

## Victuals Tour

Come along as we walk (and eat) our way through the Ferry Building.

By [Matthew Stafford](#) Published on September 23, 2008 at 4:01pm

When out-of-towners ask me where they should visit when they come to San Francisco, my initial response is always the Ferry Building. North Beach and Muir Woods I get around to eventually, but my immediate, visceral recommendation is the bustling history-rich galleria where some of Northern California's most delectable snack items are gathered under one roof. In fact, on more than one occasion I've offered to escort visitors through the place myself, pointing out the nave's marble mosaic flooring, 660-foot skylight, and lovely bay views, even sharing a bit of the building's hallowed 110-year history in the bargain; and if anyone's in the mood for a scoop of gelato, a wedge of Ubriaco, and a dozen oysters as well, so be it.

Anchoring the Ferry Building at its northwest corner is Taylor's Refresher (daily 10:30 a.m.-8 p.m., 866-EAT-FOOD), the barnlike S.F. outpost of the fabled Wine Country burger joint. Unfortunately my burger (\$6) was skinny, chewy, overcooked, and cold, while my garlic fries (\$4) were on the lukewarm side and not as transcendently rich and spiky as those served at AT&T Park. A better bet is the spicy corn-and-jalapeno-ribboned tuna salad sandwich (\$8.49) sold at Taylor's takeout window.

Across the way at the building's northeast corner is the Slanted Door (lunch daily 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m., dinner 5:30-10 p.m., 861-8329), Charles Phan's sleek and elegant temple to Vietnamese fusion cuisine. The five-spiced duck confit salad (\$14) mixes up bitter baby frisée, sweet grilled figs, and crisp, lush duck meat to excellent effect, while the Vietnamese crepe (\$10), a sunshine-yellow behemoth filled to bursting with plump prawns, chunks of supple pork, and crunchy bean sprouts, is especially tasty wrapped in fresh mint and lettuce leaves and dunked in soy sauce. (You can also get spring rolls, chicken buns, and other wallet-friendly snacks at Out the Door, the restaurant's takeout counter.)

Next door is Mistral (weekdays 10 a.m.-7 p.m., Saturday 8 a.m.-5 p.m., Sunday 11 a.m.-5 p.m., 399-9751), where the ratatouille, the mac and cheese, and the white beans Provençal (\$6.25/lb. each) are all perfectly soul-satisfying, but lack oomph and zest. Happily, the Niman Ranch pork ribs (\$13/lb.) are a tender-smoky dream, basted in honey, rubbed with fennel seeds and rosemary, and luscious throughout. Just around the corner is Ciao Bella (Monday-Saturday 11 a.m.-6 p.m., Sunday 11 a.m.-5 p.m., 834-9330), purveyor of the city's finest gelato. An excellent deal is the Piccoli Gusti (\$6), six healthy scoops of whatever your fancy dictates. Recommended: brisk, snarky key lime pie ribboned with bits of graham cracker crust; fudgy, bittersweet Scharffen Berger chocolate; grapefruit Campari, bracing and bitter as a breakfast aperitivo; and a sweet-and-cool distillation of fresh apricot. Next door, Miette (weekdays 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m.-6 p.m., Sunday 11 a.m.-5 p.m., 837-0300) offers up delicate pastries like buttery, bite-sized chocolate-orange scones (75¢), spicy gingerbread cupcakes topped with cream cheese frosting (\$3), and a moist and endorphin-rich walnut brownie (\$2.50).

Your next stop is the elegant Tsar Nicoulai Caviar Cafe (Monday-Thursday 11 a.m.-7 p.m., Friday 11 a.m.-8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m.-7 p.m., Sunday 11 a.m.-5 p.m., 288-8630), where you can (delicately) scoop a creamy chive-ribboned, truffle-infused scrambled egg from an eggshell, crème fraîche and a healthy dollop of locally farmed Osetra balanced on top: a nice little snack for \$12. Meanwhile, the aforementioned Scharffen Berger (weekdays 10 a.m.-8 p.m., Saturday 8 a.m.-8 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m.-5 p.m., 981-9150) offers a wide array of rich, deep, decadent delights, including the world's finest turtle (\$1.50), half a dozen jumbo pecan halves loosely bound together with creamy, buttery caramel and dark, devilish bittersweet chocolate.

Across the aisle is the Farm Fresh to You organic greengrocer (Monday-Friday 10 a.m.-7 p.m., Saturday 8 a.m.-6 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m.-5 p.m., 834-9981) and its juice bar and takeout counter. Opt for the veggie sandwich (\$8), a bountiful Earth-friendly mega-meal with grilled zucchini and sweet peppers, silky avocado, and fresh mozzarella

melting together between slices of herb-flecked panini. Head east a few yards and you'll find the building's two oyster bars sharing the same spectacular bay view. Ferry Plaza Seafood (Tuesday-Friday 10 a.m.-7 p.m., Saturday 8 a.m.-6 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m.-5:30 p.m., 274-2561) serves up a wonderfully thick and briny bowl of chowder (\$5), a smoked salmon sandwich on rye packed with creamy lox and a touch of brown mustard (\$13.50), and a daily-changing selection of oysters on the half shell (\$22/dozen) accented with the house's rich, lusty cocktail sauce. The Hog Island Oyster Co. (weekdays 11:30 a.m.-8 p.m., weekends 11 a.m.-6 p.m., 391-7117) has chowder and oysters, too, but its pièce de resistance may be the house grilled cheese sandwich (\$11), an unholy molten mess of mezzo secco, Gruyère, and fromage blanc with housemade pickles on the side.

Around the corner, the Golden Gate Meat Company (weekdays 7 a.m.-7 p.m., Saturday 7 a.m.-5:30 p.m., Sunday 8 a.m.-5 p.m., 983-7800) bakes miniature chicken, beef, or turkey pies (\$6 each) with buttery crusts and warm, peppery fillings that are surprisingly short on protein. But next door's Acme Bread Co. (weekdays 6:20 a.m.-7:30 p.m., weekends 8 a.m.-7 p.m., 288-2978) not only bakes artisan breadstuffs of uncommon quality, it also prepares a killer sandwich (\$5) involving paper-thin potatoes; a sweet, earthy pesto; creamy paneer cheese; and a fresh, crusty baguette, while LuLu Petite (Monday-Saturday 8 a.m.-6 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m.-5 p.m., 362-7019) cooks up a BLT (\$8.25) and a caramel-ribboned chocolate brownie (\$2.25), both of which may be the finest in the land in their respective fields.

The fish taco (\$4.75) served at Traci des Jardins' Mijita (Monday-Wednesday 11 a.m.-7 p.m., Thursday-Friday 11 a.m.-8 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m.-8 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m.-4 p.m., 399-0814) is exemplary — nothing but moist, crunchy, lightly battered rock cod stuffed in a soft corn tortilla with shredded cabbage and a touch of cilantro. At the adjacent Delica rfi Japanese deli (weekdays 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m.-6 p.m., Sunday 11 a.m.-5 p.m., 834-0344) you can feast on an almost overwhelming kaki-age (\$3.75), a big spiky globe of white prawns and shredded edamame, carrots, burdock, and onions wrapped in crunchy tempura, but the Meyer Ranch roast beef sushi (\$2 a piece) is a nice, lusty change of pace. Even better is the porcheta di testa sandwich (\$8) from Boccalone (weekdays 9 a.m.-7 p.m., Saturdays 8 a.m.-6 p.m., Sundays 11 a.m.-5 p.m., 433-6500), shards of fat-streaked, garlicky, peppery pig's head with pungent greens and creamy provolone served piping hot from the panini press.

At the Imperial Tea Court (Tuesday-Friday 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Saturday 8 a.m.-6 p.m., Sunday 11 a.m.-5 p.m., 544-9830), a wood-paneled oasis of relative quietude, you can sip a cup of Imperial White Peony while nibbling on a platter of almond cookies, ginger almonds, spiced raisins, and green tea pumpkin seeds (\$7.50). Across the concourse at Recchiuti Confections (weekdays 10 a.m.-7 p.m., Saturday 8 a.m.-6 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m.-5 p.m., 834-9494), beautifully rendered chocolates of great imagination are displayed like baubles at Tiffany. The fleur de sel caramel, bergamot tea, and lemon verbena (\$1.25 each) are as mind-expanding as any good narcotic and are especially recommended.

With only a few more venues to explore, it's time to amp up your energy level with a bomboloni from I Preferiti di Boriania (weekdays 8 a.m.-8 p.m., weekends 8 a.m.-6 p.m., 402-0421), which is like the best jelly doughnut you've ever tasted, a cloud of fried dough sprinkled with sugar and filled with sweet-tart raspberry jam. The fudgy, bittersweet chocolate-filled variety is good, too. Next up: Mastrelli's Delicatessen (weekdays 10 a.m.-6 p.m., Saturday 8:30 a.m.-6 p.m., 397-3354), home of the turkey basil special sandwich (\$9), an earthy taste of the Mediterranean packed with mozzarella, sun-dried tomatoes, sweet peppers, and housemade pesto. Grab a delicate peach button cookie (\$1.25) and a ridiculously sweet and juicy August Fire nectarine (\$3.90/lb.) at Frog Hollow Farm (weekdays 7 a.m.-5 p.m., Saturday 7 a.m.-6 p.m., Sunday 9 a.m.-5 p.m., 445-0990), then sit yourself down at the long communal table in Boulettes Larder (weekdays 8 a.m.-6 p.m., Saturday 8 a.m.-2:30 p.m., Sunday 10 a.m.-3 p.m.; no sit-down meals served Saturday or weekdays 10:30-11:30 a.m. or after 2:30 p.m., 399-1155) and feast on a succulent, fat-ribboned inch-thick filet of braised pork belly limned with thyme, carrots, and onions (\$12.50) with walnut sourdough toast and blackberry jam on the side (\$5.50).

The Ferry Building's southwest anchor is the casually elegant MarketBar saloon and restaurant (weekdays from 11:30 a.m., weekends from 9 a.m., 434-1100). On a sunny Saturday, it's nice to sit at one of the sidewalk tables, nosing on poached eggs, sweet tomatoes, Swiss chard, and soft polenta (\$13.75), watching the streetcars and strollers and tourists off the ferryboats, listening to the steel band and the clinking of glassware and the chimes of the clock towering above. And wondering if there's room for one more scoop of gelato.