

## San Francisco, California

### THE ELEMENTS

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### ~ what to expect ~

The Elements is the best hostel in San Francisco.

A noticeable void had marred this city's hostelling scene. The City by the Bay had plenty of hostels. (I researched 15.) But none had what it took to warrant a solid recommendation. Given that more hostellers visit San Francisco than any other location in the United States, that was a very distressing state of affairs.


But there's no longer any reason to be distressed. The Elements has most everything I like to see in a hostel – and a generous helping of extras.

Ethnic, interesting and safe, the neighborhood is a hosteller's delight. This is a predominantly Latin area. References to El Salvador and Mexico abound in merchants' advertisements and this influence surrounds the hostel. Several colorful murals decorate nearby buildings and some of the city's best tapas restaurants are just around the corner. Additionally, a nighttime walk around the neighborhood confirmed locals' certainty of its safety. Streets are empty of the panhandlers, homeless people and scary sorts that you almost expect to find in cities these days. This part of town is a bit off most beaten tourist paths. However, a city bus stops out front and a subway station is just a couple of blocks away. You can use either type of transport to zip down to the wharf.



The hostel itself earns high marks, too. Each floor is painted a bright signature color and the brand-new facility has a clean, contemporary feel. Bedroom choices include dorms with just two sets of bunk beds or private rooms that have either one queen-size bed or one set of bunk beds. All of the beds have new spring mattresses. No foam cots here! Each bedroom also has a television and its own private bath. Bathrooms sparkle with polished silver hardware and bright white tiles. (*cont'd on p. 56*)

## ~ fast facts ~

<b>Dorm Rates:</b>	\$19–24	<b>Season:</b>	all year
<b>Private Rooms:</b>	\$58 (twin bunks), \$60 (queen-size bed)	<b>Office Hours:</b>	24 hours
<b>Credit Cards:</b>	MasterCard & Visa	<b>Lock-out:</b>	n/a
<b>Network:</b>	n/a	<b>Size:</b>	30 dorm beds & 7 private doubles
<b>Beds:</b>	spring mattresses		
<b>Kitchen:</b>	limited (microwave & refrigerator only)		
<b>Bathrooms:</b>	private, house-style		
<b>Lockers:</b>	yes		
<b>Extras:</b>	free Internet, free breakfast, free linens and towels, rooftop deck, in-room TV, laundry, onsite café/bar/ restaurant		
<b>Be Aware:</b>	no dishes or stove in kitchen; \$20 cash key deposit		
<b>In The Area:</b>	Edgy political murals reflect neighborhood ethnic heritages & issues; nearby public transport to Fisherman's Wharf and Alcatraz tours, Chinatown, Nob Hill, Haight-Ashbury district & Golden Gate park/bridge. Tours can be booked for Napa wine country and Yosemite National Park.		
<b>Local Tip:</b>	Popular Spanish tapas restaurants/bars on Valencia; This safe, working-class Latin neighborhood has recently been "discovered" by young white professionals who are buying up property.		
<b>Closest Free Internet:</b>	onsite		
<b>Parking:</b>	garage parking behind the hostel, subway 2 blocks away, bus stop in front of hostel		

## is this hostel great for you?

**SOLO WOMEN** Yes. Safe neighborhood.

**PARTY ANIMALS** Yes. Nice bar/restaurant attached to hostel.

**OVER 30** Yes. Diverse, interesting part of the city.

**OVER 50** Yes. Each room has a private bathroom.

**COUPLES** Yes. Private rooms with one queen-size bed available.

**FAMILIES** Yes. A family can use an entire 4-person dorm room.

**GROUPS** Yes. This is a large hostel, well-suited for groups.

## California, San Francisco



Plans are underway to open a bar on the hostel rooftop, which has a grand view of the city. For the time being, it's very suitable for sunbathing. (This section of town is blessed with rays even when the rest of town is cloud-covered.)

As if the hostel and the location weren't enough, the owner provides guests with an abundance of extra services. Linens and towels are free, Internet access is free and a tasty continental breakfast is provided free of charge in the attached café. Guests can enjoy their breakfast indoors or carry it to one of the little outdoor tables. During the day, a light lunch can be purchased at the casual café. At night, however, a hip, two-story restaurant next door to the hostel commands all the attention. Dress to impress. Meal prices are too steep for hostellers, but it's a nice place to splurge on a drink. (The owner has even been known to distribute free drink coupons to hostel guests.) Both the café and restaurant/bar are open to the public.

The only section of the hostel that needs work is the kitchen, which takes minimalism to a whole new level. A microwave and refrigerator are available, but I didn't find a stove, sink, pots and pans or even dishes. The owner indicated that he intends to correct this deficiency. I'll overlook it for now, since he's done everything else just right.