



Napa & Sonoma Wine Country

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Best Places to Eat

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- » Madrona Manor (p210)

Best Places to Stay

- » Beltane Ranch (p192)
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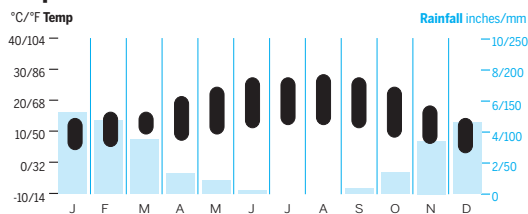
Why Go?

America's premier viticulture region has earned its reputation among the world's best. Despite hype about Wine Country style, it's from the land that all Wine Country lore springs. Rolling hills, dotted with century-old oaks, turn the color of lion's fur under the summer sun and swaths of vineyards carpet hillsides as far as the eye can see. Where they end, lush redwood forests follow serpentine rivers to the sea.

There are over 600 wineries in Napa and Sonoma Counties, but it's quality, not quantity, that sets the region apart – especially in Napa, which competes with France and doubles as an outpost of San Francisco's top-end culinary scene. Sonoma prides itself on agricultural diversity, with goat-cheese farms, you-pick-em orchards and roadside fruit stands. Plan to get lost on back roads, and, as you picnic atop sun-dappled hillsides, grab a hunk of earth and know firsthand the thing of greatest meaning in Wine Country.

When to Go

Napa



Jan Bright-yellow flowers carpet the valleys during the off-season; room rates plummet.

May Before summer holidays, the weather is perfect for touring, with long days and hot sun.

Sep–Oct 'Crush' time is peak season, when wine-making operations are in full force.

Wine Tasting

To help you discover the real Wine Country, we've mostly avoided factories and listed family-owned boutique houses (producing fewer than 20,000-annual cases) and mid-sized houses (20,000- to 60,000-annual cases). Why does it matter? Think of it. If you were to attend two dinner parties, one for 10 people, one for 1000, which would have the better food? Small wineries main-

tain tighter control. Also, you won't easily find these wines elsewhere.

Tastings are called 'flights' and include four-to-six different wines. Napa wineries charge \$10 to \$50. In Sonoma Valley, tastings cost \$5 to \$15, refundable with purchase. In Sonoma County, tastings are free or \$5 to \$10. You must be 21 to taste.



Napa & Sonoma Wine Country Highlights

- 1 Sample California's greatest red wines in the **Napa Valley** (p163)
- 2 Picnic in sun-dappled shade on the state's largest town square, **Sonoma Plaza** (p185)
- 3 Bite into the artisanal food scene at Napa's **Oxbow Public Market** (p171)
- 4 Get lost on back roads in **West County Sonoma** (p193)
- 5 Submerge yourself in a volcanic-ash mud bath in **Calistoga** (p177)
- 6 Chill with locals at the **Occidental Farmers Market** (p199)
- 7 Pedal between wineries along pastoral **West Dry Creek Rd** (p196)
- 8 Float in a canoe or kayak down the **Russian River** (p194)