



An American Tour: 26



California's San Jose Flea Market

The San Jose Flea Market, located in the heart of the Silicon Valley, was founded by George Bumb Sr. in March of 1960. His idea to open a flea market sparked while working in the solid waste and landfill business. He witnessed an abundance of treasures thrown away every day and realized he could make a profit from these discarded items. After visiting swap meets in Los Angeles and Paris' Thieves Market for inspiration, George Bumb Sr. established the San Jose Flea Market on 1590 Berryessa Road in San Jose, California. He bought 120 acres of an old meat-processing plant and remodeled it to create a market with an initial 20 vendors and only 100 customers per day. Now, the San Jose Flea Market is the largest open-air market in the U.S. and has become a California landmark with over four million visitors each year.

The eight miles worth of aisles allows for over 2000 vendors to sell an array of goods.[6] With a population and land mass larger than some small towns, the flea market is a major contributor to the income of many Silicon Valley families. Some of the treasures found at the landmark include jewelry, furniture, clothing, fruits, vegetables, shoes, collectables, toys, books, lamps, batteries, car stereo equipment, paintings, power drills, lamp shades, lipstick, and forks.

Along with the material items sold at the flea market, there are twenty five food vendors. Restaurants sell delicacies from burritos to French fries and freshly cooked meats on the outdoor barbecue in order to satisfy the tastes of the large clientele the Flea Market serves daily. There are also snack carts for shoppers on the run that offer delicious treats. Some of those include mango and pineapple spears on a stick, cold sodas, and churros. The largest section of the Flea Market is Produce Row which stretches a quarter of a mile through the market and contains vegetables and fruit from California's farmers.

The atmosphere is like none other. To accompany the sweet and savory smells of the food, there is the sound of constant music playing. Since the Flea Market attracts people from a wide range of backgrounds and ethnicities, the songs played from vendor stands reflect the Market varying tastes. So, it is no surprise that an authentic Mexican mariachi band will be playing as a Beach Boys song is heard a few minutes later. There are also a carrousel, arcade, and three playgrounds for children.

On August 14, 2007, the San Jose City Council approved a 2,800-home development for the property. The flea market will remain open until 2010, but in the meantime, a joint effort between the Bumb family and the city will take place to find a new venue to host the vendors. The Flea Market location is also a future BART, Bay Area Rapid Transit, station site. The challenge is to find a replacement site for the Flea Market. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Jose_Flea_Market]

