



INSPIRATION



Which California Wine Region is Right for You?

By TripAdvisor

Planning a trip to California conjures many inviting images, not the least of which is your smiling self in the rolling, grapevine-covered hills of its wine country, soaking up the sunshine with a glass of vino in hand. But choosing said wine country isn't so straightforward—the Golden State has more than 100 American Viticultural Areas (AVAs). Here we break down six of

California's biggest wine regions to help you find the right viticultural venture.

Inspiration

Tips



Napa Valley: For the Cabernet Enthusiast



Napa Valley

The headliner of California's wine regions, [Napa Valley](#) is a wishlist destination for both true wine aficionados and those who may not know much about wine but know they want to drink it at some of the state's most prestigious wineries and restaurants (hello, [French Laundry](#)). Napa's best-known varietal is cabernet sauvignon, which you can enjoy at wineries on and off the [Silverado Trail](#), including [Stag's Leap Wine Cellars](#), [B Cellars](#), and [Jarvis Estate](#).

Beyond the Tasting Rooms

Two activities are particularly popular in Napa—a [hot-air balloon ride](#) above the vineyards and a ride on the [Napa Valley Wine Train](#), which provides access to [Yountville](#), [Oakville](#), and [Rutherford](#) on its route from [Napa](#) to [St. Helena](#).



Napa Valley Balloons, Inc.

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1729 Reviews

Stay a Day or Stay the Night

If you're visiting Napa on a day trip from [San Francisco](#), splurge on a [VIP ride by helicopter](#) with wine tastings and food pairings in Napa. For an overnight getaway, check out the [Elm House Inn](#), a Best Western Plus hotel that's friendlier on the wallet than Napa's many \$600-a-night-and-up accommodations.

Sonoma Valley: For the Insider



Sonoma Valley

Those in the know—especially Bay Area residents—often choose [Sonoma County](#) over Napa Valley for wines that are just as delectable but in more comfortable settings. Pinot noir and chardonnay reign here, grown in vineyards that stretch from Highway 12 to the Pacific Coast. Amid the hundreds of wineries in and around [Healdsburg](#), [Glen Ellen](#), [Geyserville](#), and [Santa Rosa](#), some visitor favorites are [Cline Cellars](#), [Benziger Family Winery](#), and [Francis Ford Coppola Winery](#), where in addition to wine tasting, you can browse movie memorabilia and hang out by the pool.

Beyond the Tasting Rooms

Between wineries, soak up Sonoma's natural beauty with a hike in [Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve](#) or an oceanside drive along [Highway 1](#).

Stay a Day or Stay the Night

If you're daytripping from San Francisco, book a [wine tour that includes a stop at Muir Woods National Monument](#) to stare up in wonder at spectacular old-growth redwood trees. For overnights, the [Kenwood Inn and Spa](#) is a luxury standout.



Extranomical Tours

★★★★★
2423 Reviews

Livermore Valley: For Going off the Beaten Path



Livermore

Home to merlot, cabernet sauvignon, sauvignon blanc, petite syrah, and chardonnay varietals, [Livermore Valley](#) is one of the state's oldest wine regions but might not be on your radar due to its location in the East Bay—a less visited part of the San Francisco Bay Area. This is the place to go, though, to avoid the Sonoma and Napa crowds and to truly focus on the wine at original wineries [Wente](#) and [Concannon](#). And about an hour north is San Joaquin County's [Lodi](#), popular for zinfandels.

Beyond the Tasting Rooms

Complement your wine tastings with a [food tour](#) in downtown Livermore, or get some shopping in at Livermore's [San Francisco Premium Outlets](#).



Livermore Food Tours

●●●●●
93 Reviews

Stay a Day or Stay the Night

Livermore is an easy day trip for those already in the East Bay and for visitors to San Francisco—opt for a convenient [half-day Tri-Valley wine tour](#), or make a weekend of it at the [Hampton Inn Livermore](#).

Paso Robles: For the Rhône Fan



Paso Robles

Part of California's Central Coast region, halfway between San Francisco and [Los Angeles](#), [Paso Robles](#) is known for its Rhône-style varietals (think syrah, viognier, and roussanne). Just 30 miles (48 kilometers) from the college town of [San Luis Obispo](#), this laid-back destination is home to wineries like [Tobin James Cellars](#) and [Calcareous Vineyard](#).

Beyond the Tasting Rooms

If you're heading to Paso Robles via Highway 1, don't miss [Hearst Castle](#), a national historic landmark outside [San Simeon](#). Farther north, you'll find [Monterey County](#) and the [Santa Cruz Mountains](#).



Hearst Castle

●●●●●
6383 Reviews

Stay a Day or Stay the Night

If you have only one day to explore Paso Robles, book a [wine tour](#) from San Luis Obispo. For an overnight, book a room at the [Oaks Hotel & Suites](#).

Santa Ynez Valley: For the Sophisticate



Santa Ynez Valley

Made famous by the 2004 movie *Sideways*, the [Santa Ynez Valley](#) wine region sits outside [Santa Barbara](#), an upscale coastal town often called the American Riviera thanks to its Mediterranean vibe and upscale shops and eateries. Sip pinot noir, syrah, and chardonnay at Santa Ynez wineries like [Sunstone](#) and [Rusack Vineyards](#).



Rusack Vineyards

★★★★★
165 Reviews

Beyond the Tasting Rooms

For a culture fix between tasting sessions, head to Santa Barbara County's town of [Solvang](#) to visit [Hans Christian Andersen Park](#) or find out what's playing at the [Solvang Festival Theater](#).

Stay a Day or Stay the Night

If you're visiting for the day from Santa Barbara, get a little exercise with a [biking wine tour](#). For overnight stays, check out the [Harbor House Inn](#).

Temecula: For Those Who Like Surprises



Temecula

Southern California's [Temecula](#) Valley doesn't have just one or two stand-out varietals. From chardonnay to merlot, the region produces a diverse selection of grapes—and wines—with its unique setting between the desert and the ocean. Enjoy the SoCal climate with a visit to [Vindemia Estate](#) or [Wilson Creek](#).

Beyond the Tasting Rooms

For a special treat, start the day with a [sunrise hot-air balloon ride](#), or head to [Old Town Temecula](#) to browse shops and restaurants.

Stay a Day or Stay the Night

Temecula sits 60 miles (97 kilometers) north of [San Diego](#), providing day-trip access with a [guided wine tour](#). If your homebase is [Los Angeles](#), 90 miles (145 kilometers) away, opt for a stay at Temecula's [Ponte Vineyard Inn](#).



Ponte Vineyard Inn



1849 Reviews

For more [California](#) inspiration, head to [TripAdvisor](#) to find the top places to eat, stay, and play.

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