How to Live Like a Local @ Greenbuild

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San Francisco Ferry Building

I've been both attending Greenbuild and distributing San Francisco visitor info for over ten years, so this blog post feels like it's been a decade in the making. As both a long-time resident and a member of the USGBC Northern California Chapter's Host Committee, let me be the first to welcome you to the city by the Bay (just please don't call it Frisco). Here's my two cents on how to live like a local and make the best of your visit:

TIP # 1: Bring layers and an umbrella. This time of year our weather can be anything from a 40 degree downpour to 70 degrees and sunny. The Greenbuild week looks mostly good so far – fingers crossed! – but check the weather before packing and think layers, layers, layers, and bring comfortable walking shoes. The area around the convention center is very pedestrian friendly.

TIP # 2: Take transit. Unless it's very early or very late, BART is a great way to get to and from SFO and downtown. (You can also use it for Oakland Airport, but you need to take the $3 "Air BART" shuttle from the terminal to the station.) BART is a commuter rail, with different fare prices depending on your destination. It's $1.75 within the city, or $8.25 to/from SFO. (There's an extra airport surcharge buried in there.) Buy a ticket from a fare machine – you can add any amount over $1.75, so consider paying for more than one ride in advance if you know you'll use it. Always keep your ticket, as you'll need it to both enter and exit the fare gates.

The BART system is not to be confused, however, with the SF Muni system, which includes buses (named with numbers) and the "underground". The latter are trolleys (titled with letters) that traverse the downtown area below grade but ride at street level in the outer neighborhoods. The Muni downtown map is great for navigating many of the most popular parts of the city. Muni fares are $2 for two hours, including transfers (except for cable cars). Pay cash for the bus, or buy a ticket for the bus or trolley. Hold onto your transfer or ticket; guards will occasionally ask to see proof of ticket purchase. Muni has one of the most diverse fleets in the world.

Want the best views of the city? Take a ferry from the Ferry Building (that name's no joke) to Sausalito, Tiburon, or Angel Island.

TIP # 3: Eat well, eat sustainably. This is one is easy – not only does the Bay Area have some of the best foodie culture around, from top rated Michelin restaurants to local food trucks, we also boast a rigorous Green Business certification program. The USGBC Northern California Chapter's Host Committee pushed to get businesses certified by Greenbuild. Even better, they also negotiated Greenbuild attendee discounts and set up a raffle at the Host Committee booth for free food, goods, and gift certificates. Many of our food resources meet sustainable food criteria, including "Off the Grid" food trucks, farmer's markets (don't miss the Ferry Building's), and local/organic restaurants.

TIP # 4: Drive your bike. This is definitely one of the best ways to experience the city. Check out Blazing Saddles or San Francisco Bike Rentals. There are rental locations at the Ferry Building (walk from Greenbuild), the Haight Ashbury neighborhood near Golden Gate Park, or Fisherman's Warf. Definitely plan your route with the free SF Bike/Ped Map to avoid putting one of our famously steep hills between you and your destination. You can also bring your bike on BART (except during rush hour) or the bus.

TIP # 5: Make optimum use of your smart phone. Use Google maps to get transit or walking directions, and get transit apps to make sure you arrive on time, and never wait more than a few minutes for your bus. There are also some other fun downloads and city apps available. (Extra bonus points for pairing Tips 2 and 3, transit and smart phones.)

- The Greenbuild app syncs with Greenbuild Connect to allow you to connect with other attendees, schedule sessions, create your Exhibitor Interest List and view Exhibit Hall maps. This is a conference first!
- iBART (free: iPhone and Android) for train schedules; great for airport connection planning
- Routesy (free with iAd or $4.99 for iPhone) for real time arrivals for all Muni buses & streetcars as well as BART (but not cable cars) – this is great if you'll be moving through the city a lot. (Note: to be safe, subtract a minute or two from the real time arrival targets – these can fluctuate.)
- Two great apps by Thinkwalks ("Tours for Nerdy San Franciscans") include Everything Explained ($1.99 for iPhone) and Local Nerd! ($1.99 for iPhone). The former will help answer your SF questions on local history, politics, and best kept secrets. Local Nerd! goes a step deeper for the truly dedicated.
- The San Francisco Exploration Guide is a light and basic tourism app, which is worth the price (free) for iPhone.
- For the seriously transit savvy, download Muni system maps from http://www.sfmta.com/cms/mmaps/official.htm.

San Franciscans are, of course, social media addicts, so don't forget to tweet with the #Greenbuild hash tag and post your status updates to Facebook. Check out other conference-specific social media tips.

I hope this guide provides out-of-towner Greenbuild attendees with the resources they need to eat, travel and traverse our fantastic city of San Francisco. Locals, any other tips worth sharing? Share the wealth in the comments section.

Mara Baum
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Member employees

2 comments

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Antonio Rodriguez 2 years 20 weeks ago
LEED AP BD+C

Great post! I have already got the Greenbuild apps, and I'd also recommend the 511 Transit app (free for iPhone), it's another great way to move around!

Mara Baum 2 years 19 weeks ago
Sustainable Design Leader, LEED Fellow, HOK

Thanks Antonio - I thought about 511, both the app and the website, about 10 minutes after submitting this blog entry. It's definitely a good addition to the SF traveler's arsenal!

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