

# ENGLISH IN 10 MINUTES

## Episode 51: San Francisco

### Summary

Nick's colleague Melissa is from San Francisco in the USA. In this conversation, she talks about the city and what makes it unique.

### Transcript

Nick: Hi everyone, this week's episode is brought to you by italki - I-T-A-L-K-I - where you can have English conversations and lessons online. With italki, you'll have a human connection and an authentic life experience while learning real English. Plus, as a listener of our podcast you can get 10 US dollars in italki credits with your first lesson purchase at the website: <http://go.italki.com/englishin10minutes>.

Nick: Today I'm talking to my colleague Melissa, umm, and Melissa we're talking about your home city in the United States, which is San Francisco. And so were you born there?

Melissa: I was born in San Francisco, and I lived there for the first 18 years of my life until my studies brought me other places in California and abroad<sup>1</sup>, and then I moved to France, uhh, after I graduated from college<sup>2</sup>.

Nick: OK, and do you still go back quite a lot?

Melissa: Yeah, we try to get back there every ... once a year. Uhh, my mother still lives in my childhood house, so, uhh, I try to go back and see her every year. And I have one of my sons also studying in the area so it's really nice to go back.

Nick: It must be really nostalgic to go back to your childhood house. Do you stay in your same room?

Melissa: I do, yeah.

Nick: And the same bed and everything?

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<sup>1</sup> abroad: overseas, in another country. See also: Episode 24: Hungary.

<sup>2</sup> college: what Americans usually call university

Melissa: Yeah, the same curtains and the same carpet. Uhh, my Mom has updated the decoration a little bit, uhh, bought some new bedspreads and repainted the room which she uses as an office now, but, umm, yeah.

Nick: And so San Francisco is a very famous city in the U.S., it's a city that a lot of tourists want to go to. So what makes it interesting, uhh, in your opinion?

Melissa: Well San Francisco is very unique, umm, as far as American cities go. It's, uhh, quite small actually, it's only about seven miles across and seven miles from north to south. It's surrounded by water on three sides so it makes it more a European scale rather than a big spread-out metropolis like a lot of other cities (in the U.S.). You could actually walk from one end to the other if you want to.

Nick: It's quite interesting that you say that because also if you look at New York, it's also defined by its geography a little bit, and so these - just, in the way that I think - these are the two most unique or most interesting cities, uhh, in the U.S., and maybe they both owe that to the land space that they have.

Melissa: Ah, that's an interesting, uhh, comparison. I hadn't thought of that before.

Nick: Well, there you go. And so, if you go to San Francisco as a tourist, what kind of things would you do?

Melissa: Well, I always tell people that they should, uhh, go down to the waterfront<sup>3</sup>. Uhh, I mean, all tourist guidebooks will tell you Fisherman's Wharf, Golden Gate Bridge, uhh, Golden Gate Park now. I'd recommend renting a bicycle, uhh, you can ride through the Golden Gate Park, you can go across the bridge. Umm, and when you get to the north side of Golden Gate Bridge, you drive down to a little place called Sausalito which is a very quaint<sup>4</sup> town, with lots of artisans and nice restaurants and then you can actually hop on<sup>5</sup> the ferry<sup>6</sup> with your bike and come back to the city that way. So that's one good full day trip.

Nick: And so that's quite interesting, again related to New York, is that you have public transportation, uhh, which you don't often have in a lot of other larger cities in the United States, and it seems like it's a very green city, like you said with the bicycles, and also with other things.

Melissa: Yeah, it's very popular, and they've put in more and more bike paths. Umm, I know I grew up in San Francisco and we only ever owned one car, uhh, because my father went to work on the bus every day and the public transportation system is excellent. Umm, at the same time it's very international,

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<sup>3</sup> waterfront (noun or adjective): area facing the water

<sup>4</sup> quaint: small but picturesque and attractive

<sup>5</sup> hop on (phrasal verb): get on (e.g. a ferry, bus, train)

<sup>6</sup> ferry: a boat that's used as public transport

umm, one thing you might be interested to know is that my high school, back in the 1970s, uhh, was already nearly fifty per cent Asian-Americans.

Nick: Wow.

Melissa: Mmm-hmm.

Nick: That's quite interesting. So why do you think they were drawn to<sup>7</sup> San Francisco at that time?

Melissa: Uhh, well, after the Vietnam War, of course, a lot of Vietnamese came to California. But in the 50s and 60s a lot of, uhh, Chinese-Americans also fled<sup>8</sup> China through Hong Kong and came to San Francisco, or to the west coast of the United States, at the ... I guess being geographically closer to Asia, that's one reason.

Nick: And then, at a similar time or perhaps slightly before this, umm, in the 1950s, you had a large migration from the east coast of the United States to the west coast. So I guess around the same time you have an infusion of different people coming to San Francisco.

Melissa: Yeah, well San Francisco even today has a, sort of an Irish neighbourhood, an Italian neighbourhood. Uhh, and it's also a very liberal city - well, liberal in the sense of American English at least, meaning, uhh, slightly left on the political, umm, the political range. So a lot of people who feel persecuted could just be, umm, minorities or homosexuals came to California at that time because they were welcome from the very beginning.

Nick: And so if you look at this liberalism, if you look back to, say, the 1960s, you're looking at a kind of hippy, uhh, type of lifestyle. So what kind of ... is that lifestyle still there in San Francisco at all?

Melissa: Well you know I've been gone for a long time, but I think it's been, uhh, replaced to a large extent by the, uhh, tech industry now. And San Francisco has become so expensive that, umm, a lot of people have had to move out.

Nick: But it's also interesting that that liberalism has been retained but maybe the focus of it has shifted, like you said, towards, uhh, gay rights or other things like that.

Melissa: Yep, that's true.

Nick: And so when you go back now, do you see ... do you think that it's changed a lot from what you remember as a child?

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<sup>7</sup> drawn to: attracted to, pulled towards

<sup>8</sup> fled: left quickly and/or as a result of problems or persecution (past tense of *to flee*)

Melissa: I don't notice that many changes, but I go there a little bit as a tourist now. I go see my Mom, I go see my friends, and I go sightseeing also when I have visitors with me. So I don't feel like ... I maybe don't have quite the same feel for the city as I did when I was growing up.

Nick: And do you ... if you take people, as you said, people who come with you, who are friends, are they international, uhh, friends from France?

Melissa: From Europe, France mostly.

Nick: And what kind of reaction do they have to the city?

Melissa: Uhh, well usually we go during the summertime, so they find it's very cold. A lot of people complain about San Francisco because of the weather. I'd recommend that anybody travelling to San Francisco go there either in June or September, because there's a little microclimate and it can be quite foggy and cold in the city, uhh, during the summer.

Nick: Really? So you'd think that in July and August it would be the hottest time of the year.

Melissa: Yeah, you would, and we can pick out the tourists on the street because of the way they're dressed. Umm, the shops do a very good business in fleece - fleece but not umbrellas, because it doesn't rain.

Nick: OK, that's interesting, because people think California is a really hot place.

Melissa: Well, you can hop in your car and drive for 20 minutes north, east or south of the city and it will be quite warm and balmy<sup>9</sup>.

Nick: OK, so it's very micro, very restricted just to that area.

Melissa: I'm afraid you'd have to speak to a weather specialist who could explain it to you better.

Nick: And so if you want to take trips outside of the city, what kind of places can you go to?

Melissa: Well we like to go to Napa Valley, uhh, which is the wine area. There's also Sonoma Valley, both of those are north of San Francisco. On the coast you can also find oysters and seafood. Umm, otherwise for a short weekend trip you could go to Yosemite or Lake Tahoe, those are two of my favourite places.

Nick: Right, because Yosemite is one of the most famous national parks in the U.S., and what do you see when you go there?

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<sup>9</sup> balmy: pleasant (weather-wise), neither too hot nor too cold

Melissa: Umm, beautiful mountains, Half Dome, El Capitan, umm, you can go hiking. There are some waterfalls, Bridalveil Falls is very well known. And you also may run into a bear.

Nick: If you're not careful.

Melissa: If you're not careful, if you go camping and you leave food out in your campsite, you might be unfortunate enough to have it all eaten up by morning.

Nick: OK, and so, as you said, the centre of San Francisco is quite restricted. But now on the other side of the bay, you have another city which is Oakland, right?

Melissa: Mmm-hmm.

Nick: And so is that, are they kind of merging together, or do you think there's still a distinct difference?

Melissa: No, not at all, not at all. San Francisco will always remain distinct, uhh, because of the bay that separates the cities, yeah. And even to the south, umm, Silicon Valley is to the south of San Francisco, but there's a very, yeah, even geographical distinction, because when you drive south of San Francisco you go through sort of a mountainous area before you get to Silicon Valley.

Nick: And so even within this restricted area that you've been talking about, uhh, along the bay, you've got a lot of hills in the San Francisco area?

Melissa: Oh yeah, right in San Francisco, just like you see on TV. Uhh, it's a very hilly city, uhh, that's why we built the cable cars, to, uhh, go up and down.

Nick: So if you want to take your bicycle around like you said before, it can be a good idea as long as you know how to avoid the hills.

Melissa: Exactly. I'd suggest studying the map and the topography before taking your bicycle out. Golden Gate Park is, uhh, let's see, from east to west it probably runs about four miles, and that's fairly<sup>10</sup> flat, certainly flat enough for even a child to cycle through.

Nick: OK, so as long as you don't get lost and start going up hills, then you'll be OK on a bike. OK, thank you very much Melissa.

Melissa: OK, thank you.

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<sup>10</sup> fairly: quite, reasonably

## Comprehension Questions

1. What does Melissa recommend doing to get around San Francisco?
2. What two comparisons does Nick make between San Francisco and New York?
3. Why can Melissa spot tourists in San Francisco during the summer?

## Exercises

*Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.*

1. After finishing high school, many Americans move away from their family and their home town to go to \_\_\_\_\_.
2. If you go to Sydney, a recommended trip is to take the \_\_\_\_\_ from near the Sydney Opera House to Manly. That way, you can really experience the harbour while out on the water.
3. Many major cities have tourist buses where people can \_\_\_\_\_ and off at many different stops and see all the major sites.
4. Many people have \_\_\_\_\_ from Syria during the civil war and have become refugees in other countries.
5. When you're a student, it can be a great idea to study \_\_\_\_\_. That way, you get to experience another country and culture.
6. If you want to buy a \_\_\_\_\_ house, it will usually cost a lot more than a house with no views of the water.
7. Even though it was winter, the weather was very \_\_\_\_\_ and we were able to eat outside at night.
8. He was \_\_\_\_\_ architecture at a very young age. He was always fascinated by buildings and loved to draw.
9. Along the Annapurna Circuit in Nepal, there are many \_\_\_\_\_ little villages, with picturesque streets and houses.
10. He got a \_\_\_\_\_ big discount on a new TV in January. That's why it's worth waiting until after Christmas to make purchases like that.

## Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Have you been to San Francisco? If so, did you like it? If not, would you like to go? Why or why not?
2. Do you like cycling? Do you rent bikes while on holiday? Why or why not?
3. Melissa described San Francisco as being very multicultural, even as far back as the 1970s. Do you live in a multicultural place? How is multiculturalism viewed in your country?

## Answers

### Comprehension Questions

1. She recommends renting a bicycle and riding through Golden Gate Park and over the famous Golden Gate Bridge.
2. He compares them in terms of their limited physical space and their good public transportation, which many U.S. cities don't have.
3. She can spot tourists because they expected it to be warm in July and August and aren't dressed for the cold.

### Exercises

1. college
2. ferry
3. hop on
4. fled
5. abroad
6. waterfront
7. balmy
8. drawn to
9. quaint
10. fairly