

10 Things You Don't Know About Sonoma County

Dec 22, 2015 by Jane Reynolds

[Napa Valley](#) may get a tad more attention, but the splendor of [Sonoma](#) is certainly no secret -- after all, it's had over 150 years to build up its reputation as a fabulous destination for wine, and much more. Yet there's plenty that people still *don't* know about Sonoma; 10 things in particular come to mind. So before you book a trip abroad, or overlook it for the celebrity of Napa, consider Sonoma as the destination you may want to spend your wanderlust budget on. We just got back from an October trip to this beautiful California locale and we kinda fell in love! (*And that was before we had even completed a full wine tasting.*)

1. It has more acres of vineyards than Napa.



Vineyards at Vintners Inn

Napa has long been known as *the* California wine region. While the debate will continue for decades (over thousands of bottles of wine), Napa is generally awarded the title as the producer of the best Californian wines (particularly Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, and Merlot)-- and [this shows in the bottles' prices](#). But this doesn't mean Napa gives you more of a wine country experience than Sonoma; in fact, the opposite can be successfully argued. While Napa has just 43,000 acres of vineyards, [Sonoma has about 60,000](#) -- meaning increased production (at cheaper prices) and more opportunities for the classic vineyard selfie.

Those who stay at Santa Rosa's [Vintners Inn](#) can get a great vineyard pic without even leaving the property, as it sits on nearly 100 acres of vineyard.

2. It is less expensive than Napa.



Bungalows 313

It's not just cheaper to booze here; staying in, and exploring, Sonoma is also less expensive than in neighboring Napa. [The average daily cost per person \(including things like lodging, dining, and activities\) is \\$292 here, compared to \\$466 in Napa.](#) So a five-day trip to Sonoma costs about the same as a three-day vacation in Napa; we'll take the former, thank you!

[Bungalows 313](#) has a lovely boutique vibe, while [FountainGrove Inn](#) has a more corporate feel -- but with it, more extensive amenities.

3. But if you want to venture into Napa, it's very easy to.

Traffic can be a downer (and a major time suck), but it can take just about half-an-hour to get from some parts of Sonoma to some parts of Napa. Plenty of budget-minded tourists call Sonoma their California wine country home base, and make day trips to Napa Valley.

4. Sonoma is the birthplace of the California wine industry.



Inn at the Tides

Don't let Napa locals tell you otherwise; [Sonoma Valley](#) officially [claims the title](#), as it is home to both the state's oldest continuously family-run winery, Gundlach Bundschu, which was founded in 1858, as well as Buena Vista, California's oldest commercial winery, which was founded the year before.

If you're looking for some history in your stay, too, scenes of Hitchcock's [The Birds](#) were filmed at Sonoma Valley's [Inn at the Tides](#).

5. You can also find great beer and cider here.

Everyone knows Sonoma produces great wine, but it has a long history of producing some delicious beers and ciders, too. In fact, before it briefly closed and then reopened in a new location, New Albion, one of the first American microbreweries, called Sonoma home. New Albion has inspired like-minded locals, and over the past few years, the area has reemerged on the craft beer scene thanks to [the success of local breweries such as Russian River Brewing Company](#). All this hype has scored Sonoma the name of "California's Beer Country." There's delicious cider to be found here, too.

6. But there's a lot to do in Sonoma besides booze.



Golf Course at The Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa

Many travel to Sonoma to enjoy delicious wines -- and hopefully, now that they've read #5, beers and ciders, too. But you can have an amazing trip to Sonoma without having a sip of alcohol. The area is a nature lover's paradise, with active pursuits such as golf, kayaking on the Russian River, and hiking. If you're looking for a more relaxing getaway, there are about 60 Sonoma County spas to choose from -- so selecting one may be stressful, but once your decision is made you can let the tension melt away.

A massive upscale resort, [The Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa](#) has an 18-hole golf course, spa, lovely pool, and modern fitness center.

7. It is home to the northernmost Spanish-Mexican mission on El Camino Real.



The Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa has mission-style architecture.

And when the weather doesn't cooperate (although this is rare), you can visit area museums, such as Mission San Francisco Solano. Built in 1832, this beautiful mission is the northernmost Spanish-Mexican mission on El Camino Real, as well as the last to be erected.

8. It was the capital of the Independent Republic of California.

It may have only been so for [25 days back in 1846](#), but it's still a fun fact that most people don't know!

9. The food is delicious.



 SHED in Healdsburg; Photo Credit: Jane Reynolds

As far as fine dining is concerned, most of those with discerning tastebuds would agree that Napa has Sonoma beat. Napa is home to two three-Michelin-star restaurants and five with one star, compared to [the three one-Michelin-star restaurants in Sonoma](#). But the foodie scene in Sonoma is still amazing, and it's funky, laid-back vibe is even more appealing to some; plus, the focus on sustainability in Sonoma is impressive.

A popular activity is the [Savor Healdsburg](#) food tour, which brings foodies to various popular restaurants, eateries, and bakeries in adorable downtown [Healdsburg](#). Highlights include [SHED](#), an artisanal-grocery-store-meets-restaurant, [Taste of Tea](#), and [Noble Folk](#), where delicious pies and ice creams are served.

10. You can fly directly into Sonoma County on a commercial flight.



 Pool at Hilton Sonoma Wine Country

Napa has just one airport -- Napa County Airport (APC) -- which only services private planes and chartered jets. Sonoma, on the other hand, has the Charles M. Schulz--Sonoma County Airport, which services Alaska Airlines flights landing directly in Sonoma's [Santa Rosa](#).

In northern Santa Rosa, the [Hilton Sonoma Wine Country](#) is a solid mid-range option with large rooms, a pool, and a pleasant on-site restaurant.