SANTA ROSA WINERIES
Like most of Sonoma County’s wineries, you’ll find welcoming tasting rooms that show off the area’s many varietals, whether the fruit is estate grown or sourced at other vineyard designations in the region. Wines produced here include just about everything; all of them demonstrate intense love of the land with a grateful nod to the ideal growing climates that are unique to Sonoma. Some tasting rooms require an appointment and may charge a small fee. Many wineries offer a personal tour of the vineyards and facilities, which greatly enhances the tasting experience and facilitates a personal connection to the wines. One such winery is INMAN FAMILY WINES where you’ll most likely see founder and winemaker Kathleen Inman in the tasting room or working in the winery.

Known as quite the wine innovator—she was the latest winner of the “Rising Star Award” at the Culinary Institute of America in St. Helena—Inman’s passion for sustainability extends to a solar powered winery, which produces more energy than...
it consumes. She has also created a new tasting room built from post-consumer recycled materials, and she has included the North Bay’s first privately owned and publicly available electric-vehicle charging station, which allows guests to “fill up on sunshine.”

To feel like a member of the family and experience what it must have been like to live in mid-century Sonoma County, plan an overnight (or two) at The Inman Family guest cottage that sits on the edge of the vineyard. Authentic and rustic, with all the creature comforts, the cottage has three bedrooms, one bath, a large kitchen and a living room area.

The Inman Family portfolio of wines includes Russian River Valley small-lot Pinot Noirs, Pinot Gris and Chardonnays mainly, but also a crisply delicious Olivet Grange Vineyard Rosé called “Endless Crush,” and, in extremely limited quantities, a soft, blush-pink Brut Rosé “Nature.” All of the Inman Family wines are lovingly produced and represent Sonoma in quintessential style and finesse. (707) 293-9576; inmanfamilywines.com

On the other side of the Redwood Highway, a must-visit destination is MATANZAS CREEK WINERY where you will easily spend several hours literally “drinking in” all that the property has to offer. The vast vineyards are breathtaking, sharing the land with a grove of olive trees, a world-famous lavender farm and majestic mountains. It is one of the most beautiful places on earth, and you’ll want to stroll through the lavender and the drying barn, and take a contemplative moment on the overlook above the gardens and vineyards, which has been noted as one of the top places in the U.S to get engaged.

Matanzas Creek Winery produces elegant, terroir-driven wines—Bennett Valley Merlot and Syrah, Sonoma County Sauvignon Blanc and Chardonnay—along with a limited quantity of the ruby rich Bordeaux blend “Journey Red Wine” and the classic golden “Journey Chardonnay,” (both of which sell out early). In 2008, the winery produced its first dessert wine, “Dénouement,” made from Sauvignon Blanc. (707) 528-6464; matanzascreek.com
Other high ranked Santa Rosa wineries include SIDURI WINES, DELOACH VINEYARDS, ST. FRANCIS WINERY & VINEYARDS, HARVEST MOON ESTATE & WINERY, PARADISE RIDGE WINERY, MARTINELLI VINEYARDS & WINERY and many others.

DINING
WILLI’S WINE BAR
As the name implies, here you’ll find an extensive wine list where two-ounce tastes are available, as well as wines by the glass or bottle. Most of the wines are locally produced and pair perfectly with the small plates for which Willi’s is known. The menu is broken down by categories—Surf, Earth and Turf—and several gluten-free choices are available. (707) 516-3096; starkrestaurants.com/willi’s-winebar

UNDERWOOD BAR & BISTRO
In nearby Graton, Underwood Bar & Bistro is a hangout for celebrity winemakers. Chef/Owner Matthew Greenbaum puts out classic bistro dishes that inspire sharing and are designed to pair expertly with wine. Oysters on the half shell or a memorable porcini flatbread make perfect starters for light, healthy dishes such as sea bass in lemongrass galangal broth, or a heartier Niman Ranch hamburger. (707) 823-7023; underwoodgraton.com

ZAZU RESTAURANT & FARM
Iron Chef rockstar, Duskie Estes, and her husband, John, own and operate this highly acclaimed, farm-to-table restaurant, serving whatever is fresh from the garden every day. They make fresh pasta daily, using eggs they gathered from their own chickens, and show a deep respect for living things by using all parts of the animal, “snout to tail.” Try their famous house-cured Black Pig Salumi with a glass of Lambrusco as the menu suggests, or choose another wine from their stellar list. (707) 523-4814; zazurestaurant.com

OTHER SANTA ROSA TREATS
For fresh produce, visit CRANE MELON BARN, a Sonoma landmark for more than 130 years. The farm is owned and operated by father-daughter duo Rick and Jennifer Crane, who are fifth and sixth generation Sonoma County farmers. Along with the ripe and succulent Original Crane Melons, they grow and sell Crane yellow watermelons, heirloom tomatoes, Crane Melon Honey, organic Sonoma County walnuts, local art and much more in a down home Sonoma farm atmosphere. The melons melt in your mouth and they’re sweet to perfection during peak season in September and October. (707) 795-6987; cranemelon.com

SEBASTOPOL
If you are a lover of the bubbly, IRON HORSE VINEYARDS has mastered the methode champenoise with the eight world-class sparklers they produce along with five Chardonnays, three Pinot Noirs and one Rosé. Winery tours, often led by a member of the hands-on Sterling family, are highly educational and invite discussion about the process of making their Sparkling wines. An informal tasting follows, held in an open-air wooden structure on the hilltop overlooking the vast and beautiful acreage.

The 300-acre estate winery is composed of primarily Pinot Noir and Chardonnay vineyards that thrive in the Green Valley as it funnels chilly fog and wind from the...
Pacific Ocean. The rest of the beautiful property is covered with magnificent trees, wild blackberries and a 10-acre organic vegetable garden. In keeping with the family’s commitment to sustainable practices, Iron Horse Vineyards partners with National Geographic to celebrate Earth Day every April, and offers a special, limited-edition vintage Sparkling called “Ocean Reserve” for which a portion of the sales benefit efforts to save the ocean. (707) 887-1507; ironhorsevineyards.com

Other wineries to visit in Sebastopol include MERRY EDWARDS WINERY, PAUL HOBBS WINERY, DUTTON ESTATE WINERY, LYNMAR ESTATE, MARIMAR ESTATE and more.

SONOMA

THE GIRL AND THE FIG will whisk you to Provence with its superior food and atmosphere. The restaurant staff farms most of the ingredients themselves and you’ll delight in artful combinations such as mixed seasonal radishes with anchovy butter and grey sea salt or fig-and-port ice cream with port, caramel and tarragon. (707) 935-3000; thegirlandthefig.com

Save room for a sample or two from an amazing assortment of artisan cheeses by maverick cheese maker Sheana Davis. At her shop, EPICUREAN CONNECTION, plan to settle in for a visit with Davis to be entertained and enlightened about the nuances of cheese (she offers cheese-making classes, too). Try some handcrafted beer with Sheana’s Delice de la Vallee (triple cream cow milk blended with fresh goat milk) and Crème de Fromage (a cream top Fromage blanc) then shop the fabulous gourmet store while your order from her cafe is prepared. (707) 935-7960; theepicureanconnection.com

Chapter 2

FREESTONE

Along the artsy Bohemian Highway, pop in early to WILD FLOUR BRICK OVEN BREAD BAKERY AND GARDEN for a sticky bun—or one of a dozen other choices that change every day—along with your morning Java, then head straight to OSMOSIS DAY SPA for a unique, pampering spa experience. The spa features rejuvenating Cedar enzyme baths (Osmosis Day Spa is the only North American spa offering this Japanese-Style treatment) along with authentic Japanese gardens, Zen meditation gardens, outdoor garden massages, facials and more. Save a little time after your treatment to shop in the lobby of the spa where you can score some local crafts, handmade soaps and the ever-popular, hard-to-find Phyts skin-care products. (707) 833-8231; osmosis.com

WHEN TO GO

Insiders say the best time to visit Sonoma’s wine country is in the winter; when you’ll find tranquil scenery, cozy fireplaces, less traffic and more dining availability. A bit more of a crowd is expected in October for the Sonoma County Harvest Fair and late May for the annual Jazz Festival. The best months for scenic beauty are April and early May, March and late February, in that order. Peak season, and bigger crowds, occurs during summer months. For details about festivals, farmers markets and other events you can plan your trip around, visit sonomacounty.com.