximum temperature lies between 56 and 70 degrees year-round and the monthly average minimum lies between 46 and 56. Therefore, weather is unlikely to dampen your enthusiasm for getting outdoors for a run.

For a training or recreational route to be motivating and enjoyable it needs to have four attributes: **Comfort** from both the safety and underfoot perspective; **Attractions** to make it interesting; **Convenience** to city center and public transit; and a worthy **Destination** to help motivate you to finish the route. Applying this model to San Francisco, we came up with the following three winning routes.

Fisherman's Wharf to Sausalito (8.0 miles)

This route is a classic! Start at Fisherman's Wharf or start in the financial district at Embarcadero and run along the Bay to Fisherman's Wharf (add 1.8 miles in the latter case). Follow the Bay shore from Fisherman's Wharf, past the Aquatic Park, around Fort Mason, past the Yacht Harbor, and along the shore to Torpedo Wharf where you climb the footpath to the Golden Gate Bridge viewing area and kiosk. Cross that unforgettable bridge, fog or no fog, on the pedestrian walkway. Enjoy the spectacular view and the marine activities below. At the other end, there are a couple of different ways into Sausalito. The simplest is to run along the edge of Alexander Avenue. You get a nice workout through the hills then a scenic downhill run all the way to the lovely town of Sausalito. In Sausalito, pick the Bayside eating and drinking establishment that takes your fancy, and enjoy a beverage or snack while waiting for your ferry ride back to the city. There are ferries to Fisherman's Wharf and to the financial district, and the ride is the most scenic and exciting experience you will ever have on public transit.

Fisherman's Wharf to Ocean Beach (10.0 miles)

A scenic bonanza! This is a different experience to the Golden Gate Bridge, involving more variety in terrain, scenery, and types of environment traversed, but is equally memorable. As in the first route, start by making your way to the Golden Gate Bridge viewing area and kiosk. Then go under Route 101 and find the Bay Ridge Coastal Trail heading south along the Pacific shore. While most of this trail is easily runnable, it has some parts that are steeper and rough underfoot. Also weather conditions here are often more challenging than Bay-side. However, the scenery is nothing less than breathtaking. Continue south, past or along Baker Beach, and into the classy residential area of Seacliff. Continue westward into Lincoln Park, where you have several choices of trail,

ranging from roads to cliff-side paths. Emerge at the southwest corner of Lincoln Park, close to the start of Ocean Beach. Follow Great Highway and Ocean Beach a further 0.8 miles south to the Beach Chalet, an Oceanside restaurant at the western end of Golden Gate Park. This is an ideal place for a wind-down drink, snack, or a nice weekend brunch after your exercise. You can then go a short distance further south to Judah Street and the Muni Metro N line, which will whisk you back to downtown San Francisco.

Golden Gate Park (8.0 miles)

San Francisco's answer to New York's Central Park has as many attractions and as much diversity as the east-coast version. There are a runnable botanic garden, several attractive lakes, two waterfalls, a Japanese Tea Garden, a Conservatory of Flowers, a field of bison, several museums, and two impressive windmills. The easiest way to get here from downtown is to catch the Muni Metro N line in Market Street and take it to the Stanyan Street stop. Then head north to the southeast corner of the park. There are many trails through the park. A good approach is to work your way to almost the western end of the park along its southern side, and then come back through its northern side. If you return via JFK Drive, the main thoroughway on the northern side, it will lead you to the park's panhandle at the eastern end. Go into the panhandle then south two blocks and you find yourself in the middle of the famous Haight-Ashbury district. Stop here for a wind-down snack and drink, then catch the nearby Metro Muni N line back downtown.

© Warwick Ford, 2006

[Warwick Ford is author of "Fun on Foot in America's Cities," the book that details and maps the best on-foot routes in 14 major US cities. Check out Warwick's site www.funonfoot.com for more information and to purchase the book.]