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New wave  
*San Francisco*  
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**Preface**  
The City by the Bay might not be the first place you think of when it comes to board wax and banana smoothies but San Francisco's reputation among surfers is now as high as the waves it boasts. Paddle boarding and kite surfing are on the up, too; forget wearing flowers in your hair and just bring a wetsuit instead.

Board-sports enthusiasts in the US usually wax lyrical about the waves of southern California or Hawaii but San Francisco is muscling in with a thriving scene. The 5km Ocean Beach stretch on the western edge of the city, where pastel-coloured houses lend a seaside vibe and there's a smattering of surf shops, is an official surf hangout.

The best spots to ride the San Fran waves are Kelly's Cove and the two sections where Sloat Boulevard and Pacheco Street hit the beach. In 2011, Ocean Beach was the venue of the Rip Curl Pro Search event, one of the world's most iconic board contests.

"We have waves all year round unlike most places, including the North Shore in Hawaii," says Bob Wise, a surf guru who opened his first shop, Wise Surfboards, in 1968. Beginners learn at schools in the surrounding towns of Pacifica and Bolinas, where the conditions are gentler. Surf Camp Pacifica is headed by two certified lifeguards, Greg and Amy Gubser, offering weekend surf camps for all ages. Stand-up paddle boarding (known locally as SUP) had a boost in the Bay Area in 2010 with the opening of a rental outlet, Bluerush Board-sports, in the town of Sausalito. "If you're fitted with the right size board and have any co-ordination whatsoever you won't fall in," says Stephen Pugh, Bluerush's owner.

Surprisingly, summer isn't the most favourable time of year for surfing and SUP because wind and fog stream over the city; autumn, with its balmy weather, is ideal. The prime season for kite surfing, on the other hand, is March to September. "San Francisco is probably one of the best spots in the world for wind consistency," says Ovi Banuta, head of the Kite415 centre, which offers lessons near the city. No matter what type of board you like to ride, San Francisco's bay is full of them. — (M)

