

# FOLLOW YOUR NOSE

## WINE COUNTRY EDITION



**JULY 2019**



**WINE** DOES GET BETTER WITH AGE AND IT WAS WITH THIS THOUGHT THAT WE PICKED THE WINE COUNTRY TO CELEBRATE **TRACY'S 40 YEARS** ON THIS PLANET (AND A **MOM'S WEEKEND** AWAY FROM THE KID). THE PLAN WAS SIMPLE: TAKE RECOMMENDATIONS, MAKE RESERVATIONS, BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY, WHEN IN DOUBT...**FOLLOW YOUR NOSE** WHERE IT LEADS YOU.

MOM FACT  
#482



IF YOU COMBINE WINE AND DINNER, THE NEW WORD IS WINNER.

BadParentingMoments

## ACCOMODATION

We decided to stay in **Sonoma** over Napa as it is more our style. Napa Valley can be uppity at times. Sonoma is more laid back.

Sonoma has more small and family-owned wineries than the Napa Valley.

The **Napa Valley** is one of the great wine regions of the world but it is a bit more upscale and less rustic.

Finally, we wanted a house share and this was **more economical** in Sonoma – we made the right choice. [Here](#) is where we stayed (there were five of us all together) – the place was great and a perfect place from which to make excursions:

Check out the [property here](#) – Highly recommended and reasonable – especially for two couples. Fully stocked so we could grill out, plus there was a **hot tub**. **Below** is the view from the patio but also check out the photos at the links above:



# LIBATIONS AND...

## FOOD AND DRINK HIGHLIGHTS

### OSO SONOMA

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**SNIPPET:** **Oso Sonoma** is a hot spot in Sonoma Valley!

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Tucked into a small storefront on the town square, **Oso Sonoma** is really more a bar and lounge than a restaurant. But no matter, as the food is clearly the star attraction.

**BEST FOR:** Oso is perfect for a casual meal on the **Sonoma Plaza** that does not sacrifice quality or creativity. It's a great spot to bring a group and share plates. As an added bonus, Oso stays open late (til midnight on Fri/Sat. and 11 all other days).

**PRICE RANGE:** Moderate. Reservations highly recommended. Tasting menus by reservation only. Try the **Deviled Eggs!**

Visit the [website here.](#)

### SWISS HOTEL

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Right up a  
New Yorker's  
alley!

**SNIPPET:** Great spot on the square for a meal, quick bite or a few drinks at **the old school bar**.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Set near the bars and restaurants of downtown Sonoma, this historic hotel dating from **the 1870's** is across the street from Sonoma Plaza and is a 2-minute walk from the **Mission Solano de San Francisco**.

**BEST FOR:** The **Swiss Hotel** is perfect for a casual meal on the Sonoma Plaza It's a great spot where our crew shared a nice bottle of sparkling wine from the local **Gloria Ferrer winery** and some apps. We sat outside the bar which was great for people watching. The restaurant with indoor and outdoor seating serves **Italian and American food**, and, if the crowd allows, you can **follow your nose** up to the **old-world bar** with a wood-beamed ceiling and drink in the atmosphere.

**PRICE RANGE:** Moderate. You can also stay here – they have **5 quaint rooms** that overlook a patio garden or the Plaza. Some rooms have private entrances.

Visit the [website here.](#)

## Murphy's Irish Pub

**SNIPPET:** A comfortable pub just off Sonoma's historic **Plaza** with lots of indoor and sunny outdoor seating and full weekly schedule of entertainment.



**HIGHLIGHTS:** There is not a heck of a lot of live entertainment in **Sonoma** but this pub has a vibrant music lineup featuring many local bands. Match that with a couple of pints of good beer and you have a winner.

**BEST FOR:** Pints of beer and entertainment, especially (I was told) **Trivia Night**.

**PRICE RANGE:** Moderate

This is a pub with pub grub – super relaxed. On the night we visited the back room had an aging band of local hippies playing classic rock. The crowd, whose average age was probably 60, were dancing their **drunken asses** off (see below.)



Visit the [website here](#).



# WINERIES AND TASTINGS

IN **SONOMA** YOU HAVE LOTS TO CHOOSE FROM. DON'T BE WORRIED THAT YOU DON'T RECOGNIZE MOST OF THE WINERIES – MOST WINERIES DON'T MASS PRODUCE ON A LEVEL THAT PUTS THEM ON GROCERY STORE OR LIQUOR STORE SHELVES – THERE ARE, AFTER ALL, **425** TO CHOOSE FROM. **FOLLOW YOUR NOSE** AND SEE WHERE IT LEADS YOU.

BELOW IS A MAP OVERVIEW OF **SONOMA WINERIES** AND SOME RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON OUR EXPERIENCE **FOLLOWING OUR NOSE** THROUGH WINE COUNTRY:



Follow the following link to [Download \(pdf\)](#)

# Gundlach Bundschu Winery

**SNIPPET:** Sixth-generation, family-owned winery known for well-crafted wines, live music events, and lots of **interesting characters** on parade.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** With over **150 years** farming their estate vineyards, this family's history and legacy is intricately tied to that of Sonoma Valley. As you imbibe you can check out some striking murals paying homage to the Mexican Americans who contribute to the winery industry }or just ignore them, bend your elbow and play **CORNHOLE!**

**BEST FOR:** Tired of pretentious wineries? Drop by for a no-BS, authentic Sonoma experience that delivers on its promise of good wines and friendly service. It's also a convenient stop on the way to Napa. We really loved spending the evening here - we closed the joint! Great music, beautiful views, cool people and **CORNHOLE!!**



**PRICE RANGE:** Basic tasting: \$15 Glasses were between \$10-\$15. We found it more economical to **buy bottles** - we really liked the pinot noir.



**Pro tip:** Speak like a local and walk in knowing how to **pronounce the name** of the winery - unlike us. Here is cheat for the Germanically and phonetically challenged:



Link to the website [here](https://www.gundlachbundschu.com).

# Del Dotto Winery

**SNIPPET:** At **Del Dotto**, the winemakers think the barrel is important, and its tour centers around that. On a **Del Dotto tour**, you won't taste fully aged wine poured from a bottle. Instead, you'll sample directly from the barrels. The cool thing is that you will have the opportunity to visit the **19<sup>th</sup> century** caves where the wine is stored. These were dug by hand by Chinese labor and caves have the pick axe marks to prove it. We learned about barrels and how their construction impacts the wine. Your tour guide will use a **wine "thief"** to draw samples from wine barrels for you to taste and the **"pours"** were quite generous – a **designated driver** is encouraged.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** **Del Dotto's singular** focus on how the barrel affects the wine that ages in it is unique. It may be the single most informative tour you'll ever take about winemaking, in terms of how that glass of wine in front of you came out tasting the way it did.

**PRICE RANGE:** Basic tasting: \$45 The Cave experience and barrel tasting: \$75

**BEST FOR:** Learning, drinking and eating. Our **guide Jeff** did a great job.

**Pro tip:** You should also be aware that the wines you'll taste are still immature and not the refined, fully ready-to-drink wines that you might sample in other wineries. Don't let that deter you from going—the experience is all part of learning to appreciate wine and enjoy it. **We really did!**



Look at Val and Beau 'learning'.



A look into the **Del Dotto** Cave Cellar

Link to the website [here](#).



## THE LARSON FAMILY WINERY

**SNIPPET:** Even more laid back than **Gundlach Bundschu**, we came here on a **Monday morning** on our way to the airport. We could have spent the whole afternoon wine tasting, picnicking, playing horse shoes, or bocce ball. Unfortunately, we had a plane to catch and managed just **one bottle** of Malbec after out tasting.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** Rich with history, the family run winery is the former site of the famous **Sonoma Rodeo** – evidence of which adorns the walls.

**BEST FOR:** Casual, down-home wine tasting in an off-the-beaten path tasting room. The **resident labs** (pictured right) have the run of the place.

**PRICE RANGE:** Tasting fees waived with purchase. We loved the **Malbec!**



**Pro Tip:** The head of wine sales and tastings is a former parole enforcement officer named **Bob** (pictured left). Be prepared for colorful jokes, colorful language, colorful shirts and a rather unorthodox approach to wine education. **New Yorkers** will feel right at home – the **southern belles** among us (pictured left) may not appreciate the impropriety.

Visit the [website here](#).



Scenes from a relaxing morning at **Larson Family Winery**. A fine end to a long weekend.





## EXCURSION – TIME TO PUT DOWN THAT GLASS FOR A BIT and get some exercise.

This part of the world is beautiful, and a great place to get up close and personal with that beauty is by taking an excursion to **Jack London State Park**.

### Jack London State Historic Park

**SNIPPET:** **Glen Ellen** was home to writer/adventurer Jack London from 1905 until his untimely death in 1916 - and today the Beauty Ranch is part of [Jack London State Historic Park](#). A 20 minute ride from Sonoma takes you through the tiny town of **Glen Ellen**, past the **Benziger Winery** and into the park. It's a truly beautiful property, filled with lush forests, redwood groves, meadows, and hills that afford amazing views.



**HIGHLIGHTS:** If you are a fan of Jack London the museum is the place for you. If you are not you may become one after visiting this great space and learning all about Jack and his wife. It is unbelievable all this guy did before he died at the ripe **old age of 40!!** You can hike more than 20 miles of [trails](#) that range from easy-as-pie to you-better-be-in-real-good-shape (those latter trails reward you with pretty awesome views, though). We planned to hike to the top of Sonoma Mountain but we ended up joining a free tour that hiked to view the magnificent ruins of London's 15,000-square-foot [Wolf House mansion](#) (it burned to the ground a month before completion.) A very informative excursion that ends at the ruins among the redwoods.

**PRICE RANGE:** Free (\$10 parking fee)

**BEST FOR:** Fresh air, exercise and learning.

[Here is a map](#) of the park and [here is a map](#) of the **Sonoma Mountain Ridge Trail** (in case you are inspired.)

**Pro tip:** We **Ubered** to the park which allowed us to avoid the parking fee in addition to leaving us wide open for some post-hike imbibing. It is about a 20 minute walk downhill from the park to [Glen Ellen](#)



where you can visit in-town wineries, a brewery or have a bite at a local restaurant. Half way down you can follow your nose to an excellent pit stop at the beautiful [Benziger Winery](#). You can have several kinds of experiences at Benziger. You can take the tour, visit a tasting room or you can just enjoy a glass on the shaded patio—we **chose the latter**. **Follow your nose**

and have a look around – **you will be rewarded**. Don't believe me? - Check out some of the images I shot at the winery:



Enjoy your trip Y'all!!