



# Getting Out on San Francisco Bay: From Ferries to Hornblower Cruises

Author's Note: This article "Getting Out on San Francisco Bay: From Ferries to Hornblower Cruises" is a stand-alone article on my website. Further parallel articles on the Bay include chapters in my two main travel guidebooks/ebooks on California. They are [\*Northern California History Travel Adventures: 35 Suggested Trips\*](#) and [\*Northern California Travel: The Best Options\*](#). All my travel guidebooks/ebooks on California can be seen on my [Amazon Author Page](#).

By Lee Foster

Getting out on San Francisco Bay in a boat of some kind is a concept I recommend to all visitors and locals. San Francisco Bay is such an inviting body of water, especially if your boat trip takes you across the Bay or out beyond the Golden Gate Bridge.

From a boat you can see the Bridges, especially the Bay Bridge and the Golden Gate Bridge, plus the skyline profile of the city of San Francisco. You can see the lovely green Marin hillsides and the profiles of the main Bay islands, such as Alcatraz and Angel Islands.

The protected Bay waters are usually not too rough. Sometime you will encounter wildlife, such as sea lions and migrating birds. Occasionally, you may pass close to the immense container ships that come through the Golden Gate into the port of Oakland. Their cargo will likely come from China and Korea.

## The Ferry Option for San Francisco Bay



The excursion boat California Hornblower ready to depart on San Francisco Bay

There are many ways to get out on San Francisco Bay in a boat, and I have done most of them at one time or another.

Ferries are an inexpensive and fun option, plunging you into the everyday workaday world of folks commuting to and from San Francisco. Most passengers go to Oakland or to Larkspur in Marin County.

[Ferries regularly cross the Bay](#) from the Ferry Building, foot of Market Street. The major routes are to Oakland/Alameda in the East Bay, Larkspur in Marin County, and Vallejo in the North Bay.

I have particularly enjoyed the early morning ferry ride between Oakland's Jack

London Square to the Ferry Building in San Francisco. The morning light can be dazzling as you pass the container ships in the port of Oakland. You sail underneath the Bay Bridge western section. You observe close-up the downtown San Francisco skyline from the water. Review the ferry schedule for details.

## **The Posh Hornblower Cruise Option**

At the other end of the spectrum, consider a Sunday morning champagne brunch cruise on [Hornblower](#). You leave from Pier 3 at 11 a.m. for the two-hour cruise on their large and stable *California Hornblower*. Large and stable is good to avoid any seasickness issues.

You receive an assigned white-table-cloth table for your dining. The champagne flows freely from an attentive waiter, and is included in your ticket price. The brunch itself is sumptuous, and strategic choices need to be made.

You can concentrate on the leafy salads. There is also traditional bacon, sausage, eggs, and waffles. Or try the delicate smoked salmon and cream cheese bagels, and maybe the baked salmon fillets. It is OK to change course in this culinary voyage, and go back for more and different. Live music entertains you.

At some point you will want to go out on the upper deck and watch the glorious scene unfold. The boat sails out under the Golden Gate Bridge and turns around. The first part of this leisurely voyage from Pier 3 passes along the San Francisco skyline. Then the green Marin County hills emerge to the north.

## **Passing Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay**

Finally, Hornblower crosses the Bay on the north side of the Alcatraz prison island (now a National Park entity, welcoming visitors) and heads towards the Bay Bridge. Then it turns back to Pier 3.

Full details on Hornblower's many cruise possibilities, including dinner and holiday cruises, can be seen on their [website](#).

# Alcatraz Island Tours

A boat ride out to Alcatraz and a visit is one of the most popular San Francisco Bay outings.

Excursions out to see the [Alcatraz prison island](#), which depart from Pier 33, include the boat tour, which circles the island.

A boat was, of course, the only way to get prisoners, guards, supplies, and water out to the secure prison island. The relatively high cost of maintaining this draconian prison site included barging out the potable water. High costs eventually led to the closure of the federal prison phase in this island's long history.

## Blue and Gold, Red and White Fleets



The sumptuous Sunday Morning Buffet on the boat California Hornblower on San Francisco Bay

Farther west from Pier 33 along the Embarcadero in the Fisherman's Wharf area, there are two excursion boat services. They are the [Blue and Gold Fleet](#) and the [Red and White Fleet](#) of tour and ferry boats.

They have regularly scheduled out-on-the-Bay trips.

Right at Fisherman's Wharf, on Jefferson Street, several of the small fishing boats consider tourists to be the "catch of the day." They gladly take visitors out for a look at the Bay. This is an intimate small-boat option, good for people who don't get seasick.



A selfie on the deck of the boat California Hornblower on San Francisco Bay

However you choose to make it happen, rest assured that getting out on San Francisco Bay will enhance your delight in the area.