

PAINLESS WAY TO LEARN: Corporate museums make learning about Bay Area companies fun, with tours of a sake factory, silicon chip cleanrooms, and the oldest jeans and sourdough mix in the world.



MICHAEL MACOR / The Chronicle

John Meek and Michelle Armstrong of Sacramento stop at the Takara Sake Museum in Berkeley to check out the history and artifacts of the sake production.

The past and future meet

By Victoria Colliver
 CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

While they lack the high-velocity thrill of a Disneyland roller coaster, the Bay Area's corporate museums offer an entertaining insider peek at how sake is made, the history of sourdough bread, what it's like to be inside a silicon-chip manufacturing factory and more. These are companies with dedicated museums that are open to the public, offering an educational diversion during the last weeks of summer.

But others are more than happy to open their doors, and many offer group tours. Best yet: Most are free. Here's a sampling.

Takara Sake USA Inc.

Sake Museum: Established in 1982 in Berkeley, Takara Sake makes the Sho Chiku Bai brand of sake, Takara Mirin and plum wine. The company offers an on-site tasting room and a museum featuring exhibits of the historical sake-making process, Japanese sake artifacts and a history of sake-making in America. The collection is the only one of its kind outside of Japan and draws about 12,000 visitors a year.

Notable exhibit item: A large, turn-of-the-century sake press with hanging stone weights.

Odd fact: Sake, referred to as rice wine, actually has more in common with beer than wine. Because rice lacks sugar, mold is used to convert rice to sugar as

part of the fermentation process.

Word from the curator: "This building is very dingy from the outside, and people neglect to come in because it's not a particularly inviting building. Whatever the excuse — they're stuck on the freeway and see the sign and also because sake is becoming pretty popular — they say, 'Gee, why not go in?'" said Izumi Motai, senior tasting room and marketing manager.

Info: 708 Addison St., Berkeley; (510) 540-8250; links.sfgate.com/ZEHC. Hours: Daily from noon to 6 p.m. Admission: Free.

Intel Corp.

Intel Museum: Nearly 80,000 people a year visit Intel's 10,000-square-foot museum, which celebrates 40 years of



Intel Corp.

The Intel museum allows visitors to spell words using 0's and 1's.

the Santa Clara chipmaker's history through more than 30 interactive exhibits, educational programs and docent-led tours.

Notable exhibit item: A binary-code exhibit allows visitors to spell words using a combination of 0's and 1's in a computer's binary, or two-part, language.

Odd fact: The most common request by visitors is to visit an actual silicon-chip fabrication facility, or fab, which cannot be accommodated because the facilities must be kept perfectly clean. The museum has created an exhibit that re-creates what it's like to be inside a fab, and visitors can dress in technician "bunny" suits.

A word from the curator: "We get a

lot of letters from kids who like the idea of a cleanroom. They say, 'I liked visiting, but I couldn't keep my room that clean,'" said Tracey Mazur, Intel Museum's curator.

Info: Robert Noyce Building, 2200 Mission College Blvd., Santa Clara; (408) 765-0503; intel.com/museum. Hours: Monday through Friday 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Closed Sundays and holidays. Admission: Free.

Levi Strauss & Co.

Levi Strass & Co. Visitors Center: Opened in 2003 for the company's 150th anniversary, the center features historic and current collections of clothing and documents — everything from letters to the company to adver-

► **MUSEUMS:** Page C4



LEVI STRAUSS & CO.

Levi Strauss has a vault with historic items from the Gold Rush.