



November 2010

ZOOM

in on america

A publication of the U.S. Consulate Krakow and the U.S. Embassy Budapest

Issue 30

San Francisco

Whoever said: "The coldest winter I ever spent was a summer in San Francisco" didn't say it without reason. Though a gross exaggeration - it hardly ever gets colder than 15° Celsius and it never snows throughout the year - the quote pinpoints the true nature of San Francisco summers. They are simply chilly, especially around the Bay. The summer time fog rolls in from the Pacific and envelops San Francisco Bay and one of the most famous landmarks of the city, the Golden Gate Bridge, in dense and humid patches of white (see the picture below).

The 2,737 m long Golden Gate Bridge was built between 1933-37 when the rest of the United States was submerged in a serious economic crisis known as the Great Depression. A group of renowned engineers and bridge designers joined forces and designed a light and graceful Art Deco suspension bridge to connect San Francisco to Marin County. Its six lanes are arranged in such a way that when the traffic is heavier towards the city - on weekday mornings - four lanes out of the six run in that direction. On weekday afternoons it is the other way around. In addition to cars, the bridge is open to bicyclists and to pedestrians too, but the latter can cross only during daylight.

(Photo © AP Images)



The Streets of San Francisco



The famous Lombard Street winds down a steep hill with many hairpin turns. It is nicknamed America's "most crooked street" (see photo on the left). Streets rarely make a tourist attraction, but this street is apparently a must see for all visitors to San Francisco. Beautiful Victorian mansions line the street and flowerbeds flank its sharp curves. The crooked part of Lombard Street is a treat for the eye in daytime when it sparkles with colors. A taxi ride down this street at night is said to be an unforgettable experience and an adrenaline booster.

Lombard Street is not the city's only street running along a steep hill. Indeed, the number of hills within the city boundaries exceeds 50. Some parts of San Francisco are named after them; for example, Nob Hill, Russian Hill, and Pacific Heights. As you can imagine, this hilly landscape can pose a challenge to traffic and public transportation.

The San Francisco cable car - the first mechanical vehicle that could ascend and descend the city's steep streets - is a story in itself. Behind this story is Andrew Smith Hallidie, who was born in 1836 in London. He immigrated to California in search of gold in 1852. Hallidie was a born engineer. He constructed his first electrical machine at the age of 10. However, he was not a very successful gold miner. Finally he gave up mining, returned to San Francisco and started manufacturing wire rope. Among the many patents that Hallidie registered was the "Hallidie Ropeway (or Tramway)", a transportation device operating on a line that could be used in mountainous and hilly areas. He constantly worked on improving his invention, and finally he developed the cable car.

In a report to the Mechanics' Institute he explains his motives for working so hard on the project: "I was largely induced to think over the matter from seeing the difficulty and pain the horses experienced in hauling the cars up Jackson Street, on which street four or five horses were needed for the purpose..." (more at <http://www.sfmuseum.net/bio/hallidie.html>)

However, the road to implementing his ingenious invention was long and difficult. Hallidie had to overcome very strong opposition from those who did not believe the cable car could work. Had he not been so determined and had he not invested all his savings (\$20,000) in carrying out his project, San Francisco horses may have had to haul heavy cars up steep streets a lot longer. Fortunately, his will prevailed. The first test run was performed on August 2, 1873. Most accounts report that when the driver (called a grip man) looked down the hill he refused to operate the car. However, Hallidie took the grip in his hand and ran the car down the street safely. Later, cable cars were introduced in other American cities and Hallidie finally got due recognition.

Today the San Francisco cable car system is an icon of the city. It is operated manually just like in past centuries. Two routes connect downtown to Fisherman's Wharf and one runs along California Street. Needless to say, most passengers are tourists and the most desirable place is not a seat inside, but the boarding step outside the car.



Above: A California Street cable car decorated for the holidays makes its way down Nob Hill.



Left: Workers turn a cable car around at the turntable on Powell and Market Streets.

(Photos © AP Images)

In & Out of the City

Fisherman's Wharf

San Francisco natives prefer to stay away from this very crowded spot, but that does not change the fact that Fisherman's Wharf is one of San Francisco's top-rated tourist attractions. Complete with a fishing pier, stalls selling fresh crab, restaurants, a shopping mall, and the take-off point for Alcatraz rides and San Francisco Bay cruises, it is also a wildlife habitat. Yes, a huge number of sea lions recline on wooden boards which float off the side of the most popular mall on Fisherman's Wharf called Pier 39. The sea lions'



Fisherman's Wharf

Photo by Bozena Pilat

barking and roaring mingle with tourists' delighted "Ohs" and "Ahs," creating a truly unusual atmosphere.

Bay cruises offer great views of the city shoreline, a close look at the Golden Gate Bridge from below, and as many circles around the island of Alcatraz as it takes for the passengers to listen to a recording about the prison's history and its most notorious inmates.

The tall ship "Europa" sails past the former penitentiary on Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay (Photo © AP Images)

Golden Gate Park

Nature lovers can find an excellent refuge from the hustle and bustle of the city in a very special city park. With its 4.1 km², San Francisco Golden Gate Park is just a little bigger than New York's Central Park and resembles it in its rectangular shape. Established in a difficult terrain consisting mainly of dunes, it posed quite a challenge for its founders, who - as history has proven - managed to permanently transform the sandy area into an oasis full of lush vegetation. William Hammond Hall and John McLaren founded the park at the beginning of the 1870s and 1880s. Both men favored natural landscapes and introduced wildlife to the park instead of sculptures and statues (a small herd of bison was introduced to the park in the 1890s). Nevertheless, many statues of famous people can be seen in the park today, including ones depicting Robert Burns, Goethe, Schiller, Beethoven, and Verdi. There are also buildings showcasing several architectural styles. Water was originally pumped to the park with the use of two windmills. There is a Japanese tea garden, a botanical garden, and a lake in the park which is popular with yacht sailors. The biggest and most spectacular areas include the music concourse area, where numerous performances are staged, the De Young Museum featuring fine arts, and the California Academy of Sciences - one of the largest natural history museums in the world.

Muir Woods

Those who feel like leaving the city for a day to relax have a great option to do so less than 20 km north of San Francisco - Muir Woods. The area, which in 1908 was declared a national monument by President Theodore Roosevelt, was named after the great Scottish-born American naturalist and conservationist John Muir, who played an important role in preserving Yosemite and Sequoia National Park. There are 3 walks in Muir Woods that can take from half an hour to 1.5 hours, but there are also longer hikes. The forest park is paved so that it is easily accessible for people in wheelchairs and mothers with strollers. The main attraction of Muir Woods is the Coast Redwood, a relative of the Giant Sequoia. The average age of the redwoods is between 500 and 800 years and there is a tree in Muir Woods that is 1,200 years old. The tallest tree in Muir Woods is nearly 80 m tall. It is a unique experience to walk by the tallest living things on earth; trees that can live 10 times longer than man!



People view a trio of giant redwoods at the Muir Woods National Monument (Photo © AP Images)

Activity Page

Exercise 1— Comprehension: Decide whether the sentences below are true or false!

- 1/ The fog that appears in the Bay Area in summer is the result of the proximity of the Pacific.
- 2/ There is always an equal number of lanes going south and north across the Golden Gate Bridge.
- 3/ Pedestrians are not allowed on the Bridge at any time.
- 4/ Nearly all streets in San Francisco are flat.
- 5/ Andrew Hallidie was a gold miner, an engineer, and an inventor.
- 6/ It was easy for Hallidie to convince San Franciscans that his cable car would solve the problem of transportation on steep streets.
- 7/ You can sail a yacht on a lake in Golden Gate Park.
- 8/ You can see sea lions at Fisherman's Wharf.
- 9/ The cable car system is going to be discontinued.
- 10/ Muir Woods were named after a famous pianist.

Exercise 2— Match each city with its nickname!

Many U.S. cities have nicknames, some of them have more than one. Here are ten cities and ten nicknames - just a little messed up :-)

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| 1/ Baltimore | A/ City of Angels |
| 2/ Chicago | B/ The Biggest Little City In the World |
| 3/ Cincinnati | C/ The Athens of America |
| 4/ Detroit | D/ The Big Apple |
| 5/ Honolulu | E/ Motown |
| 6/ Las Vegas | F/ Cinci |
| 7/ Los Angeles | G/ The Windy City |
| 8/ New York | H/ The Big Pineapple |
| 9/ Reno | I/ B-More |
| 10/ Boston | J/ Sin City |



Tourists watch sea lions on boat docks at Pier 39 in San Francisco.
(Photo © AP Images)

Exercise Key: http://hungary.usembassy.gov/quiz_key.html

Zoom is available online at

<http://hungary.usembassy.gov/zoom.html>

Please send comments and requests for subscription to:
zoom@usembassy.hu

Regional English Language Office
relomail@usembassy.hu

Information Resource Center
infousa@usembassy.hu

Mailing address:
U.S. Embassy
Public Affairs Section
1054 Budapest
Szabadság tér 12.

Glossary

to pinpoint - to find or locate exactly
to submerge - to cause to be under water
Art Deco - a decorative style of the late 1920's and the 1930's based generally on geometric forms
suspension bridge - a bridge in which the weight is supported by vertical cables suspended from other cables that run between towers
steep - rising or falling sharply
hairpin - U-shaped pin for hair
crooked - not straight, bent, curved
to flank - to be placed beside
patent - a document granting the exclusive right to produce, sell, or get profit from an invention
to induce - to succeed in persuading
to haul - to pull or drag with effort
wharf - a place, usually made of stone, where ships can be tied to unload goods
to recline - to be or to put oneself in a position to rest
pier - a platform on pillars
hustle and bustle - hurried, busy, noisy activities
terrain - ground, especially with regard to its natural or physical character
lush - growing very well; thick and healthy
concourse - a large hall or open area
stroller - a folding chair on wheels for pushing a small child along