

# San Francisco

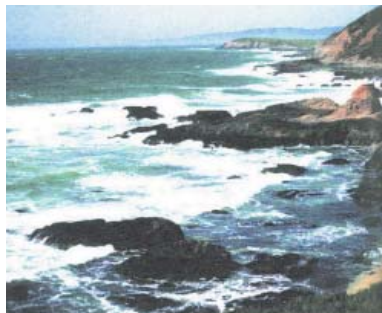


## Sonoma

### Wine Country Secrets

Five ideas that will have you tasting, dining, and lingering in California's most diverse (and dreamy) county. **By Mary Jo Bowling**

You can argue that the best of California can be seen without leaving the border of Sonoma County. The region contains an embarrassment of riches in all categories: Wineries (more than 53,000 acres are planted with grapevines), food (world-class restaurants, olive oil producers, and culinary centers are sprouting like wild mustard among the vines), and outdoor adventures (everything from kayaking to river rafting, farm trails to mountain paths) make frequent visits necessary. In fact, this season brings five great new reasons for visiting the county just north of San Francisco.



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#### 1 Wine Country is Beer Country

Wine isn't the only thing being bottled in Sonoma County. The region is the birthplace of craft artisan beer. That's why it makes sense that Dean Biersch, cofounder of the Gordon Biersch Brewing Company, is opening the Hopmonk Tavern (707-320-2405, hopmonk.com) in Sebastopol. The tavern will serve up a tasty array of local and international craft brews paired with seasonal gourmet pub food in a historical landmark building with a lush, 85-seat beer garden out back. Guests will find an ever-changing menu of more than 75 bottled beers, 16 drafts, and two cask-conditioned ales.

#### 2 Sonoma Cuisine to Relish

The new Relish Culinary Center (707-431-9999, relishculinary.com) in Healdsburg is bound to become a hot spot for the food-obsessed in Sonoma County. You'll be sling-ing olive oil with the confidence of Rachael Ray after taking classes in its state-of-the-art indoor and outdoor kitchens. Past lessons featured seasonal cocktails, aphrodisiac dinners, bistro suppers, and Mexican food. Other classes are designated as "roving" and take place in the region's top-notch wineries and restaurants. Through July 31, the nearby Hotel Healdsburg is offering a special rate for Relish students.

#### 3 Behind the Scenes at McEvoy Ranch

For foodies, a trip to McEvoy Ranch (866-617-6779, mcevoyranch.com) is akin to visiting the mythical Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory: The ranch and gardens are beautiful, they contain a bounty of great tastes, and trips behind the gate are rare. This year, those gates swing open for a limited number of special tours of the organic olive orchards and gardens and (for the very first time) special al fresco olive oil tastings and lunches.

#### 4 Pug's Leap Farm: Happy Goats = Great Cheese

What goes with wine better than cheese? Pug's Leap Farm makes some of the best cheese in Sonoma County on a tiny goat dairy right on Dry Creek Road in Healdsburg (707-433-2923, pugsleap.com). The happy milking goats produce amazing buche and pave, and you can try it at the Cheese Shop in Healdsburg (707-433-4998) or at the Saturday Farmer's Market (located at North and Vine Sts.) when it opens in June.

#### 5 A World of Wine in One County

Think you've "done" Sonoma wine tasting? You haven't unless you've tasted in all 10 of the American Viticultural Areas (AVAs). AVAs are regions created by growing conditions, and each region's climate and soil give wines a distinct flavor. Until you've tasted in each region from Alexander Valley to Sonoma Valley, your wine education is incomplete. For a list of AVAs, visit wineinstitute.org.

To plan a visit to Sonoma County check out [sonomacountry.com](http://sonomacountry.com).

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