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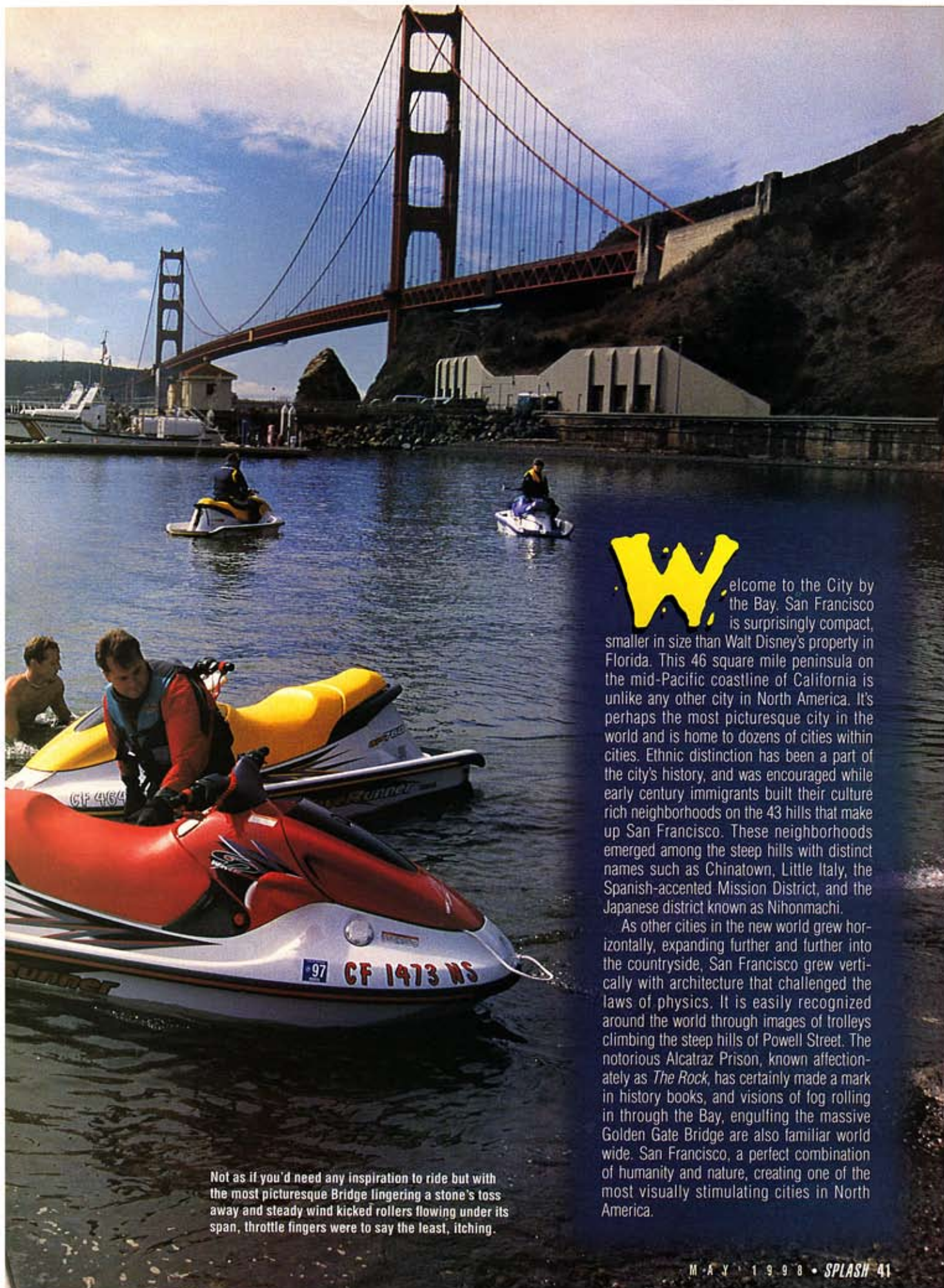
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SAN FRANCISCO TREAT

TRAVEL: SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

by Tim McKercher

Photo: Bryan Ventura

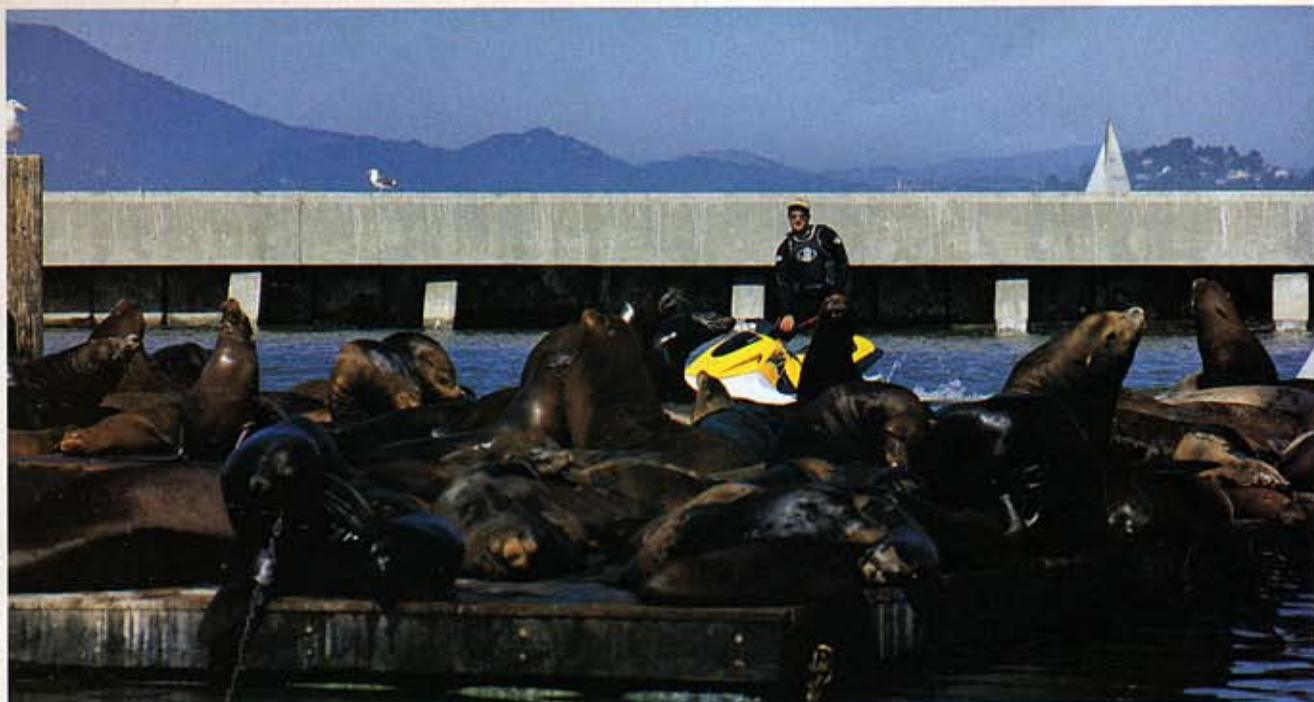


Not as if you'd need any inspiration to ride but with the most picturesque Bridge lingering a stone's toss away and steady wind kicked rollers flowing under its span, throttle fingers were to say the least, itching.

W

elcome to the City by the Bay. San Francisco is surprisingly compact, smaller in size than Walt Disney's property in Florida. This 46 square mile peninsula on the mid-Pacific coastline of California is unlike any other city in North America. It's perhaps the most picturesque city in the world and is home to dozens of cities within cities. Ethnic distinction has been a part of the city's history, and was encouraged while early century immigrants built their culture rich neighborhoods on the 43 hills that make up San Francisco. These neighborhoods emerged among the steep hills with distinct names such as Chinatown, Little Italy, the Spanish-accented Mission District, and the Japanese district known as Nihonmachi.

As other cities in the new world grew horizontally, expanding further and further into the countryside, San Francisco grew vertically with architecture that challenged the laws of physics. It is easily recognized around the world through images of trolleys climbing the steep hills of Powell Street. The notorious Alcatraz Prison, known affectionately as *The Rock*, has certainly made a mark in history books, and visions of fog rolling in through the Bay, engulfing the massive Golden Gate Bridge are also familiar world wide. San Francisco, a perfect combination of humanity and nature, creating one of the most visually stimulating cities in North America.



PWC's aren't the only one's looking for dock space in the Bay. If you can manage to coax one of these mammoth sea lions off the dock you can experience the city's most popular pier, Pier 39.

As a member of the Xtreme Water Show, I traveled to many of America's biggest and most beautiful cities this past summer, performing watercraft exhibitions while promoting safe boating. The show, seen by millions of people, demonstration numerous ways to have fun with PWC and Jet Boats. After performing at some of the nations largest festivals and events, the Xtreme show's next to last stop was in San Francisco, for the Pier 39 Sailing Regatta.

Having never been to the Bay Area, I only knew what I have heard others say or what I've seen on television. There were a few perceptions engraved into my brain before I arrived. I knew the '49ers played at the legendary Candlestick Park. I braced myself for the bone chilling waters, and looked forward to exploring the fog blanketed bay, steep hills, and Chinatown.

San Francisco History 101

In 1776, a Spanish officer, Juan Bautista de Anza, founded the Presidio at the northern tip of the Peninsula. Later that same year, the Mission San Francisco de Assisi was built and in the following years the settlement around the mission, known as Yerba Bueno (*good herb* because of the abundance of mint in the area) was developed. In 1847, the city name was officially changed to San Francisco. A year later after the Mexican War ceded the territory to the US, the San Francisco area was officially included in the State of California. The population in 1847 was roughly 800 people. The discovery of

gold in the region in 1948-49 spurred a tremendous growth in population. This is where the term '49ers originated. In the following years San Francisco was notorious for it's lawlessness.

Through the city's growth, the development of the city as a major port began in 1855. With this growth and lawlessness, fires devastated the city at various times. The most disastrous and well known was the fire following the earthquake of April 18, 1906. This fire raged for three days, destroying almost the entire city. Within a year San Francisco was rebuilt and the city became much more civilized and modern. Between 1910 and 1950 the population of San Francisco increased to 775,357. Today nearly 724,000 people reside in San Francisco, with nearly 6.5 million living in the Greater Bay Area.

The City

As I exited Highway 101, the images of steep hills and people trudging to the top or bicyclists whizzing down at blurring speeds was fully realized. Looking into the distance, every towering street offers incredible views of the Bay, and the rapid descents are down right roller coaster like. The city has ten streets with grades greater than 24 degrees, and two streets, Filbert, between Leavenworth & Hyde, and 22nd between Church and Vicksburg, have inclines of 31.5 percent grades! No sidewalks here, only steps and the smell of roasting brake pads. San Francisco has 43 hills and none more

famous than Lombard Street's eight curves. Known as the curviest street in the world, Lombard Street spirals down a brick lain path among a beautiful showcase of California flowers and shrubbery trimmed to a barbers expectations.

During a weekend stay, one could not fully experience the numerous cultural offerings in San Francisco. Each ethnic area is a puzzle piece that completes this city's picture. The New Year is celebrated twice here, as Chinatown celebrates this holiday at the end of January. Watch your step and your ears in the weeks prior, as fireworks are Chinatown's favorite accent.

Everywhere you go, you learn something new. Some of the more popular mind enhancing museums and attractions include the California Academy of Science, the San Francisco Zoo, and the Museum of Modern Art. If you have more than a weekend, you might try to experience the Cable Car Museum, take a tour of the Jelly Belly or Hershey factories, check out the National Maritime Museum, and experience the beautiful Exploratorium, Palace of Fine Arts. For the tourist getting back to the basics, maybe Mission Street's Cartoon Art Museum could be the yabba dabba doo of your trip. As The City turns dark, a journey to the top of Twin Peaks to view the shimmer in the darkness is as romantic setting as can be found anywhere on the planet. Market Street offers a different look from any other with a warm, yellow glow. The crisp evenings will energize patrons looking

for fun nightclubs or coffee houses.

I have somehow ended up in a micro-brewery in every city I've visited, and San Francisco proved to be no different. On 11th and Folsom stands the 20 Tank Brewery, where our Xshow members primed the evening by sampling some fine Bay brewed beers. After getting primed at 20 Tanks, party goers can walk across the street to Holy Cow's and dance to retro '80s music, venture off to the popular club Biscuits & Blues, or get wild at Club OZ.

Sittin' on the Dock of the Bay

Fisherman's Wharf and Pier 39 are two of San Francisco's most visited attractions. Both waterside hot spots contain a couple dozen tantalizing restaurants. What is the specialty at Fisherman's Wharf? Seafood, and a lot of it! Neighbors to the restaurants are exquisite specialty shops and boutiques. Pier 39 is said to be the third most visited attraction in the United States, hosting almost 11 million visitors a year, and home to the Regatta, where we performed our shows. This place is like a giant outdoor mall with 110 shops, in a visually appealing atmosphere.

Roughly a mile and a quarter off of the end of the Pier stands *The Rock*, home of the notorious Alcatraz Prison. On a clear day, Alcatraz is an awesome site. Around the corner on the west side of Pier 39 you'll find hundreds of Pacific Sea Lions barking and carrying on to the chagrin of the tourists. The Pier is home to 10 restaurants such as the Alcatraz Café, Chic's Sea Food, and the Bubba Gump Shrimp Co., complete with Forrest Gump sitting on a bench out front.

A dream stay in San Francisco would include sleeping in the heart of the action, in the waters next to Pier 39. For an extravagant getaway, reserve a couple of nights on your own private bed and breakfast luxury yacht. After a full day on the Bay, head to



Photo: McKercher

What better way to see the city for a PWC enthusiast. Spectacular scenery everywhere you look like this glimpse of the city under the San Francisco side of the Bay Bridge.

Pier 39, pull in past the sea lions and tie up at the Dockside Boat & Bed.

On the Bay

There is no better place to view the sites than on the waters of the Bay. The Bay itself is fed by sixteen rivers, producing a swift outgoing current that moves more water through the Golden Gate pass than the Mississippi River Delta at New Orleans. Touring the Bay on a PWC is one of the most scenic and exhilarating rides you will experience. Bring your wetsuit! The blue waters of the bay range between 48 and 59 chilly degrees. I happened to visit the area in September, which was the most comfortable and clearest time of the year. Most of the year, the Bay is blanketed with fog, making visibility very difficult. Fortunately, I encountered crystal clear skies and unseasonably warm weather of 80 degrees.

The port side road of Embarcadero travels along San Francisco's 45 plus piers and, with some street side-stepping, the road

leads to the Presidio in the Golden Gate National Recreation Area. Local PWC enthusiasts launch their boats here from the beaches beneath the famous Golden Gate Bridge. For a breathtaking road trip along the Pacific coastline, travel down the shoreline path of the Golden Gate rec area, through Golden Gate Park, past the Zoo, and on to Fort Funston for the most pristine panoramic views on the West Coast.

Upon approaching the pier, I gazed off at Alcatraz when I thought I saw a dog swimming in the water. "What the hell is a dog doin' out here in this cold water?," I thought with a tilted head. Then it went under. Duh, Florida boy, it was a sea lion. This one wasn't a loner. Upon entering the marina, I was amazed to see a few hundred of the whiskered guys lounging on the floating docks.

The Rock was overwhelming. Alcatraz, Spanish for Island of Pelicans, towers 135 feet over the crashing waters of the Bay. I've

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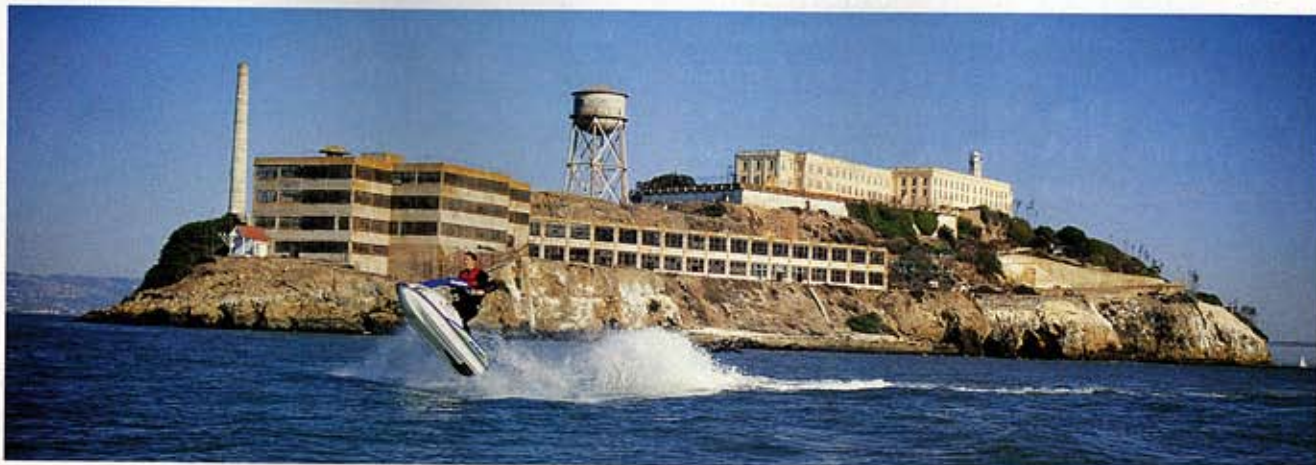


Photo: McKercher

Escaping from the Rock may have been a little easier with a Kawasaki accomplice, but taking one dip in the water may remind you why few ever braved the swim from Alcatraz to shore.



Photo: Ventura

Launching at Fort Baker provides immediate access to the Golden Gate and just outside; the open ocean. The boys at Your Scooter Shop in Menlo Park supplied us with some eager Yamaha's to tackle this assignment.

seen all the movies about this 12 acre island and since hearing of this trip I've wanted to ride in the shadows of Alcatraz in person. History interests me very much and seeing this dreaded island up-close gave me a true understanding on why it was coined inescapable.

The 5' by 9' cells were surrounded outside by multiple rows of barbed wire and up to 100 machine toting guards. If anyone was diabolical enough to make it to waters edge, they would have to scale down vertical rock cliffs and swim 2 miles through hypothermic waters to land. Alcatraz was converted from a military prison to a federal penitentiary in

1933. It was closed in 1966, because it was claimed inhumane, only during the legendary "Escape from Alcatraz" in 1962 did any prisoner leave the island, alive. Three bank robbers, Frank Lee Morris, John and Clarence Anglin tunneled out with sharpened spoons, a feat that took years and rewarded the three with never have being found. Many of America's all time most notorious criminals were kept here including Al Capone, Machine Gun Kelly, Alvin Creepy Harris, and the most famous of them all, Robert The "Birdman" Stroud. Even now, Alcatraz is every bit as scary looking as I'm sure it was for incoming criminals fifty years ago.

Having to come home with a piece of The Rock was one of my goals. How hard would it be to go grab a rock? What I didn't know was there was no beach at Alcatraz, only cliffs and, guess what? It's a federal crime to step onto the island from any other boat than the tour ferry. I left my goal alone.

On the south side of the Bridge lies the smooth sand beach of the Golden Gate Promenade. This is a great place to stop and take a quick break before heading towards the Pacific. Fort Point, directly below the bridge, ranks on my list of all time favorite wave jumping spots. The waves break steep and fast, but what makes them so cool is that when you sky and look up, there's the massive Golden Gate Bridge. To cool!

An author once described San Francisco as "every man's favorite city other than his own." I'll have to go with that. For the PWC enthusiast, San Francisco is a treat. There is so much to do and see from the water, you may very well forget about the cool things on land. Of all the places I've traveled with PWC, San Francisco offers the greatest on-water opportunity for sensory overload. Ride Fast, Ride Hard, Ride Smart. 🐣



Photo: McKercher

Members of the Extreme Watershow eatin' chocolates with Forrest at the Bubba Gump Shrimp company.

SOURCES

San Francisco Visitors Bureau
415/391-2000

Dockside Boat & Bed
415/392-5526