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**THEY'RE THE ESSENTIAL PLACES AND EXPERIENCES THAT DEFINE LIVING IN SONOMA COUNTY** — COMFORT FOOD FOR THE SOUL, AS WE LIKE TO SAY. THINK DUNGENESS CRAB SANDWICHES WOLFED DOWN JUST STEPS FROM THE WATER, A QUIET WALK UNDER A THICK CANOPY OF REDWOODS, A BARSTOOL CALLING YOUR NAME AT A DECADES-OLD WATERING HOLE WHERE THE OWNER INSISTS YOU PUT AWAY YOUR PHONE. SETTLE DOWN, TAKE A DEEP BREATH, AND EASE INTO THE NEW YEAR RIGHT.

BY  
**DANA REBMANN**

WITH JOHN BECK, TINA CAPUTO,  
TIM CURLEY, SOFIA ENGLUND,  
MACI MARTELL, DEREK MOORE,  
ABIGAIL PETERSON, NATE SELTENRICH,  
AND CAREY SWEET.

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*Bodega Bay's Fishetarian, where winter seafood is at its peak and picnic tables are just feet from the tides.*



Kim Carroll

## BUCKET LIST

## Winding Weekend Drives

Head northeast from Healdsburg on Highway 128 past the wineries of **Alexander Valley to rural Knights Valley**, where you'll take in views of a historic 1,200-acre cattle ranch (that donates some of its beef to people in need), a trout farm, and distant hills layered upon mountains. Time seems to stop in this hidden corner of the county.

Curvy **Coleman Valley Road** begins in Occidental and leads west, emerging from a series of redwood groves onto a hilltop plateau of prairie-like pasturelands. From the very top, before the road takes a curvy, jawdropping descent to join Highway 1, you can often watch the sun sink into banks of pillowy fog.

Ramble westward through the agricultural valleys outside Petaluma, starting on Western Avenue to **Chileno Valley Road** for the seasonal spectacle at Helen Putnam Regional Park. From there, take Chileno Valley Road west and then north, before looping back to town via Tomales Road and Bodega Avenue. Especially stunning when the skies clear just after a storm.



Chileno Valley Road



## BEST HIKES

North Sonoma Mountain Regional Park

**Kortum Trail** One of the most stunning hikes in all of Northern California, winding along the bluffs and headlands from Blind Beach to Wright's Beach, with views all the way to Point Reyes on clear days.

**Where:** Park near the end of Goat Rock Road, just south of Jenner and the mouth of the Russian River.

**Details:** 4 miles one-way to Wright's Beach. Make an out-and-back hike of any length you like. Easy and mostly flat. *Sonoma Coast State Park, parks.ca.gov*

**Sea to Sky Trail** This unforgettable route takes a serious commitment as it winds up through coastal grasslands, oaks, and redwoods to 360-degree views at the top of Pole Mountain, the highest peak along the Sonoma Coast. Many friends meet each New Year's Day to hike this trail together.

**Where:** Start at the parking area in the Jenner Headlands Preserve, along Highway 1 just north of Jenner.

**Details:** 15.2 miles round trip with 3,000 feet of climbing. Strenuous uphill; gentle coming back down. *Sonoma Land Trust, sonomalandtrust.org, Wildlands Conservancy, wildlandsconservancy.org*

**Gunsight Rock** This is an ambitious out-and-back hike that leads to a landmark volcanic rock formation at the top

of the Mayacamas range, with views across all of Sonoma Valley, topping out some 2,700 feet above the valley floor. There are a few different routes to reach Gunsight from trailheads along both Pythian Road and Adobe Canyon Road, but in winter and spring, we prefer the route that begins in Sugarloaf Ridge State Park.

**Where:** From the lower parking area in Sugarloaf Ridge State Park, head northwest on the Goodspeed Trail, which becomes the Nattkemper Trail as it crosses into Hood Mountain State Park.

**Details:** 7 miles round trip. Strenuous. *Sugarloaf Ridge State Park, sugarloafpark.org*

**Mount Saint Helena Summit Trail** A shady first mile gives way to miles along a sunny fire road to reach the highest peak in Sonoma County at 4,342 feet.

**Where:** Start on the other side of the ridge in Napa, at Robert Louis Stevenson State Park. The trail crosses the county line along the way.

**Details:** 9.5 miles round trip with 2,000 feet of climbing. Strenuous uphill, gentle coming back. *Robert Louis Stevenson State Park, parks.ca.gov*

**Sonoma Overlook Trail** In the town of Sonoma, this short hike begins at the historic cemetery then switchbacks through meadows and oaks to views of the town and the

Mayacamas. Just a few blocks off the plaza, but it feels like a world away.

**Where:** Start at the parking lot for Mountain Cemetery at the end of First St. West.

**Details:** 3 miles round trip. Easy to moderate. *overlook-montini.org*

**North Sonoma Mountain to Jack London State Park** This hike takes some planning, as it's an ambitious, all-day affair connecting newer trails in the North Sonoma Mountain Regional Park and Preserve to Jack London State Park. Classic Sonoma oak woodlands and grassy hills with views for miles, including from the shoulder near the summit of Sonoma Mountain. At the finish, hike past vineyards to tour Jack London's home and the Wolf House.

**Where:** Start at the North Sonoma Mountain Regional Park & Preserve parking lot on Sonoma Mountain Road.

**Details:** 8 miles one way, moderate to strenuous. Four miles from the parking area to the border of Jack London State Park, then another 4 miles to the finish in Jack London via the Mountain Trail. Print out maps in advance, and make plans to get a ride back to the start or take two cars to shuttle back and forth. *North Sonoma Mountain Regional Park & Preserve, parks.sonoma-county.ca.gov*

## ONE PERFECT DAY

## Santa Rosa

Gazing into the breakfast pastry case at **Marla Bakery**, it's clear tough decisions will have to be made (*marlabakery.com*). A savory caramelized onion-cheddar scone might be easier to nibble while wandering nearby Railroad Square, but the sticky buns also beckon. Maybe today's the day to go for both.

**Railroad Square** is brimming with inspiration—you just have to be in the right mood to see it. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the neighborhood's nooks and crannies offer up vintage vinyl and shoes and what's said to be one of the largest yarn stores in the country.

Hop back in the car for a nostalgic journey with Snoopy and the Peanuts gang at the **Charles M. Schulz Museum** (*schulzmuseum.org*). Watch a timeless animated special in the theater, then seek firmer footing and a moment of calm in Snoopy's outdoor labyrinth.

Further south in the Roseland neighborhood, the food trucks at **Mitote Food Park** offer up some of the best Mexican eats in Sonoma County (*mitotefoodpark.com*). For lunch, feast on carnitas *tlayuda* at Antojitos Victoria or fish tacos at Pezcow; a stop at La Churroteka for a churro filled with chocolate is a must.

At the mountaintop **Coursey Graves Estate Winery**, just east of the city in Bennett Valley, unwind with a Bordeaux blend while taking in panoramic views of the Monet-inspired lily ponds and gardens. There's even a Monet-style arched footbridge (*courseygraves.com*).

You might feel as though you've traveled the world by the time you land back in town at **Monti's**, which reopened earlier this year after a major renovation (*montismv.com*). Spreads & Bread is fun to order with hummus, sweet and spicy eggplant, whipped beet feta, and za'atar flatbread to share.



## THE CLASSICS

## Ernie's Tin Bar

Since 1923, this watering hole on Lakeville Highway has offered respite from the bustling world outside its door. Snack on all the shelled peanuts you want, but keep your cellphone tucked away—their use is frowned upon. Instead, strike up a chat with your neighbor. "If you sit down, you're going to end up in a conversation with somebody," says third-generation proprietor Ernie Altenreuther. 5100 Lakeville Highway, Petaluma. 707-762-2075.

## Friday Pie Day at Hazel

Michele Wimborough's Friday pie day is legendary, with picks ranging from peanut butter and blackberry to Dutch apple and lemon meringue. You never know what she'll be making, which is half the fun of your pie adventure. 3782 Bohemian Hwy., Occidental. 707-874-6003, *restauranthazel.com*

*Clockwise from top: Peanut butter pie at Hazel in Occidental. Neighbors meet at Ernie's Tin Bar along Lakeville Highway. Santa Rosa's Charles M. Schulz Museum.*



Clockwise from top: Peanut butter pie at Hazel in Occidental. Neighbors meet at Ernie's Tin Bar along Lakeville Highway. Santa Rosa's Charles M. Schulz Museum.

## BUCKET LIST

## Live Music

**Little Saint**  
HEALDSBURG

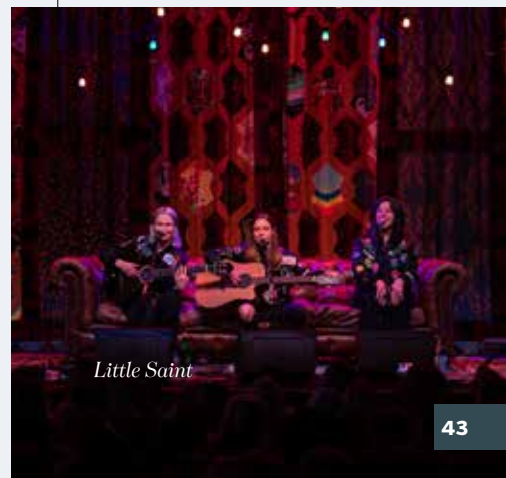
Every show feels like an intimate house concert at this music club and gathering space on the second floor of a well-known plant-based restaurant. The owners and concert programmer are well plugged into the folk/Americana scene, and free concerts happen most Thursday nights, along with occasional ticketed shows. Superstar trio boygenius played a surprise under-the-radar show here in 2023. [littlesainthealdsburg.com/music](http://littlesainthealdsburg.com/music)

**The Mystic Theatre**  
PETALUMA

A 1911 vaudeville theater-turned-club with a landmark marquee anchors the North Bay music scene, booking national touring acts, tribute bands, comedy shows, and more. Seeing a show here is a true step back in time, the intimate kind of venue that real music fans love. [mystictheatre.com](http://mystictheatre.com)

**The 222**  
PETALUMA

Jazz trios, choral music, and opera are just some of what's heard at this community-minded art gallery and performance space just off the Healdsburg Plaza. Also poetry readings and film nights. Always thoughtful, always welcoming. [the222.org](http://the222.org)



Little Saint



## BEST BEACHES

## FOR SPREADING OUT

**Blind Beach, South of Jenner**

This narrow pebble beach offers great views of the ocean and the impressive arched rock. It's the perfect beach sanctuary for those who want to get away and listen to the crashing waves. Hwy. 1 and Goat Rock Rd., Jenner. [parks.ca.gov](http://parks.ca.gov)

## FOR BEACHCOMBERS

**Schoolhouse Beach, Near Bodega Bay**

Enclosed by rocky headlands, this beach has a glorious pebble shore and a low tide that sea scavengers will enjoy. Tidepools teem with life: starfish, mussels, hermit crabs, sea anemones and more. Viking Strand and Hwy. 1, Bodega Bay. [parks.ca.gov](http://parks.ca.gov)

## WITH DOGS

**Doran Beach, Bodega Bay**

Take your playful pup (on leash!) on the boardwalk trail over the wetlands or wander the sands. This regional park beach is a popular destination for picnics, paddleboarding, fishing, birdwatching, and even horseback riding. 201 Doran Beach Rd., Bodega Bay. [parks.sonomacounty.ca.gov](http://parks.sonomacounty.ca.gov)

## FOR GETTING AWAY

**Black Point Beach, The Sea Ranch**

There are six public access trails in The Sea Ranch leading to coastal beaches like Shell Beach. But Black Point, a long sandy cove accessed via a steep wooden staircase, is a favorite. The beach is typically secluded and enjoys beautiful ocean views. Access Black Point Beach via Sea Walk Drive, off Hwy. 1, The Sea Ranch. [parks.sonomacounty.ca.gov](http://parks.sonomacounty.ca.gov)

Above: Looking north along the coast to Goat Rock Beach, where seals and seagulls play.



Buena Vista Winery



Valley



Hanson of Sonoma

## ONE PERFECT DAY

## Sonoma

Sonoma Plaza makes everyone feel as if it's their place. Designed by General Mariano Vallejo in 1835, it's home to City Hall, a duck pond, rose garden, and plenty of benches for prime people-watching. Start the day with espresso, waffles, and mimosas at **Sunflower Caffè**, a sunny gathering spot right on the park that understands breakfast is the most important meal of the day ([sonomasunflower.com](http://sonomasunflower.com)). After, wander past the plaza's Sebastiani Theatre to check out what's playing—the venue hosts both independent movies and occasional live shows ([sebastianitheatre.com](http://sebastianitheatre.com)).

A short drive away, raise a glass to Wine Country history at **Buena Vista Winery**, in a tasting room that dates to 1857. The theatrical light-and-sound show at the winery's Wine Tool Museum details early local history and stories of Buena Vista's eccentric founder, Agoston Haraszthy ([buenavistawinery.com](http://buenavistawinery.com)).

Haraszthy's historical tales continue at nearby **Bartholomew Estate Winery** ([bartholomewestate.com](http://bartholomewestate.com)). This was originally part of the same estate as Buena Vista, and guests are encouraged to wander the property just as the self-proclaimed "Count of Buena Vista" might have done. At Bartholomew Estate, you can opt for a guided forest bathing experience or escape solo on more than three miles of trail before sitting down to taste wines and nibble on marinated olives, pickled veggies, baba ganoush, and more from Sonoma's Spread Kitchen.

Flavors of the season aren't limited to wine. In their smart tasting room a short drive from downtown, **Hanson of Sonoma** mixes warm boozy delights like hot chocolate made with organic espresso vodka ([hansonofsonoma.com](http://hansonofsonoma.com)). It's hard not to love, especially on a chilly afternoon. For a decadent splurge, pair vodka martinis with Thomas Keller's Regis Ova caviar.

Back at the plaza, reserve ahead at **Valley** for a locally inspired, farm-to-table dinner and thoughtful low-intervention wines ([valleybarandbottle.com](http://valleybarandbottle.com)). The crispy rice with ginger and scallions, and a custardy boiled egg with spicy, umami-laden XO sauce are standouts among an ever-changing lineup. Interesting visiting chef collaborations and special events happen throughout the year.

## CLASSIC HISTORY

## Pliny the Younger

Why is there a long line of folks standing out in the cold and—even sometimes in the spring rain—along Fourth Street in Santa Rosa? It's a rite of passage that goes back over two decades: the annual release of the Pliny the Younger beer. The triple IPA packs a punch at over 10% alcohol and is available at Russian River Brewing Co.'s pubs in Santa Rosa and Windsor for only two weeks, starting in late March. Waiting in line for a pint of Pliny is a classic, only-in-Sonoma experience that you've got to try at least once. [russianriverbrewing.com](http://russianriverbrewing.com)



**Geyserville Gun Club** This former Masonic lodge masquerades as the most next-level bar in the county. Though their craft cocktails would spit in your eye if you called them that, selections like the She Devil, with mezcal, cherry liqueur, a squeeze of citrus, and a dusting of ghost pepper are certainly creative. The bar menu is a munchie fantasy: fat Korean tacos with Kewpie mayo and bonito flakes, for example, and some of the tastiest burgers around. [geyservillgunclub.com](http://geyservillgunclub.com)

Opposite, clockwise from top: John Bugness; Courtesy Sonoma County Tourism; Emma K. Photo/Courtesy Sonoma County Tourism; This page, clockwise from top: Spencer Spellman/Courtesy Sonoma County Tourism; Emma K. Photo/Courtesy Little Saint.

BUCKET LIST

## Wander the Redwoods

**Guerneville**  
**ARMSTRONG REDWOODS STATE NATURAL RESERVE**  
 The classic 805-acre reserve has both strenuous hikes and paved, accessible strolls along gorgeous Fife Creek. The Colonel Armstrong Tree, the oldest in the grove at an estimated 1,400 years, honors the Civil War Union officer who first preserved this special place. [parks.ca.gov](http://parks.ca.gov)

**Healdsburg**  
**RIVERFRONT REGIONAL PARK**  
 Along the banks of the Russian River just steps from vineyards, this pretty grove connects to easy riverside trails and access to the water for kayakers and paddleboarders. [parks.sonomacounty.ca.gov](http://parks.sonomacounty.ca.gov)

**Near Jenner**  
**RED HILL**  
 In Sonoma Coast State Park, the Red Hill and Pomo Canyon trails loop through coastal grasslands and very pretty stands of coast redwoods fed by nearby springs. [parks.ca.gov](http://parks.ca.gov)



Riverfront Regional Park

## ONE PERFECT DAY Healdsburg

Ah, Kouign-Amann, with your layers upon layers of flaky dough and sugary bliss. Don't worry if you can't pronounce it—the friendly weirdoughs (their term!) at **Quail & Condor** bakery know the drill ([quailandcondor.com](http://quailandcondor.com)).

Healdsburg's chic downtown packs a punch and is best navigated on foot. Pop into **Harmon Guest House** to see the latest installation of its rotating artist series ([harmonguesthouse.com](http://harmonguesthouse.com)), then head to **Levin & Company Community Booksellers**. For 30-plus years, this family-owned bookstore and its upstairs art gallery has offered a snug space for contemplation and escape ([levinbooks.com](http://levinbooks.com)).

Nearby, the popularity of downtown newcomer **Acorn Cafe** is no surprise, with dishes like shakshuka and lemon ricotta hotcakes, topped with lemon lavender ice cream from local favorite Noble Folk ([acornhealdsburg.com](http://acornhealdsburg.com)). At Acorn, settle in on the patio by the plaza, or opt for a grab-and-go sandwich and hit nearby **Fitch Mountain** for heart-pumping hiking trails with a view.



For a more serene outdoor adventure, set your sights on **Aesthete Farm & Winery**, a short drive away in Dry Creek Valley ([aesthetewines.com](http://aesthetewines.com)). Home to more than just vineyards, guests are encouraged to roam the 24-acre property, meet the social herd of rescue sheep and goats, and taste wines from rockstar winemaker Jesse Katz. If Dry Creek is flowing at a mellow pace, the winery has Adirondack chairs by the water that are the place to be.

Back in town for drinks and dinner, start at **Lo & Behold** for a Happy Trails gin cocktail or the World's Best Vodka Soda, crafted with local Young & Yonder vodka, and maybe a pre-dinner snack of kimchi noodles, made fresh daily ([loandbeholdca.com](http://loandbeholdca.com)). Then finish at the casual **Tisza Bistro** ([tiszabistro.com](http://tiszabistro.com)), a warm, neighborhood-y spot for crispy potato latkes with smoked salmon, dumplings, and schnitzel—a dinner date that's hard to break.

Clockwise from top left: Quail & Condor, Harmon Guest House, Lo & Behold, Aesthete Farm & Winery.



This page, clockwise from top: Emma K Photo/Courtesy Quail & Condor, Courtesy Sonoma County Tourism, Anna Wick/Courtesy Lo & Behold, Courtesy Sonoma County Tourism, Aesthete Farm & Winery, Courtesy Sonoma County Tourism, Opposite: Mariah Hurley/Courtesy Sonoma County Tourism, Rabbil Pengelly, KRM Carroll.



## MUST-TRY DISHES

**BARBECUE**  
**A&M BBQ**  
 Barbecue powerhouses Kris Austin and Marvin McKinzy teamed up last year for the ultimate Texas 'cue in Sebastopol. The line can snake out the door, and sometimes they sell out, so it's good to get there early. "We don't try to cover up the meat with sauce, so you can taste the time we put into it," says Austin. 707-888-1315

**TEN-LAYER LASAGNA**  
**Catelli's**  
 You can literally read a newspaper through each layer of super-thin pasta going into the dish. A family recipe that's been refined over the years, it has a three-cheese filling of creamy Bellwether Farms ricotta, goat cheese, and aged Parmesan. [mycatellis.com](http://mycatellis.com)

**WHOLE ROASTED BRANZINO**  
**Glen Ellen Star**  
 Just about anything from chef Ari Weiswasser's wood-fired oven is pretty magical, but the flaky, crispy whole roasted fish rises above, especially when served with shaved fennel, preserved lemon, and tomato-y romesco sauce. [glenellenstar.com](http://glenellenstar.com)

**PERFECT BREAKFASTS**  
**Willow Wood Market Café**  
 Since 1995, this charming spot has welcomed west county neighbors for excellent French folded eggs with fontina and basil, or golden polenta crowned with exquisite poached eggs and crispy prosciutto. [willowwoodgraton.com](http://willowwoodgraton.com)

**LAMB CHOPS**  
**Willi's Wine Bar**  
 This Santa Rosa institution is a not-so-secret clubhouse for many of the county's movers and shakers, an office away from home. Lamb chops are just one of the many small-plates favorites here, along with curried crab tacos and roasted carrots. [starkrestaurants.com](http://starkrestaurants.com)

**JOOK PORRIDGE**  
**Jam's Joy Bungalow**  
 We're special fans of this morning hangover helper: a tummy filling rice porridge with spicy ginger, herbs, fried shallots, a custardy 6-minute egg, and khao man gai sauce, a traditional Thai street-food favorite. You'll never look at oatmeal the same way again. [jamsjoybungalow.com](http://jamsjoybungalow.com)

**BLUE CORN TACOS**  
**Quote**  
 Handmade blue corn tortillas topped with fresh rock cod, cochinita pibil with pickled onions, or al pastor and salsa verde, always make our "best tacos" list. Add a side of guacamole with serrano chiles and crispy raspadas or brothy Rancho Gordo beans to get the full experience. [quotemx.com](http://quotemx.com)

**PIZZA**  
**Psychic Pie**  
 Rectangular, Roman-style pizza with a fermented sourdough crust is served by the inch (you tell them how much you want) at this casual slice house in Sebastopol. The picks switch up weekly, and there are always veggie and vegan types in addition to meatier options. New this winter? They're trying out round pies every once in a while—what a concept! [psychicpie.com](http://psychicpie.com)

Above: An epic brunch spread at Willow Wood Market Café in the rural west county town of Graton.



**CLASSIC SONOMA**  
**The Swiss Hotel**  
 There's no better place to take in the scene on the Sonoma Plaza than from one of these outdoor tables, a well-mixed Negroni in your hand. This historic hotel and restaurant has been around for well over a century, and the sense of history shows. A collection of beer steins hang above the bar, black-and-white photos of sportsmen and Hollywood actors cover the walls, and the menu is filled with Italian family-style favorites like pastas and chops. There's an epic wall of wine bottles, many rare and historic, in the main dining room. [swisshotelsonoma.com](http://swisshotelsonoma.com)



**Fishetarian**  
**BODEGA BAY**  
 This easy-going seafood shack right on the Bodega Harbor boasts fresh-caught fish daily and picnic table seating just steps from the water. You can't go wrong with the menu here, with picks like platters of fat oysters served raw or BBQ-style, Boston-style clam chowder, fish tacos, and crab cakes. Stock up for the fridge back at home at the fresh seafood counter. [fishetarianfishmarket.com](http://fishetarianfishmarket.com)



## ONE PERFECT DAY Petaluma

With eclectic small boutiques, antique shops, and tons of great restaurants, Petaluma's downtown is charismatic and intimate. Jumpstart the day at the grab-and-go counter at legendary bakery **Della Fattoria** ([dellafattoria.com](http://dellafattoria.com)). The cinnamon twist is a harmony of savory and sweet—odds are you'll be covered in some highly coveted crumbs before you make it out the door.

Browse sustainable clothes and apothecary goods at **Estuary**, get lost among stacks of vinyl at **Paradise Found Records & Music**, stock up on heirloom seeds at **Petaluma Seed Bank**, or lose an hour or two at **Copperfield's Underground**, a treasure trove of rare and used books ([petalumadowntown.com](http://petalumadowntown.com)).

A short walk away, everyone loves the Swedish meatballs (with extra lingonberries, please) and falafel kebabs at family-owned **Stockhome** restaurant ([stockhomerestaurant.com](http://stockhomerestaurant.com)). Don't leave without a bag of colorful candies from the glass jars that line the counter for your own version of the Swedish custom of *lördagsgodis*, or Saturday morning sweets. From there, a quick stop at **Cottage Gardens of Petaluma** provides inspiration for future flowery goodness, with paths lined with roses, succulents, and bubbling fountains ([cottagegardensofpet.com](http://cottagegardensofpet.com)).

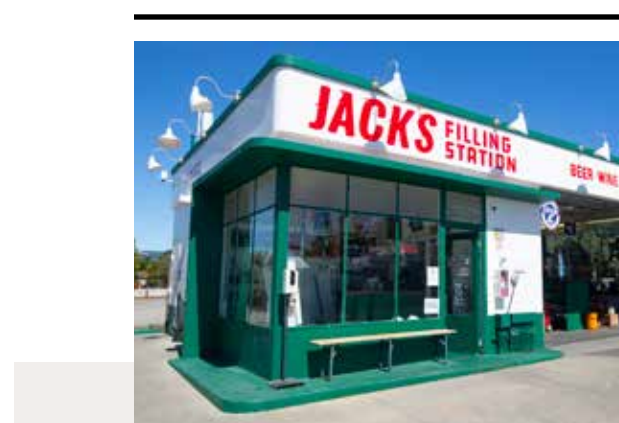
Lush and green, the hillsides at **Helen Putnam Regional Park**, a short drive from town, shine this time of year ([parks.sonomacounty.ca.gov](http://parks.sonomacounty.ca.gov)). If it's been a rainy week, the paved Ridge Trail is a go-to. When the ground is firm, the park's 6-mile looped trail system weaves together quiet spaces for reflection with panoramic views of the city and rolling pasturelands.

Back in town, celebrate all those steps from a comfy seat near the window at **Barber Lee Spirits** ([barberleespirits.com](http://barberleespirits.com)). Whiskey drinkers will certainly feel at home here, but the family-owned distillery is also well-known for crafting spirits that aren't widely produced in the United States, including anise-flavored absinthe and *lambanog*, a traditional 100-proof liquor from the Philippines with an alluring slight sweetness.

From the tasting room at Barber Lee, it's less than a 15-minute walk to a memorable dinner at **Table Culture Provisions** ([tcprovision.com](http://tcprovision.com)). What started as a fried chicken pop-up during the pandemic has blossomed into an ambitious multi-course tasting menu that reminds us of the bounty in our backyard.

*This page, clockwise from top: Spring trails at Helen Putnam Regional Park. Swedish comfort food at Stockhome. Bodega locals gather at Casino, which isn't a casino at all. Chic housewares at Petaluma's Estuary.*

This page, clockwise from top: Courtesy Sonoma County Tourism, Elise Allern Photography/Courtesy Sonoma County Tourism, Chad Sumitck, Adam Potts Photography/Courtesy Estuary, Erik Caseris, Robbi Pergelty, Sierm Downey/Courtesy Sonoma County Tourism.



### Sonoma Classic: Jack's Filling Station

It's the only place we know where you can both fill up your gas tank and walk away with a vintage vinyl record and a six-pack of craft beer or a bottle of natural wine from an up-and-coming producer. The Little Lou's food truck is parked at the side most mornings, with gigantic breakfast burritos and some of the best burgers in town. [jacksfillingstation.com](http://jacksfillingstation.com)

## ONE PERFECT DAY Sebastopol

Begin the morning with a croissant at **Sarmentine**, a favorite French bakery with a new location at The Barlow, the popular strollable outdoor marketplace with shops and restaurants, tasting rooms, and a terrific natural wine bar, **The Punchdown** ([thebarlow.net](http://thebarlow.net)). Hop in the car for a quick tour down Florence Avenue to take in the whimsical **public art** pieces made from recycled metal and other castoffs by Brigitte Laurent and her husband, Patrick Amiot ([patrickamiot.com](http://patrickamiot.com)).

Next, head to **Ragle Ranch Regional Park**, best known as the setting for the signature Gravenstein Apple Fair each August ([parks.sonomacounty.ca.gov](http://parks.sonomacounty.ca.gov)). The park's Veterans Memorial Grove is a sheltered cluster of redwoods atop a beautiful knoll, and the Peace Garden is a good spot to pause and come back to center, especially after tackling 3 miles of rolling backcountry trails.

Outside of town, wind along the Bohemian Highway to reach the solar-powered, biodynamically farmed **Marimar Estate Vineyards & Winery**, run by Marimar Torres and her daughter Cristina Torres, whose family's winemaking history stretches back to the 1600s in Spain ([marimarestate.com](http://marimarestate.com)). Settle into the welcoming tasting room for a glass of Albariño or Godello, with house-made tapas inspired by Marimar Torres's native Barcelona.

From there, stop at **Gold Ridge Organic Farms**, whose name celebrates the town's rich Goldridge soils, which helped put this agricultural region on the map ([goldridgeorganicfarms.com](http://goldridgeorganicfarms.com)). Farmer Brooke Hazen risked everything to transform this 88-acre cattle ranch into an award-winning olive operation with 13,000 olive trees as well as hundreds of apples and other fruits. Now through March marks the brief season for *olio nuovo*, the new release of freshly milled olive oil, which you can taste at the farmstand.

Back downtown, stroll past the shops before seeking out playful vibes at neighborhood standout **Third Pig Bar**, where craft cocktails come served in vintage glassware or—our favorite—a pink pig tiki mug ([thirdpigbar.com](http://thirdpigbar.com)).

Nearby at **Handline Coastal California**, a family-friendly dinner spot, you'll be faced with a difficult decision: linger over a bowl of cioppino or excellent fish tacos, or pay tribute to the eatery's humble beginnings as a Foster's Freeze with a burger topped with St. Jorge Fonduta cheese and a side of hand-cut French fries ([handline.com](http://handline.com)). It's all delicious, especially when you finish up with a root beer float, made with local Strauss soft serve.

## BUCKET LIST

### Neighborhood Crossroads

#### The Starling

In Sonoma, this locals bar has quite the scene, with live music as a mainstay 2-3 nights a week plus plenty of cold beers and interesting craft cocktails. They've recently added comedy nights and line dancing, plus meatball sandwiches (YES!) and hot pizza from an oven out back. Feeling brave? The open mic night is one of the best around. [starlingsonoma.com](http://starlingsonoma.com)

#### Underwood Bar

In rural Graton, take a seat at the big, loud, nickel-topped bar to rub shoulders with west county winemakers, farmers, and other cool kids. All around, folks indulge in French onion soup laden with molten Gruyère, duck confit with lentils, flatiron steaks, and, interestingly, some mighty fine Thai dishes. [underwoodgraton.com](http://underwoodgraton.com)

#### The Goose & Fern

This British-style pub in Railroad Square has deep green walls covered in horse-racing prints and a big TV tuned to Premier League soccer (football!). The menu has hearty pub favorites like Guinness pie, bangers and mash, and local rock cod fish and chips—they'll even give you the crispy bits from the deep fryer to nibble on for free. Such a chill addition to the nightlife scene in Santa Rosa. [thegooseandfern.com](http://thegooseandfern.com)



### CLASSIC HISTORY The Casino Bar & Grill

Oh, Casino, how we love you—and we hope you never change. This waystation in the town of Bodega was overseen by the legendary Evelyn Casini for 75 years. Evelyn passed away last September at age 97, but Casino keeps going, fueling ranchers, fishermen, and lucky visitors to this tight-knit town of 200. The Holly and Tali Show ([thehollyandtali.com](http://thehollyandtali.com)) pops up here a few nights a week with farm-to-table local food, cash only. 707-876-3185



Underwood Bar

## BUCKET LIST



## Public Gardens

Glen Ellen's **Sonoma Botanical Garden** has a focus on library specimens of rare Asian trees and ornamental plants, including Japanese maples, obscure magnolias and dogwoods, and lilies. A section of the garden focused on California native plants offers inspiration for their use in local landscapes, helping visitors become smarter, more water-wise gardeners. [sonomabg.org](http://sonomabg.org)

Self-taught horticulturalist **Luther Burbank** laid down roots in Sonoma County in 1875 and called our landscape "the chosen spot" in all the world. He bred and propagated more than 800 varieties of plants, including plums, potatoes, lilies, and spineless cactus. Learn about his legacy at on a self-guided visit to his home and gardens in Santa Rosa or tour the remaining 3 acres of his experimental farm in Sebastopol. [lutherburbank.org](http://lutherburbank.org)

**Western Hills Garden** outside Occidental was bought by a new generation of owners in 2021 and has been relaunched as a nonprofit for the community. New seasonal collaborations and public events include concerts, botanical craft workshops, and, recently, a reading from artist and author Obi Kaufmann of "The California Field Atlas." The gardens encompass three lushly planted acres with five ponds and 34 bridges—and while it remains rather under the radar, it's a must-see. [westernhillsgarden.com](http://westernhillsgarden.com)

## ONE PERFECT DAY Bodega Bay

There will be a line. There is always a line. But it moves fast, and after your first bite of a scone laced with Meyer lemon and blackberry or butternut squash, Gouda and onions, you'll vow to return to Freestone's **Wild Flour Bread** ([wildflourbread.com](http://wildflourbread.com)). The landmark bakery is just off the winding highway that many travel to reach the two sister communities, Bodega and Bodega Bay, that are such a draw in winter seafood season.

There's something about that first glimpse of the white steeple of **St. Teresa of Avila Church** in the distance that captures the spirit of Bodega's serene surroundings ([stphilipsteresa.org](http://stphilipsteresa.org)). The simple façade was made famous by two great artists, photographer Ansel Adams and film director Alfred Hitchcock, and its beauty still resonates today. You don't want to just blow through the small town that surrounds the church—after all, the ocean isn't going anywhere. If you're questioning whether you should have brought that extra hoodie, now's your chance to pick one up at neighboring **Northern Light Surf Shop** ([northernlightsurf.com](http://northernlightsurf.com)). Also in the town of Bodega, the **Dodrill Gallery**, located in a former butcher shop, showcases the work of adventure photographer Jerry Dodrill, who shoots climbers and adventurers around the world. His rich photographs of Sonoma County landscapes remind us to seek out special experiences close to home.

The drive from Bodega out to Bodega Head adds to the magic of the day's journey. Take the time to notice the windswept hues and fluttering kites of the shops along the coastal highway, and stop in at **Patrick's of Bodega Bay**, a sweets shop with a sweet, pink-and-white striped paint job. Later in the week, when you're wishing you were at the coast, a stash of saltwater taffy can ease the sting ([patricksofbodegabay.com](http://patricksofbodegabay.com)).



Doran Beach in Bodega Bay



Continue around the small bay to **Spud Point Crab Co.**, where you can take in views of a resilient fleet of fishing boats harbored in Spud Point Marina and warm up with a cup of clam chowder ([spudpointcrabco.com](http://spudpointcrabco.com)). Nearby, **Bodega Head** promises striking views with little effort. It may be a bit early for migrating whales, but there are crashing waves and many other types of coastal life, including seals and birds. If the tide is cooperating, save a few moments to pull into Campbell Cove, the too-often overlooked stretch of sand at the base of Bodega Head. At low tide, the tidepools here sparkle with sea stars and anemones.

A swell way to cap a day on the coast is from a table by the window at the new Southern-style fish house, **Rocker Oysterfeller's at Lucas Wharf** ([rockeroysterfellers.com](http://rockeroysterfellers.com)), which has brought even more fun to the waterfront scene here, already a standout with fresh fish from the counter next door at Fishetarian. As the sun sets, watch for harbor seals at play from a table topped with local BBQ oysters and the giant Captain's Platter, with seafood and hand-cut fries.

This page, clockwise from top: Daniel Perales Studio/Courtesy Sonoma Botanical Garden, Courtesy Sonoma County Tourism (2), Opposite: Courtesy Sonoma County Tourism, Crissy Pascual, Kent Porter.



## TASTING ROOMS

### WITH THE FAMILY Preston Farm and Winery

There is plenty of space to for families to spread out here, with relaxed and rambling gardens and lawns to explore, wandering kitties to pet, and fresh, hearth-baked sourdough bread and farm-grown veggies in a small store. [prestonfarmandwinery.com](http://prestonfarmandwinery.com)

**FOR HISTORY  
Gundlach Bundschu Winery**  
The oldest family-owned winery in the state, GunBun's Rhinefarm vineyards, on the east side of the town of Sonoma, were first planted in 1858. The Bundschu family is known for Cabernet Sauvignon and coastal Chardonnay, among a dozen different varieties—and for rollicking outdoor concerts in the old redwood barn. Metallica once performed a secret concert here. [gunbun.com](http://gunbun.com)

### LANDMARK PINOT Flowers Vineyards & Winery

There are few better ways to impress than with a visit to the House of Flowers, where a short walk through the redwoods reveals a masterfully designed tasting room, broad gardens, and acclaimed Chardonnay and Pinot Noir from the Sonoma Coast. [flowerswinery.com](http://flowerswinery.com)

### COOL CLUBHOUSE Pax Winery & Tasting Room

At The Barlow in Sebastopol, this is a gathering spot for like-minded independent winemakers, led by Syrah and Grenache specialist Pax Mahle. There's often vinyl on the turntable or live music, and at harvest time, you can peek around back at the busy crushpad, which Mahle shares with natural wine pioneer Martha Stoumen. [paxwine.com](http://paxwine.com)

### DOWNTOWN LUXE Corner 103

Founder Lloyd Davis has earned all kinds of recognition for his Corner 103 boutique spot in downtown Sonoma, including being named one of the top 10 tasting rooms in the country—twice. Davis credits the Black Lives Matter movement for making guests aware of the importance of diversity in the industry and strives to make wine approachable to all. [corner103.com](http://corner103.com)

### FOR GOURMET MEALS Jordan Vineyard & Winery

Chef Jesse Mallgren left the Michelin-starred restaurant he'd run for 13 years in 2023 to head the culinary program at this glamorous, French-inspired tasting room in Alexander Valley, amping up an already upscale program. Onsite gardens, orchards, and hives provide fresh ingredients for the seasonal tasting menu. [jordanwinery.com](http://jordanwinery.com)

### INDIE AND FAMILY-OWNED Lioco Wines

In downtown Healdsburg, this spot from Matt and Sara Licklider is like tasting at your coolest friend's even cooler home, with interesting art and design and a record player spinning vinyl in the corner. They're known for stellar Chardonnay, Pinot Noir, and Carignan with an emphasis on older vines, unique soil types, and heritage clones—and they're always exploring something new. [liocowine.com](http://liocowine.com)

### A LANDMARK RED BARN Martinelli Winery

For more than 135 years, the Martinelli family has farmed this land, including the famously steep Jackass Hill. Daredevil winegrower Guiseppe Martinelli planted the hill in 1889 and farmed it with a team of horses for three decades. Today, tastings are in a historic hop barn or adjacent terraced garden with views across the Russian River Valley. [martinelliwinery.com](http://martinelliwinery.com)

Above: *Flowers Vineyards & Winery along Westside Road outside Healdsburg.*



### Washoe House

This fun roadhouse on the rural outskirts of Petaluma and Cotati is one of the oldest buildings in the county, dating back to 1859. Over the decades, it's been a stagecoach station, a dance hall, and a locals' watering hole, with pinned-up dollar bills and handwritten messages absolutely plastering the ceiling. The food is good, from BBQ oysters and steaks to Henhouse fried chicken and fried cheese curds. 707-795-4544



### Dry Creek General Store

This distinctive green-and-white clapboard 1881 general store and restaurant is the place to stop on a wine-tasting tour through rural Dry Creek Valley west of Healdsburg, near the Lambert Bridge. It's the heart of this small rural crossroads, with cellar staff stopping in for takeout deli sandwiches during harvest and mixing it up with dressed-up visitors having a glass of wine on the porch. The adjoining bar is back with its distinctive saddle barstools, and everyone's having a good time. [drycreekgeneralstore1881.com](http://drycreekgeneralstore1881.com)