

48 HOURS



The Speakeasy is part bar, part theater (left, right). The Saratoga is a new hot spot (lower right).



## Sippin' in the City by the Bay

San Francisco has always been a great place to enjoy whisky and has the history to prove it. While the inferno of the 1906 earthquake incinerated most of the city, firefighters worked overtime to save the vast whiskey warehouse of a local merchant named A.P. Hotaling. The building still stands on Jackson St., and the plaque outside displays a cheeky tribute to their effort:

*If, as they say, God spanked the town  
For being over-frisky,  
Why did He burn His churches down  
And spare Hotaling's whiskey?*

The rest of the poetry on this tour will come in a glass. No need to rent a car, because the city is small enough to walk or hail a lift or, in true Silicon Valley style, call a ride share.

### Day One

It's late morning; you've just arrived and are ready to head out on the town. First stop, the Ferry Building for a coffee at **Blue Bottle**. Enjoy the famous joe as you stroll in this bustling marketplace, because you're going to need the caffeine.

Latte in hand, enjoy the short walk just 400 paces to the north for lunch at **Hard Water**, a radiant temple of American whiskey with an airy, light-drenched interior. Gape at its towering wall of whisky, many hundred

bottles strong, while finding a stool around the horseshoe bar. If you don't commit to a whisky flight, take a Mint Julep with your fried chicken (Southern cuisine is the inspiration).

Hurry back to the Ferry Building in time to, naturally, catch a ferry. Inside, at the Bay Crossings stall, buy a ticket to Alameda and enjoy the fifteen-minute cruise before disembarking and strolling one quick mile to **St. George Spirits**, the king of California craft distilling. Do a tasting and pick up a bottle of its nuanced Baller single malt. Don't linger though, as you've got to get back to town.

Back in San Francisco, it's a fifteen-minute hike up Market St. from the ferry to **Cask**, a great place to shop for rare whiskies and cocktail ingredients. A few blocks away sits **Rickhouse**, another of the city's standout whisky bars. Dark and burnished—the ceiling's made of staves from 300 Kentucky bourbon barrels—Rickhouse is gorgeous and boozy. Try to make it before 5 p.m., because this place gets crazy with the after-work crowd.

From Rickhouse, it's a three-block walk up Sutter St. to the chic **Mystic Hotel**, which is just off Union Square. Its central location makes it an ideal spot to book a room. The real draw of the Mystic is the **Burritt Room** bar, which channels San Francisco's history in *noir* cinema and smoky intrigue. Indeed, the hotel sits right on Burritt Alley, where Sam

Spade's partner was gunned down in "The Maltese Falcon."

Put on some nice-ish clothes—no jeans or T-shirts—and a fedora, if you've got one. Grab a car to dinner at the **Comstock Saloon**, a bar dating to 1907 (renovated in 2009), with a beautifully classic vibe. A simple Manhattan or Old-Fashioned is the call and the food is a mix of French bistro and burgers.

Hurry out by 7:40, as just a few blocks away you'll find the cryptic entrance (password required) to **The Speakeasy**—a cross between a bar, interactive theater, and a time machine. After entry, you'll be confronted by



TOP LEFT: PETER LIU



Smokestack at Magnolia Brewing serves barbecue and hipsters (top). Comstock Saloon offers a classic vibe and tasty Manhattans (left). The Saratoga exterior (right).

a maze of rooms in which different storylines from the age of Prohibition unfold, played by 35 costumed actors. Move about as you wish, observing different stories. There's cabaret, casino, and complimentary period drinks. It wraps up around 11:30, leaving time for a nightcap.

Another brief car ride puts you in striking distance of your hotel and several of the city's best whisky bars. Some are just outside the gentrified zone in the slightly seedy Tenderloin District, but despite appearances, it's generally considered safe. **Whiskey Thieves** and **Bourbon & Branch** are great bars, but I'm a fan of **Tradition**, a classy space that ages and finishes classic spirits in select barrels. Try Redbreast 12 year old after a year spent in a Guinness-washed cask.

### Day Two

Today, we head to the other side of town for breakfast overlooking the bay. Grab a car to **The Ramp**, named for its popular boat ramp, and brunch outside, surrounded by sailboats while downing a spicy Bloody Mary (sub a peaty scotch for vodka). From here it's just a hop on the KT train (just paces away) to **Seven Stills**, one of the city's newest craft distillers, located in the sunny, up-and-coming Bayview District. Seven Stills' owners



specialize in whiskey distilled from their own beer, offering guests an opportunity to taste their whiskey alongside the very fermented stuff it came from, be it a hoppier India pale ale or a more exotic peanut butter milk stout.

The same train will take you back north up 3<sup>rd</sup> St. to lunch at **Smokestack at Magnolia Brewing** in the ultra-hip, industrial Dogpatch District, the former home of San Francisco's shipbuilding industry, now buzzing with hipsters. Smokestack offers tasty barbecue along with the locally famous



Magnolia beers brewed on site. Among the 200 whiskies, you'll find Smokestack's house-aged Four Roses, Henry McKenna, and Smooth Ambler Old Scout, whose barrels later flavor special beers.

From here it's a short ride to **Anchor Distilling**, which for the first time in its 24-year existence opened to the public last year. Reservations are mandatory for their guided tastings. Climb through the renowned brewery to the rooftop bar and sample their range of influential spirits. After all, as the first 100

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: ERIC WOLFFINGER, ED ANDERSON, NATALIE DARVILLE.



percent rye on the market in generations, Anchor's seminal Old Potrero ignited the rye whiskey rage way back in 1996.

Enjoy the relaxing rooftop view, because it's time for dinner at **The Saratoga**, a new heavyweight on the spirits scene. A stylish, swanky restaurant with one of the most serious spirits collections in the country, The Saratoga occupies two levels. Downstairs is an intimate, plush supper club, and that's where you want to be. Make a reservation weeks in advance to ensure you get a table.

Dinner is classic American fare, while whiskey lovers can rejoice over such rarities as Van Winkle 13 year old Family Reserve rye.

San Francisco is crazy for Japanese whisky, and there's no better place for a postprandial than at **Nihon Whisky Lounge** in the Mission. A ten-minute car ride gets you to this Tokyo-style bar, with its dark interior, smooth-grained wood paneling, and what they claim is the largest whisky selection on the West Coast, at 500 bottles. If you're still hungry, salmon sashimi

dipped in soy (no wasabi) pairs beautifully with Yamazaki 18 year old.

Finish the night with a dram at **Elixir**, a hardscrabble San Francisco saloon carrying almost 160 years of continuous bar service. Elixir wasn't as fortunate as Hotaling's warehouse; the building that stands now was rebuilt on the original site in 1906, making it a good place to raise an expert cocktail or just a bourbon and a beer to San Francisco's long love affair with whisky.

—Jordan Mackay

At craft distillery Seven Stills, you can sip whiskey and the beer it's made from (top). Cask is a destination for rare whiskey and specialty cocktail ingredients (bottom).

### Bars/Restaurants/Coffee Shops

**Blue Bottle Coffee** 1 Ferry Building #7; 510-653-3394; [bluebottlecoffee.com](http://bluebottlecoffee.com)

**Bourbon and Branch** 501 Jones St.; 415-346-1735; [bourbonandbranch.com](http://bourbonandbranch.com)

**Burritt Room and Tavern** Mystic Hotel; 417 Stockton St.; 415-400-0561; [mystichotel.com](http://mystichotel.com)

**Comstock Saloon** 155 Columbus Ave.; 415-617-0071; [comstocksaloon.com](http://comstocksaloon.com)

**Elixir** 3200 16th St.; 415-552-1633; [elixirsf.com](http://elixirsf.com)

**Hard Water** Pier 3 The Embarcadero; 415-392-3021; [hardwaterbar.com](http://hardwaterbar.com)

**Nihon Whisky Lounge** 1779 Folsom St.; 415-552-4400; [dajaniigroup.net](http://dajaniigroup.net)

**The Ramp** 855 Terry Francois St.; 415-621-2378; [theramprestaurant.com](http://theramprestaurant.com)

**Rickhouse** 246 Kearny St.; 415-398-2827; [rickhousebar.com](http://rickhousebar.com)

**The Saratoga** 1000 Larkin St.; 415-932-6464; [thesaratogassf.com](http://thesaratogassf.com)

**Smokestack at Magnolia Brewing** 2505 3<sup>rd</sup> St.; 415-864-7468; [magnoliabrewing.com/smokestack/](http://magnoliabrewing.com/smokestack/)

**Tradition** 441 Jones St.; 415-474-2284; [tradbar.com](http://tradbar.com)

**Whiskey Thieves** 839 Geary St.; 415-506-8331

### Shops

**Cask** 17 3<sup>rd</sup> St.; 415-424-4844; [caskstore.com](http://caskstore.com)

### Hotels

**Mystic Hotel** 417 Stockton St.; 415-400-0500; [mystichotel.com](http://mystichotel.com)

### Distilleries

**Anchor Distilling** 1705 Mariposa St.; 415-863-8350; [anchordistilling.com](http://anchordistilling.com)

**Seven Stills** 1439 Egbert Ave. Unit C; 415-594-4753; [sevenstillsofsf.com](http://sevenstillsofsf.com)

**St. George Spirits** 2601 Monarch St.; 510-769-1601; [stgeorgespirits.com](http://stgeorgespirits.com)

### Entertainment

**The Speakeasy** 644 Broadway; 415-891-9744; [thespeakeasysf.com](http://thespeakeasysf.com)