

# 36 hours in... SONOMA

BY PAUL RUBIO



Fall colors drape the rolling hills of Sonoma Valley, California.

Lush hills strewn with grapevines, endless expanses of rugged coastline, towering redwoods and picturesque sleepy towns, Sonoma County is painted in the landscapes of fairy tales. A natural nexus of fertility, it's the principal producer within California's wine country. And around this fascinating world of viticulture and viniculture, an entire tourism industry, inclusive of more than 400 wineries, has sprouted.

Sonoma is not quite as polished as sister county, Napa, but that's exactly its charm. Heavy on creative undertakings, mom-and-pop establishments, artisanal wineries and welcoming locals, this is a region that simply embraces a global love affair with wine, farm-to-table cuisine and California dreaming. Here, your 36-hour guide to the soul of California wine country.

## DAY 1

Begin your Sonoma County adventure with an early evening in downtown Sonoma proper. Check into the Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa and enjoy an aperitif at one of the adorable wine shops lining Sonoma's proximate main plaza. Sample a prized pinot noir at the quaint and rustic Sonoma's Best or opt for a zesty chardonnay at the boutique Sonoma Wine Shop, housed in an impressive circa-1891 building, which sources all of its wines from small wineries across California.

Before sundown, explore the historical attractions that comprise Sonoma State Historic Park radiating from the plaza. Don't miss Mission San Francisco Solano, the final Spanish-Mexican mission built in California. At dusk, return to the plaza for dinner. Delight in the just-caught, seafood-centric menu and

extensive local wine list at the intimate OSO Sonoma or experience the apex of farm-to-table freshness while dining alfresco at Harvest Moon Café, where the menu changes daily.

## DAY 2

Rise and shine for your daytrip through Sonoma's vast wine country. Start off with stops at two legends: Buena Vista Winery, California's first premium winery, and Gundlach Bundschu, the state's longest-running family-owned winery. Both are located just a short drive from downtown.

Next, head to Ravenswood Winery, where you can preregister for your bespoke blending seminar where you'll learn the art of winemaking and create your own blend to bottle, label and bring home. Then, buckle up for the scenic 50-mile sojourn along the



Clockwise from top left: Dish from Santé Restaurant at Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn; wine barrels at Buena Vista Winery; Armstrong Redwoods State Reserve; wine, grapes and corks from Rodney Strong Vineyards; Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa.



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Dry Creek Vineyard's Sonoma Valley estate

Russian River Valley toward the picture-perfect town of Healdsburg for the Food & Wine Pairing Experience—five bites flawlessly paired with five prestigious wines—at Rodney Strong Vineyards, one of the region's most renowned brands.

Finish off the afternoon in the tasting rooms of a few other Sonoma greats, such as Jordan Winery, also in Healdsburg. Or, head to Geyserville to oenophile-favorite Stryker Sonoma or the Hollywood-infused Francis Ford Coppola Winery, where wine production and movie memorabilia unite.

Once palate fatigue sets in, head to the happening town of Sebastopol. On the way, pop into Lynn's Lavender & Lotmore, a local lavender farm with an assortment of personal-care items, lotions and shampoos made on-site. Spend your evening at The Barlow, an

adaptive reuse of a large-scale apple cannery plant that now houses a hodgepodge of tasting rooms, craft breweries, food producers, art galleries and restaurants, including Zazu Kitchen + Farm, helmed by Food Network personality Duskie Estes.

### DAY 3

Wake up early to experience Sonoma's natural bounties beyond wine country. Whisk through tiny towns toward the north shore, stopping at Howards Station Café in Occidental (population: 1,300) for the ultimate hangover breakfast, continuing on to Freestone (population: 32) to pick up picnic supplies at Wild Flour Bread Bakery. Ascend to Armstrong Redwoods State Reserve to smell the fresh air and get inspired by the towering trees before heading west to U.S. 1 until you

reach the misty, rock-hewn coastline. Toast to your final hours in Sonoma overlooking the crashing waves at Fort Ross Vineyard Tasting Room, the closest vineyard to the Pacific Ocean in California, and enjoy a small picnic at one of many points along the coastline, en route to the airport.

Clearly, the sprawling Sonoma Valley has much more to offer than what you can soak up in just 36 hours; so, call your Travel Leaders agent today to start planning your next California wine country adventure. **TL**

### CALL US

To experience the winery-filled Sonoma Valley, contact our Travel Leaders agency today—our number is on the back cover.



### WHEN TO VISIT:

The best time to visit Sonoma is during harvest season, September to mid-November, when the vineyards—and the entire county—erupt in full bloom. Runner-up is the summer season, June to August, when the terrain reaches peak green and young clusters of grapes begin to appear.



### GETTING AROUND:

Given the distances between the towns within Sonoma County, a rental car is highly recommended. Rent a car upon arrival at either of Sonoma's two gateway airports: San Francisco, 90 minutes outside of Sonoma, or the smaller airport in Santa Rosa in the heart of Sonoma County.



### SHIP IT!:

It's likely you'll want to return home with many a bottle from your wine country pursuits. Sonoma-based Wine Country Shipping provides stress-free delivery of your new favorite red or white from nearly any winery directly to your home.