



The Napa Valley Bucket List

25th Anniversary Edition

Photo by Bob McClenahan

25 Must-Do Napa Valley Experiences

✦ BY LAURA LARSON




Napa Valley is where every moment feels like a celebration of life's finest pleasures. From world-renowned wineries and breathtaking vineyard views to luxurious spas, charming small towns, and unforgettable culinary adventures, Napa offers something for everyone. In the spirit of our 25th

Anniversary year, we've curated a list of 25 must-do experiences that capture the magic of Napa wine country. Whether a first-time visitor or a seasoned local, these bucket list adventures will help anyone savor the best of Napa Valley—and create memories that will last a lifetime.



**DON'T FORGET
TO KEEP TRACK OF
YOUR PROGRESS &
TAG US ALONG
THE WAY!**

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NAPA
VALLEY *life*
magazine



Oxbow Market // Photo by Bob McClenahan

1 **SHOP AT THE OXBOW PUBLIC MARKET**

Located in downtown Napa, the bustling Oxbow Public Market offers a diverse mix of local vendors, a wide selection of artisan eateries, and specialty shops where one can enjoy a fresh ground espresso from Ritual Coffee, savor oysters from Hog Island Oyster Co., or indulge in fresh pastries from Model Bakery. The market also hosts live music, wine and olive oil tastings, and cooking demos, making it a must-visit destination for a taste of Napa Valley's culinary scene.

610 FIRST ST., NAPA • WWW.OXBOWPUBLICMARKET.COM



Photo courtesy of
Uptown Theatre

2 **A SHOW AT UPTOWN THEATRE**

The Uptown Theatre is a beautifully restored Art Deco venue that first opened in downtown Napa in 1937. With a seating capacity of 863, it offers an intimate setting where every seat is within 90 feet of the stage, ensuring excellent views and acoustics. The theater hosts a variety of performances, including music and comedy acts, featuring renowned artists such as Willie Nelson and B.B. King. Its historic charm and eclectic mix of artists and entertainment options make it a must-visit destination in downtown Napa.

1350 THIRD ST., NAPA • WWW.UPTOWNTHEATRE.NAPA.COM



Photo courtesy of
Napa Valley Museum,
The MAC

3 **VISIT THE NAPA VALLEY MUSEUM**

The Napa Valley Museum offers a rich cultural experience that delves into the region's art, history, and environment. Now, with two locations—Napa Valley Museum Yountville and the new MAC (Museum of Art & Culture)—the museum presents a diverse range of exhibitions, from historical artifacts to contemporary art. Interactive displays and educational programs make it engaging for all ages, providing a deeper understanding of Napa Valley's unique heritage. It's a must-visit for those seeking to enrich their wine country experience with cultural insights.

WWW.NAPAVALLEYMUSEUM.ORG



Napa Valley Vine Trail courtesy of Napa Valley Bike Tours

4 **BIKE THE VINE TRAIL**

Cycling the Napa Valley Vine Trail offers an immersive journey through wine country. The 47-mile paved path stretches from Vallejo to Calistoga, weaving past vineyards and several towns, such as Napa, Yountville, and St. Helena. The trail offers a safe, car-free route for cyclists of all levels, with amenities such as rest stops and art installations enhancing the experience along the way. Recent expansions, including the scenic Calistoga to St. Helena segment, make it an ideal way to explore Napa's landscape and culture on two wheels.

WWW.VINETRAIL.ORG



Photo courtesy of Napa Valley Aloft

5 **TAKE A RIDE IN A HOT AIR BALLOON**

Soar above Napa Valley's rolling vineyards with a sunrise hot air balloon ride—an unforgettable way to experience wine country from the sky. Most companies offer pricing packages for singles or groups, and some even include early morning flights, complete with pre-flight pastries and post-flight sparkling wine toasts.

WWW.NAPAVALLEYBALLOONS.COM
WWW.NVALOFT.COM • WWW.BALLOONRIDES.COM



Photo by Alexander Rubin

6

ATTEND A BARREL AUCTION

Attending a Barrel Auction in Napa Valley offers wine lovers an insider experience—tasting one-of-a-kind wines directly from the barrel, often never-before-released vintages and the opportunity to meet winemakers, learn about their craft, and bid on futures of highly sought-after wines. For collectors and enthusiasts, it's not just about wine—it's about access, discovery, and supporting local vintners. Events like Premiere Napa Valley and Auction Napa Valley, both hosted by Napa Valley Vintners, draw serious buyers and passionate fans alike.

WWW.NAPAVINTNERS.COM



Photo by Tyler Chartier courtesy of Roman Spa

7

DETOX IN A MUD BATH

Relax and heal in one of Calistoga's famed mud baths. Calistoga's springs are best known for their volcanic ash, which is said to detoxify and soothe. Top spots include Indian Springs Resort, which offers classic mud and mineral water soaks, and the Roman Spa Hot Springs Resort, ideal for couples and those seeking spa packages. Dr. Wilkinson's Backyard Resort & Mineral Springs combines retro charm with modern amenities. These spas offer clay-rich treatments, hydrotherapy, and massage, creating an indulgent and therapeutic experience set amidst wine country surroundings.

WWW.INDIANSPRINGSCALISTOGA.COM • WWW.ROMANSPAHOTSPRINGS.COM
WWW.DRWILKINSON.COM



Winemaker for a Day // Photo courtesy of Raymond Vineyards

8

BECOME A WINEMAKER FOR A DAY

Experience the art of winemaking firsthand with one of Napa's premier wineries. Raymond Vineyards and Conn Creek Winery are two Napa Valley wineries that offer a "Winemaker for a Day" program, which invites guests into their blending rooms for a unique, hands-on winemaking experience. Participants craft their own red blends, bottle them, design a custom label, and take home their personalized creations.

WWW.RAYMONDVINEYARDS.COM • WWW.CONNCREEK.COM



Photo courtesy of Napa Valley Gondola

9

TAKE A GONDOLA RIDE

Glide through the heart of Napa Valley on an authentic Venetian gondola with Napa Valley Gondola. Departing from downtown Napa's Main Street riverfront, these private cruises offer a serene journey along the Napa River, complete with Italian melodies and a singing gondolier. Each handcrafted gondola accommodates up to six guests, perfect for romantic outings or small groups. Bring a favorite wine to enhance the experience.

WWW.NAPAVALLEYGONDOLA.COM



Photo courtesy of Napa Valley Wine Train

10

JOURNEY ON THE NAPA VALLEY WINE TRAIN

The Napa Valley Wine Train offers a unique blend of luxury, history, and culinary adventure. Guests can enjoy a series of experiences, including a 36-mile round-trip journey from Napa to St. Helena. Indulge in gourmet multi-course meals complemented by Napa Valley wines, or a curated experience, with winery tours and tastings at local vineyards. Whether a wine enthusiast or seeking a memorable culinary adventure, the Napa Valley Wine Train promises an experience that captures the essence of Napa Valley's heritage and hospitality.

WWW.WINETRAIN.COM



Photo courtesy of CIA at Copia

TAKE A COOKING CLASS

Napa Valley offers a variety of cooking classes that cater to both culinary enthusiasts and professionals. The CIA at Copia in downtown Napa provides hands-on classes, including multi-day boot camps and single-day sessions, led by expert CIA chefs in a state-of-the-art facility. For a casual experience, PLAYTE Kitchen in Napa offers interactive classes which focus on diverse cuisines and techniques. Napa winery, Cakebread Cellars combines wine tasting with cooking classes, treating guests to the pleasures of food and wine pairings.

WWW.CIAFOODIES.COM/CIA-CALIFORNIA-COPIA-CLASSES/
WWW.PLAYTEKITCHEN.COM • WWW.CAKEBREAD.COM



Mariachi Show at Taqueria Maria
Photo by Leslie Pacheco

CHECK OUT A MARIACHI SHOW

Celebrate Napa's vibrant cultural heritage with live mariachi music. Don't miss the annual ¡Viva Mariachi! Festival at Napa Valley College each April, showcasing top groups like Mariachi Aztlán and folklórico dance. In May, La Onda at the Napa Valley Expo blends major Latin music acts with roaming mariachi bands and local cuisine. For casual vibes, catch live mariachi Friday nights at Taqueria Maria or occasional Sunday shows at La Cheve Bakery and Brews in downtown Napa.

WWW.NAPAVALLEY.EDU • WWW.LAONDAFEST.COM
WWW.TAQUERIAMARIA.COM • WWW.ILOVELACHEVE.COM



HIKE THE OAT MINE TRAIL

For an invigorating outdoor adventure, the Oat Hill Mine Trail is a popular hiking trail known for its challenging terrain and rewarding views. It's an 8-mile out-and-back trail that climbs to the top of Bald Hill, offering breathtaking views of Napa Valley. The trail is suitable for hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians; however, prepare for a rough and rocky experience. It's worth the effort once one reaches its peak and takes in the sweeping vistas of Napa Valley, Mount St. Helena, and the surrounding mountain ranges.

WWW.NAPAOUTDOORS.ORG/PARKS/OAT-HILL-MINE-TRAIL/



TAKE A SELFIE DURING MUSTARD SEASON

Mustard season in Napa Valley, typically from late January to March, transforms the vineyards into a sea of yellow, perfect for unforgettable selfies. The golden fields beckon viewers to take photos with (or in) the mustard as a stunning backdrop. Whether snapping pics along the Silverado Trail or posing between vineyard rows, the scenery is Insta-magic. To find the best viewing spots, get the map from the Visit Napa Valley website.

WWW.VISITNAPAVALLEY.COM/EVENTS/WILD-MUSTARD-SEASON/#MUSTARD-SEASON-MAP



Rail Arts District Murals

VISIT THE RAIL ARTS DISTRICT

The Rail Arts District (RAD) offers an exciting open-air gallery along two miles of the Napa Valley Vine Trail and Wine Train tracks. Featuring large-scale murals and sculptures by local and international artists, highlights include Felipe Pantone's Chromodynamica, Hueman's The Garden, and Mikey Kelley's Begin and Continue. RAD is free to explore by foot or bike. For details and an interactive map, visit the RAD website.

WWW.RADNAPA.ORG



Photo courtesy of
BottleRock Napa Valley

ATTEND A **BOTTLEROCK CONCERT**

BottleRock Napa Valley is a must-attend event for music lovers and foodies alike. Held in downtown Napa, this three-day festival combines world-class musical performances with gourmet food, craft cocktails, and premium local wines. Guests of all ages enjoy a relaxed vibe, top headliners, and culinary stages featuring celebrity chefs. The event also showcases Napa's best "street food" from renowned local restaurants. For unforgettable music, food, wine, and scenery, BottleRock delivers an unmatched Napa Valley experience.

WWW.BOTTLEROCKNAPAVALLEY.COM



Photo by Susan Rini

VISIT THE **OLD FAITHFUL GEYSER**

Experience the natural wonder of Calistoga's Old Faithful Geyser, one of only three "faithful" geysers in the world, erupting every 30–40 minutes. This family-friendly attraction offers more than just geothermal displays. Enjoy the petting zoo with fainting goats and llamas, explore serene gardens, and visit the geology museum. It's also a perfect spot for a picnic!

WWW.OLDFAITHFULGEYSER.COM



Photo courtesy of NIMBUS

TAKE AN **ART CLASS**

Napa Valley's art scene offers opportunities for all skill levels to explore their creative side. At Jessel Gallery, artist Jessel Miller leads personalized painting classes where students receive individual instruction and complete a finished piece—materials included, often with refreshments or potlucks. In St. Helena, Nimbus Arts, a community-focused nonprofit, provides a wide range of classes in painting, ceramics, and mixed media for both adults and children, fostering artistic expression in a collaborative, welcoming environment.

WWW.JESSELGALLERY.COM • WWW.NIMBUSARTS.ORG



Photo by Scott Chebegia

VISIT THE **1881 WINE MUSEUM**

The 1881 Napa Wine History Museum in Oakville offers a fascinating journey into the roots of Napa Valley's winemaking legacy. Housed in one of the valley's oldest Victorian homes, the museum showcases a rich collection of 19th-century winemaking artifacts, vintage tools, and historical photographs, providing insight into the pioneers who shaped the region's viticultural heritage. This unique destination, brought to Napa by industry veteran, historian, and Napa icon Jean-Charles Boisset, is a must-visit for history enthusiasts and wine lovers.

WWW.MCSTAGING.1881NAPA.COM/WINE-HISTORY-MUSEUM



The French Laundry
Photo by Meg Smith

DINE AT **THE FRENCH LAUNDRY**

A reservation at The French Laundry in Napa Valley offers a world-class dining experience led by renowned Chef Thomas Keller. This three-Michelin-star restaurant features a daily-changing tasting menu that highlights seasonal ingredients, many from its own garden. Each artfully plated course is paired with exceptional service and an extensive wine list. With flawless attention to detail and French-inspired creativity, The French Laundry delivers an unforgettable culinary journey worth planning ahead for.

WWW.THOMASKELLER.COM/TFL/

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SHOP AT A LOCAL FARMER'S MARKET

Visit one of Napa's bustling farmers' markets, each showcasing Napa's best local offerings for meeting friends, greeting neighbors, and enjoying fresh produce, gourmet food vendors, and beautiful, handcrafted items. The three main markets are hosted in downtown Napa on Saturday mornings (year-round) and on Tuesdays (spring/summer season), in St. Helena on Friday mornings, and in Calistoga on Saturday mornings. Whether shopping for home-grown goods to prepare at home or homemade treats to enjoy at the market, there's something for everyone.

WWW.NAPAFARMERSMARKET.ORG • WWW.STHELENAFARMERSMKT.ORG
WWW.VISITCALISTOGA.COM/LISTING/CALISTOGA-FARMERS-MARKET/

Photo by Bob McClenahan

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RIDE THE STERLING GONDOLA

The Sterling Aerial Gondola at Sterling Vineyards offers a unique journey to the only winery in the world with its own gondola. Suspended up to 105 feet above the valley floor, the solar-powered ride features full-length panoramic windows for stunning 360-degree views of Napa Valley. The gondola's triangular route leads to the hilltop winery, where guests enjoy wine tastings and scenic vistas. This secluded, scenic experience is a memorable highlight of any wine-country visit.

WWW.STERLINGVINEYARDS.COM

Photo courtesy of Sterling Vineyards

23

VISIT NAPA'S OLDEST WINERY* CHARLES KRUG

Established in 1861, Charles Krug is Napa Valley's oldest winery and a landmark in California winemaking. It introduced the state's first public tasting room in 1882 and has been owned by the Mondavi family since 1943. The estate blends historic charm with modern elegance, featuring the restored Redwood Cellar and Carriage House. Guests can enjoy acclaimed wines like Cabernet Sauvignon and Bordeaux-style blends while experiencing a setting steeped in heritage and Napa's pioneering wine legacy.

2800 MAIN ST., ST. HELENA • WWW.CHARLESKRUG.COM

Photo courtesy of Charles Krug

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LEARN FALCONRY AT BOUCHAINE

Bouchaine Vineyards in Napa Valley offers a unique falconry experience that combines wine tasting with an up-close encounter with birds of prey. Led by master falconer Rebecca Rosen, guests learn how falcons and hawks help protect the vineyards from grape-eating birds. The experience includes live flight demonstrations, opportunities to interact with the birds, and insights into sustainable farming practices. Afterward, guests can enjoy a glass of Bouchaine wine in the garden, with the option to bring a picnic.

WWW.BOUCHAINE.COM

Photo courtesy of Bouchaine

25

PARTICIPATE IN A HARVEST

Harvest season in Napa Valley (August–October) offers immersive experiences for wine lovers. Many wineries invite guests to join grape picking, stomping, and behind-the-scenes tours. Grigich Hills Estate hosts its iconic stomp, while Conn Creek and Raymond Vineyards offer blending sessions. Harvest parties often include live music, local food, and fresh wine straight from the barrel. Vineyard walks, educational tastings, and traditional "Blessing of the Grapes" ceremonies provide a memorable way to connect with the winemaking process.

WWW.NAPAVALLEYLIFE.COM/EVENTS • WWW.VISITNAPAVALLEY.COM

Harvest at Mumm
 Photo by Bob McClenahan