

# Town&Country TRAVEL

## TRAVEL SMART

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### Inside the City by the Bay Concierge Robert Spinrad of the Ritz-Carlton San Francisco reveals the city's best finds.

By Erin Schulte



**Town & Country Travel:** What's the ideal itinerary for a first-time visitor to San Francisco?

**Robert Spinrad:** *Most of my guests come to the concierge desk at the Ritz-Carlton with a vision of what they want to see and do in San Francisco. It usually comes from a movie -- whether they saw Alcatraz prison in *The Rock*, the magnificent coastline in *Basic Instinct*, or Kim Novak jumping into San Francisco Bay in *Vertigo*. I like to find out what special places they have dreamed of visiting, and then add a few places that they may not have heard of as well. For example, I might suggest a morning of sightseeing with a private guide, then an exotic dim sum lunch at Yank Sing, on to some antique shopping in Jackson Square, followed by a traditional afternoon tea in our Lobby Lounge and then an intimate dinner at Allegro Romano, a quaint Italian restaurant on Russian Hill.*

**It's my 20th visit to San Francisco. What's going to be new to me?**

*For someone who has been to San Francisco many times, I would suggest they explore one of the neighborhoods of the city. San Francisco is like a series of little towns, and every local will tell you that his or her neighborhood has the best coffee shop, burrito stand or yoga studio in town. I would send my guest to my own neighborhood, the Marina district, home of the Palace of Fine Arts (a remnant from the World's Fair of 1915), and then I would have them enjoy the spectacular views of the Bay from Crissy Field, and the most amazing pizza funghi outside of Naples at A16 on Chestnut Street.*

**It's your last meal, and you'll be dining in San Francisco. Where do you go, and what do you order?**

*Ask any five-year-old in San Francisco the difference between Mandarin and Szechwan cuisines, or tapas and taquitos, and you'll likely get the correct answers. San Franciscans are obsessed with food and our multicultural heritage is reflected in our favorite dishes. Your dream dinner would begin at The Dining Room at the Ritz*

*Carlton, where our Chef Ron Siegel would tempt you with your spectacular first course: Tahitian vanilla-flavored chilled foie gras with pear and port syrup. Your next course would take you to the elegant Chinese restaurant, Tommy Toy's, where you would enjoy the fresh whole Lobster sautéed with mushrooms, chives, and a peppercorn sauce. After that, you'd be amazed with the Arnisia Paidakia at Mezes Restaurant. It's grilled marinated lamb chops served with crisp roasted potatoes that arrives at your table with a flaming sprig of rosemary. For dessert, your last stop is the popular Garibaldi's on Presidio where a decadent chocolate budino, served warm with espresso ice cream, awaits you. After that meal, you may be tempted to hike back to the Ritz-Carlton.*

**Is there an iconic local libation I need to try, and who does it best?**

*Since San Francisco is just outside the wine country, you'll find that the locals prefer the glass of wine to almost any cocktail. There's a wine bar in every neighborhood. And what could be better than a glass of Chalk Hill Chardonnay with some fresh Dungeness crab and crusty sourdough bread? If I did have to pick a local libation, I would head over to Trader Vic's on Golden Gate Avenue for a Mai Tai. The famous drink was invented here in the Bay Area by Vic Bergeron in 1944 and has been a favorite of San Francisco high society ever since.*

**Here's \$5,000 for a shopping spree. Where are you headed?**

*Ever since the days of the Gold Rush, anyone in San Francisco with some money to spend went to Gump's. World-class shoppers from Barbara Hutton to Barbra Streisand have found that there is something for everyone at their remarkable shop on Post Street in Union Square. Like San Francisco, the store has an international and cosmopolitan point of view and their jade and pearl jewelry is legendary. They even stock my favorite shaving soap from London, Geo. F. Trumper.*

**Robert Spinrad, Chef Concierge  
Ritz-Carlton, San Francisco**

**I've done the museums, shows, shopping, and restaurants.  
What's off the beaten path?**

*For my guests who have "seen it, done it," I like to suggest the magnificent mansion and gardens of Filoli in Woodside, 30 miles south of San Francisco. Last owned by the owner of the Matson Navigation Company, Filoli is a spectacular place to spend an afternoon. Meanwhile, the Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum, an hour's drive to San Jose, is the next best thing to a trip to Cairo. And if you are lucky enough to be in town when the Castro Theatre is showing an old Bette Davis movie or a sing-along musical, it will be an experience you'll never forget.*

**San Francisco's waterfront is gorgeous. What is the most luxurious way to take it all in?**

*Ask me to arrange a private yacht or a plush Mercedes sedan. If you are feeling hungry, ask your skipper or chauffeur to pop into the Ferry Building, a unique epicurean food hall, and pick up a nibble. I would suggest the Royal Osetra Caviar at the Tsar Nicoulai Café or a bar of the local-made Scharffen Berger Chocolate.*

**What is San Francisco's greatest hidden treasure?**

*With such natural beauty in San Francisco, it's easy for visitors to overlook the historic buildings and homes of the city. From my hotel's grand 1909 neo-classical facade to the famous Victorian homes in Pacific Heights, I encourage my guests to get inside some of San Francisco's historic buildings. Depending upon the time of year, we can guide them to what is open to the public. Special events, like the Decorator Showcase, give them a glimpse of the often-hidden view of life in San Francisco.*

**You can't say you've been to San Francisco unless you've...**

*Ridden on a cable car. When you see California Street towering above you, you'll know why Tony Bennett described them as going "halfway to the stars." There is nothing like the rhythmic clamor of the cable-car bells to remind you that you are in the most unique city in America. The California cable car runs right past the Ritz-Carlton, and at night, with the lights of the financial district twinkling and the fog rolling in over Nob Hill, it's a magical moment that is not to be missed.*

**What's the most over-the-top request you've ever fulfilled?**

*I've had a few over-the-top requests in the past 16 years, although the guests who asked for them didn't think they were anything out of the ordinary. One guest took out her checkbook and asked me to buy her a new Jaguar. All I could think of to ask her was what color she wanted. Another guest wanted Danielle Steel's latest novel. That didn't seem too difficult...until she told me she needed it in Hebrew.*