

ESCAPE

Mega Guide

The Press guide to everything
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THE PRESS, CHRISTCHURCH Monday, November 5, 2007

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FROTHY STUFF

The Napa Valley has plenty of beers as well as wines.

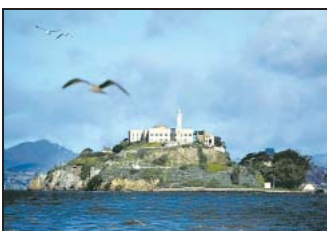
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RETRACING CHASE

Mike Deacon walks steep streets of famous movie.

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ON THE ROCK

John Glionna joins Alcatraz night watchman.

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Sausalito saunter

Standing proud, PAMELA WADE finds two-wheel electric transport a breeze as she checks out Sausalito in the San Francisco Bay area at the northern end of the Golden Gate Bridge.

You're not tourists any more," says Jeff, pointing behind us. "You're a tourist attraction." We turn to see diners in the restaurant at the bottom of the pier standing to get a better view of the five of us — and some of them have cameras.

It is understandable. Even four years after their invention, Segways, although still a novelty for most people, are the most wonderful fun and — even when ridden by middle-aged people in bike helmets — the height of cool.

The helmets are compulsory because we are in the United States, which also explains the half-hour training session, including road cones, video and the two liability waivers to sign. But the two-wheel, self-balancing, electric transport — the Segway — is a breeze to ride. Within minutes I am hankering after Jeff's special red-ignition key that allows him to rip along at 20km/h instead of the modest 14km/h that is all our blue keys permit. As we swoop and hum around the carpark, racing down the straight and practising emergency stops ("Please don't go near that Bentley!" Jeff begs), we scarcely glance at the view across the bay past Alcatraz to San Francisco's distinctive skyline: there is far too much to occupy us here at the northern end of the Golden Gate Bridge.

The little town of Sausalito is just a short ferry-ride from the city, but a world away in attitude and ambience, and there is no better way to discover this than during a guided ride along the waterfront. Behind us is our hotel, the Inn Above Tide, where we lay in morning luxury, listening to the mournful wail of foghorns, the slap of water against the building piles, and the comforting hiss of the gas fire by floor-length windows that look over subtle layers of silver and grey.

Now, though, the sky has cleared, the sun is sparkling off the waves, and we are gliding along the bike path to the other end of the harbour, where people live over the water in a quite different style. Bumping along the boardwalk we can see, through the tangle of masts belonging to the shiny



Left: waterfront promenade on Segways.

Below: view from the Inn Above Tide, mailboxes at Galilee Harbor and Waldo Point, and Sausalito houseboat
Photos: Pamela Wade



yachts in the marina, something looking totally out of place: two onion-shaped domes either side of a high-arched entrance. It is the Taj Mahal, reincarnated as a houseboat, the grandest of more than 400 clustered along Sausalito's edge in a colourful jumble.

People retreated to the water here when things got tough: after the 1849 goldrush petered out, when the 1906 earthquake and fire destroyed their houses, when the bridge took the ferry custom away, and when the shipyard closed down after World War 2. Among the early recyclers, they converted lifeboats and barges, railway carriages and huts and created a floating community that had a lively history of its own up to and including the Flower Power years of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when Sausalito was the second-coolest place on the planet, after Haight-Ashbury, according to Jeff.

Now, the flower-boxes grow roses and tomatoes, rather than anything more stimulating. With prices reaching over \$US1 million for the fancier homes, life at Galilee Harbor and Waldo Point has been gentrified — not that the blue herons poking

for frogs in the reeds have noticed.

As well as dot.com multimillionaires with a taste for the eccentric, many writers and artists live here, supplying galleries and boutiques in the pretty converted Victorian wooden houses along Bridgeway Street, where we find a fabulous collection of photographs by Rodney Lough. He specialises in wilderness scenes from the national parks in the high Sierras, but there are giant redwoods just up the road at Muir Woods. Jeff tells us about the trees as we reluctantly step off our Segways and surrender the keys. The trees can't stand alone, he explains. It's only because their roots are interlinked that they don't fall. It's a wonderful life lesson.

I see his point, but after standing alone for three hours, magically balanced by gyroscopes, I'll take the Segway any day. Getting there: Air New Zealand flies to San Francisco daily,

offering special deals as part of their Northern Lights campaign until December 15, with fares from \$NZ1762 a person all-up plus bonus Airpoints Dollars: go to www.airnewzealand.co.nz for details.

Where to stay: the Inn Above Tide has great views of San Francisco, from \$US295 a night. See www.innabovetide.com
What to do: the Segway tour is a must (also offered in San Francisco) for \$US75 a person; see www.sfelectrictour.com
Further information: www.visitcalifornia.com
Pamela Wade was a guest of Tourism California and flew courtesy of Air New Zealand.

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NORTHERN LOOP

Head south from San Francisco airport to San Jose, a sophisticated and wired-up city, home to eBay and Adobe. Santana Row has eateries and high-end boutiques, while nearby Valley Fair mall offers more realistic shopping. Hotel Valencia (www.hotelvalencia.com) is central and its Ayoma Lifespa will ease the kinks of the 12-hour flight. Crazy Winchester Mystery House has 160 rooms, more windows than the Empire State (some of them in the floor), doors to nowhere and a fascinating history.

West lies SH 49, the Golden Trail linking quirky goldrush towns like Jamestown and Angels Camp, leading to Lake Tahoe, big, blue and beautiful. At the lake's Emerald Bay,

the rocky Fannette Island view is one of the most photographed in the world. The Resort at Squaw Creek (www.squawcreek.com) is tucked into a valley filled with activity options whatever the season: biking along the Truckee River under golden trees watching trout jump is hard to beat.

Interstate 80 takes you back towards San Francisco. Stop off at Truckee to visit the Donner Memorial Museum, commemorating a short-cut in 1846 that ended in not just death but cannibalism. Drive on with renewed appreciation for the motorcar to the wine country of the Napa Valley and wind down through Marin County to Sausalito. —Pamela Wade





sunrise

Up with you in the morning.

WEEKDAYS FROM 6.30AM

