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Passport to Sonoma

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Just ask any Napa or Sonoma resident about the other, and the competition is evident: You'll get an upturned nose and a "we're better than them" response. But this coming weekend, Sonoma takes center stage with its annual wine extravaganza. In honor of Passport to Sonoma Valley, we've compiled a list of some of our favorite Sonoma pastimes.

Stay: Located in the heart of Sonoma proper, the [Lodge at Sonoma](#) is one of the most convenient, while still affordable, stays in the area. Ten acres of lush foliage encase a plethora of cottage rooms, suites, and lodge rooms, all of which are centered around a courtyard, pool and hot tub. The *piece de resistance* of the recently renovated resort is the Raindance Spa, which pampers *au naturel*, with essences like mustard, lavender, grape seeds, and olive oil all procured locally.

Play: The active oenophile can now get his full of vino and exercise with [Kunde Family Estate's](#) Green Eco-Tour, conducted by fourth generation winegrower, Jeff Kunde. Beginning on the Sonoma Valley floor and climbing 1,400 feet in a four-hour span up into the Mayacamas Mountain range, this strenuous hike is not for the faint of heart. Along the way, you'll learn about the history and sustainable practices of the Kunde family. At the end of the journey, there's a box lunch and wine-tasting high above the vines. The eco-tour is only offered a couple times per summer; however, there is a shorter Sustainable Winegrowing Hike offered more frequently. To book or for more information on either trip, call 707-833-5501 (ext. 334).

Eat: The Lodge's on-site restaurant, [Carneros Bistro and Wine Bar](#), has a delectable offering of seafood and steaks, with a focus on local produce, and some beyond-scrumptious desserts, like a roasted banana split, with caramelized banana, scoops of chocolate, vanilla, and malt ball ice cream, and brownies at the base. An added bonus: Carneros doesn't charge a corkage fee, so feel free to bring along the bottle of bubbly you picked up from one of your vineyard visits. [The Girl & the Fig](#) serves up "country food with French passion" in an intimate, sunshine-yellow dining room with pleasing wood paneling. The cheese and charcuterie platters are smash hits, so start your evening off with one of these delights. When the weather's right--and often in Wine Country, it is--request a table out on the patio.

Taste: [Landmark Vineyards](#) is one of our favorite in the areas, if not just for the setting and backstory alone: With roots spanning 1838 to the present, from America's heartland to Northern California, it's a Deere family legacy (yes, as in the John Deeres). Since Deere's great-great-great-grandson Michael Deere Colhoun and his charming wife Mary have been at the helm of Landmark, they've turned the place into a true agricultural work of art that would make good ol' John grin from ear to ear from his grave. Those who prefer to wine and dine where they stay can book the guest cottage or suite.

Experience: [Gloria Ferrer](#) organizes some interesting tours of the caves and cellars, followed by some excellent tastings and pairings with its award-winning sparkly. The views from the patio can't be beat, overlooking the valley below. Another one worth braving the crowds is [Chateau St. Jean](#), with its castle facade, charcuterie and picnic areas--where gourmet sandwiches, salads and artisan cheeses are sold, as well as wine by the glass--and a large gift shop with all sorts of Wine Country memorabilia.

Advance tickets for this weekend's event, which include tastings, tours and pairings at more than 50 wineries, are \$55 for both Saturday and Sunday (\$65 at the door), or \$50 for a single day (\$60 at the door). Advance tickets are sold through 6pm on May 15 and can be purchased by logging onto www.sonomavalleywine.com.