



ON THE ROAD

San Francisco's SoMa District

By Tara Taylor

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South of the Powell Street BART station in San Francisco lies a wonderland of art, music, and hidden gardens waiting to be explored. Clustered within four blocks are four art museums, a carousel, waterfall, playground, ice skating rink, bowling alley, and butterfly grove.

The South of Market District (SoMa) holds days' worth of activities. It is a common destination for tourists, but it has a magnetic effect on locals too!

The New Kid on the Block

If you visited the Yerba Buena Gardens (on Mission Street) in the past five years, you noticed a lot of construction going on across the street. In June 2008, the construction stop-ped to reveal an architecturally stunning building that now houses the Contemporary Jewish Museum.

Once a PG&E substation, the museum now holds exhibits that focus on Jewish culture and art. Designed by architect Daniel Libeskind, the building itself is a great draw for children. There are jutting angles, an outdoor water fountain and stream with stones to walk across, and a massive building extension made from blue metallic steel that changes colors depending on the position of the sun.

Stepping inside the building itself reveals an equally impressive open space, filled with sunlight from dozens of skylights. The first floor houses an exhibition space, museum store and cafe, and the Sala Education Center.

The upstairs is dedicated to exhibits. *Jews on Vinyl* (on display through Oct. 13) is an auditory tour of Jewish music. You can sit on roomy couches and listen to iPods featuring a large selection of music including a collection of renditions of "Hava Nagila." Across the hall is *Chagall and the Artists of the Russian Jewish Theater, 1919-1949* (on display through Sept. 7), which will interest any age group. There are recordings, costumes, set designs, and posters from the theater movement in Soviet Union.

There's a Mystery There: Sendak on Sendak, a collection of drawings and watercolors by famed children's book author and illustrator Maurice Sendak (*Where the Wild Things Are*), opens Tuesday, Sept. 8, and continues through Jan. 19, 2010.

But the museum is not all about looking and listening – it is about creating, too. Sundays from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. are geared toward families, with drop-in art programs. The Sala Education Center is stocked with paper, markers, glue, and

other art supplies for kids to create projects that incorporate themes from ongoing exhibits. Sunday, Sept. 13: *Start the New Year with a Book*. Create your own journal with illustrations. Sunday, Sept. 20: *Wild Things on Parade*. Create a three-dimensional Wild Things garland.

Go Modern

For years the draw downtown was the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA). Home to the works of Steven Holl, Frida Kahlo, Henri Matisse, Georgia O'Keeffe, and Jackson Pollock, SFMOMA is where you automatically take family visiting from out of town.

Over the past few years the museum

has been actively changing its image. With family programs, free days, an education center, and a new rooftop sculpture garden, SFMOMA is drawing in locals, too.

The Koret Visitor Education Center, located on the museum's second floor, houses an activity center for children with computers, a screening room, and a library of books for children and adults. It is also the location of bi-weekly art activities for families.

The

Family Studio Program offers children the chance to explore the world of modern art with a parent or guardian. Programs usually relate to a special exhibit, and families can drop in at any time between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. (Just ask at the information desk, and they will lead you to the group's location.) Activities are geared toward children ages 12 and under. On Sundays, Aug. 5 and Aug. 19, meet at the Education Center for a family tour of the museum's permanent painting and sculpture collection at 1 p.m. Then head back to the center for an art activity. Museum entry and art programs are free on these days.

If you are exploring the museum on your own, pick up activity cards from the Koret Visitor Education Center which will guide kids to appealing parts of ongoing exhibits in the galleries.

Spend the Day Outside

The Yerba Buena Gardens are an important part of the relaxed feeling in SoMa. On weekdays you can find men and women eating their lunch on the grass of the Esplanade or taking a break from the hustle and bustle of downtown. On weekends this grassy field fills with couples and children catching a free concert or puppet show, or playing tag.



The carousel at Yerba Buena Gardens is open year-round.



Children create art after a family tour of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

Photo by Orange Photography

