

Creating a HOME away from HOME

DANIELA CUADROS
LINDA REEDER

Between the Golden Gate Bridge and Interstate 280 lies a city rich with culture and teeming with diversity.

San Francisco boasts a variety of ethnic enclaves and communities. From Chinatown to Little Italy, each neighborhood hosts a diverse range of businesses, restaurants, and shops.

These communities serve not only to preserve the cultures of their ancestors and homelands, but also to bring together visitors and tourists from around the world.

An elderly man plays a traditional Chinese dizi flute on a Chinatown sidewalk. "The older people, like the grandmas and grandpas, show off the culture and are part of why people are attracted here," said Eileen Li, a Chinatown shopper. Photo by **Nathan Turnbeaugh**

CHINATOWN'S *resilience*

On a bustling morning in San Francisco, Anita Chan Rainer commutes to her jewelry store in Chinatown.

Rainer follows a generational tradition of hard work, inheriting the business from her grandparents. She now runs two jewelry shops in the neighborhood.

"My business is 45 years old already. It's three generations and family-owned," Rainer said.

What has become a world-renowned cultural center in the bustling city of San Francisco carries a rich history, represented through small shops and stores that line the iconically steep streets.

The history of Chinatown is marked by persecution and struggle, yet it also serves as a testament to the community's perseverance and resilience.

"Chinese people will work hard to support the community. Even though they eat soy sauce and tofu rice, they can survive," Rainer said.

As the oldest Chinatown in the nation, the town's roots date back to the mid-1800s, according to PBS. The San Francisco Golden Age beckoned Chinese immigrants into the city, but the reality was far from golden.

Chinese immigrants were faced with a multitude of barriers coming into the United States, from loans and financial burdens to racism and discrimination.

"The traditional narrative is that the Chinese came here because China had a lot of disturbances at the time, Civil War, the Opium War, and there were floods, famine, but that turned out not to be so true, because we know the first wave of Chinese that came, they were almost all merchants, and they didn't come to pan for gold. They came here to mine the miners," said David Lei, the chair of the program and collection committees of the Chinese Historical Society of America.

Throughout the 1870s, anti-Chinese laws were passed

at the state and local levels in the United States, aimed at excluding the Chinese from certain occupations and participating in society, according to PBS.

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 was the culmination of anti-Chinese legislation. The act suspended Chinese immigration for 10 years, isolating Chinese communities within the United States from family and relatives outside the country, according to Britannica.

"In the United States, by 1875 we had the Page Act. Congress passed the Page Act, which made it very difficult for the Chinese women to come. It targeted Chinese women," Lei said.

In response to these discriminatory laws, Chinese Americans banded together in the neighborhood that has since become known as Chinatown.

"People can stay in one house, under one roof, no problem. And in the tough times, they'll bundle up and wait it out," Rainer said.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented an additional challenge; many shops and restaurants, which relied on tourism and in-person shoppers, lost business.

"People were not buying jewelry. People were buying food. But luckily, I have very loyal, local customers for many years,"

Rainer said.

What began as a community driven together by discrimination is now a landmark tourist destination filled with rich history and culture, attracting visitors from all over the world to San Francisco.

"I feel like there's also a growing appreciation for Chinese culture," said Katie Liu, a San Francisco resident.

Among its shops, there are about 80 restaurants within Chinatown that provide Chinese San Franciscans with a taste of home, according to Fog City Secrets.

"Whenever I want a certain type of meal, I like to come here," said Eileen Li, a San Francisco resident.

“
CHINESE PEOPLE
WILL WORK HARD
TO SUPPORT THE
COMMUNITY. EVEN
THOUGH THEY EAT
SOY SAUCE AND
TOFU RICE, THEY CAN
SURVIVE.”

ANITA CHAN RAINER

Paper lanterns hang over Chinatown's streets. Many similar icons of Chinese culture and architecture are also spread all throughout the district. "One of my favorite parts about coming here is that I can see the culture as I'm passing through," said Eileen Li, a Chinatown shopper. Photo by **Nathan Turnbeaugh**

ITALY

brought to life

Asiya Islam community members wave flags as they celebrate Italian American culture at the annual Italian heritage parade. "I love seeing all the people coming out. It really builds a sense of community, and it's a great display of culture," said Rose Hilstron, an employee at local grocery store Luke's Local. Photo by **Nathan Turnbeaugh**



A dancer, wearing a traditional Calabrian Italian dress, celebrates Italian heritage by performing folk dances. "I love the people here. During the parade, you can see all your friends and celebrate together," said Bill Mastrangel, the Italian heritage parade organizer. Photo by **Nathan Turnbeaugh**

From the late 19th century to the early 20th century, Italian immigrants flooded the San Francisco Bay Area, settling in North Beach, which quickly became the home of San Francisco's large and vibrant Italian community.

Soon after, the area adopted the name Little Italy, characterized by its Italian shops, restaurants, and architectural design, resembling the familiar culture across the sea.

According to FoundSF, most of the region's members were middle-class, working Italians, many of whom established local restaurants to maintain their Italian culture and introduce it to the San Francisco sphere. Although the actual beach in North Beach has long since disappeared, the area still retains its iconic name. It is now associated with its populous and rich Italian heritage.

Nestled in the busy Little Italy neighborhood, sits Luke's Local, a favorite grocery store for many San Franciscans.

Surrounded by the constant energy and vibrance of Italian culture, Rose Hilstron, a Luke's Local employee, finds Little Italy to be a local favorite.

"It's one of the nicer neighborhoods of San Francisco, and I think that really draws people in. It has a nice location. It's very walkable," Hilstron said.

In addition to its favorable location, the neighborhood features dozens of Italian restaurants lining the streets.

Since the pandemic, many restaurants have developed outdoor seating areas, making the display of cultural pride even more evident due to their open-door nature.

"There are so many

good restaurants around here, and it's just how lively it is in general, especially on a day like today. There are a lot of people walking around, and it's a nice display of culture," Hilstron said.

The deep roots of Italian culture are displayed when multiple generations of Italians come together to showcase their pride in their culture. This pride is most apparent in San Francisco's annual Italian Heritage Festival and Parade held in October.

Bill Mastrangel has been on the board of directors for the last 11 years. For him, the parade is a way for the entire Italian community to gather.

"This is all about getting everybody together and being Italian for a day,"

“IT'S JUST THE FEELING OF CULTURE, I FEEL LIKE IT'S ALWAYS VERY LIVELY.”

EILEEN LI

Mastrangel said.

The logistics of the parade require extensive planning. The parade starts at 12:30 p.m., stretching a distance of 1.3 miles, starting in Fisherman's Wharf and ending at Saints Peter and Paul Church. The route features parade cars and floats in addition to groups such as the Court of Queen Isabella, made up of young Italian women who uphold Italian cultural values, and a performance by Teo Boy.

"It takes about nine months, and we have 30 people on the board that are handling all sorts of issues, such as getting people into the parade, working with the city, getting cars, arranging the floats, and all that stuff," Mastrangel said.

Many restaurants are also featured along the parade route. Many Italians, San Franciscans, and visitors alike can bask in a homey Italian feel through

authentic dishes such as lasagne alla bolognese and pizza margherita.

"My favorite part is the section of the road where you have everybody coming down, and we just have a beautiful day. It's the best day of the year in the city," Mastrangel said.

In addition to the annual parade, celebration of Italian culture is apparent throughout the year in events such as Festa Colionale Italiana and Light Up the Tricolore. Festa Colionale Italiana, an Italian street fair, is held in May, while Light Up the Tricolor, a lighting ceremony and live music, occurs in October.

Ultimately, what makes these events so special is the people who come together, whether for a day or throughout the year. These events serve as a way to preserve cultural heritage, pass it on to the next generation, and share it with the diverse San Francisco community and visitors beyond.

"I love the restaurants and all the people you walk on the street with. All your friends are either working or sitting outside. It's the best part of being in this neighborhood," Mastrangel said.

BRIDGING CULTURE

Whether brought together by food, art, pop culture, or music, these enclaves maintain vibrant cultures, even if they are thousands of miles from their origin. The growth of tourism and appreciation for diverse cuisines and attractions has strengthened cultural publicity, enabling these centers to stay alive despite challenges such as the pandemic.

More importantly, these hubs have provided multiple generations of individuals with the opportunity to come together in celebration of a shared characteristic, serving as a home away from home to keep their culture alive.

"It's just the feeling of culture, I feel like it's always very lively. There's older grandmas and grandpas walking around, the food's authentic, and it attracts crowds," Li said.