



Guest Senior Travel Writer AAL, Omaha NE: Just about everywhere you look in all directions is a beautiful view. Tony Bennett sings about it:

*I left my heart in San Francisco.
High on a hill, it calls to me.
To be where little cable cars
Climb halfway to the stars!*

If I had to choose just a few spots in the beautiful city, it would be difficult, but here's my attempt. Now in my 90s, my memories go way, way back to September 1945. After service in the Philippines, and the war just ended, I was on a troop ship returning about 3,000 Navy and Marine veterans to the States.

Some of the guys had been overseas for more than three years, including newly-freed POWs. As we entered the bay and saw the magnificent Golden Gate Bridge loom up from the mists, we knew we were home. Some lined up at the railing, waved and yelled at the top of our voices. Others just stood there silent, while brushing away tears.

We had made it through the war! Just weeks before in the Philippines, the U.S. was assembling an enormous fleet and a million troops for the final battle, the air and amphibious assault on the Japanese home islands. D-Day, along with staggering casualties, was expected to be in late 1945. The cynical quote about eventual homecoming then was: Golden Gate in '48.

I also choose Fisherman's Wharf as a prime San Francisco must-see. It's an obvious tourist trap, with all kinds of souvenir clothing, overpriced restaurants and retail shops. However, it still has the look, smell and feel of a quaint fishing village. If you're in the right (and reasonable) Wharf restaurant, order delicious meals of super-fresh seafood just hauled in a few hours ago.

The pier itself is enjoyable, and has beautiful views of the Bay, Alcatraz Island and the Golden Gate Bridge. If you're lucky, you'll visit during one of the frequent outdoor music festivals, including everything from rock to Bach.

Tony Bennett sang about the ancient but still thrilling, cable cars of San Francisco. To see the city from the very top of Nob Hill to bottom at Market Street or Fisherman's Wharf, just jump aboard one of the cars.

The two main cable car routes are the California Street line, with scenic views of Chinatown and the residential streets on up to the top of the hill at the Fairmont and Mark Hopkins Hotels. The Powell-Hyde cars go through the business and theater areas, and both meet at the turnaround at the Wharf.

Chinatown is a favorite San Francisco experience. Enter through a fancy, dragon-festooned gate at Bush and Grant, and you're immediately immersed in the world's largest Chinese community outside of China itself. The streets, stalls and stores are always festooned with bright red, white and yellow decorations. If you're there on holiday and parade days, you can experience the dancing dragons and fireworks.

Whenever we're in town and wander this area, we look for the most out-of-the-way little family restaurant we can find, usually down or up a flight of stairs from the street. The pricey, touristy Chinese places are OK, but for authentic ethnic food, you want to go to where the locals meet and eat.

Of course, San Francisco is not limited to just five bright sights. There are hundreds more, and when you're on your next visit to one of the world's most beautiful cities, be sure to savor every one of them.