



Tourist Trapped: Sunday Brunch at the Palace Hotel

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Tourist Trapped is a weekly Culture Blog post in which Beth Spotswood visits San Francisco's popular tourist destinations and reports back. This week: Sunday Brunch at the Palace Hotel's Garden Court.



It physically hurts me to consider spending \$68 on breakfast, but when my extended family was gathering at the [Palace Hotel's Sunday Brunch](#) for a "surprise" yesterday, I made myself available. Arriving to find everyone sitting at a massive table in the middle of the Garden Court, I settled in and looked around. The Garden Court at the Palace Hotel is in stunning atrium, a gorgeous dining room surrounded on three sides by various food stations and packed with excited groups celebrating special occasions. The glass ceiling, I couldn't help but notice, is the very one Michael

Douglas fell through in the movie, "The Game."

After polite hellos, there was no dilly dallying. Omelets stations, sushi stations, muffin stations, dim sum stations, prime rib stations, oysters, cheeses, a wall of dessert and an ice sculpture of the Ferry Building weren't going to drool over themselves.

My father and "Uncle" Greg began with plates of oysters, pacing themselves and planning their brunch cautiously. I, on the other hand, returned with breakfast sausage, a pork bun, chunks of blue cheese, a mini bran muffin, caprese salad, a croissant and an egg roll.

This was not the wisest course of action, but as I carried my warmed dinner plate around from station to station, everything looked so good. Scrambled eggs? Okay! Israeli couscous? Why not! Peking Duck? Don't mind if I do!



It's hard to look cool when you're anxiously waiting for your custom omelet, no matter how hard you try.

By the time I made my way to the carving station, I was feeling a little woozy. I looked over at my

cousin Kate, trying to select which sushi to place next to her leg of lamb and cinnamon roll.

We should not be trusted with so many delicious options.

Everyone agreed that the Israeli couscous was the hit of brunch. It was curried, dotted with roasted asparagus and carrots. I wanted to pull out a Tupperware and take a little to-go portion. After all, "The Godfather, Part II" was on TV later.

But that's the thing about these glorious buffets: one is presented with gorgeous, delicious and exotic gourmet extravagance for two whole hours, and then one is ripped away, back to the real world and restaurants with food all from the same meal-time and country of origin.



Suddenly, I find myself in the mood for a crepe.

All of a sudden, in the middle of the Garden Court, a couple broke into a dramatic Italian opera. The diners all paused mid-bite, surprised and delighted. Our table was no different, looking around wondering what the hell was going on.

With that, our friend Gail, dining two seats down the table from me, picked up a bunch of plates and silverware and dramatically slammed it on the floor. Kate and I shot each other a nervous glance across our brunch plates. Gail looked at us, she looked at the singers and in one swift movement, pushed herself towards the center of the restaurant belting bold and beautiful opera.

"Oh my God." Kate said. "Gail's in on it.



"Um, Gail. What are you doing? And more importantly, who's your new friend?"

Gail, it turned out, is part of a group called [Opera Frontier](#), the very group that had decided to flash mob the Palace Hotel's Sunday Brunch with their renegade opera. Several singers performed three numbers, much to the delight of everyone dining. Not that anyone let a little opera keep them from the flambeed crepe station.

This was our surprise, a mini-Opera over our mini-muffins. Not a bad way to spend breakfast. After Opera Frontier took their bows to thrilled and appreciative applause, the jazz trip resumed their slow jams and we went back to our brunch.