

WHISKEY · TANGO · GLOBETROT

Eat, Play, Stay in Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley

By Spencer Spellman



You guys, Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley may just be one of my favorite corners on the West Coast. Yes, this is in fact Sonoma, which is one of the best wine regions in the world. Yet what stands out for me is much more than simply your token wine experience. Its roots run deep (literally and figuratively), while it has a certain beauty coupled with rugged uniqueness that you don't often find in wine destinations.

So recently I partnered with Dry Creek Valley to further explore this unique corner of California. And while I'll be sharing more about my recent trip, I first wanted to share my eat, play, and stay guide to Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley. Let's go!

Eat

Where to eat in Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley largely starts in nearby Healdsburg, and especially downtown, where most of the town's best restaurants are either around the Healdsburg Plaza, or within a few blocks of it. First is the new-ish Healdsburg SHED, which is like New York City's Eataly meets California farmers markets. 2014 James Beard Award winner for restaurant design, SHED is part marketplace, part café, part coffee bar, and part boutique food shop, all rolled into one. Not to mention that the space is beautiful. And, most importantly, the food is good, and good for you, balancing out all those Dry Creek Zinfandels. I had no idea that a pizza could look so good, and be so good for me. To balance it out, I chased it with their housemade kombucha.



Since wine and Italian food go so naturally together, of course there are a number of Italian restaurants in Healdsburg. This includes Scopa, Campo Fina, and Baci Cafe and Wine Bar, all of which are just off Healdsburg Plaza. For Neapolitan-style pizza, you'll be hard-pressed to find anywhere in Northern California that's better than Diavola in nearby Geyserville. Order that day's house salami, since Diavola doubles as a salumeria, as well as a pizzeria.

Lastly, there's Spoonbar, which is located at the H2hotel, which I like in part for a break from wine tasting, since it's one of the best places in Sonoma County for cocktails. The bar features renditions of classic cocktails, as well as their own list of custom cocktails, while the restaurant menu includes a little bit of everything, from oysters to filet mignon to a number of pasta dishes.

Don't leave, however, without going to Costeaux French Bakery. This is no artificial French bakery, but with serious French roots, having served Healdsburg since 1923. I may or may not have gone to the counter for seconds of the chocolate croissants. However, they also serve a full breakfast, which you can order at any time of the day. French toast for the win!

Play

Naturally, where to play in Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley begins with the more than 60 wineries that dot the valley. But this is not your everyday wine appellation, but rather boasts a deep-rooted history (literally and figuratively), with some of the valley's vines dating back more than a century. As such, Dry Creek Valley is one of the oldest appellations in California, still characterized by the same zinfandel vineyards today that characterized the region at the turn of the last century (in your face prohibition).

What stands out to me about the Dry Creek Valley is how unique, personalized, and often offbeat the experiences are. One of my most unique experiences was at Bella Vineyards and Wine Caves, which is literally off-the-beaten-path, located at the end of what's essentially a one-lane road. It's here that you'll find some of those 100-year-old vines. What's most unique, however, is the fact that the tasting room is located in a cave (yes, seriously) that's built in one of the hills topped with vineyards. I did their 60-minute Unleash the Beast Tour, which took me on a tour of the caves, as well as a tasting of a number of their wines.



Elsewhere, the offbeat experiences continue at Truett Hurst, where you can buy a bottle of wine and grab a seat along Dry Creek, where if you time it right, you can watch the salmon run the creek. Toward the beginning of the Dry Creek Valley is one of the area's newest wineries, Comstock Wines, featuring yoga in the vineyard every second and fourth Sunday, and bocce ball and wood-fired pizzas on the first Friday of every month.

For less car time, and more wine time, there's Timber Crest Farms, which is a collection of a number of Dry Creek Valley wineries, including award-winning wineries like Papapietro Perry Winery and Kokomo Winery. Zinfandel has been grown on the property for more than 150 years, and while the original winery was closed after prohibition, the property now features several wineries. You could easily spend an entire day just at Timber Crest.



Cheese and fruit plate at Kokomo Winery in Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley.

Similarly, a number of Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley wineries have tasting rooms around Healdsburg Plaza. This included Stephen & Walker Winery, a small, artisanal winery off of Healdsburg Plaza. Here I had some

of the most unique wines of my trip, such as the appropriately named Portentous, a port fortified with brandy from nearby Germain-Robin, and the 2012 Late Harvest Botrytis, which is a late harvest Chardonnay.

If you're anything like me, however, then you'll probably need a recess from wine tasting. And that recess for me began at Dry Creek General Store, which is one of my favorite stops in all of Northern California. Dating back to the late-1800s, it's part general store and part bar, where you can't get much more "vintage" than this. Grab a sandwich and beer from the store to sit outside on the porch overlooking Dry Creek Valley's vineyards, or belly up to the bar for a drink underneath antiques hanging from the ceiling.

I'd be remiss, however, to talk about playing in Sonoma's Dry Creek Valley, and not mention Lake Sonoma, a reservoir that's just beyond Dry Creek Valley's vineyards. While boating is the most popular activity, Lake Sonoma also has a number of hiking trails, of which every time I've hiked, I've had the trails completely to myself.



Stay

Located on Dry Creek Road, and the closest hotel to Dry Creek Valley is the Best Western Dry Creek Inn. I know what you may be saying to yourself right now, "Really Spencer? A Best Western?" Yes, really, because it's probably unlike any chain hotel you've stayed in, looking far more like a boutique, Tuscan-inspired hotel, and less like a chain hotel. Furthermore, it has two pools, two hot tubs, complimentary wine tastings on the weekend, and complimentary continental breakfast. Many of the other hotels are in downtown Healdsburg, such as the Hotel Healdsburg, H2hotel, and Hotel Les Mars.

If you're a Bay Area or Sonoma Instagrammer, join us Wednesday, July 6th for Dry Creek Valley's first Instameet, a wine walk featuring several local wineries. Required RSVP is [here](#), where you can then receive an invite.

<http://whiskeytangoglobetrot.com/eat-play-stay-sonoma-dry-creek-valley/>