



On National Wine Day, we raise a glass to the best of Sonoma County

By Sheryl Nance-Nash, May 24, 2016

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Bet you didn't know May 25th is National Wine Day. It's a good excuse to grab a glass and say cheers. It's also a good reason to look closer at Sonoma County and its rising star city, [Santa Rosa](#).

Once an undistinguished City, Santa Rosa, and indeed greater Sonoma County, no longer plays distant second fiddle to the renowned Napa Valley wine region nearby. Sonoma County has more than 300 wineries and Santa Rosa has its fair share. Take, for example, Paradise Ridge Winery which sits on a hilltop overlooking the city and surrounding Sonoma County. Enjoy the sculpture garden while tasting the wines that come from their Russian River Valley vineyard and the esteemed Rockpile region to the north of Santa Rosa. Not far away is Matanzas Creek Winery which is nationally recognized and beloved for its merlots and sauvignon blancs.



It's not just the wineries that are buzzy, but also the food. The in spot for breakfast or brunch these days is Dierk's Parkside Café. Specialties include the Sonoma vegetable hash with goat cheese, local vegetables, hash browns and eggs, and the chicken benedict consisting of fried chicken over bacon, roasted tomatoes, green onions, hash browns and eggs. Bird & The Bottle is conveniently located in downtown Santa Rosa. It makes surprising combinations that wow you—think mac 'n' cheese with fried kielbasa and crispy Brussels sprouts or fried buttermilk chicken, bean sprouts and black eyed pea slaw and mambo sauce. You don't

want to visit the city and not go to John Ash & Co.; this is the birthplace of California Wine Country Cuisine. Thirty six years ago, the original chef/owner John Ash introduced the contemporary renaissance of farm-to-table seasonal dining.



Santa Rosa is great for outdoor adventures including biking, hiking, and horseback riding. Check out Annadel State Park where you can get your fill of such activities and know that vino is the backdrop for much of life in these parts. Getaway Adventures, for example, offers biking along country lanes and visits with a handful of small, family-owned wineries. They offer another tour, seven miles of biking along flat, country roads and visits to a few wineries and kayaking down

four miles of gentle rapids in the scenic Russian River. The Safari West wildlife preserve brings a bit of the

Serengeti to Santa Rosa. Take a three hour riding and walking tour at this 400+ acre preserve and get a close view of zebras, cheetahs, gazelles, giraffes, antelope and other animals. You can also arrange a private safari. Your guide will choose a hilltop location for you to relax by oak and bay trees while you sit back and sip on a selection of Francis Ford Coppola wines, as well as South African wines, accompanied by the finest local hand selected artisan cheeses and breads.

If you're inclined to be pampered, you'll love Osmosis Day Spa Sanctuary in Freestone, a short drive from Santa Rosa. One of its signature treatments is the Cedar Enzyme Bath. It's a therapeutic treatment from Japan that reportedly isn't done anywhere else on this continent. Step into a mixture of hot ground cedar, rice bran and living enzymes that stimulate metabolic activity inside and out.



Sonoma County is also home to the scenic tiny village of Bodega Bay, where *The Birds* was filmed, and to the posh farm-to-table foodie haven, Healdsburg, which has more than 100 wineries, a mix of shops featuring local artisans and international designers, fine art and antiques. You can't go wrong with Healdsburg, it has the Russian River at one end and Lake Sonoma on the other, offering plenty of opportunity for swimming, kayaking, canoeing, tubing, water and jet skiing. Healdsburg is also where you'll find Esterlina Vineyards & Winery, one of few black-owned wineries in the country. About 20 minutes north of Santa Rosa there's the Francis Ford Coppola Winery in Geyserville. You can rent poolside cabins in the summer months, while kids can do a smoothie tasting and enjoy a movie gallery with memorabilia from the Coppola family's films.

Even though you're celebrating National Wine Day, it must be said that Santa Rosa and Sonoma County will next undoubtedly be nearly as famous for its brews. The Russian River Brewing Co. in Santa Rosa is just one of a growing number of breweries and brewpubs.

So as you're raising your glass, toast one to Santa Rosa.

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