























Healdsburg, CA: Savoring Sonoma

Sonoma isn't an attraction, it's an experience. A visit to the county is a spiritual quest to have your senses heightened. Sonoma simply embodies everything that is wonderful about traveling. It's like putting on a comfy pair of slippers and your favorite robe. The county simply embodies everything that is wonderful about Northern California. An enduring whimsical energy is the backbone of this vital and energetic rural region, whereas the spirit of America is felt nearby in the impressive redwoods, 800-acre Jack London State Park, and the historic town of Healdsburg, which is a magnificent magnet for artists, galleries, and one-of-a-kind boutiques and craft shops

Only an hour drive north of San Francisco, a mere 35 miles via Highway 121 or State 101 to Sonoma County and another hour to **Healdsburg**, is an eternity removed. Visitors will find, as I did, a rich assemblage of working farms which encourages one to drop by for a basket of cherries, a jug of apple cider, or a wedge of Sonoma cheese, all perfect for a picnic along the Russian River or in the tree-shaded **Healdsburg** town plaza. There are 1,450 miles of meandering country roads here, linking family-run farms, and small towns to spectacular beaches, and a rugged, unspoiled coastline.

Vino Anyone?

Exploring the destination with Peter, VP of Sales and Marketing for the Ventker Media Group, it was my first trip to Sonoma County, and I was aware of a fabled tradition of winemaking but didn't realize that Sonoma county is the largest wine producer in Northern California with 18 viticultural areas, 63,000 acres of vineyards, 60 grape varieties, and 425 plus wineries. Driving through Sonoma County to **Healdsburg**, I personally enjoyed the maze of green vineyards, so nicely in step with nature, so perfectly organized, and hugely augmenting the magnetism of Sonoma. It seemed as if the vines were planted and carefully systematized by an expert architect from a different planet.

Healdsburg Allure

The 1,600-square-mile county is filled with free-spirited folks who are wildly enthusiastic about their cuisine and wine. Newcomers, when they arrive in search of a region where they can rediscover themselves, put down their roots quickly. It seems to me that Sonoma has as many artists, crafts people, and antique shops as it has wild flowers. The county is a playground for California creativity and produces some of the country's finest olive oil, mustards and cheese. Petaluma, in Sonoma County, is the Egg Capital of the World and "The Girl & and the Fig" is in the city of Sonoma. This French restaurant is in the attractive Sonoma Plaza and seeks to educate palates to the sensual, crunchy, and luscious qualities of, what else, figs.

Healdsburg has continuously been selected as one of the top 10 towns in the country, and I indeed understand the awards. Edged by orchards and farms, **Healdsburg** is friendly and attractive with its web of leafy trees and Victorian-style architecture and a showcase central plaza >>>















Savoring Sonoma

with one-of-a-kind boutiques, antique shops, galleries, 30 wine tasting rooms, farm-to-table restaurants, hiking and biking paths, and you can test your skills with either a canoe or kayak on the nearby Russian River.

Hotel Healdsburg

We enjoyed two nights at the 56-room, 4-star, boutique hotel, found on the western edge of the town's plaza, complete with a large garden pool and jacuzzi, bordered by personality-laden knotted trees, and a full-service spa and fitness center. **Charlie Palmer's Dry Creek Kitchen** offers French cuisine, lunch and dinner only, and for dog lovers the hotel has dog beds and bowls, if needed. We didn't have time for a bike ride, maybe next time, but they are available at no charge as is the valet parking, Wi-Fi, and buffet breakfast. After a busy day, the snug and chic Frette Italian sheets were a delightful blessing.

Tipping a Glass at The Jordan Vineyard & Winery

Visiting the heart of the Sonoma wine country it was time for a bit of wine tasting. There are enough selections to keep us busy for an eternity, but our time at **Jordan** in the hills of the Alexander Valley was spectacular. Family owned, their 1,200 acres that surround the winery and chateau run on solar energy and are certified sustainable, of which 125 acres are planted grapevines amidst nature and two lakes. The vine covered chateau reminded us of something that could have been lifted from the French wine country and placed here, the French flag still flying. The delightful trait of travel, as I have noted in other travel articles, is the expectation to understand and absorb a destination. The art of creating wine is complex. **Jordan's** first planting was in 1972. They use French oak barrels from Bordeaux and stated "You don't drink wine, you taste it, and always with food because it enhances the dining experience," so we experienced the Tour & Tasting with delights created by the **Jordan** chef.

The sizeable tasting room home to large oak barrels and windows with views of the vine-yard was a journey of flavors with their Bordeaux-style blends, and with **Jordan** sharing the history and details behind each varietal. First up was a taste of a 2021 Chardonnay, light and tasty, accompanied by Brentwood corn, estate tarragon, hazelnuts, and the chef's Reserve Caviar. The 2019 Cabernet Sauvignon, Bordeaux influenced, was layered with hints of fruit and paired with marinated wild mushrooms and local salumi, aged Parmesan cheese, and garden celery mixed with Jordan Estate Extra Virgin Olive Oil. A 2017 Cabernet Sauvignon paired with truffle fondue and bread, fruit crackers and Jordan Estate Extra Virgin Olive Oil, was another favorite with suggestions of blackberries, rosemary and spices.

I did feel life surging around me as I strolled through the vineyard. The owner, **John Jordan**, is a leader in sustainable winemaking practices to reduce the winery's carbon footprint, installing solar panels, water conservation programs, and organic and biodynamic farming practices in the vineyard. Whether you're a seasoned oenophile or a curious wine devotee, a visit to the **Jordan Winery** is a journey that delights the senses while embracing the remarkable landscape in the midst of wine country brilliance.

