

Northern California Family Road Trip Guide: Where to Eat, Stay & Play

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Northern California is a scenic haven offering a host of attractions for families. A short drive from San Francisco's stunning city limits places you in the heart of wine country, where art and cultural experiences abound. Venture farther afield and you'll be gifted with protected old-growth forests and pristine coastal nature reserves. The opportunities for exploration are endless.

To help inspire your Northern California family road trip, check out where to eat, play and stay in Sonoma County, Napa Valley and Mendocino County.



Courtesy of property

NAPA VALLEY

With its fleet of opulent landmark wineries and picture-perfect vineyards, Napa Valley has defined itself as one of the country's most distinguished destinations for oenophiles. However, while the region's illustrious profile continues to soar among wine aficionados, families have become equally enamored by its bounty.

EAT

As expected, Napa's culinary scene is matchless – from farm-to-table casual fare to Michelin-rated sensations, and everything in between. For families wanting high-quality food in a child-friendly atmosphere, there are many standout choices. In downtown Napa, the Oxbow Public Market is a gastronomic smorgasbord, featuring a sophisticated selection of grab-and-go eats. Freshly shucked oysters, wine flights, cheese platters, sushi, tapas and artisanal chocolates are just a sampling of the delicious selection available. Heritage Eats is another good find for its globally-inspired rice bowls, salads and bao buns. Dine in-house, or order takeout for a picnic at Fuller Park, in the centre of town.



Courtesy of Pizzeria Tra Vigne

Further north, in St. Helena, Pizzeria Tra Vigne is exceptional. Ask for a seat on the patio, and order the freshly hand-pulled (incredible, amazing, wonderful) Mozzarella al Minuto with grilled crostini. The Brooklyn-style arancini (crispy risotto ball) and Nonna's spaghetti are also delicious.



Curt Woodhall



Courtesy of property

PLAY

Embarking on a wine tour in Napa Valley with the kids in tow may feel daunting. But, if you choose your wineries carefully, the entire family will be able to enjoy the experience. Begin with Castello di Amorosa in Calistoga. The winery is an authentic replication of a medieval Tuscan stone castle, complete with a dungeon, drawbridge and torture chamber. Kids can explore the expansive grounds and climb the winding staircase of the lookout tower. In the tasting chambers, you'll find a special room for families where children can draw, nibble on breadsticks and sample the castle's grape juice.

For a more intimate affair, book a tasting experience at Alpha Omega in St. Helena. While the atmosphere is more serene, the winery provides children with crayons and a special Exploring the Napa Valley with Traveler Teddie activity book. Sampling Alpha Omega's cabernet sauvignon will be a pinnacle moment in Napa. Then, spend some time checking out the quaint shops along St. Helena's Main Street.

STAY

Solage, an Auberge Resorts Collection property in Calistoga, will elevate your time in the Napa Valley. The elegant estate's family pool, reserved for guests with children 12 years and under, is where you'll likely spend the majority of your time. Additional features, like lawn games, picnic and ping-pong tables and complimentary cruiser bikes are also available for guests of all ages. Solbar, the resort's signature restaurant, is a magical farm-to-fork experience. If you request a table outside, the kids can play bocce while you sip local wines or a craft cocktails. The lobster gnocchi, grilled octopus and olive poached Alaskan halibut with morel mushrooms and California asparagus are show-stoppers. A comprehensive kids' menu is offered as well.