



Superb, affordable seafood in the city

Page 85

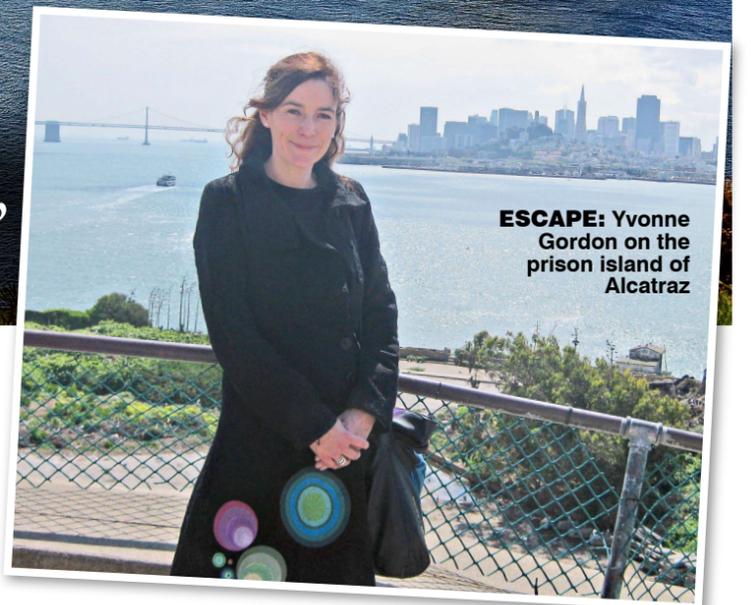
TRAVEL

BAY AREA: The Golden Gate Bridge, in all its galoxide red glory



Golden gate memories

Yvonne Gordon on the secrets of San Francisco, from Alcatraz to the bay city's foodie enclaves



ESCAPE: Yvonne Gordon on the prison island of Alcatraz

I walked down Seedy Street. It was grim and dark, with just one shaft of distant light coming from above. Along the walls were rows of metal gates. Earlier, I had passed 'Broadway' and 'Times Square', but the overall feeling was of gloom.

The word seedy brought back a memory of the night before, where within the first three hours of arriving in San Francisco, we met a large black lady called Magnolia, who had an Afro, glittery pink lipstick and who was a hostess – and later that evening, a singing stripper – at the

Supperclub, a nightclub where seats are actually beds; handy if you've just come off an 11-hour flight.

But all is not what it seems in San Francisco. Seedy Street is just the nickname for the C-D cell block in the prison of Alcatraz, and Broadway and Times Square are ▶



SUMMER FAMILY FUN AT WHITES OF WEXFORD

2 Nights Bed, Breakfast and a Family Pass to The Irish National Heritage Park, Leisure Max Play Centre or Secret Valley Farm. PLUS Young Vikings Kids Club takes place Midweek (Sun-Thurs) in July & August.

FROM **€260** per family



HAPPY DAYS

2 Nights B&B, 1 Evening Meal PLUS €100 Spa Voucher to use in our Tranquility Spa.

FROM **€149** pps



YOUNG AT HEART ACTIVITY BREAK

5 Nights Dinner, Bed & Breakfast and Full Activity Programmes. Arrive 8th June or 7th September.

Package Includes:

- Transport to and from train station. • Tea/Coffee and freshly made scones on arrival. • Entertainment nightly
- Two fully organised day trips (all travel and entry fees included). • Health & Beauty Tips • Aqua Aerobics
- Floral Demonstration. • Art Class with local artist.

FROM ONLY **€335** per person

WHITES
OF WEXFORD
Hotel | Spa | Convention Centre



TOWN CENTRE LOCATION | ACCESS TO LEISURE CENTRE | WI-FI

www.whitesofwexford.ie • 05391 22311 • Whites of Wexford, Abbey Street, Wexford

SKIPPER: Yvonne Gordon at the helm of America's Cup yacht USA 76



► other locations in the main jailhouse. I was passing them on a self-guided walking audio tour of the former prison, which is on Alcatraz Island in the middle of San Francisco Bay.

'The first thing to know when you get to Alcatraz is to keep your mouth shut and your back to the wall.'

This is what former correctional officer Pat Mahoney used to advise inmates – his was the stern voice on the recorded tour soundtrack. It was advice I found handy the next night, when I walked a few blocks the wrong way by mistake in one of the run-down parts of the city centre.

Although the prison on Alcatraz Island may seem a spooky place for a visit, the audio tour, which has voices of real inmates and prison officers, gives a fascinating glimpse into what life was like in the cells when it was a prison between 1934 and 1963, when gangsters such as Al Capone did time.

Other guided tours such as the 'escape tour' detail the 14

attempted escapes that occurred from Alcatraz. The island is just 2km from the shore so an escape was tempting. 'There was never a day you didn't see what you were losing or what you were missing,' said one inmate's voice on the audio tour, though the raging currents running between the island and the shore put paid to many escape attempts. Nobody is known to have escaped and

survived – but the jury is still out on whether the three inmates who escaped in 1962 made it to freedom, as they were never heard of again.

Getting out to Alcatraz Island is a pleasant 20-minute ferry journey from the city, and it gives a great view of the city skyline and San Francisco Bay's two bridges – the Golden Gate Bridge and its sister bridge, the

San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, from the waterfront. The ferry departs from Pier 33 on the Embarcadero, a wide boulevard full of walkers, joggers and the F-line vintage streetcars that run all along the waterfront.

Nearby, the Fisherman's Wharf area is full of relaxed cafés, souvenir shops and entertainment. Fishing boats are docked at the piers, and it's the place for fresh seafood – the famous sidewalk crab sellers tempt passers-by with steaming pots of Dungeness crab and bread bowls filled with clam chowder.

Serious foodies will love the Ferry Building at the other end of the Embarcadero. The marketplace is home to artisan food producers, wine bars and cafés. Drop into Miette's patisserie for a fleur de sel chocolate truffle tart; artisan cheese at Cowgirl Creamery or an Argentinian sandwich

at El Porteño Empanadas, and take it all to a bench outside to watch boats come and go.

After the seriousness of Alcatraz, I decided to try another experience on San Francisco Bay – a few hours of sailing on the former America's Cup yacht, USA 76, which was used by the Oracle racing team in 2003.

USA 76 is based on a pontoon at Pier 39 and I joined it for an afternoon trip. Once the crew had chased two grumpy sea lions away from the mooring ropes so they could untie the boat, we set off and motored out into the bay. Us guests were roped in to grind winches and help hoist the huge mainsail (the mast is 35 metres high), and we also got to take turns at the helm of the high-speed yacht – playing skipper as we sail past Alcatraz and under the Golden Gate Bridge.

'Over there is where the starting line was. These conditions are the same today – about 10 to 15 knots of breeze and the tide is flooding under the Golden

Sidewalk vendors tempt with steaming bowls of chowder



Gate,' said the real skipper, Jon, pointing out the locations of last year's America's Cup. Later we sailed over where the race's finish line was, and as we crossed the imaginary line I could almost hear the applause of the crowds that would have lined the dock.

If you've seen San Francisco's main sights, an interesting way to learn some of the city's secrets is on an Urban Hike walking tour. We joined guide Alexandra Kenin for a 7km walking tour, exploring the stairways, hills and secret parks in

SEA VIEW: A cable car in the Russian Hill area, with Alcatraz Island in the background

the North Beach, Telegraph Hill and Russian Hill areas of the city.

Our first climb was up Greenwich Street steps from North Beach. The hilly city has more than 600 public stairways, which are vertical parks with wooden and stone stairs winding up past old houses and through gardens with patches of fennel, nasturtium and blackberry vines, while bees hum in the background. We admired views of the bay from the landmark Coit Tower and Alex brought us to the viewing platform in the tiny, hidden Jack Early Park, from where we could look down over the Golden Gate Bridge and Alcatraz.

On my last day, I learnt that it was not only Alcatraz that had an issue with escapees. 'Make sure when you leave that you don't have any butterflies on you,' said the guide, as myself and a group

of other tourists entered the Rainforest exhibit over at the California Academy of Sciences in Golden Gate Park. The warning was in case any of the colourful occupants were making a bid for freedom underneath someone's coat. The rainforest is set in a massive glass dome with four levels. Hot and humid, it's full of tropical plants and animals. While I was there, butterflies and birds flew around, frogs croaked and reptiles hid on branches in cages while colourful macaws chattered loudly from tree branches. It was a colourful end to a vivid few days in San Francisco.

maldron
HOTEL
WEXFORD

99 HOUR SALE

Valid until 11th July

€99 pps

2 Nights Bed & Breakfast
1 evening meal
Bottle of Wine
Ice-cream during your stay
Early check in midweek
Limited Rooms Available

WEEKEND OFFER

FROM **€99**

ROOM ONLY

(Terms and Conditions apply)

- Full use of our Leisure Centre.
- Free Car-Parking. • Free Wifi.

MALDRON HOTEL & LEISURE CENTRE

WEXFORD • TEL: 053 9172000 • www.maldronhotelwexford.com

MEMORIES OF A

There's a photograph somewhere in my 'travel' archive that I have been trying to put my hand on these past couple of weeks. I am on the back of an open truck in the Wadi Rum desert in southern Jordan. A caravan of camels and their minders can just be seen trickling away into the distance as those of us perched on the pick-up-style truck smile for the camera on a September evening 11 years ago.

Beside me is Conor Caffrey, with a slightly awkward-looking smile on his face. He was never one for grinning inanely for the camera for the sake of it, and yet Conor, whom I had met for the first time just a few days earlier on that particular press trip, was a photographer himself. A terrific one. A specialist travel photographer with an incredible talent. He was also a writer, a travel



and fiction writer. And he was a scientist, too.

He was, in other words, a man of myriad talents, across a number of disciplines, a man who would have put the rest of us in that pick-up truck to shame when it came to accomplishments.

Yet he wore his brilliance lightly and in the subsequent decade that I was privileged enough to be his friend, I never heard Conor boast about any of his achievements. Rather, he could be self-critical and self-doubting to the point of driving you round the bend at times.

MAN OF MYRIAD TALENTS



TERRIFIC: Conor Caffrey, father, photographer, writer and scientist

Conor died suddenly on April 10. He was 51. As I write those words here I have to repeat them to myself. For emphasis. As if to say them again and again will actually make me believe them. For how can it possibly be true

that Conor is gone?

On that Jordan trip when we discovered, coincidentally, that we both lived in Greystones (he a native, me just a blow-in), we bonded together and became firm friends – first with each other and then, in a wider way, when my husband Gerry and his wife Gill joined the throng. I didn't fully recognise back then how special Conor was. But I came to admire him greatly.

For here was a person who refused to play the game. Conor couldn't be bothered with all the nonsense that surrounds so much of what is deemed to be 'travel journalism'. He was a freelance writer and photographer. Any press trip he accepted he did so on the basis that

this was work, this was something that, yes, he loved, alright, but he was here because this was how he earned his living.

So you'd never find Conor in the hotel bar, for example, in the wee small hours. Indeed, you'd be much more likely to find that he had set his alarm for 5am so that he could head out with his camera to capture some particular dawn image he had in his head. He was dedicated to his craft.

Just as he was dedicated to his family – to Gill, his 'dream girl' as he called her, and to his children, Caoimhe, Oisín and Saoirse. Caoimhe was his only child when I first met him and I remember him telling me, as we wandered the Red Sea

shores of Aqaba together, how the highlight of his toddler daughter's endless journeys to the airport, to deposit or collect her travel-mad father, was spotting the giant Coca Cola bottle outside the Point in Dublin. It's funny how things stick in your mind.

Conor loved Spain and spoke the language, of course. But the one place I recall him talking to me about with the greatest passion was Botswana. It bowled him over.

And so, in these dark days since he left us a month ago, I like to think of him wandering there amid the beauty of the Okavango Delta, birdlife all around, camera at the ready... and at peace with the world.

GETTING THERE

SAILING BY: The America's Cup yacht USA 76 passes Alcatraz



Aer Lingus flies five times a week from Dublin to San Francisco, with fares from €369 each way, including taxes and charges. See aerlingus.com for details and up-to-date offers. Rooms at the Intercontinental San Francisco start from \$189 (€137) per night, see

intercontinentalsanfrancisco.com and rooms at the Handlery Hotel start from \$179, (€130) see handlery.com. For information on activities, see acsailingsf.com, urbanhikerssf.com, calacademy.com and www.sanfrancisco.travel.

SUNWAY
ALGARVE
No: TO 101

Sunway
Amazing Algarve



TURISMO DE PORTUGAL **algarve**

June Holiday Specials 7 nights
Estrela Do Vau Apts 4* S/C fr. €549
Luna Clube Oceano Apts 3* S/C fr. €579
Pestana Dom Joao Hotel 4* B/B fr. €699
Algarve Casino Hotel 5* B/B fr. €669

FLIGHTS, ACCOMMODATION, TRANSFERS & 20KG BAGGAGE ALLOWANCE ALL INCLUDED!
Offers are per person & valid on dates 01st Jun for 7 nights. Terms & conditions apply.

Visit Your Local Travel Agent
www.sunway.ie 01 2311895