Angel Island in the middle of SF Bay lives up to its name

By Kathryn Reed

ANGEL ISLAND – “Not a bad view.”

It was the mantra for the day and the reason we barely made the 5-mile loop in our allotted one-hour bike rental time period.

Views of San Francisco, the Golden Gate Bridge, Bay Bridge, Alcatraz – it’s all so breathtaking from the perimeter trail around Angel Island.



San Francisco from Angel Island. Photos/Kathryn Reed

I think I was a kid with my parents and a group of friends the last time I was on this island in the middle of San Francisco Bay. It was Sue’s first trip.

If I learned about the history of the island those many years ago, it was forgotten. Reading “Shanghai Girls” earlier this year gave me a glimpse into life of people trying to immigrate to the United States in the last century who were stopped at Angel Island before being allowed on the mainland.

On the ferry from The City a group of women said they were going to the island to retrace their family heritage.

Along the perimeter trail is the immigration station. (We had to walk back to it because we ran out of time on the bikes.)

Walking through the compound, reading about the conditions, seeing pictures – it's one of those times when I don't like being white. It's one of those times when I wonder why our history books don't teach us more. It's one of those times when I wonder if we'll ever embrace our similarities instead of continuing to point out our differences.

Asians were separated from Europeans – and treated much worse. Men and women – even if married – were separated.

Barbed wire surrounded the dormitories – and still does – even though these were not criminals and even though this is an island.

The island has a rich history. It was used during the Civil War in 1863 as an Army outpost in case the Confederate ships sailed into the bay.

In 1954, it was one of 19 Nike Missile sites in the Bay Area.

Today it is a state park.

Old buildings are scattered about. Some you can go into. Park workers also live on the island.

Ferries leave from a couple terminals in San Francisco, as well as Tiburon and Alameda. Our roundtrip ticket cost $16 each. The hour bike rental was $10 each. We could have paid $35 each for a half-day rental.

Although it's bound to be cold, camping is allowed on the island. With the views so incredible during the day, they must be even more breathtaking at night.

We chose not to bag a peak on this trip. Mount Livermore is the highest point on the island at 781 feet.

Back in The City

It’s Fourth of July weekend in San Francisco and it’s hopping. The Marriott on Fourth Street is a central location for all things we have planned. Walking and easy to use public transit mean not having to drive for three days.

Chinatown provides a shopping opportunity for ingredients I can’t get in Tahoe.

North Beach provides outdoor seating at a fun Italian restaurant.

The Giants don’t win – but there’s never a bad day at the ballpark.

Before the game we catch some rays and relaxation on the lawn at Yerba Buena Gardens.

The only disappointment is the fireworks that night. It’s hard to beat the ones on the South Shore.

Near the Ferry Building is an outdoor art fair as well as a zip line. It’s set up across the asphalt and above the tourists who hope the cables hold.

Everything I love about cities – the energy, the constant choices of things to do, the abundance of delicious food, reliable public transit, how easy it is to find things – sometimes I miss all of that.

ngg_shortcode_0_placeholder (Click on photos to enlarge.)