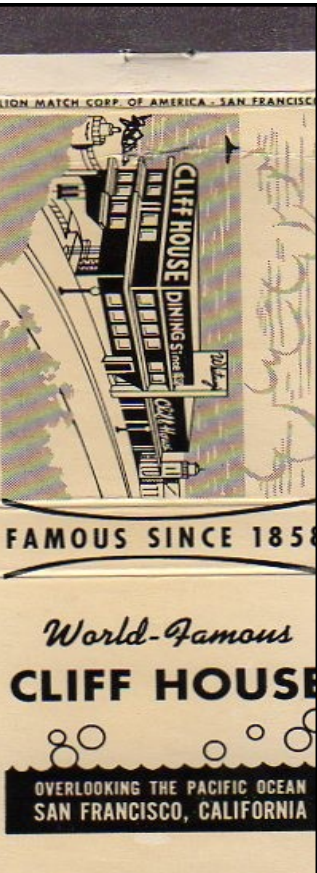


California Tour: 6

San Francisco's Cliff House

Located at the westernmost edge of the city, overlooking the scenic Pacific Ocean, this well-known San Francisco landmark has been part of California's heritage for over 130 years. The cliff below Sutro Heights has actually been home to four different Cliff Houses over the years.

The first was built in 1863 by Adolph Sutro. Sutro was a wealthy San Franciscan who made his fortune in the mining business and then invested in San Francisco real estate. At one point, he owned 2200 acres, or about 1/11th of the entire city. This first Cliff House was damaged by an explosion in 1887 when a dynamite-laden schooner crashed on the rocks below. The surviving portion of the building was destroyed by fire on Christmas day seven years later. Adolph built a new Cliff House in 1895, only to see it destroyed by fire that same year.



In 1896, he tried again, building an elaborate French Chateau-style building that is often seen in old photographs. That building survived the 1906 earthquake, but was again destroyed by fire the following year. The current building was constructed in 1909 and has been extensively modified over the years. Today, the Cliff House entails restaurants and gift stores catering mostly to tourists. The area around the Cliff House offers excellent views of the Pacific and of Seal Rocks; unfortunately, the sea lions that used to camp out on Seal Rocks moved to Pier 39 a few years ago and have not returned.



There's a National Park Service Visitors Center on the terrace below Cliff House, and in the Cliff House basement there is a fabulous collection of antique coin-operated mechanical games and musical instruments.