nileGUIDE
ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP

Ian L

Small Winery Tour of Napa

Napa Valley, 3 Days

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Guide Description

AUTHOR NOTE: If you pull into a winery parking lot and see a row of tour buses belching exhaust, turn around. This isn't the Napa Valley you came to see. Luckily, the old Napa, with its family-owned hardscrabble wine culture, is still there, you just have to hunt a little harder — and turn off onto some steep, winding side roads — to find it.

It's actually surprising how many small family-owned and boutique wineries are still operating around the Napa Valley -- in fact it can seem like there are more every day. But they don't have the big marketing budgets to advertise their wares, nor the land and budget for a splashy tasting room. What they do have is great wine, and sometimes if you're lucky you'll be drinking wine poured by the hands that made it.

Some family-owned wineries are small enough that visits are by appointment only, but don’t be put off by that. Make a quick call, and you’re likely to have the memorable experience of sampling boutique wines that never make it to the shops. And many of these wineries are operating by sustainable principles, participating in widespread initiatives to green Napa winemaking. Here are a few of my favorites.

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Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 3 - Napa Valley

Stag's Leap Wine Cellars
Famous for historic International prize

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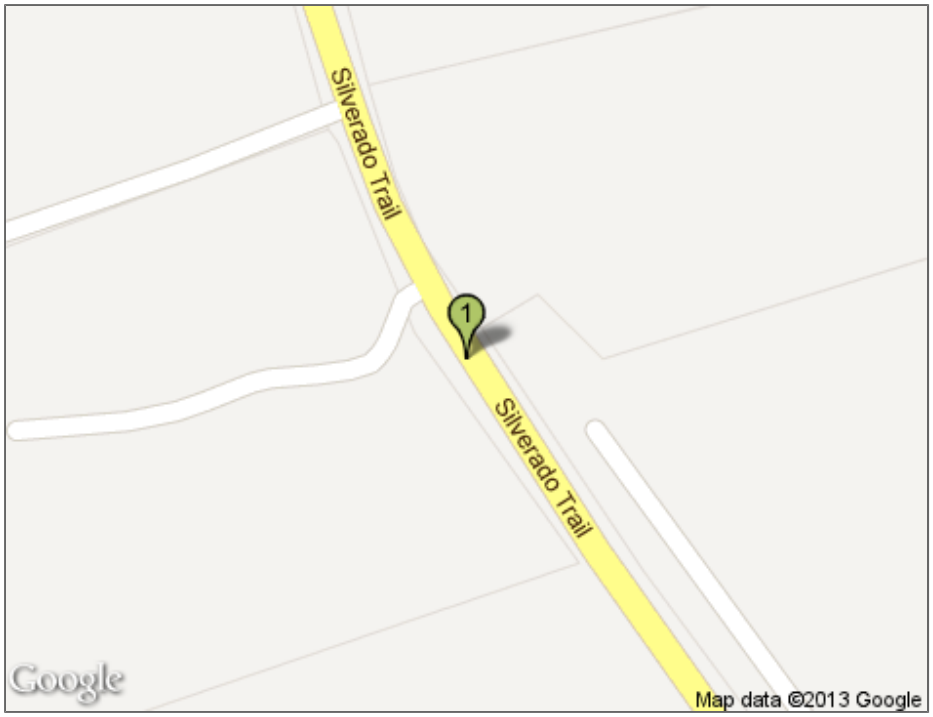
Day 3 - Napa Valley



QUICK NOTE

contact:
tel: +1 707 944 2020
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location:
5766 Silverado Trail
Napa CA 94558

hours:
Daily 10am-4:30pm. Tours by appointment only

1 Stag's Leap Wine Cellars

DESCRIPTION: Founded in 1972, Stag's Leap shocked the oenological world 4 years later, when its 1973 cabernet won first place over French wines in a Parisian blind tasting. Visit the charmingly landscaped, unfussy winery and its very cramped "tasting room," where you can try a selection of four current release wines for $15 per person. Be prepared to pay $30 to $40 for estate wines. A 1-hour tour and tasting runs through everything from the vineyard and production facilities to the ultraswank $5-million wine caves. © Frommer's

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Napa Valley Snapshot

Local Info

Napa Valley attracts some 5 million visitors each year, and for good reason. Located 50 miles north of San Francisco, Napa Valley is one of the world's premier wine-growing regions, home to picturesque small towns filled with foodie-fave restaurants, wellness spas, award-winning golf courses, artisan-oriented shops, and beautiful open spaces offering hiking adventures and ridgetop views...What's not to love?

Napa

The city of Napa is the largest of Napa Valley's communities, yet downtown Napa retains the feel of a quiet country town. While quite a few mansions and large estates rest back against the hill, Napa tends to be a friendly, down-to-earth town with a refreshingly unpretentious personality. In every season, the farms and wineries dotting the valley make a glorious setting for bike rides and country drives.

Napa's history as the center of the valley's Italian heritage is reflected in a variety of top-quality Italian restaurants. The valley's Hispanic population leaves its culinary mark as well; no drive down Soscol is complete without a quick bite to eat at one of the town's famous beloved taco trucks. The Carneros area on Napa's south side, prized by aficionados for its Pinot Noirs and Chardonnays, now features a slew of hip new inns and restaurants. And the revitalized riverfront area is a mecca for hopping bars and lively galleries.

The commercial center, known as the"Old Town" district, bustles with retail stores and boutique wine shops like Bounty Hunter Rare Wine and Provisions."Old Town" provides casual dining options like ZuZu, a popular tapas restaurant with tons of local color, literally: most of the artwork featured is from Napa Valley artists.

Yountville

Yountville is far closer to the popularFalcon Crest image of Napa Valley, retaining as it does the quaint charm a small, country town. Less populous and more gentrified than the city of Napa, there are also a lot of grapes growing here. You may see the vineyards first, strangely enough, as a bright, metallic twinkle: growers use reflective foil to scare away grape-eating birds. Yountville, however is perhaps most famous for first-class dining: French Laundry, Bistro Jeanty, Bouchon, and Ad Hoc are clustered right here. Nationally famed, these establishments are happily embraced by San Franciscans as an integral part of the Bay Area restaurant culture, but clearly, they and Yountville stand on their own(and standing is indeed what you will do if you don't make a reservation weeks in advance). In 2007, the inaugural year of the Michelin Guide to San Francisco, Bay Area& Wine Country, several Yountville restaurants were awarded Michelin Stars.

Oakville

By this point, one has entered the heart of Napa Valley: Wine production. Robert Mondavi, one of the titans of California wine, is headquartered in Oakville. Other, smaller wineries can be seen on both sides of the valley, though the premium cellars seem to be on the west side. While tiny Oakville has a post office, it's really an unincorporated part of Napa County, best known for the Oakville Grocery, a legendary roadside delicatessen stocked with a mind-boggling array of gourmet delights from France, Italy, and their own kitchens. As with other spots throughout the valley, one is likely to be greeted in the early spring by a waving sea of yellow under sparse vineyards: growers often plant mustard underneath grapevines.

Rutherford

Microscopic Rutherford is home to Beaulieu Vineyards, Rutherford Grove, Rutherford Hill, and St. Supery Vineyards& Winery. Take in Napa's landscape with a chilled bottle of sparkling wine in Mumm's outdoor terrace. Francis Ford Coppola's Niebaum-Coppola Estate, generally mobbed with tourists, features memorabilia from his career in cinema. Rutherford is also a fine place to eat: Restaurant at Auberge du Soleil and La Toque are two exceptional Napa Valley restaurants.

St. Helena

With its rows of historic stone and beam storefronts and perfectly restored Victorians, downtown St. Helena looks much it did in the early 1900s. Off the main street, cottage gardens are tucked between elegant bed and breakfasts in historic mansions, while elegant boutique hotels surround fountain-bedecked quiet courtyards. The Silverado Museum hosts an exhibit of Robert Louis Stevenson ephemera. Fans of ghost story writer and misanthrope Ambrose Bierce will want to stay at the Ambrose Bierce House, now a bed and breakfast. St. Helena is also home to the Beringer Vineyards, a popular tasting destination.

The Culinary Institute of America at Greystone is hidden in the vineyards of St. Helena. The CIA is a master's level training center for working, certified chefs. It's situated in the former home of the Christian Brothers winery, an awe-striking, three-story, 101-year-old building that housed generations of winemaking friars. Take a look at some of the history exhibits inside, and don't miss Brother Timothy's 1800-piece corkscrew collection. The CIA gives cooking demonstrations in their fully equipped teaching theater. Then enjoy the sights at the outdoor terrace of Wine Spectator Greystone Restaurant.

Calistoga

Calistoga is famous for the hot springs that bubble out of the geyser-studded northern end of the valley, and the mineral-inflused mud that Europeans traditionally believed had healthful properties. Mud baths, along with mineral baths, saunas, hot steam treatments, whirlpools, and herbal body wraps, have all been an attraction of the area ever since San Francisco entrepreneur Sam Brannan first promoted the benefits of the area's hot springs in the mid-19th century. Dr. Wilkinson's Hot Springs Resort, Lavender Hill Spa, and Indian Springs Hotel& Spa are good spots to enjoy relaxing spa treatments.

To get a feeling for the thermal springs without getting in one, go two miles out of town on Tubbs Lane and catch Old Faithful Geyser of California. The geyser spouts boiling water 60 feet into the air every half-hour or so.

Calistoga is an engaging, health-conscious, bustling little town in every way. The Calistoga Inn Restaurant& Brewery or Wappo Bar& Bistro are all great places to replenish yourself after the ardors of a rub, steam, or scalding soak.
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