

Wine Country in a Day: The Perfect Summer Day Trip to Napa Valley

Ian White | Photo: Mack Male/Creative Commons | August 2, 2017

Bubbly in the morning, a wine-blending session after lunch, and a museum stop in the afternoon.



The Winemaker for a Day class at Raymond Vineyards.

Photo: Courtesy of Raymond Vineyards

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One day in the Napa is all you really need to get a good buzz, a quick tour of the highlights, and a few bottles for the house. But with all the summer traffic—not to mention the heat—you could easily spend most of your day stuck in the car and end up with a brutal sunburn instead of a well-earned hangover. So here's your whirlwind tour of Napa, featuring some of the valley's top bottles, biggest views, and coolest caves.

Morning

Have breakfast, pack a lunch, and do your best to get over the bridge by 9:30 a.m. so you don't waste any time in morning traffic, which begins to build around 10am. But if you skipped breakfast, plan a stop at [Market](#) in Carneros for a breakfast burrito or maybe an acai bowl to get something in your stomach. This is also a good place to stock up on picnic items like the caprese baguette or the Carneros Cobb. And remember to grab a nonalcoholic beverage—those sips of water you take between pours don't count as hydration.

From here your first stop, [Domaine Chandon](#), is about a 20-minute drive. Kick-start the day with some bubbles (for sparkling haters, the winery also has good morning still wines like Yountville Rosé, \$28, and Carneros Chardonnay, \$28). If it's a nice morning, meander through the lush grounds, sit by the ponds, and buy a bottle to enjoy outside. If you're late or it's hot, worry not: The tasting room is large, indoors, and air conditioned. You'll find plenty of of tasting options at different price points, but if you buy bottles to sip on the patio, you can sip at your own pace and get more bang for your buck (prices range from \$8 for a half bottle to \$80 for a full bottle). While the reserve-level sparkling wines are certainly more refined and complex, the classic lineup will not disappoint. Try the 2012 Vintage Yountville Brut (\$45) for something delicate and unusual, the Sweet Star for citrus and tropical notes (\$24), or Étoile Tete du Cuvee 2006 (\$80) if you're really looking to impress.

Next up: [VinRoc](#) in Atlas Peak, another 20-minute jaunt. (You'll need a reservation to visit this small, family-owned winery, where the tasting fee is \$50 per person). But it's worth every penny. The hospitality here is matched only by the quality of the impossible-to-find and highly rated wines (\$42 to \$100 per bottle). You'll go on a cave tour and sample all three of VinRoc's wines Plus, the Sunset Hut overlooks one of the best views in the valley. If it's hot, ask owners Michael and Kiky if you can eat your picnic lunch in the cave. OR lunch in the Sunset Hut if you can handle the heat or if there happens to be a nice breeze.

Afternoon

Now that you've tried some good wines, it's time to go make your own. Book a Winemaker for a Day class at [Raymond Vineyards](#), where you get to learn about winemaking, [blend your own wine](#), and even take a bottle of your blend home with a label that you design (\$125 per person). You'll have the opportunity to blend bold red wines with flavors that range from smoky and leathery to jammy and sweet, so your blend can be anywhere from the pushiest, grow-hair-on-your-chest beast to a subtle and sweet sipper.

If you want to leave the winemaking to the pros, point your smartphone to the [Hess Collection](#), about a 40-minute drive southwest. In addition to the winery, Hess maintains an impressive, multi-level (and fully air-conditioned) art museum. Stop in for the Francis Bacon paintings and the large-scale fiber works by Polish sculptor Magdalena Abakanowicz; stay for the paintings of photorealist Franz Gertsch, whose works are a linchpin of the collection. Stop in at the tasting room, where Hess stocks six different white wines that are well suited for summertime. While the sauvignon blanc (\$11 per bottle) is a winner for the price, look out for the Grüner Veltliner (\$28), albariño (\$28) and orange muscat (\$25)—all fun and unusual wines with plenty of refreshing zest. If you're all about reds, you're still in luck. Try the massive malbec (\$19) or Hess's spicy, complex, and cellar-worthy 30th Anniversary Cabernet (\$125).