

# Welcome to Northern California

*Northern California has its own scale – the world's biggest trees, the continent's highest peaks – and to know it firsthand is to change forever the way you apprehend space and time.*

## Natural Splendor

Mother Nature puts on a spectacular show all across Northern California. In the mighty Sierra Nevada Mountains, blue Lake Tahoe is so deep that if drained it would fill the entire state with 14 inches of water. Across the Sierra's eastern escarpment, the mountains hang like curtains above the vast high deserts of the Great Basin. Even the region's major city, San Francisco, gets in on the act, with the towers of the Golden Gate Bridge playing peekaboo in the fog, while eagles and osprey soar overhead.

## National Parks

Northern California has an incredible six national parks. At Yosemite National Park see – and hear – some of the world's highest waterfalls. The tallest trees on the planet grow in Redwood National Park; the world's most massive trees at Sequoia National Park. Lassen Volcanic National Park showcases a bona fide volcano, while King's Canyon has gorges deeper than even the Grand Canyon. And the rock formations at Pinnacles National Park look like the Desert Southwest plunked down in Northern California.

## Food & Drink

Expect to eat really well – this is a region at the forefront of American culinary trends. Everything grows here, from apple trees to Zinfandel grapes, and great food and wine are a collective fetish. You need not be fancy. Locals wax poetic about the humble burrito, or a platter of fresh cracked crab, plucked that day from the sea. Napa and Sonoma are the rural outposts of the Bay Area's dynamic and progressive food scene, with restaurants by celeb chefs, you-pick-'em orchards and artisanal dairy farms producing some of the highest-grade foods anywhere in the nation.

## Weekend Escapes

Idyllic escapes are never far away here – just pick your theme. For road trips, it's hard to beat coastal drives up fog-shrouded Hwy 1 to Mendocino; or down the dramatic Pacific Coast Highway to Big Sur, a thousand feet above the crashing surf. For history, head east to explore the foothills of the Sierra Nevada and Old West towns dating to the Gold Rush. For outdoor adventure, go up, up, up the mighty Sierra Nevada and hike granite domes and valleys made famous by John Muir. And for world-class art and culture, you need never leave San Francisco's city limits.



## Why I Love Northern California

By John A Vlahides, Author

Nature constantly pulls focus in Northern California. Even in San Francisco, I'm forever looking skyward, mouth agape, at flocks of wild parrots zipping overhead, or an approaching wall of fog tumbling over the hills. Unlike Southern California, where the coast has been subdivided to death, Northern California's coast mostly remains wild, preserved in parklands. We need wild places to restore us. Northern California restores me. When I need a real jolt, I head up high in the Sierra Nevada, and recall John Muir, who said, 'You will top arise and need the tongues of angels to tell what you see.' Indeed.

**For more about our authors, see page 576.**