



Gold Country & Central Valley

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Best Places to Stay

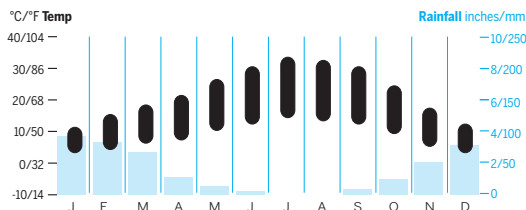
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Why Go?

Gold Country is where it all began – the drowsy hill towns and oak-lined byways of today's quiet road trip belie the wild chaos of California's founding. Shortly after a sparkle caught James Marshall's eye in 1848, the rush for gold brought a stampede of 300,000 '49ers to the Sierra foothills. Today, fading historical markers tell tales of bloodlust and banditry, while the surviving boom towns survive on antiques, ice cream, wine and gold-rush ephemera. This 400-mile-long green strip of the Central Valley, in the center of the state, is the most agriculturally productive region in America. Many travelers hardly hit the brakes while rushing between California's coasts and mountains, or cities of the south and the Bay Area, but those who slow down long enough are rewarded with fresh farm stands, twangy country music traditions and, naturally, wine.

When to Go

Sacramento



Jul When temperatures are scorching, plunge into a Gold Country swimming hole.

Oct & Nov The trees explode with color and fall fairs happen throughout the region.

Apr–Jun The Central Valley's spring crops bring food festivals galore.

NEVADA COUNTY & NORTHERN GOLD COUNTRY

The '49ers hit it big in Nevada County – the richest score of the mother lode – and the wealth built one of the most picturesque and well-preserved boomtowns, Nevada City. Get out of town and you'll find lovely, remote wilderness areas, a clutch of historic parks and rusting relics of the long-gone miners. This is also a magnet for adrenaline junkies looking to fly down single-track mountain-bike lanes or plunge into icy swimming holes that are remote enough for skinny-dipping.

Auburn

Look for the big man: a 45-ton effigy of pioneer gold panner Claude announces the visitor's arrival in Gold Country. The hallmarks of Gold Country – ice-cream shops, strollable historic districts, antiques, curious historical sites – are all here. A major stop on the Central Pacific's transcontinental route, Auburn is busy with trains on the Union Pacific's main line to the east and a popular stop for those rushing along I-80 between the Bay Area and Lake Tahoe. You'll have to venture along Hwy 49 for a deeper taste of Gold Country, but those who want just a sample will be rewarded in this accessible town.

👁 Sights & Activities

The fact that Auburn has minted itself the 'Endurance Sport Capital of the World' will give you a sense of how good the area is for cycling, trail running and other gut-busting athletics. See www.auburnendurancecapital.com for a complete list of events.

FREE Placer County Museum MUSEUM

(101 Maple St; admission free; ☎10am-4pm) The 1st floor of the monumental 1898 **Placer County Courthouse** (☎8am-5pm) has Native American artifacts and displays of Auburn's transportation heritage. It's the easiest museum to visit and gives a good overview of area history; there's also the impressive bling of the museum's gold collection.

Bernhard Museum Complex MUSEUM
(☎530-888-6891; 291 Auburn-Folsom Rd; donation requested; ☎11am-4pm Tue-Sun) At the south end of High St, this museum was built in

FAST FACTS

- » **Population of Sacramento** 407,000
- » **Average temperature low/high in Sacramento** Jan 37/52°F, Jul 55/87°F
- » **San Francisco to Nevada City** 148 miles, 2½ hours
- » **Sacramento to Bakersfield** 277 miles, 4½ hours
- » **Bakersfield to Los Angeles** 112 miles, two hours

1851 as the Traveler's Rest Hotel. The museum has displays depicting the typical life of a 19th-century farm family, and at times volunteers in period garb ham it up.

FREE Gold Country Museum MUSEUM

(1273 High St; admission free; ☎11am-4pm Tue-Sun) Those with a taste for exploring history should hit this museum, which is toward the back of the fairgrounds, where you can walk through a reproduced mining tunnel and try panning for gold for a small fee.

🍴 Sleeping & Eating

Upper Lincoln Way toward the Chamber of Commerce has several restaurants popular with locals, but there's plenty of sunny outdoor eating right off the highway. For a place to sleep look to the highway exits where there's every brand of chain hotel.

Auburn Ale House BREW PUB \$

(www.auburnalehouse.com; 289 Washington; mains \$7-17; ☎11am-10pm Sun-Thu, to 11pm weekends) One of those rare brewpubs that offers excellent craft beer *and* excellent food; patrons dig into burgers, sweet potato fries, 'adult mac and cheese' and sweet-and-savory salads (the walnut gorgonzola is delicious). The beer sampler is a great deal, and a must for beer fans, as Auburn brings home tons of festival medals for their spread of ales and pilsners. Hand over the keys before trying too many of the PU240 Imperial IPAs, its flavor profile sporting a 'weapons grade hop bomb.'

Ikedas BURGERS, GROCERY \$

(www.ikedas.com; 13500 Lincoln Way; burgers \$9-12; ☎8am-7pm, to 8pm weekends) If you're cruising this part of the state without time to explore, the best pit stop is off I-80 at exit 121. This place feeds Tahoe-bound travelers