



Napa & Sonoma Wine Country

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Best Places to Eat

- ➔ The Shed (p214)
- ➔ Oxbow Public Market (p171)
- ➔ Fremont Diner (p193)
- ➔ Madrona Manor (p215)

Best Places to Stay

- ➔ Beltane Ranch (p196)
- ➔ Cottages of Napa Valley (p170)
- ➔ Mountain Home Ranch (p183)
- ➔ El Bonita (p177)

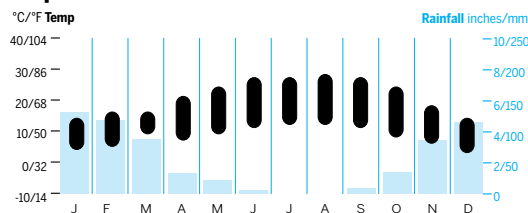
Why Go?

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.

Apr–May Before summer holidays is perfect for touring, with long days and warm sun.

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

i Getting There & Away

Napa and Sonoma counties each have an eponymous city and valley. So, the town of Sonoma is in Sonoma County, at the southern end of Sonoma Valley. The same goes for the city, county and valley of Napa.

From San Francisco, public transportation gets you to the valleys, but it's insufficient for vineyard-hopping. For public-transit informa-

tion, ☎ dial 511 from Bay Area telephones, or look online at www.transit.511.org.

Both valleys are 90 minutes' drive from San Francisco. Napa, the further inland, has over 400 wineries and attracts the most visitors (expect heavy traffic on summer weekends). Sonoma County has 260 wineries, 40 in Sonoma Valley, which is less commercial and less congested than Napa. If you have time to visit only one, for ease choose Sonoma.



Napa & Sonoma Wine Country Highlights

- 1** Sample California's greatest red wines in **Napa Valley** (p164).
- 2** Picnic in sun-dappled shade on the state's largest town square, **Sonoma Plaza** (p190).
- 3** Bite into the artisanal food scene at Napa's **Oxbow Public Market** (p171).
- 4** Get lost on West County Sonoma back roads, like **Coleman Valley Road** (p202).
- 5** Submerge yourself in a volcanic-ash mud bath in **Calistoga** (p181).
- 6** Meet kooky locals at the **Occidental Farmers Market** (p204).
- 7** Pedal between wineries along pastoral **West Dry Creek Road** (p200), in the Dry Creek Valley.
- 8** Float in a canoe or kayak down the **Russian River** (p197).