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Bay Area & Beyond



MARTA YAMAMOTO/FOR BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

Tiny lights are strung between the old-fashioned lampposts that surround Lake Merritt in Oakland.

Many facets to Jewel of Oakland

By **Marta Yamamoto**
for Bay Area News Group

It's hard to miss Lake Merritt. This tidal lagoon covers 155 acres and is bedecked with fairy lights strung between vintage lampposts around its 3.4-mile circumference. A peaceful oasis of water and greenery surrounded by Oakland's cityscape, it's aptly named the Jewel of Oakland.

The lake and surrounding park are a destination that lures recreation and nature enthusiasts, avid gardeners, music lovers, children, lakeside diners and an ever-growing colony of Canada geese not content to restrict themselves to any designated wildlife refuge.

Whether you have an hour, a morning or an entire day, there is plenty to see and do.

Tune into wildlife

The Rotary Nature Center is rustic by today's standards but has a charm all its own, with an emphasis on a functional approach to nature, specifically estuary ecology. From the wall display of bird life and the case filled with animal skulls to the mural of Lake Merritt life, it serves as a good introduction to this nature area carved out of an urban setting.

The center is part of the larger Wildlife Refuge at Lake Merritt, where a cacophony of bird conversations fills the air. Year-round residents, including egrets, cormorants, herons and gulls, share two offshore islands with migratory birds. Leafless trees expose huge bird nests, while coots and mallards practice patterned swimming in the brackish water.

Tone and firm

The perimeter path is a great way to follow the Necklace of Lights — those 4,000-plus tiny lights strung between 126 lampposts — while getting in some exercise. Touring the rim also lets you take in all the fine architecture and attractive plantings that surround the lake.

The Lake Merritt Boating Center has a variety of nonmotorized water vehicles available for rental. Here you can exercise your feet with a pedal-boat, paddle a canoe, skim the lake in a kayak or sail an El Toro (a small sailboat). There's even a moonlight gondola cruise that's almost like being in Italy.

Take home ideas

There's much to see at the Demonstration Gardens, with a wealth of mature trees and shrubs, as well as recently planted beds with flowers and vegetables. Paths meander throughout, with benches placed for viewing and contemplation.

One pleasant spot for reflection is the koi pond, where the quiet sounds of rushing water are complemented by large boulders banked by bird of paradise plants and agapanthus. The looming orange Torii Gate, dedicated to Frank Ogawa, translates as a gateway to heaven.

A traditional Japanese wood fence encloses the Bonsai Garden, where carefully tended specimens on raised wood platforms are displayed among the simple elements

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PHOTOS BY ELLEN GALVIN/FOR BAY AREA NEWS GROUP

A white-water rafting party battles icy water, strong enough to move huge boulders, at the bottom of the riverbed, while paddling down the wild and scenic Middle Fork of the Salmon River in Idaho.

Wilderness soundtrack

Nature's orchestra takes center stage on an Idaho river

By **Ellen Galvin**
for Bay Area News Group

Superpowers aren't all they are cracked up to be.

I know, because I hear sounds that most other people cannot (least of all my husband). This is not always a plus considering I make a living through technology — the kind that beeps, buzzes and hums nonstop.

It was definitely not an advantage when I found myself on an airplane surrounded by raucous revelers on their way to a wedding from Oakland to Boise. Or in a hotel room at the foot of the Sawtooth Mountain Range, where neighbors turned the volume on their television to a level barely below "screaming."

I was in Idaho to escape the cacophony of daily life on a white-water rafting trip down the wild and scenic Middle Fork of the Salmon River. No cellphones, no Internet access, no motorized equipment or transportation. Just quiet isolation in an extraordinary and untouched area of federally designated wilderness.

Mother Nature quickly reminded me that she is anything but silent.

It started with a short, bumpy — and jarringly loud — propeller flight to the 2.3-million-acre Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. We landed at Indian Creek, a put-in point 25 miles farther downstream than originally planned, thanks to the unseasonably fast, cold and wild conditions in June. (Despite my disappointment at the guides' de-



Faded pictographs on granite walls are evidence that Shoshone Indians once lived in Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness.

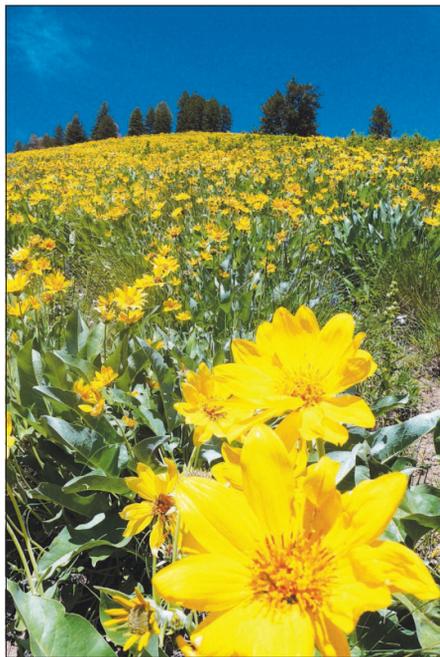
cision to bypass the top portion of the run, I recognized the wisdom of their decision.) As the plane came to a rest on the isolated dirt airstrip, I breathed a sigh of relief: "Finally, silence."

Then I heard the roar of the waves.

More than a roar, this was the forceful, pounding sound of millions of cubic feet of water being pushed through one of the deepest gorges in North America. The noise filled my head before my neoprene-clad feet even hit the boat. For the rest of the trip, that roar was the soundtrack that accompanied the rugged beauty of the scenery and the drumbeat that urged me to paddle as if my life depended on it — which it sometimes did.

When the mad rush of icy water wasn't trying to wash me out of the

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Wildflowers blanket an alpine meadow on a hike in Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness.

Plan ahead when children have to fly alone

By **Samantha Bomkamp**
Associated Press

Sending your child on a flight alone can be overwhelming for a parent — from packing the right things to making sure the kids are fed.

Adding to the confusion, not all airlines follow the same rules, or charge the same fees for children flying solo. Yet hundreds of thousands of kids fly on their own each year — about 160,000 on Delta last year alone. Delta was the world's largest airline in 2010 before being displaced when United and Continental combined.

Here are the general guidelines on unaccompanied minors and some do's and don'ts to avoid problems at the airport.

Reservations are made the old-fashioned way: by calling an airline or travel agent directly. You won't be able to book online, but you should still research flights online before calling. Airlines should waive an additional phone reservation fee in this case. Check with the customer service representative about that.

You'll be charged between \$25 and \$100 each way for an unaccompanied minor in addition to the airfare. When two or more children from the same family (immediate or extended) travel together, most airlines charge a single fee for all of them. Most airlines also waive the first and second checked-bag fees for kids fly-

ing alone. The fee for unaccompanied minors buys a flight attendant escort on the plane and between flights, but not constant supervision. Children likely will spend some time alone, either on the plane or in an airport room away from other passengers, especially when extended layovers or delays are involved.

Now, the basic rules: Kids must be at least 5 to fly alone and 8 to take a connecting flight. Children 12 to 14 can fly alone, but don't have to. Parents can opt to pay the fee to have their child accompanied, up to age 17.



DAI SUGANO/BAY AREA NEWS GROUP ARCHIVES

Knowing the rules and planning ahead can alleviate worries for parents and their children who fly unaccompanied.

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