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10 Best Wine Travel Destinations

<http://www.winemag.com/Web-2014/10-Best-Wine-Travel-Destinations-2015/index.php/cparticle/10>



Mendocino

Mendocino County has 107 wineries and more than 17,000 acres of vineyards, but it draws visitors for other pleasures like giant redwoods, Dungeness crab, wild chanterelle mushrooms, an exhilarating rocky coast and, yes, marijuana cultivation. Mendocino is laid-back, to say the least. A two-plus hour drive north of San Francisco through Sonoma County, traffic is practically nonexistent except for logging trucks. Tasting rooms and restaurants are rarely crowded, but lodging options are scarce except on the coast near the New England-esque town of Mendocino. Ukiah, in the warmer, drier inland valley along Highway 101, is the biggest city, with a whopping population of 16,000. Since 95 percent of the land in Mendocino County is rolling or mountainous, it offers plenty of bends in the road to explore. —Jim Gordon



Where to Dine

The enduring Boonville Hotel, run by the Schmitt family, renamed its restaurant Table 128. It serves upscale family-style, prix-fixe dinners with an Italian bent and a rainbow of local ingredients. A block away, former luxury yacht chef Christina Jones came home to open Aquarelle, a creative seafood café and wine bar. In Ukiah, locals crowd Cynthia Ariosta's Saucy for classic wood-fired, thin-crust pizza, and they rave about the remarkably authentic sushi and hot soup noodles at Oco Time.

Where to Stay

Anderson Valley's most pampering hotel is The Madrones near Philo, which has the feel of an Italian villa and underwent a recent expansion by owner-designer Jim Roberts. For spectacular views of the crashing Pacific surf and logger-chic design, book one of the 10 rooms at the wood-shingled, contemporary Brewery Gulch Inn near the town of Mendocino. Or bring a few friends and lodge among the Carignane vines on the Testa Ranch property in quiet Calpella. Grape grower Maria Martinson renovated her family's three-bedroom 1927 guesthouse for country comfort.

Other Activities

Before your massage and facial, soak in one of the few naturally warm and carbonated mineral baths in North America at the 160-year-old Vichy Springs Resort, on 700 acres outside Ukiah. Shop in Mendocino for local art and New Age jewelry, and marvel at the ocean views. Stay, cook and learn about organic farming at the simply gracious Apple Farm in Philo.

Budget Tip

Don't be dissuaded by Libby's goofy sign: a cartoon jalapeño wearing a sombrero. Located in Philo, it's the best place for fresh Mexican with a Mendocino twist. It's homey, clean and affordable.

When to Go

January through March brings Dungeness crab season and rainstorms (if California's drought breaks), but the wineries, redwoods and coast are open year-round.

Where to Taste

Pinot Noir fans head straight to Anderson Valley for the highest concentration of tasting rooms and the most prestigious wines in Mendocino County. Some charge for tasting, but many of the old guard don't. Visit the classics, like Roederer Estate for bubbly, and Handley and Husch for Pinot Noir and Alsace varieties. Navarro is a beautiful stop with a professional staff and wine-cheese pairings using its own Pennyroyal Farm cheeses. Visit Goldeneye for \$15 and \$25 tasting options, plus a manicured picnic area. Taste boutique Pinots from



Drew, Knez, Bink and Signal Ridge at The Madrones. Stop in Hopland for a confluence of tasting rooms. Call ahead to Saracina for a cave tour and dazzling white wines. If you like organic wines, make an appointment at Frey Vineyards in Redwood Valley. You'll be greeted by one of the 50 family members who live on the 1,000-acre property. Take a walk through the biodynamic gardens, and even meet the livestock.

Mendocino's best wines divide into cool-climate types like Pinot Noir and Gewürztraminer in Anderson Valley, and the warm-climate types like Zinfandel, Petite Sirah and Rhône varieties inland. Many Anderson Valley Pinot Noirs are outstanding and share a personality that's vivid and balanced. Top-rated Pinots are made within the valley by Lazy Creek, Navarro, Goldeneye, Angel Camp, the brand-new Domaine Anderson and others, and by outside wineries like Williams Selyem, Donum and Saintsbury, all of which buy Anderson Valley grapes. Inland, ask about Coro Mendocino, a limited-production, Zinfandel-based blend produced by Barra, Brutocao, Clos du Bois, Fetzer, Golden, McFadden, Parducci and Testa. That 28 percent of the county's grapes are certified organic or biodynamic adds to the wines' appeal.

Local in the Know

Third-generation winemaker Jake Fetzer loves the ruggedness of Mendocino, like the wild mountaintop location of his winery, Masút. "The Broiler in Redwood Valley is a classic steakhouse in the middle of nowhere. Montgomery Woods is a great hike for the active and boasts some of the world's tallest trees. On the coast, Noyo Harbor is a great place to watch the catch come in at Caito Fisheries. Oh yeah, and the Skunk Train is a real adventure."