



Center of Innovation

San Jose is a hub for technology, arts and culture | By Bill Fink

Although I live only a few miles from San Jose, California, whenever I say, “I’m going to the city,” people assume I mean San Francisco. Despite the fact that San Jose is larger and has almost 200,000 more residents than its famous neighbor 50 miles to the north, it garners less attention. In fact, America’s 10th most populous city offers many attractions—good weather being just one of them. San Jose averages more than 300 sunny days per year. The city also boasts an interesting past, a dynamic present and a promising future. And its innovative food, culture and arts scenes appeal to travelers from around the world.

From Spanish Mission to Farming Center

San Jose was founded as a Franciscan mission within the Spanish empire, and the settlement’s first homes were built in 1777. The city’s current layout—spread over 178 square miles in the Santa Clara Valley—reflects its history as a farming community that developed around the mission.

You can still find evidence of that early history tucked incongruously amid the forest of glass-and-steel office buildings in downtown San Jose. The Peralta Adobe—a weathered, one-story, Spanish mission-style house constructed of 2-foot-thick adobe walls in 1797—is the last remaining structure from El Pueblo de San José de Guadalupe.

Visitors can arrange tours of the Peralta Adobe, as well as of the Thomas and Carmel Fallon House—a Victorian-style mansion built in 1855 by San Jose’s 10th mayor—which sits across West Saint



John Street from the adobe. The mansion showcases 15 fully furnished rooms typical of the Victorian period. (The Peralta Adobe and Fallon House are both maintained by the nonprofit organization History San Jose. Tours of the structures, which have been closed due to nearby construction, will resume in late April.) The few blocks surrounding these structures and St. James Park make up San Jose's historic district.

Another way to experience what San Jose was like in the late 19th and early 20th centuries is to visit the 14-acre History Park,

located at the end of Kelley Park southeast of downtown. History Park—complete with paved streets, trolleys that run on weekends, and an old-time ambiance—features 27 buildings that are reproductions of historical structures or are restored buildings relocated to the site. Visitors can pick up a park map at a replica of the 1880s-era Pacific Hotel, and wander through the assortment of homes, shops and galleries at their leisure, or take a docent-led tour of the park (reservations required). On a warm day, I enjoy stopping by the old-time O'Brien's Candy Store for an ice cream sundae.

Until the mid-20th century, San Jose was an agricultural center, a city of produce markets and canneries that packed the fruits—harvested largely by the Italian immigrant community—from the orchards of the Santa Clara Valley. Del Monte and

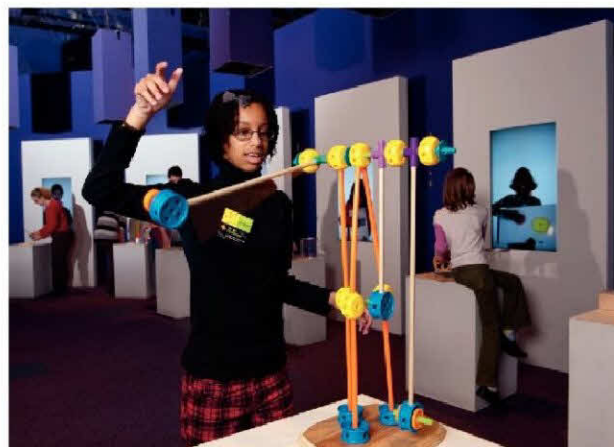
its predecessor companies were once San Jose's biggest employers, but the massive old canneries have since been torn down or transformed into residential developments such as the Plant 51 loft-condominium complex just southwest of downtown.

Much like the canneries, San Jose's Little Italy district has mostly disappeared. One relic of the now-dispersed community remains, however—Original Joe's Italian Restaurant, an old-school diner founded in downtown San Jose in 1956; the portions are huge, and the pasta and sauces authentic.

San Jose's historic connection to Mexico—the city was part of Mexico upon that country's independence from Spain in 1821 until the California territory was annexed by the United States in 1846—is still alive and well. San Jose has a vibrant Hispanic community (almost 32 percent of the total population), and the entire city celebrates Mexican culture each year with the Mariachi & Mexican Heritage Festival at the end of September. An array of mariachi bands play, in addition to popular musicians such as past performers Los Lobos, Ozomatli and Linda Ronstadt. Art exhibits, films, workshops and food round out the schedule of this popular weeklong event.

Circuit Boards and Hockey Pucks

The agricultural community evolved into a technology center as the high-tech boom took off in California in the 1970s. San Jose now bills itself as the "Capital of Silicon Valley," with the largest concentration of technology expertise in the world. More than 6,600 technology companies make San Jose their home, including major employers such as eBay, IBM, Cisco Systems, Hitachi and Adobe Systems. Tech



COURTESY: THE TECH MUSEUM

giants Apple, Google, Yahoo and Facebook are also based nearby within the valley.

There's no better way to embrace the spirit of Silicon Valley than with a visit to The Tech Museum, which highlights the people, inventions and mind-set that make the region such a hotbed of scientific and technological innovation. This large, three-story museum has an extensive array of interactive exhibits covering technology topics from computing to astronomy, and robotics to seismology.

I see kids squealing with delight as they clutch the shaking banister of an earthquake-simulation house; others shout out their high scores from light-beam target practice as they climb out of an air-jet-powered space chair. At another exhibit, families use basic computer-programming commands to power Mr. Potato Head's activities.

The nearby San Jose Museum of Art showcases the intersection of technology and creativity in some of its contemporary art exhibitions, such as "Beta Space," on view March 26 through August 14. This exhibition series will be an "experimental laboratory" of art, architecture and col-

The Vintage Wine Bar's cozy outdoor patio (opposite) is one of the appealing dining options at the Santana Row development. The Tech Challenge Gallery (above) at The Tech Museum offers 20 hands-on activities highlighting basic scientific principles.

EASY DAY TRIPS FROM SAN JOSE

SANTA CRUZ

Less than an hour's drive southwest of San Jose, the lively coastal city of Santa Cruz features the Beach Boardwalk amusement park, complete with a roller coaster and carnival-like atmosphere. Santa Cruz's beach is popular for volleyball, surfing, fishing off the long wharf, or just sitting back and enjoying some California sunshine.

MONTEREY AND HIGHWAY 1

South of Santa Cruz, the iconic Highway 1 winds along the Pacific Coast, with sweeping views of the pounding surf, rolling hills and nearby farmlands—so be sure to take it slow and stop for photos. In Monterey, visit the world-renowned Monterey Bay Aquarium, the historic Cannery Row and the nearby Pebble Beach Golf Links.

AÑO NUEVO STATE PARK

About 50 miles southwest of San Jose, this preserved seashore of rolling sand dunes and brush is home to hundreds of massive elephant seals, sea lions and cavorting sea otters. The best time to visit is during the elephant-seal mating season—December through March—when rangers lead tours to viewing platforms. Drive a dozen miles north to see Pigeon Point Lighthouse, a 115-foot-tall beacon perched at the edge of a jutting peninsula.

CAMPUS LIFE

There are a number of prominent universities in the Silicon Valley, including San Jose State University, located in downtown San Jose. Santa Clara University, four miles northwest of San Jose, was established on the site of Mission Santa Clara de Asís, the eighth of the original 21 California missions. Farther northwest in Palo Alto is the spacious green campus of Stanford University, known as "The Farm" for its agricultural origins. Stroll through the university's buildings; attend a Pac-10 football or basketball game; or go on a shopping trip to downtown Palo Alto.

—B.F.



COURTESY: SAN JOSE MUSEUM OF ART

laboration, playing off the concept of the famed "Silicon Valley garages," such as the one in Palo Alto where Bill Hewlett and Dave Packard started their company. The museum's permanent collection includes more than 2,000 paintings, sculptures, photographs and other works from the 20th and 21st centuries.

The Tech Museum and San Jose Museum of Art are just two among a host of downtown cultural attractions within walking distance of each other, including the Museum of Quilts and Textiles; the Center for the Performing Arts (home to Ballet San Jose and Broadway San Jose); the restored Art Deco-style California Theatre, where Symphony Silicon Valley and Opera San Jose perform; the San Jose Repertory Theatre; and the Children's Musical Theater, which stages productions at Montgomery Theater.

San Jose is also a sports city, home to Northern California's only professional hockey team: the perennial playoff powerhouse San Jose Sharks. The team skates at the 17,500-seat HP Pavilion (aka "The Shark Tank"), where its many all-star players strive to earn the Sharks their first Stanley Cup championship.

Soccer fans can watch the MLS San Jose Earthquakes play at nearby Santa Clara University (until the team's proposed new stadium is built).

The San Jose Museum of Art features works by contemporary artists.

For an inexpensive and fan-friendly baseball experience, I enjoy seeing the San Jose Giants Single-A team play minor-league ball in San Jose's Municipal Stadium southeast of downtown. General admission seats start at \$10; food is inexpensive; and there's always an entertaining array of promotions announced over the loudspeaker, such as "half off Martinelli's cider for five minutes if the next guy strikes out."

The dining scene in San Jose reflects the city's diverse population, with Asian, Hispanic and European ethnicities about equally represented. For example, the upscale Santana Row promenade of shops and restaurants, west of downtown, includes Singaporean food at Straits Restaurant, Indian cuisine at Amber India, and Mexican at Consuelo Mexican Bistro and El Jardín Tequila Bar & Restaurant. In downtown San Jose, the House of Siam Thai restaurant consistently wins "best of" awards for its food and authentic decor.

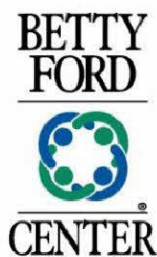
San Jose is home to the largest Vietnamese population of any U.S. city, and Little Saigon—centered on Tully and Story roads just southeast of downtown—is a great place to try *bánh mi* (sandwiches) and *pho* (noodle soup).

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Rancho Mirage, California

Organic Food and Innovative Arts

San Jose's plans for the future include a colorful nod to the past at the San Pedro Square Market. The retail development, scheduled to open later this spring, will become a hub for the local organic-food movement and will feature three market halls with dozens of vendors selling farm-fresh produce, artisan-crafted chocolate, and meat and pasta products like those one might have seen in San Jose's agricultural heyday of the 1920s.

The mixed-use indoor/outdoor space will also include restaurants, park space and several outdoor stages, set among eucalyptus and pepper trees, for evening concerts. Located next to an existing collection of bars, restaurants, theaters and cafes, the San Pedro Square Market will augment downtown's already popular entertainment, dining and shopping scene.

San Jose's lively festivals are another way to get a glimpse of the future of the city as an epicenter for food and arts. For example, the quirky SubZero Street Festival is a uniquely San Jose annual event that will return to the "SoFA" (South of First Area) downtown on June 3. Last year, Japanese Taiko drummers shared the stage with hip-hop DJs, and events included a fashion show and a moped rally.

For those who aren't in town during the festival, first-Friday art walks in SoFA showcase a dozen different galleries—each with its own slant on the modern art scene.

Whether you're in search of the San Jose of the past; want to enjoy dynamic, modern Silicon Valley culture; or hope to get a peek into the future of the city, San Jose can provide what you're looking for. The next time you visit San Jose, you'll be able to say you went to "the city." ▲

Travel writer Bill Fink lives between San Jose and San Francisco.

GETTING THERE



Alaska Airlines offers daily flights to San Jose. Book reservations at alaskaair.com or call 800-ALASKAAIR.