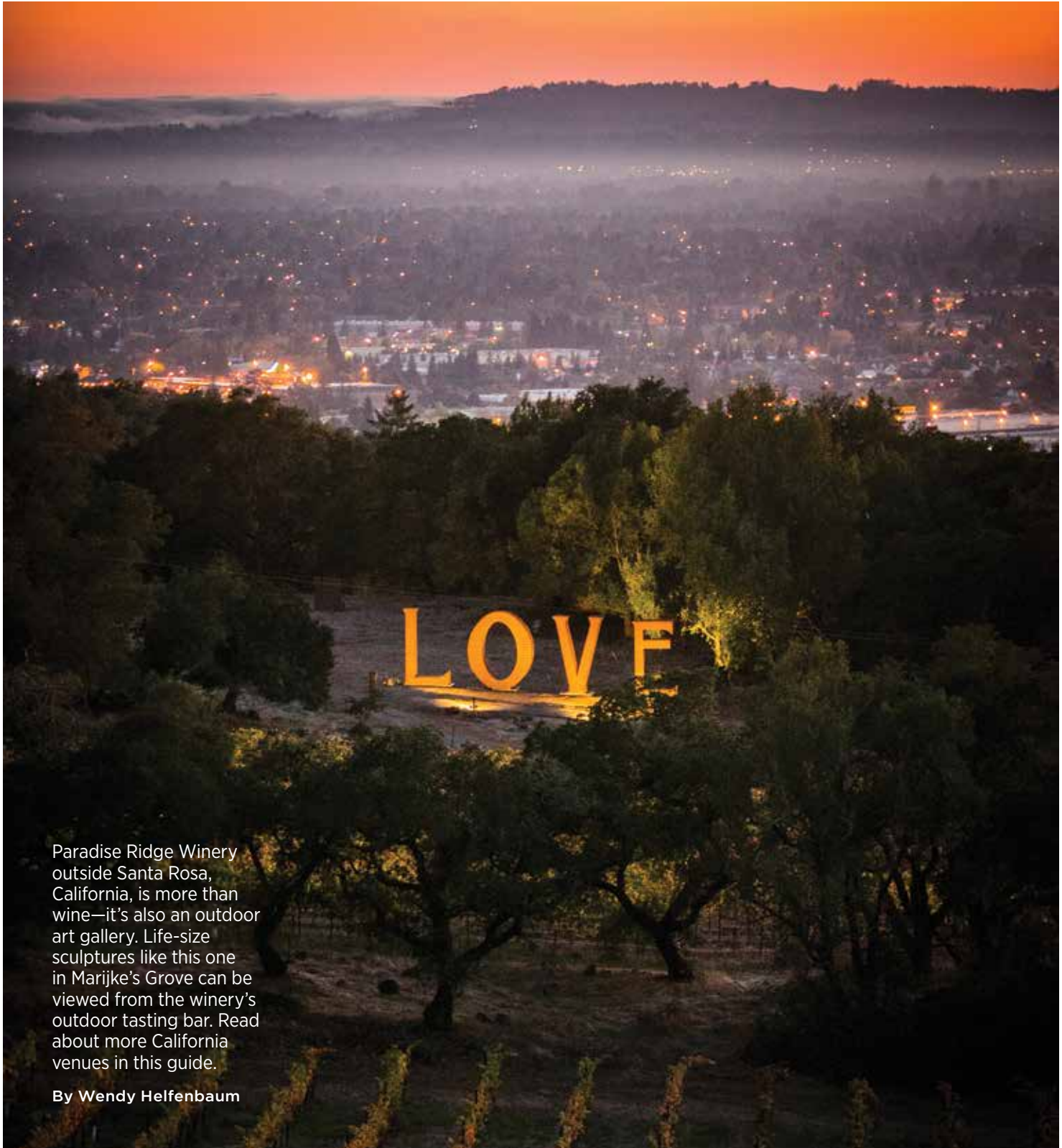


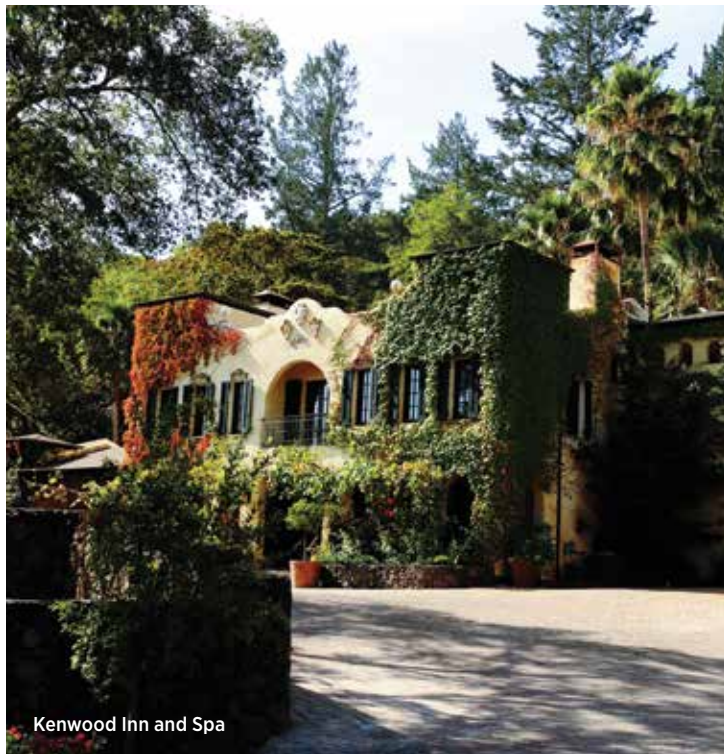
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# CALIFORNIA



Paradise Ridge Winery outside Santa Rosa, California, is more than wine—it's also an outdoor art gallery. Life-size sculptures like this one in Marijke's Grove can be viewed from the winery's outdoor tasting bar. Read about more California venues in this guide.

By Wendy Helfenbaum



Kenwood Inn and Spa

## Cheers to Sonoma County

Northern California's celebrated wine country has more than vino.

With 55 miles of Pacific Coast scenery, elegant hotels and hundreds of farm-to-table restaurants, Sonoma County is a huge draw for groups craving adventure amid the oak-covered hills or a chance to explore the area's hiking and walking trails during downtime.

Sonoma's redwoods and rivers region is steeped in history and hosts a variety of outdoor festivals throughout the year that planners can overlap with conference dates, like the Gravenstein Apple Fair in August or the Heirloom Tomato Festival in September. Hot air balloon rides, river kayaking, whale watching excursions and zip lining are a few of the dozens of activities available for small- to medium-size groups. And, of course, the renowned vineyards are a major highlight: The county's valleys have more than 370 wineries, 40 spas, 22 golf courses and 500 restaurants for off-site receptions and dinners.

While Sonoma County doesn't have a convention center, there are 14 hotels with meeting space. The two largest hotels are the 250-room Hilton Sonoma Wine Country Hotel and the 245-room DoubleTree by Hilton Sonoma Wine Country, and the 183-room Sheraton Sonoma County - Petaluma has the most meeting space, with 15,000 square feet.

SONOMA COUNTY TOURISM

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## QUICK FACTS

**Area guest rooms:** 6,600

**Nearest airport:** Charles M. Schulz-Sonoma County

**Largest convention hotel:** Sheraton Sonoma County – Petaluma

**Meeting space:** 15,000 square feet

**Meeting rooms:** 13

## NEW IN 2015

Upgrades at Courtyard Santa Rosa to its public areas, pool, hotel and bistro will be completed in May.

Flamingo Conference Resort & Spa underwent a \$3 million transformation.

Bennett Valley Cellars opened a new tasting room; DeLorimier Winery added wine-and-food pairings from local farms; and Tilted Shed Ciderworks opened a tasting room in Windsor and hosts seminars on ciders.

New tours and whiskey tastings were added at Prohibition Spirits Distillery's Indigenous Spirits Lab.

## [CASE STUDY]

"Having our event in Sonoma County worked very much in our favor," says Jessie Korosec, marketing and events manager for Equipment and Tool Institute, a Rochester, Michigan-based international association for equipment and tool manufacturers and distributors. Korosec brought about 160 attendees and spouses—more than in previous years—to Sonoma County last April for ToolTech 2014, a four-day event consisting of meetings and a trade show. "Sonoma is superfriendly and laid-back, which makes everything so enjoyable," says Korosec. "It's more spread out, so it feels less crowded than Napa."

The Fairmont Sonoma Mission Inn & Spa hosted ToolTech. The group used the property's two ballrooms for meetings and exhibitors' booths. "We had lunch at The Fairmont every day, which was wonderful—great presentation and great food," says Korosec. "We also did a showcase happy hour one night near the trade show booths with heavy appetizers and an open bar, and we had a hospitality suite each night."

Korosec held ToolTech's opening networking reception at Imagery Estate Winery, a Benziger Family Winery, where attendees sampled wine and food. The closing dinner was at Paradise Ridge Winery, minutes from downtown Santa Rosa. Both wineries were recommended by Sonoma County Tourism, says Korosec, who also found a few hidden gems on her own.

"One of my all-time favorite wineries is Bella Vineyards, which has a beautiful wine cave where they do all the tastings," she says. She suggested Vintners Inn for members who wanted to stay a few extra days past the conference, and says she never goes to Sonoma without eating at The Girl & the Fig, where she's also planned a past president's dinner.

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