

Sacramento still has a sparkle

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The gold rush began in Sacramento and never ended. Its influence is everywhere, from the gold-hued Tower Bridge that spans the Sacramento River, to the 49ers who became legends of industry, finance and politics. It's fitting that the capital of the Golden State is where the rush began.

Brilliantly poised within the great delta that flows to the ocean through San Francisco Bay, the inland city of Sacramento was a settler's dream back in 1849. The rich farmlands, abundant fish and game and plentiful rainfall for crops often seduced those flocking to the area seeking gold. When the gold didn't pan out, farming did.

Gold nuggets turned to golden wheat nuggets. Within 15 years of gold's discovery at Sutter's Mill, the Sacramento farming community led the state in production of wheat, fruit and nuts. When the transcontinental railroad connected the east and the west in 1886, Sacramento was the end of the line.



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The California state capitol is open for tours every day of the week. The building is both a museum and the place of the working government.

Despite its golden history and distinction as the capital of California, Sacramento couldn't compete with its western cousin, San Francisco, in terms of culture, commerce and tourist appeal. Tourists came to Sacramento to see the gold fields, then hopped onto steamboats

and cruised down the river to San Francisco for thrills and excitement. Only a few decades later, Los Angeles, the upstart southern sister, eclipsed both cities as the center of California culture and commerce.

Another fact about gold: It never tarnishes. It can be out-shimmered by the glitter of fool's gold or dusted with the debris of history, but the real deal can always be refined or shined to glisten again. In the past 20 years, Sacramento has reshaped the old into a new city with sparkling streets lined with gemlike art galleries, boutiques, upscale cafes and bistros, wine bars, parks and museums.

Our first night in Sacramento, we wanted to be near the Capitol and sought lodging where families could be comfortable. We selected the Marriott Residence Inn, diagonally across the street from Capitol Park. The roominess of the burgundy-themed suite with its kitchen, separate bedroom and sleeper sofa makes it perfect for traveling with children. We never moved our car from the hotel parking garage and found this location perfect for walking to the many sites on around the park.

We strolled through the Memorial Grove in Capitol Park, a tranquil setting of mature trees taken from the battlefields of the Civil War, then over to the Veterans Memorial obelisk and finally to the Vietnam War memorial. After the memorials, it seemed fitting to pause in the World Peace Rose Garden to take it all in.

The capitol building is open until 5 p.m. for tours seven days a week in the Capitol Museum. The Capitol Museum houses offices restored to look like historic settings from governments past, but in the working area of the building, you'll see the office doors of the governor and other state officials.



Sacramento residents enjoy the city's public parks and plazas at such events as the concerts in the park.

Farther along the footpaths of Sacramento history is Old Sac, the rejuvenated shopping area alongside the Sacramento River. Even when clomping along the boardwalk in our Nikes and flip-flops, it's not hard to imagine the vintage wooden buildings where the saloons, hotels and stores once hosted grizzly faced 49ers coming into town.

We lunched on the picturesque patio of the Firehouse Restaurant. Built in 1853 as the home of Sacramento's No. 3 firefighting company, the Firehouse was the first building to be restored in Old Sacramento and is a state historical landmark.



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The glistening gold-toned Tower Bridge spans the Sacramento River, joining Old Sacramento with newer neighborhoods to the west.

Within walking distance of Old Sac are dozens of museums examining and preserving the history of such important developmental aspects of modern life as the California State Railroad Museum, the Discovery Museum's Gold Rush History Center and the California State Military Museum. Jump on one of Sacramento's frequent city buses or the light rail train and you can be at the Wells Fargo History Museum, the Crocker Art Museum, or the California Museum for History, Women and the Arts.

The sun set behind the Sacramento River while we dined on salads and ravioli at Rio City Cafe.

Later we ventured down to Sacramento's Grid, a neighborhood neglected through the years of urban sprawl, but dusted off and polished with millennial spirit. The Grid radiates the magic of big city life with community events, street festivals and emphasis on the arts.

On Friday nights during the summer, the city holds concerts in Cesar Chavez park and fences off a beer garden. No one under the age of 12 is allowed to enter the beer garden where the beer and wine booths are bustling with lines 10 or 15 people deep.

The age limit doesn't keep families with young children from attending and grooving outside the fence. On the night we visited, the band was a fun blend of hip-hop with some bluesy rock influences. Young and old were dancing together near the stage, while hundreds of others watched.

Our next stop was a bit more subdued and conducive to conversation. We walked through the Grid to Crepeville and enjoyed a bottle of wine in the cool summer breeze on the outdoor patio. The area boasts dozens of eateries, everything from tapas at Aiolis, to crepes at Crepeville, to contemporary Japanese at Kru.

We spent our second night in Sacramento at the Amber House, a bed and breakfast in the heart of the Grid. Amber House is actually two houses diagonally across the street from each other. Set on a street lined with shady trees, the two houses reflect the essence of turn-of-the-19th century California. The main house is a quaint 1905 Craftsman, the second house a charming 1895 colonial revival. After our second day about town, we returned to find milk and warm chocolate chip cookies waiting in our room. The next morning we were spoiled by breakfast delivered to our room and served on the patio overlooking the shady backyard dining area of the house.

Gold sparkles and draws attention to itself, while enhancing whatever it rests upon. You'll find that gold all over Sacramento.

IF YOU GO

Sacramento Area Visitors: www.discovergold.org

Marriott Residence Inn: www.marriott.com/hotels/

travel/sacdt-residence-inn-

sacramento-downtown-at-

capitol-park

Amber House Inn: www.amberhouse.com

Sacramento Museums: www.sacmuseums.org

Capitol Museum & Tours: www.capitolmuseum.ca.gov