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SEPTEMBER 2015



Celebrating Crush

Whether you prefer to stomp the grapes or sip the results, harvest time in wine country offers delightful diversions. **By TERESA RODRIGUEZ**

SEPTEMBER IN WINE COUNTRY IS LIKE SPRINGTIME EVERYWHERE else in the world. The air is filled with anticipation as the sweet scent of ripe grapes hovers over the land. While vintners are excited about their beloved harvests, wine aficionados benefit from events timed to the processing of the grapes—a time known as Crush.

Here are some of the wonderful experiences you can take advantage of during Crush, and a few of the amazing places to visit and stay during that magical time.

V. Sattui's 130th Anniversary Harvest Ball

Saturday, September 12, 6–11 p.m.;
707-963-7774

This iconic winery is sparing no expense for this over-the-top celebration, taking place in the middle of a vineyard, with everyone in black-tie attire. The exquisite six-course meal is being prepared by Michelin-star chef **Luca Collami** of Genoa, Italy, and will be paired with V. Sattui's award-winning wines and live entertainment from Abbadadabra—the ultimate ABBA tribute band.

Annual Harvest Party & Grape Stomp at Madrigal Family Winery

Saturday, September 12, Noon–4 p.m.;
707-942-8619

Get ready for the Madrigal Grape Stomp competition. The winner is the person who can get the most juice out of their barrel of grapes.

Prizes are given to the three top stompers. Besides getting messy with the grapes, you'll enjoy paella, live music and Madrigal wine tastings.

Peju Harvest Celebration

Saturday, September 19, 6–10 p.m.; 707-963-3600

The tiny town of Rutherford will be buzzing during Peju's Harvest Celebration. The evening begins with wine tasting, followed by a beautiful harvest dinner in the vineyard, then dessert and dancing in the Peju Tower.

Landmark Vineyards Harvest Festival

Saturday, September 19, 11 a.m.–3 p.m.; 707-833-0053

Just north of Sonoma is the quiet town of Kenwood. There, at the edge of the Mayacamas Mountains, you'll find Landmark Vineyards, which celebrates its annual Harvest Festival September 19. You'll get to taste the current releases paired with scrumptious bites, and can attend a special tasting seminar focusing on the four regions where Landmark grapes are grown. There's also a cozy guest suite and cottage where you can spend the night.

Crush Brunch at Buena Vista Winery

Sunday, September 20, 10 a.m.–1 p.m.; 800-926-1266

Indulge in a morning at Buena Vista Winery and learn all about the 2015 harvest. Celebrate Crush with brunch and a glass of sparkling wine in the Fountain Courtyard while their winemaking team demonstrates the process of crushing and sorting grapes. Dress appropriately, since you're encouraged to participate and get your hands dirty.



COURTESY OF MADRIGAL FAMILY WINERY

Grape stomping



Harvest Moon Dinner at Sbragia Family Vineyards

Saturday, September 26, 5:30–9 p.m.; 707-473-2992
There's nothing like a Harvest Moon Dinner under dramatic autumn skies. Chef **John Ash** will create a four-course extravaganza paired with Sbragia's best wines. New Skye band will take to the stage playing country rock, Americana and jazz. After dinner you get to sample select 2005 cabernet magnums in honor of that vintage's 10-year anniversary.

Carmel Valley Ranch Harvest Celebration Weekend

Friday, October 9–Sunday, October 11; 855-OUR-RANCH
Although not in the North Bay wine country, Carmel Valley Ranch has earned its badge for winemaking. The resort offers a Release Dinner on Friday and a Harvest Celebration and Dinner on Saturday, featuring wine tastings, a wine label-making contest, and vineyard games including barrel rolling, grape stomping and seed spitting. Sunday's Vintner's Luncheon offers tastings from a host of Monterey County wineries.

STAY AND PLAY

Spa, sip and sleep

Nestled on the banks of the Napa River is Milliken Creek Inn and Spa. This small, 12-room inn's Harvest Napa Valley package includes everything you need for the perfect three-day experience in wine country. First stop is a 90-minute cave tour and tasting at Porter Family Vineyards, which is a private winery that is not open to the public. Also included is a five-hour wine tour, which ends at the inn with a sunset wine and cheese pairing. Then, indulge with breakfast in bed and a grapeseed body polish at their spa. To book your stay, visit millikencreekinn.com.

Best of town and country

Villa Carneros is the five-star winery estate home of Attune Wines, and it can be yours for a weekend. Attune Wines produces small runs of ultrapremium pinot noir, chardonnay and rosé, which you can enjoy in the villa's tasting room. The property is perfectly situated just minutes from Sonoma Plaza. After

a day of sightseeing, take a dip in the swimming pool or relax in the hot tub. The hardest part will be choosing the nine friends who'll join you. To book this villa, visit beautiful-places.com.

Be a winemaker for a day

Between San Jose and Gilroy, there's a little slice of heaven called CordeValle. Along with being an award-winning golf course and resort, it's the home of Clos LaChance Winery and vineyard. The Winemaker for a Day package teaches you the basics of blending wines (with a focus on their Bordeaux and Rhône varietals) and an opportunity to create your own blend of wine and experience the "crush pit." For more details, visit rosewoodhotels.com.

Party like *The Bachelor*

Vineyard Knoll Estate was featured on ABC's *The Bachelor*, and it can be yours during Crush. Located in the celebrated town of Glen Ellen—home of Glen Ellen Star and the Fig Café—this glorious villa lets you and 11 wine-loving friends create your own crush around a private pool surrounded by chardonnay and pinot noir vines. For more information visit vrbo.com/699809. **ABC**

Teresa Rodriguez is a travel expert and the founder of tangodiva.com. She is also the author of several books, including *Fly Solo: The 50 Best Places on Earth for a Girl to Travel Alone*; *Solo: 7 Keys to Conquering the World Alone*; and *Body, Mind*.