

Golden Gate Park is a timeless magic kid and adult wonderland in the middle of the big, crowded City by the Bay. The park has been a fun and recreation area for more than 100 years, a quiet wooded haven for San Franciscans who need to get away from the stone, steel, cement and traffic-jammed streets. The 1,000-acre park is a strip of lush green that rolls from Stanyan Street to the shores of the Pacific Ocean.

Once inside, there are virtually endless activities for every member of the family, from infants to grandparents. Hiking, jogging and bike trails circle through the beautiful scenery. For the sports enthusiast, a nine-hole golf course beckons, as well as fields for football, soccer, baseball and lawn bowling. A riding academy offers horseback experiences for kids and adults. There's also a spacious greenhouse, presenting under its glass coverings hundreds of exotic trees and plants from all over the world.



The park's prime tourist attraction for photo and video shooting is the Japanese Tea Garden, complete with its traditional arched walking bridge in an idyllic pond setting of exotic plants and flowers. On almost any day, visitors will see happy bridal parties enjoying this memorable site. Nearby is the California Academy of Sciences, featuring a Conservatory of Flowers, Planetarium and hundreds of historic artifacts and hands-on activities for children.

At the deYoung Museum of Fine Art visitors may enjoy collections of paintings and sculpture from both traditional and contemporary artists. For the younger kids and adults who think young, there's a traditional carousel, and a family of rare American buffalo roaming on their own large field.

We were fortunate one recent summer to be visiting San Francisco during Golden Gate Park's annual Renaissance Faire. This year's event, the sixth annual one, is scheduled for August 29 and 30. You'll find it compete with characters, costumes and activities from the Shakespeare era. It is, of course, located in the beautiful Shakespeare Garden area of the park. The theme presents young Will arriving in Londontown to start his career as an actor and playwright.

In the pageant's wanderings, young Will meets various characters, including young Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, Hamlet and others, whom we immediately recognize as future subjects of Will's plays. There were other enactments throughout the Faire, with nearly a thousand costumed characters doing their entertaining Shakespeare era routines, often gathering visitors together to sing and quote passages from Will's writings. There were also wandering minstrels, dance

troupes, clowns, jugglers and magicians.

Everyone got into the spirit of the presentation, including, of course, Queen Elizabeth I herself. The costumed scenes were a bit bizarre at times when camera-pointing 21st Century tourists elbowed themselves among First Century murderers of Julius Caesar, 12th Century dramatic love sessions and the fatal duel scene between Hamlet and Laertes.

The food court offered Shakespeare-era foods, including roasted exotic peacock and swan legs. They were actually limbs from domestic chickens and turkeys, but no animal rights people showed up to challenge the situation. The drinks served in metal cups were advertised as mead, rum, ale and grog, but were actually sweet cider and orange juice.

The Faire's main action attractions included a jousting contest, which looked very authentic. The troupe was a well-trained crew called the Knights of Avalon, who regularly put on such events in Las Vegas, Disney parks and other venues throughout the country. Like well-trained pro wrestlers, they put on some exciting and realistic-looking mock horse, lance and knight battles that thrilled kids and adults alike.

Another expert group, called St. Michael's Salle d'Armes, presented a sword and epee demonstration. After their performances, they invited kids and adults from the audience to learn some of the fine art of dueling.

No matter where or when you go to Golden Gate Park, even when there are no special events, you'll find hundreds of fun activities and scenic attractions to enjoy. And they're especially for kids and those grizzled greyheads among us who never really wanted to grow up.