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Napa After The Quake: Wine Tasting Is Back On!

Special
Traveler

By Katie Hammel | 2014-09-10T17:14:56Z | [Comments](#) [Email](#) [Print](#)

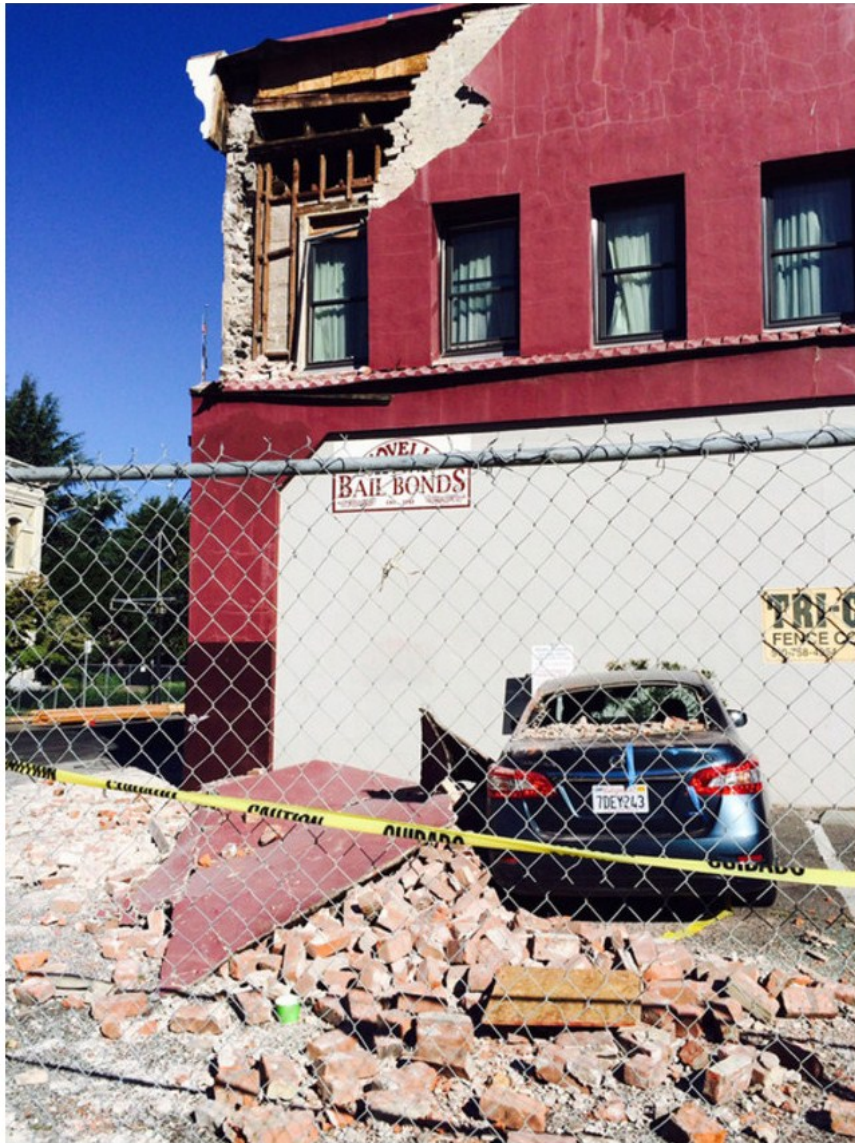
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Photographer: YinYang/Getty Images

At 3:20 a.m. on Sunday, August 24, 2014, a 6.1 earthquake hit California's Napa Valley. It was the Bay Area's strongest earthquake in 25 years.

While photos of smashed bottles in tasting rooms, toppled barrels at wineries, and fallen bricks in the city of Napa are what made the news, it was local homes that took the brunt of the damage. The quake's epicenter was in a residential area called American Canyon, nine miles south of downtown Napa, and many wineries—particularly those farther north—escaped damage altogether. At Silverado Vineyards, 10 miles north of downtown, losses totaled just one glass and two bottles of wine.



Photographer: Katie Hammel

Two downtown Napa hotels—**Andaz Napa** and the Napa Valley Marriott Hotel & Spa—are temporarily closed, but more than 95 percent of businesses are open and welcoming visitors, who are vital to the area's economy. More than three million people visit Napa Valley each year, contributing \$1.4 billion in spending.

"As we slowly get things back to normal, we are witness to the resiliency and camaraderie of the wine industry and the Napa Valley community," said Rene Schlatter, president of Merryvale Vineyards and Starmont Winery. The Napa Valley Vintners Association is accepting donations to a **Relief Fund** and one of the best things people can do to help the locals now is to visit. Here are 15 ways to enjoy wine country and support the local recovery.



Photographer: Katie Hammel

Cooking the Wine

Surprisingly few wineries offer cooking classes, which are a natural pairing (thank complicated winery regulations for the rarity). At **Whitehall Lane Winery**, Italian-trained Chef Larry Calicchio teaches guests how to prepare grilled steak with cabernet sauce or a lemon and white wine risotto, using Whitehall Lane wines in each dish. Along the way, plenty of wine is served, and guests finish the experience enjoying the fruits of their labor, a three-course meal with—you guessed it—more wine.

At Cakebread Cellars, hands-on **cooking classes** tackle dishes like cannelloni with braised beef or pappardelle with butternut squash. Once everything is ready, classmates sit down for a family-style meal paired with Cakebread wines.

Picturesque Pairings

Perched high above the Silverado Trail and overlooking the winery's estate vineyards, **Silverado Vineyards** has one of the best views in Napa Valley—but the view is even better from ground level, out in the vineyard and enjoyed while sipping wine beneath the shade of a massive tree just steps from the grapes. The private **Saddle Block Vineyard Tour** takes guests around the vineyard estate and finishes under an old oak tree where a table is set with a tasting of wines paired with seasonal bites.

At **Domaine Carneros** Domaine Carneros, the pairing is little more unusual. Instead of complimentary snacks, the still and sparkling wines are paired with fragrances. The sommelier-led "Making Scents of Wine" program helps guests hone their sense of smell to better understand a wine's bouquet by comparing scents found in vino to those found in perfumes.

Be an Amateur Winemaker

Dreaming of spending your days in the vineyards tending grapes and sipping vino? At

some wineries, you can try your hand at being a winemaker without the million-dollar investment.



Courtesy Raymond Vineyards

In **Conn Creek's "Barrel Blending Experience,"** serious wanna-be vintners can sample more than a dozen wines sourced from various locales (each with characteristics unique to that location's elevation, weather conditions, and soil) to create their own perfect blend of wine. At Raymond Vineyards, the **wine blending experience** has a more playful vibe. Taking place in a stainless steel "laboratory," it includes sparkly lab coats for participants, who use eyelet droppers and glass beakers to blend four different varietals into their perfect potion.

The **"Full Circle Experience" at Long Meadow Ranch** goes further, giving guests a in-depth view of running a winery and ranch, with a tour of the ranch's organic vineyards and farm to learn the art and science of growing grapes and other produce, raising chickens, and keeping honey bees. Guests explore the winery, caves, and olive oil press before touring the vineyards, olive orchards, and paddocks housing the ranch's draft horses and Scottish Highland Cattle. The day ends with a comprehensive tasting of LMR wine and a farm-to-table meal (paired with wine) featuring meat and produce from the farm.



Photographer: Matt Edge

Round Pond Estate's "Day in the Life" program combines time working in the vineyards and winery—picking and sorting grapes, performing punchdowns and pumpovers, and analyzing the fresh juice—with tastings, blending, a tour of the olive mill, and a sumptuous wine-paired lunch.

Winery Fitness Class

Wine tasting trips may be all about indulging for some, but those who want to work off the calories consumed will also have options. At **Vineyard 29** in St. Helena, the "Pilates Essentials" package includes an hour-long Pilates or Barre workout class for groups of six to ten, followed by a tour of the winery, an hour-long "Essentials Tasting" paired with small bites, and a spa lunch.



Courtesy Domaine Carneros

Hiking and Horseback Through the Vines

The wineries, homes, and businesses of neighboring Sonoma County saw much less quake damage than those in Napa, but their proximity means it's easy to make a side trip over the mountains for a quick visit.



Courtesy of Condé Nast Traveler

At **Chalk Hill Winery**, guests can relax on a 90-minute **horseback ride through the vineyards**, learning about grape-growing and viticulture as they take in views of the valley, before heading to the tasting room for a sample of Chalk Hill wines. **Kunde Family Estate** also combines outdoor adventure with wine tasting, offering a four-hour mountain-top

experience that brings guests on a hike 1,400 feet up the Mayacamas Mountain range to learn about the winery's sustainable practices and to taste wines in the same vineyards where the grapes are grown.

After Hours Activities

Nearly all wineries in Napa close by 6 p.m., so visiting one in the evening is a rare treat. On select summer nights at **Merryvale**, the historic "Cask Room," a two-story trove of 100-year-old, 2,000-gallon casks, is stocked with comfy couches, wine, and popcorn for special movie screenings (August's movie, *SOMM*, was appropriately wine themed).

On Friday nights from April to October (6–8 p.m), Round Pound Estate hosts a **sunset terrace event** with wines by the glass or bottle, small plates, and sunset views over the vines.

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