

Alcatraz: Prison Island [B1]

Quest'isola nella baia di San Francisco, è nota per essere un ex penitenziario federale di massima sicurezza con una storia movimentata di tentativi di fuga. Abbandonata 60 anni fa, oggi è una riserva ornitologica che fa parte del Golden Gate National Park.



Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay is [infamous](#) for being a former maximum-security prison. Between 1934 and 1963 the federal penitentiary [nicknamed](#) “the Rock” was occupied by America’s most notorious criminals. The twenty-two-acre island is located two kilometres off the coast of California. The bay [opens out onto](#) the Pacific Ocean and the waters are freezing and the [tides treacherous](#).

BRIEF HISTORY

In 1775, Spanish naval officer Juan Manuel de Ayala named the island “Isla de los Alcatraces” (Isle of the [Gannets](#)), because of the many seabirds that lived there. It became a military fort during the American Civil War in the 1860s, holding military deserters, insubordinates and Confederate sympathisers. At one time, indigenous people the Hopi were imprisoned there, too, for passively resisting government attempts to assimilate them.

NOTORIOUS INMATES

In the early 20th century a new prison was built there for America’s most dangerous civilian criminals. [Inmates](#) (all men) included [mobsters](#) Al Capone and George “Machine Gun” Kelly, and convicted murderers such as Robert F. Stroud, [nicknamed](#) “the Birdman of Alcatraz”. Prisoners slept in three metre by 1.5 metre cells, and were closely supervised by the latest security technology. They did factory work, [laundry](#), general prison maintenance and food preparation to keep them occupied.

ESCAPE ATTEMPTS

Alcatraz was considered [escape-proof](#). [Nevertheless](#) there were fourteen escape attempts involving thirty-six inmates. Twenty-three were recaptured, seven killed and three bodies recovered from the bay. Five inmates remain [unaccounted for](#). In 1937, bankrobbers Theodore Cole and Ralph Roe escaped through a window in the prison factory they worked in and disappeared into [thick fog](#). A thorough search revealed nothing and the men were [presumed](#) dead, [swept out](#) into the ocean.

DUMMY HEADS

In 1962, Clarence Anglin, John Anglin and Frank Morris used spoons [to dig](#) holes in their cells and left [dummy](#) heads made of soap, paper and hair in their beds as a [cover-up](#). They then took to the waters on an inflatable [raft](#) made out of [raincoats](#). They were never seen again. In 2014, two academics at Delft University in the [Netherlands](#) teamed up with a tidal expert to make a simulation of all the

routes the raincoat [raft](#) might have taken, some of which, they proved, might have led the men to freedom!

TOO EXPENSIVE

In 1963, less than a year after this [infamous](#) escape, Alcatraz was abandoned as a prison. The necessity of transporting fresh water to and [waste](#) away from the island was just too expensive.

THE BIRDMAN OF ALCATRAZ

Robert Franklin Stroud was a violent convicted murderer and a US federal prisoner for fifty-four years of his life. During this time, much of which was spent in solitary confinement, he [reared](#) and sold birds and became a respected self-taught ornithologist and author of two books on bird diseases. He was incarcerated at Alcatraz from 1942 to 1959. While he could not keep birds there, he continued his research while studying law in the prison library. His memoir *Looking Outward: A Voice From The [Grave](#)* was published posthumously in 2013.

Glossary

- **mobsters** = mafiosi
- **unaccounted for** = non compreso
- **presumed** = ritenere
- **swept out** = spazzare, travolgere
- **dummy** = manichino
- **raincoats** = impermeabili
- **reared** = allevare
- **nicknamed** = soprannominare
- **escape-proof** = a prova di fuga
- **thick** = fitta
- **fog** = nebbia
- **cover-up** = occultamento
- **tides** = maree
- **Inmates** = detenuti
- **laundry** = lavanderia
- **raft** = zattera
- **waste** = rifiuti
- **to dig** = scavare
- **Netherlands** = Paesi Bassi
- **Grave** = tomba
- **infamous** = tristemente nota
- **opens out onto** = aprirsi verso
- **treacherous** = traditrici
- **Gannets** = sule
- **Nevertheless** = nonostante