

## SCANDINAVIAN TRAVELER

# VISIT THE VINEYARDS IN NAPA VALLEY



One of the more surprising things about California's Napa Valley is just how small it is. The 45km stretch of small towns, vineyards and bucolic countryside – a uniquely northern Californian mix of grapevines, olive trees, conical evergreens and the occasional, incongruous row of palms hovering over the landscape like visitors from the tropics – has a reputation in the wine world and with travelers alike that is wildly disproportionate to its size.

While the valley produces just four percent of the state's wine, that wine is ranked among the world's best, making it a magnet for oenophiles.

Here it is all about the good things in life. With some 400 wineries dotting the countryside, the main streets of Napa Valley are dedicated to wine and its complementary pursuits; small art galleries and antique stores, boutiques and hotels, restaurants that range from the rustic to the Michelin-starred, local food artisans of every stripe and, because the valley is geothermal, numerous spa resorts.

One of the best ways to see the valley is to begin in the town of Napa, and drive north via Yountville, St. Helena and Calistoga. Downtown Napa is also the departure point for the family owned Napa Valley Wine Train, a series of beautifully refurbished, wood-paneled Pullman rail cars – some of which embarked on their first journey in 1915.

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Drive 30 minutes north through picture perfect Yountville – home to Thomas Keller’s iconic restaurant The French Laundry and the adjacent Bouchon – and you’ll arrive in St. Helena, a lovely little town bursting with tasting rooms for the various wineries in the area.

Just outside town, Raymond Vineyards is a regular stop on the Wine Train tour. The certified organic and biodynamic vineyard and custom winemaking operation has an eccentric winery that includes mirrored fermentation tanks, a crystal chandelier, and costumed mannequins. The winery also doubles as a party venue.

The Theater of Nature introduces visitors to biodynamic farming and practices such as burying goat horns filled with cow dung to produce a highly concentrated fertilizer and insect repellent – and explains the basics of fermentation, aging, and wine tasting.