Chinatown Walking Tour

Chinatown Gate: Grant Ave. at Bush. This 1970 addition to the Chinatown entrance marks the transition from Union Square. Beyond you'll see the Dragon Lights, ornate streetlights added in 1925.

St. Mary's Church: Grant at California. Its granite foundations came from China and its bricks came "around the Horn" with the gold seekers.

Eastern Bakery: 720 Grant Avenue. Opened in 1924, this is the United States' oldest Chinese bakery. Moon cakes are their specialty, with lighter melon filling or rich lotus-seed paste.

Portsmouth Square: Kearny Street between Clay and Washington (one block down Clay off Grant). You'll often find old men playing elephant chess here, and sometimes they draw quite a crowd.

Retrace your steps on Clay Street. Just past Grant, you'll find **Waverly Place**.

Waverly Place is often called the Street of the Painted Balconies, but it wasn't built for tourists. On this two-block-long street, you'll find a dry cleaner, travel agency, employment agency two funeral businesses and two temples.

If you like musical instruments, detour to **Clarion Music Center** by going left on Waverly. They have drums, cymbals, flutes, Tibetan singing bowls and many unusual instruments.

Tien Hou Temple: The smell of temple incense is one of Chinatown's sensory treats, and you'll find plenty of it on the top floor at **125 Waverly Place**, in a temple dedicated to the Goddess of Heaven. They don't mind respectful visitors and admission is free, but make a donation, just to be polite. Nearby at 109 Waverly, is Norras Temple, the city's oldest Buddhist temple.

Cross Washington, turn left and make a quick right into **Ross Alley**. Listen. If you hear soft, clacking sounds, it's probably someone shuffling Mah Jhong tiles.

Golden Gate Fortune Cookie Factory: 56 Ross Alley. It's not what you might expect of a factory, but more like a Rube Goldberg invention gone awry. Some people think the staff rude, and they'll give about 30 seconds to look around before insisting you buy something. Just smile, buy some and watch the cookies being made.

Sam Bo Trading Company: 50 Ross Alley. This small shop sells Buddhist and Taoist religious items, Buddha statues, incense and paper goods burned in tribute to ancestors and the gods. A pack of handmade paper printed in gold makes an inexpensive, beautiful souvenir, costing less than a dollar.

At the end of Ross Alley, go left on Jackson to Stockton and turn right.

Chinese Markets cluster here, heaped with Asian fruits and vegetables and crowded with people shopping, arguing over asparagus, wrangling over radishes and shaking eggplant to see if it's firm.

Chinese Funerals: One of San Francisco's most multicultural events, Chinese funeral processions start at Green Street Mortuary, near Stockton and Columbus. A brass band playing traditional Christian music precedes an open convertible bearing a large photograph of the deceased, followed by the hearse and other vehicles. More important funerals go through Chinatown; others go straight down Columbus.

Ten Ren Tea Shop: 949 Grant Avenue. Buying Chinese tea can be a bewildering experience. Ten Ren helps by giving samples.