

San Francisco, USA



Report made by

- **Name:** Joan & Joe
- **Social media handles:** @joan_pahisa (Twitter, Instagram), @joanp (TabiFolk); @DwarfFamily (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook).
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General information of the city

- **Name of the city and country:** San Francisco, USA
- **Description:** Misty and surprisingly cool in summer, San Francisco is a fantastic melting pot of cultures. Inclusive and friendly to all, aside from having world renowned sights, such as the Golden Gate bridge, the Alcatraz prison or the cable cars, each neighborhood has its unique personality, making it a city of a thousand atmospheres.

Transportation accessibility

- San Francisco has a wide network of public transportation mainly composed of: the BART (train that connects San Francisco with the airport and the rest of the Bay Area); the MUNI Metro (it operates as a subway, although most of it goes above ground); the MUNI Buses; and MUNI Cable & Street Cars (the iconic cable cars).

- BART train stations are reportedly 100% wheelchair accessible. You can board any of the cars, although some of them have specific wheelchair spaces. These are marked with a wheelchair sign on the car's door. Here is a [map of all BART lines](#).
- Unfortunately, elevators at BART stations are frequently out of order or unusable due to people messing them up or sleeping inside.
- Also, despite BART trains being level to the platform, to board some of the doors there is a gap between the train and the platform. If the driver sees you when boarding, they will wait for you if you need to change doors.
- Disabled passengers that may require assistance on and off trains can book assistance in advance through the [Paratransit Service](#).
- All BART stations have extensive tactile pavement, as well as audio announcements for incoming trains and next stops. You can check all [accessibility related information here](#).
- The MUNI Metro is partially wheelchair accessible. All stations connecting with the BART and other stations near downtown (the underground ones) are wheelchair accessible. The T line is also fully wheelchair accessible. Here is a [map \(accessible stations are marked with a bigger circle\)](#).
- Aside from the aforementioned stations, less than 50% of the rest of the MUNI Metro is wheelchair accessible (usually one in every 3 to 4 stations). MUNI stations are not far away from each other, so it is not as bad as it may seem. Also, the gap between the MUNI trains and the platform in accessible stations is minimal, so no worries there.
- You can check for out of order elevators in the BART or MUNI and other service issues either on their official Twitter accounts or through notifications on their mobile apps.
- MUNI City Buses are 100% wheelchair accessible by means of kneeling and/or floor ramps. It is the preferred means of transport when either the MUNI Metro doesn't reach or isn't wheelchair accessible.
- Also, stop and intersection announcements are made on all buses.
- The 3 cable car lines (C, PH and PM) are not wheelchair accessible.
- The historic street car line F going along Market Street is partially wheelchair accessible, although it is more of a tourist attraction, as the BART, MUNI Metro and Buses cover similar routes. Here is a [map of accessible stops](#).
- Accessible taxis are also available in the city (at the same fare rate) and can be ordered on demand from [Luxor Cabs](#) or from other similar taxi services, such as Uber or Lyft. Here you can find a [list of phone numbers for other taxi companies operating Ramp-Taxis](#).
- Finally, all Ferry Services are wheelchair accessible, although the [GGF ferry route from San Francisco to Larkspur](#) is temporarily not accessible if you cannot use stairs.

- **Score: 3/5.** Both the city buses and the BART, the train system serving the Bay Area, are 100% wheelchair accessible, though, for BART, elevators are frequently unusable and, sometimes, you have to mind the gap between the train and the platform. As for the MUNI Metro, once it's above ground, aside from line T, which is fully accessible, only one in every 3 to 4 stations are wheelchair accessible.

Streets accessibility

- Although San Francisco is known for its steep streets, around most of the touristic areas (Downtown, Embarcadero, Chinatown, etc.), these are mostly flat or with moderate uphill slopes.
 - However, there are indeed really steep streets on many residential areas or nearby some of San Francisco's most iconic houses, such as The Painted Ladies, or parks (e.g. Dolores Park).
 - Steep streets can be mostly avoided by using city buses.
 - Sidewalks are usually wide and well-maintained and with a smooth surface made of concrete.
 - Also, all crossings have curb cuts at either 0 or nearly 0 level and have tactile pavement.
 - As for traffic lights, although once San Francisco was a leading city in traffic lights with audio signals, it has not improved much in the last decade. Here is a [list of intersections with audio signals](#).
 - Many doors that are heavy have buttons, usually marked with a wheelchair sign, to open them automatically when pushed.
 - There aren't many pedestrian only streets around the city.
 - There are barely any public restrooms.
- **Score: 4/5.** Even though San Francisco is renowned for its steep streets, most of them are not in touristic areas or can be mostly avoided or navigated with city buses. Curb cuts and tactile pavement on intersections are also widespread. Said steep streets and few pedestrian only areas near Downtown are its only downside.

Restaurants & shops

- Overall, in San Francisco, between 70 to 80% of restaurants and shops have step-free entrances. Many of the inaccessible ones have a single step.
- As for the inside, it varies a lot between restaurants. Some have little maneuvering space, while others have plenty.
- As there are plenty of options throughout the city, you should not have a problem.

- Regarding accessible restrooms, as for [California's accessibility law](#), if a restaurant, bar, shop, etc. has a restroom for the public, it needs to comply with accessibility standards. So, even though not all places have accessible restrooms, finding one is quite common.
- Also, as per a law, since 2019, restaurants, hotels and other venues in California are [required to have a website that's accessible by screen readers](#).
- **Score: 5/5.** Accessibility laws in California are one of the most advanced in the world, ensuring that finding accessible restrooms or websites accessible by screen readers for people with visual impairments, things that in most countries are optimistically rare, in San Francisco are quite common. Also, between 70 to 80% of the places have accessible entrances.

Hotels & accommodation

- Again, as per ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliance, many hotels in San Francisco are wheelchair accessible.
- However, implementation of accessible bathrooms varies a lot. For good roll-in showers, major hotel chains are recommended.
- Here is a [list of accessible hotels in San Francisco](#) (check the last section Wheelchair Accessible Hotels in San Francisco) with both good roll-in showers as well as adaptations for people with hearing impairments (keep in mind that some of the information in the other sections of the website is not up to date)
- As for other options, such as AirBnB apartments, accessibility is not as good, as many houses and older buildings in San Francisco have many steps. Double check with the host before booking.
- Unfortunately, San Francisco's hotels are quite expensive. For cheaper accommodation options, try BART connected surroundings in the Bay Area.
- If sharing a room, or having a private room with a shared bathroom, is an option for you, there is also accessible hostel type accommodation.
- **Score: 4/5.** There are many wheelchair accessible hotels in the city. Some even have accessibility features for people with hearing impairments, such as visual alarms, which are not common to find. High hotel prices, in general, are the only drawback.

Tourist attractions accessibility

- In San Francisco, all major tourist attractions are fully or partially wheelchair accessible.
- It is also common for attractions to have other accessibility features, such as accessible restrooms, leaflets in Braille, Braille guide posts, tours or visual guides available in American Sign Language, etc.

- To visit the Golden Gate bridge, city buses that get to the Welcome Center are accessible, as well as nearby viewpoints, such as Crissy Field. To reach some of them, you may have to do small detours or there may be dirt paths in the way, but they are mostly compact and ok to wheel. Also, if you want to walk the bridge, which is nearly 3km long, the Eastern walkway is wheelchair accessible. For more info on information on accessibility, you can [check the bridge's website](#).
 - As for Alcatraz Prison, the ferry from Pier 33 to go the island, operated by Alcatraz Cruises, is wheelchair accessible. The island itself is hilly and has really steep slopes. They are manageable in a power wheelchair, but manual wheelchair users will need help to reach the top where the prison tour starts. Actually, there is a tram going up the hill that is exclusive for disabled visitors. Manual wheelchair users, as well as people with mobility impairments, can board the tram, but power wheelchairs or scooters are not allowed on board due to space/weight restrictions. Once inside the prison, many areas are wheelchair accessible. There are also other accessibility features in place for people with hearing or visual impairments. You can [check them here](#), with more [details on the tram's accessibility here](#).
 - Fisherman's Warf and Pier 39, another of San Francisco's popular areas, where you can see seals chilling on the pier, is wheelchair accessible. Most of its popular restaurants are also accessible.
 - Famous Cable Cars going up steep streets in the city, as mentioned previously, are not accessible. Only some of the stops of the Street Car along Market Street are wheelchair accessible. Refer to the [Transportation section](#) for more information.
 - Ferries around the Bay Area are also wheelchair accessible and are a great way to sightsee. Only the [GGF line between San Francisco and Larkspur](#) is temporarily not accessible and, also, some of the cruises are only accessible in the lower decks (e.g. the [Blue & Gold Fleet Bay](#)).
 - Museums, such as the [California Academy of Science](#) or the [San Francisco MOMA](#), among others, are fully accessible for persons with different types of disability.
 - Finally, parks, although they may have inaccessible areas or steep slopes (e.g. the Dolores Park), always have wheelchair accessible paths. As for beaches in San Francisco, here you can check the [availability of beach wheelchairs](#) for each of them.
- **Score: 4/5.** Even if the famous historic Cable Cars of San Francisco are not wheelchair accessible, the rest of the attractions are either nearly or fully wheelchair accessible, with only minor inaccessible areas, such as some of the upper levels inside of the Alcatraz Prison or the Western walkway of the Golden Gate Bridge, which, by no means, hinder the worthiness of the visits. Also, many accessibility features, like Braille leaflets or guide posts, guides in American Sign Language or accessible restrooms, are also common in attractions.

Getting there

- The main airport of the city is San Francisco International Airport (SFO). You can get to it directly from many cities within the US and also from abroad.
- There are other airports in the Bay Area, such as the Oakland International Airport (OAK) and the Mineta San Jose International Airport (SJC).
- Assistance at the airports should be booked in advance through your airline.
- SFO has an accessible BART station that goes to the city center in about 30 minutes (Bart Yellow line). From Downtown Bart stations (Civic Center, Powell Street, Montgomery and Embarcadero) you can transfer to the MUNI Metro or to MUNI City Buses. See the [Transportation section](#) for more information on accessibility.
- From OAK to the city center, you need to take the BART Beige line and transfer to the blue or green lines at Coliseum station.
- [Accessible taxis](#) can also be requested to the taxi coordinator at SFO, although waiting times can go up to 30 minutes.
- You can also get to San Francisco from other major cities by Greyhound or FlixBus highway buses, which are also wheelchair accessible. Here are the websites with accessibility information for [Greyhound](#) and [FlixBus](#).
- **Score: 4.5/5.** There is a fast and accessible connection by BART train from San Francisco International Airport to the city center. The lack of a good long-distance train option to get to the city makes it miss out on the perfect score.

Overall accessibility score

- **Score:** 24.5/30. Overall **4.1/5 stars**.
- **Summary:** Despite the image in films of cars racing down crazy slopes, actually, San Francisco is currently one of the best destinations for accessible travel. Even if accessibility can still improve, in all of the assessed sections, except for elevator maintenance, it is top tier in the world and does not require a lot of extra planning.