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San Francisco

*Fisherman's Wharf, Coastal Trail,
Cable Car Museum* / **BY JO PIAZZA**

1. **Standing inside** the Musée Mécanique in the Fisherman's Wharf neighborhood, I feel like I've been transported back in time. There are more than 300 vintage items here, from coin-operated pianos to coin-operated antique arcade games, all of which visitors can play. Several items in the collection date to the 1880s, including a praxinoscope device that makes a sequence of still images look like they're moving.

I've brought my most skeptical friend with me, someone who thinks the wharf area caters only to out-of-towners. I direct him toward Laffing Sal, a 6-foot-tall mechanical doll that does exactly what her atypically spelled name

suggests. She laughs at you, cackles really. She's wonderful and terrifying all at once. "You win," my friend tells me. He's also enthralled by the vintage fortune-telling machines, the mechanical musical instruments and the black-and-white-photo booths at this family-owned arcade on Taylor Street.

Pulitzer Prize-winning writer William Saroyan once said: "If you're alive, you can't be bored in San Francisco. If you're not alive, San Francisco will bring you to life."

The Fisherman's Wharf community, with its bustle of activity, is a great example of an enlivening experience. Recreational options also include a carousel

handcrafted in Italy, Madame Tussauds San Francisco, Ripley's Believe It or Not! San Francisco, and the Aquarium of the Bay—plus phenomenal views of the Golden Gate Bridge, Alcatraz and Angel Island.

I recommend starting a visit at The Buena Vista cafe on Hyde Street—the place where Irish coffee was allegedly perfected in America in the mid-20th century. If you're craving chowder in a sourdough bread bowl, brave the lines at the Blue Mermaid for perhaps the creamiest concoction on the bay.

Grab a bucket of Trish's Mini Donuts for dessert as you stroll down Pier 39 to visit some loud and playful neighborhood residents: the sea lions. Locals and visitors alike can't help but smile at these boisterous beasts of the bay.