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## Special Travel Feature

*Vintage vacations.***Six great getaways for wine lovers.**

WHAT COULD BE MORE RELAXING THAN A WINE COUNTRY WEEKEND? Life moves at a slower pace when you stop to notice how the sun ripens the grapes on a lush, rolling hillside. Really savoring a glass of wine — learning to identify and appreciate its aromas and flavors — can be a purely sensual experience.

We've rounded up six fantastic getaways for wine lovers, from the luxury and romance of Napa to the rustic back roads of Washington's Yakima Valley. There's a whole world of wine just waiting to be discovered. Cheers!

# Napa Valley

## { SUBLIME DESTINATION }

America's most celebrated wine-growing district is the ultimate destination for food and wine lovers. The Napa Valley is overflowing with world-renowned vineyards, gourmet restaurants, spas, and seductive country inns.

Despite its high profile, Napa is surprisingly welcoming to casual wine drinkers. Sterling Vineyards (800-726-6136, [sterlingvineyards.com](http://sterlingvineyards.com)) is a terrific stop for first-timers. An aerial tram whisks you up to the visitor center, perched atop a rocky knoll with sweeping vistas.

Napa is home to such heavy hitters as Beringer, Robert Mondavi, and Niebaum-Coppola. But with more than 200 wineries open for tours, there's plenty of opportunity to discover hidden gems.

The Stags Leap District, in the southeast Napa Valley, is full of up-and-coming names, such as the low-key Taylor Family Vineyards (707-255-3593, [taylorfamilyvineyards.com](http://taylorfamilyvineyards.com)), which produces elegant cabernet sauvignons. My favorite find is Robert Sinskey Vineyards (800-869-2030, [robertsinskey.com](http://robertsinskey.com)), a boutique winery that has created private-label vintages for some of America's top restaurants. The Sinskeys' organic farming techniques work magic with pinot grapes and their pinot noirs are beginning to command a loyal following.

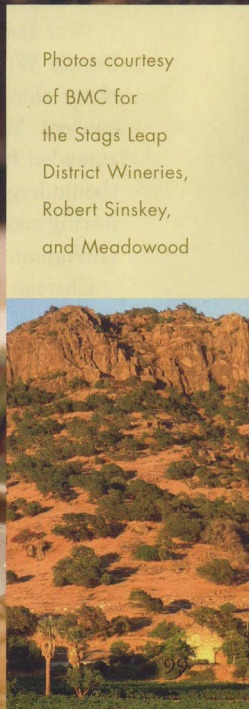
Zinfandel fans should seek out Storybook Mountain Vineyards (707-942-5310, [storybookwines.com](http://storybookwines.com)), at the northern end of the valley. Tours (by appointment only) offer the chance to check out century-old wine caves, where Storybook's carefully crafted Zins age in oak barrels.

Complementing its world-class wines, Napa has a dazzling array of destinations for serious foodies. The Oakville Grocery Co. (707-944-8802, [oakvillegrocery.com](http://oakvillegrocery.com)) is the place to assemble a gourmet picnic. At Woodhouse Chocolate in St. Helena (800-966-3468, [woodhousechocolate.com](http://woodhousechocolate.com)), each edible work of art is handmade in the classic French and Belgian style, then packaged in a pretty blue box.

Floating over the vineyards in a colorful hot-air balloon is the ultimate romantic adventure. Most flights depart early in the morning and end with a champagne breakfast. Call the Bonaventura Balloon Company (800-FLY-NAPA, [bonaventureballoons.com](http://bonaventureballoons.com)) well in advance to book your flight.

For lodging, look no further than Meadowood (800-458-8080, [meadowood.com](http://meadowood.com)), a low-key but utterly luxurious retreat in St. Helena. The resort sprawls across 250 lovely wooded acres, with hiking trails, world-class golf and tennis, and a spa. The impeccably furnished rooms feature private decks, fireplaces, and understated country decor.

RESOURCES: HIGHWAY 29 LINKS TOGETHER THE CHARMING SMALL TOWNS OF NAPA, YOUNTVILLE, RUTHERFORD, ST. HELENA, AND CALISTOGA. VISIT [NAPAVALLEY.COM](http://NAPAVALLEY.COM) FOR MORE INFORMATION.



Photos courtesy of BMC for the Stags Leap District Wineries, Robert Sinskey, and Meadowood