

California's Sonoma valley wine route: top 10 guide

Napa may grab the headlines but the roots of Californian wine are in nearby Sonoma valley, where family-owned vineyards, farm-to-table restaurants and charming hotels make it an area ripe for exploring

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Buena Vista Winery



Photograph: Rick Gerharter/Getty Images/Lonely Planet Images



To experience the diversity of the valley's AVAs, leave behind the comforts of the plaza and head for the hills to meet winemaking families. California's wine industry began in 1857, when "Count" Agoston Haraszthy, a Hungarian, launched Buena Vista Winery. Today it is part of the Boisset wine empire, but its vibe is warm and welcoming, and every detail reflects Jean-Charles Boisset's enthusiasm for the winery's colourful history. The tasting room pours several varietals and a red blend (The Count) inspired by Haraszthy but the best way to soak up the old-California atmosphere is to order one of the winery's picnic hampers (\$75, including wine tasting) and relax around the cobblestone courtyard. History buffs can drive or hike to neighbouring [Bartholomew Park Winery](#), once part of Haraszthy's estate, to learn more about the flamboyant count - including the devastating phylloxera virus that ended his winemaking career ... and the alligator that ended him.

● Tasting \$15-\$40, tours from \$25, 18000 Old Winery Road, Sonoma, +1 707 963 6900, buonavistawinery.com. Open daily 10am-5pm