

WEALTH GEEKS

Wine With a Purpose: How Your Sonoma Getaway Can Nourish More Than Just Your Palate

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Following a year of overwhelming crowds at popular overtouristed destinations, travelers' consciousness of tourism's detrimental effects on local communities is growing.

Though many businesses are just now jumping on the sustainable bandwagon, Sonoma County in California is hitting its sustainable stride after implementing strategies in 2014.

Responsible travel is on the rise, and more and more travelers are looking to make a positive impact while exploring destinations.

In 2019, Sonoma County Tourism announced it was moving from being a destination marketing organization (DMO) to a destination stewardship organization (DSO) with the goal of ensuring all programming is in the best interest of Sonoma County.

Sonoma has long been considered one of California's top wine destinations. But beyond its reputation for great wine, Sonoma offers a unique opportunity for visitors to enjoy a memorable vacation while supporting local communities and sustainable practices.

How does Sonoma pour kindness alongside its fine wines and allow travelers to respect its environment, community, and culture? It's all about community.

The Power of Community

1 in 4 people in Sonoma County face food insecurity, a shocking statistic considering how bountiful the region is. One nonprofit organization in Sonoma connects abundance with need and offers visitors the opportunity to immerse themselves in the local community.

Launched in 2008, Farm to Pantry provides a continuous supply of fresh, healthy produce to the most vulnerable residents who lack access to it by cultivating a community of growers and volunteers.

Many county residents have an abundance of fruit trees in their yards, but that fruit often ends up on the ground rotting because there is just too much of it. Since starting, Farm to Pantry has rescued more than 400,000 pounds of produce and delivered more than 6 million servings of fruits and vegetables to those in need.

Visitors to Sonoma can sign up for the opportunity to be a gleaner in the community, which entails spending three hours on a farm or property collecting produce with a local

"We glean generally from nine to noon. You are with really cool, generous people, but you are also going to see how food is grown, how beautiful Sonoma County is, and you can get the inside scoop about where you should really eat. It's a great thing for tourists," explains Duskie Estes, Executive Director of Farm to Pantry.

And with an endless list of award-winning restaurants in the area, incredible gleaning opportunities exist. Potential gleaners can spend three hours in the gardens that supply Michelin-starred restaurants like Kendall Jackson's garden, located in Forestville.

"It's really powerful. You feel the immediate gratification of spending two to three hours with us. There's no question that you did good. You walk away thinking, I did something for somebody. And, as we all know, you get by giving. Every pound gleaned is four servings. At the end of the glean, if we picked 200 pounds, we do the math, and that's 800 servings," continues Estes.

Be a Kind Traveler

The presence of a well-known hotel is not always advantageous for the local community or the city it is located in. Jessica Blotter, Co-Founder and CEO of Kind Traveler, wants to change that.

Founded in 2016, Kind Traveler emerged as a transformative travel platform dedicated to fostering responsible tourism and empowering travelers to make a positive difference in local communities.

As cited in the 2022 Impact Tourism Report by Kind Traveler, 96 percent of travelers indicated it's important for their travel dollars to positively impact the communities they visit.

Kind Traveler simplifies the process for destinations and hotels to raise funds for local nonprofits in their communities.

Additionally, it effectively communicates the positive impact generated by travel dollars. As reported by Blotter, Kind Traveler ensures that they convey clearly the connection between travel and driving positive change.

"Through the mission of Kind Traveler, the travel industry's first responsible travel program empowering travelers to positively impact the communities they visit through a 350+ partner network of hotels, nonprofits, and destinations, it's never been easier to inspire, mobilize, and celebrate how travel dollars are empowering local communities and the environment," states Blotter.

In Sonoma County, through a partnership between Sonoma County Tourism and Kind Traveler, travelers looking to advance positive impact while traveling are encouraged to explore Kind Traveler's new Every Stay Gives Back hotel collection, where every guest stay helps fund a local nonprofit in the community visited. Regardless of where you book, the Every Stay Gives Back initiative donates 100% of funds to participating local charities.

Some of the positive impacts created so far through the Kind Traveler and Sonoma County Tourism partnership, as shown in a live impact report, include:

- 17,660 servings of Sonoma County-grown vegetables provided to families facing food injustice with Farm to Pantry
- 1,110 science-based nature experiences provided to elementary students with Pepperwood
- 168 days of care provided to farm animal welfare efforts with Charlie's Acres Farm Animal Sanctuary
- 41 miles of hiking trails maintained with Sonoma Land Trust
- 7,500 pounds of trash removed from the Russian River with Russian Riverkeeper

Kind Hotels

Located in Sonoma County's Russian River Valley is the exquisite Farmhouse Inn, a tremendous destination available on the Kind Traveler platform. The boutique hotel, also a Virtuoso property, is run by 5th Generation siblings from Sonoma County and has the most thoughtful touches everywhere you turn.

The owners want to share their version of Sonoma with guests and achieve it through partners and friendships with businesses in the region. All you have to do is get there, and they will take care of the rest.

As if visiting Sonoma County wasn't a rich enough experience, the Farmhouse Inn offers its guests the chance to nourish their taste buds along with their palate. The restaurant is the cornerstone of the hotel, the beating heart of operations. A six-course

Another Kind Traveler destination, this time on Sonoma's coast, is the breathtaking Lodge at Bodega Bay. This 8-acre property features an infinity-edge hot tub overlooking Bodega Bay, bicycles for a quick escape to the beach, morning-guided nature walks, and afternoon hot cider.

A combination of open and inviting outdoor areas blend seamlessly with cozy and comfortable indoor spaces. Each guest room boasts a view of the bay and features a wood-burning fireplace, perfect for winter evenings.

Adventures Beyond the Vine

Sonoma is so much more than a wine-lover destination. Boasting a microcosm of climates, soils, and terrains all within the confines of Sonoma County, it is a top destination for any outdoor enthusiast. The abundant coastline offers some of the best kite surfing in California, while the rugged terrain allows visitors to cycle or hike through ancient redwood trees.

For a unique tasting experience that isn't wine, book an olive oil tasting appointment at Gold Ridge Organic Farms in Sebastopol. The Olio Nuova tastings are flavorful and informative, and you will never buy store-bought olive oil ever again!

One of the most unique experiences is kayaking along the Russian River Estuary, which navigates through an impressive wetland. The river provides a safe haven for hundreds of species of birds and the occasional curious seal.

Another popular activity is Sonoma Canopy Tours, where you can soar through the redwoods 200 feet above the forest floor on zip lines, sky bridges, and rappels.

For a more relaxing outdoor experience, plenty of picturesque parks and nature preserves exist. Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve is a must-visit for its awe-inspiring grove of towering redwood trees that date back over 1400 years.

While at Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve, join a fascinating docent-led tour of the Pond Farm, where visitors can learn about the Herr Family and Marguerite Wildenhain, the pioneering female potter who graduated from the prestigious Bauhaus. Pond Farm served as Marguerite's residence, school, and studio for over three decades, where she imparted the teachings of the Bauhaus to countless students, carrying forward its rich traditions.

Winter in Sonoma

While Sonoma County may be known as a summer and fall destination, the winter season offers its own unique beauty and charm. The arrival of cooler temperatures in Sonoma reveals a distinct charm, inviting you to indulge in a more intimate experience.

It creates an opportunity for a more intimate and leisurely experience, where unhurried itineraries seamlessly blend with exploring the county's diverse cultural, culinary, and outdoor attractions.

Winter in Sonoma is prime time for indulging in hearty meals and cozying up by the fire.

Fireside wine tastings are the norm, and Bodega Bay is well-known for being a hotspot for whale and birdwatching, with the annual gray whale migration along Sonoma County's coast peaks during the winter months.

It's the perfect time to visit to snag those reservations that are impossible to get during the summer months. Savor farm-to-table meals without the crowds and long waits, or find a peaceful spot on a secluded beach to watch the sunset.

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