

California Tour: 10

Treasure Island



“Har Har! ‘Tis Treasure Island, maties!”...no, not that one! This is California’s *own* Treasure Island, in beautiful San Francisco Bay. In 1939, it was the world’s largest man-made island, built as the site of the 1939 Golden Gate International Exposition. Later it was appropriated as a Naval base.

The creation of Treasure island was a construction miracle. Rock walls composed of 287,000 tons of quarried rock were sunk in the shoals. Twenty million cubic yards of sea bottom were dredged up and piled between the walls. When the sand was 13 feet above sea level, engineers “unsalted” it by a leaching process. Barges brought in 50,000 cubic yards of loam from the mainland to enrich it. When the engineers finished, a 400-acre island, a mile long and two-thirds of a mile wide, had appeared in the Bay, connected by a 900-foot paved causeway to the Bay Bridge.

Meanwhile, botanists were hunting throughout the world for unusual trees and plants. Eventually, 4,000 trees, 70,000 shrubs, and 700,000 flowering plants became part of Treasure Island. Fresh water from San Francisco was piped over the Bay Bridge into a 3,000,000-gallon reservoir. And, finally, a \$50,000,000 fantasy arose on the island—America’s World’s Fair on the Pacific.

After the exposition, Treasure Island became an airport for the great trans-Pacific China Clippers of the day. And, in fact, the island was the planned site for the San Francisco International Airport.

With American involvement in World War II approaching, however, Treasure Island was a logical location for the movement of equipment and personnel headed for the Pacific. In 1941, the Navy traded the city land in South San Francisco for Treasure Island. The South San Francisco site became the new International Airport, and the Navy eventually acquired title to Treasure Island in 1946.

Take a look at Treasure Island next time you go to SF.

