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Seeing San Francisco From a Different Angle

By **NAN K. CHASE**

SAN FRANCISCO — As fires raged downtown after the 1906 earthquake, residents of this city fled to two nearby districts to the south, Bernal Heights and Glen Park. Though part of [San Francisco](#), both areas looked more like countryside then, with open ranchland, vineyards and orchards, dirt roads and wetlands, and a few houses. The windswept peaks above Glen Park were called Little Switzerland.

Many of the earthquake refugees wound up settling there, and both neighborhoods also attracted waves of new immigrants. Today, Glen Park and Bernal Heights, two distinctive communities little more than a mile apart and accessible on foot from the Glen Park BART train station, retain a self-contained village atmosphere as well as some of their wild, open vistas.

Visitors to San Francisco can linger two or three days off the tourist track in this hilly and little-known tangle of streets, [hiking](#), picnicking on fresh [California](#) fare and working up an appetite for the dozens of international restaurants and cafes they'll find.

With a jog to trendy Noe Valley to the north and a side trip to the nearby [Mission Dolores](#), the itinerary includes both the hip and the historical. It's a San Francisco even some natives don't know. Hotels are scarce, but house and apartment rentals are even better, since they make it possible to shop at local specialty food shops and cook at home.

Bernal Heights Natural Area, a 24-acre knob of red Franciscan chert that rises from a sea of colorful row houses like the prow of a ship, has a 360-degree view of San Francisco in its pastel glory. The city ripples into the distance in all directions: from the downtown skyscrapers and Golden Gate mist to Candlestick Park and the industrial East Bay, and to San Bruno Mountain to the south.

As one of the city's largest off-leash dog parks, this park, elevation 433 feet, attracts mostly locals who come to get a daily dose of fresh air for themselves or their pets. Wildflowers around the margin shelter small [birds](#) and mammals and butterflies. Hawks hunt overhead (and owls at night), and the whole area lies in the Pacific Flyway for migratory birds.

There are many approaches to the Bernal Heights park, notably from the south and west on the many side streets off Cortland Avenue — the neighborhood's commercial artery — or off Mission Street, its western boundary (except for Mitchell's Ice Cream parlor a block farther west, at 688 San Jose Avenue). An easy approach is Bernal Heights Boulevard which circles the park. The 24th Street Mission BART stop is actually closer to Bernal Heights than is the Glen Park station, but the walk from there has little scenic appeal.

Highlights of Cortland Avenue include Good Life Grocery, which stocks sourdough bread, cheese, chocolate, fruit, wine and other picnic supplies; Moonlight Cafe and Crepe House for a hearty brunch; and

the sunny Red Hill Books for an upbeat selection of new and used titles.

More so than Bernal Heights, Glen Park feels like a real town, with a dry cleaner, a hardware store, a library branch, liquor stores and a first-rate greasy-spoon diner. But there are also superb restaurants, specialty groceries large and small, and a landmark bookstore and performance space.

The neighborhood's main attraction, however, is Glen Canyon Park, a 70-acre swath of city-owned wilderness nestled in a sweeping ravine and just out of sight of several major roads.

Beginning about six blocks up from the Glen Park BART station, at the end of Bosworth Street, a trail just under a mile long ascends steadily through dense creekside forest, then over a meadow dotted with trees and boulders — a place for sunbathing or bird-watching — and finally to a nearly hidden shopping center with yet more good eating and million-dollar views of downtown San Francisco far below.

A good day's outing from Glen Park starts with breakfast at Tyger's, a [coffee](#) shop at the corner of Diamond and Chenery Streets, north of the BART station, or at the fragrant and light-washed Destination Baking Company, a block east. Then, shop for picnic provisions at Canyon Market, on Diamond, followed by a leisurely hike up Glen Canyon.

Next, descend steep walkways around Diamond Heights Boulevard and Gold Mine Drive, through the rainbow-hued residential streets of Noe Valley for a coffee break on 24th Street or lower Castro, then back to Glen Park for dinner.

The 24th Street and adjacent Church Street commercial districts in Noe Valley are home to specialty groceries like Drewes Brothers Meats, 24th Street Cheese Company and Church Produce.

For a very different Glen Park tour, walk downhill (east) on Bosworth Street from the BART station, then left on Mission Street to St. Mary's Avenue. There, the impressive Old World profile of St. John the Evangelist [Roman Catholic Church](#) towers over quiet streets where thousands of recent immigrants have made their homes alongside generations of longtime San Franciscans.

The nearby Manila Oriental Market on Mission Street offers a supermarket-size assortment of Asian groceries for this new population, including a selection of exotic seafood, both in tanks and on ice.

It's another example that away from San Francisco's worthwhile but overcrowded tourist stops, the city remains fresh and unpredictable in these two ever-changing and compact communities.

IF YOU GO

WHERE TO EAT

Le P'tit Laurent Bistrot Français, 699 Chenery Street (Glen Park); (415) 334-3235, [leptitlaurent.com](#), serves dinner daily.

La Corneta Taqueria, 2834 Diamond Street (Glen Park); (415) 469-8757, [lacorneta.com](#), serves lunch and dinner daily, eat in or take out. Seafood and other Mexican specialties; tacos are \$1.65 to \$5.50, combination plates \$9.25 to \$13.75.

Osha Thai Cafe, 2922 Diamond Street (Glen Park); (415) 586-6742, oshathai.com, lunch and dinner daily; lunch \$11-13, dinner \$13-17, extensive noodle soup menu.

Moonlight Cafe and Crepe House, 634 Cortland Avenue (Bernal); , serves breakfast and lunch daily until 6 p.m. Monday to Friday, until 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Sweet or savory crepes, \$6 to \$9; cheeseburger with caramelized onions and port-wine cheddar, \$10.

Clay Oven Indian Cuisine, 1689 Church Street (near Bernal Heights); (415) 826-2400, clayovensf.com, serves lunch and dinner daily. Clay-oven-cooked entrees are \$11 to \$17.

El Paisa Restaurante, 3322 Mission Street (Bernal Heights); (415) 550-0557, elpaisasf.com, serves a hearty Honduran and Salvadoran menu with friendly service; breakfast, lunch and dinner daily. Breakfast \$6 to \$10, soups \$7 to \$14, seafood entrees \$11 to \$25.

LOCAL FOOD SHOPS

Good Life Grocery, 448 Cortland Avenue (Bernal); Canyon Market, 2815 Diamond Street (Glen Park); Destination Baking Company, 598 Chenery Street (Glen Park); Manila Oriental Market, 4175 Mission Street (near Glen Park); 24th Street Cheese Company, 3893 24th Street (Noe Valley); Drewes Brothers Meats, 1706 Church Street; and Church Produce, 1798 Church St.

WHERE TO STAY

The Noe Valley Voice online (noevalleyvoice.com) lists homes to rent, as does Vacation Rentals by Owner (vrbo.com).

WHAT TO DO

Bird & Beckett Books & Records, 653 Chenery Street (Glen Park), (415) 586-3733, birdbeckett.com. New and used books, specializing in [San Francisco](#) history and culture, and appearances by poets and musicians.

[Mission Dolores](#), 3321 16th Street (near Bernal); (415) 621-8203, missiondolores.org, founded in 1776, is open daily. Suggested donation is \$5.

Neighborhood festivals include Fiesta on the Hill, usually in October, sponsored by the Bernal Heights Neighborhood Center (bhnc.org), and the Glen Park Festival (glenparkfestival.com), usually in April, both with lots of [music](#).

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