

Climate conducive to growing grapes enables visitors of all ages to enjoy region.

BY IRENE S. LEVINE
Tribune Newspapers

Legendary for its more than 400 wineries and numerous Michelin-starred restaurants, Napa Valley also is welcoming to families. "It's not just about the wines or an adult-only destination," said Mike St. Jovite, a Bay Area travel adviser with Protravel International.

The same Mediterranean-type climate so conducive to grape growing — warm, sunny days followed by cool evenings — enables visitors of all ages to enjoy the outdoors. Each of the cities and towns along state Highway 29 — the 30-mile

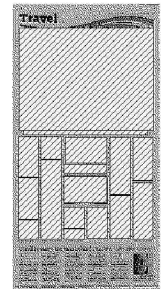
stretch of road traversing the valley from Calistoga in the north to American Canyon in the south — is family-friendly. With traditions of hospitality dating to the mid-1800s, the area offers many choices for relaxed lodging and dining.

Located about 60 miles from San Francisco International Airport, Napa Valley is perfect for exploration by car. Unless you hit traffic, distances between attractions usually are manageable, even for fidgety young passengers, and there are plenty of places to park, leave the car and explore.

Because there is no hop-on, hop-off bus, get an overview of the region by boarding the Napa Valley

Wine Train (winetrain.com). The restored 10-car, 140-seat antique Pullman train departs from downtown Napa (the depot is near the Oxbow Public Market, oxbowpublicmarket.com), traveling north to St. Helena before the locomotive is switched to the opposite end for the return. During the three-hour ride, guests enjoy gourmet lunches or dinners prepared in the kitchen car while capturing glimpses of Napa, Yountville, Oakville, Rutherford and St. Helena through oversized picture windows.

For a memorable aerial view, glide over lush vineyards on a colorful hot air balloon operated by family-



owned Napa Valley Aloft Balloon (nvaloft.com). Balloons launch from the V Marketplace (Yountville) and accommodate children as young as 6 — as long as they're tall enough to see over the side of the basket.

For younger children, the nonprofit Scientopia Discovery Center (scientopia.discoverycenter.com/content) in downtown Napa offers hands-on science, math and art exhibits.

Nature lovers will enjoy Old Faithful Geyser of California (oldfaithfulgeyser.com) in Calistoga, one of three "faithful" geysers in the world that erupt regularly. One of the most photographed spots in California, the property also has a farm with goats, sheep and llamas, plus tables for picnic lunches.

The valley's vibrant arts scene includes galleries, museums, studios and outdoor exhibitions that are visually appealing even to babies in strollers. The 217-acre di Rosa (dirosa.art.org/about/the-collection) art gallery in Napa includes more than 2,000 pieces of contemporary art by more than 800 Bay Area artists. Older kids love the rural setting with roaming peacocks along with the unusual sculptural displays indoors and outdoors, such as a hanging car.

For families that prefer traveling on two wheels, portions of the 47-mile Napa Valley Vine Trail (vinetrail.org) are paved for cyclists, and numerous hotels and tour outfitters rent bicycle equipment, including Napa Valley Bike Tours (napavalleybiketours.com/index.html) in Yountville. Some resorts,

including the **Carneros Inn** in Napa and the Andaz Napa, Hotel Yountville, Solage Calistoga and Indian Springs in Calistoga, provide complimentary bikes with suggested routes.

The wetlands along the Napa River and Bay Trail (baytrail.org/pdfs/Bird-BayTrail.pdf) in American Canyon offer bird-watchers views of raptors, pelicans and sandpipers. Kids can burn off excess energy at one of many public parks, including Pioneer Park in Calistoga, Crane Park in St. Helena, Yountville Park and Fuller Park in downtown Napa, which has a state-of-the-art play structure with benches nearby for weary adults.

Rabid wine lovers with kids may want to hire baby sitters at some point during their stay, but many wineries welcome families. Check ahead because minimum age requirements vary. Especially appealing to children and teens, for example, is Castello di Amorosa in Calistoga (castellodiamorosa.com). Kids older than 5 can enter the authentic 107-room castle, which has a moat, drawbridge, torture chamber and defensive towers.

As part of the tour at family-friendly Sterling Winery in Calistoga, guests can board a gondola (aerial tram) to soak in stunning views of the winery and vineyards. Kids are served grape juice while grown-ups taste wine.

For families with teens who want to combine winery visits with exercise, Stony Hill Vineyard in St. Helena sponsors by-appointment "Hike through the Vines" tours of the

160-acre property led by the proprietor and her dog.

Napa Valley Vintners has cataloged a list of family friendly wineries at napavintners.com/wineries/wineries-family-friendly.asp.

It would be difficult not to eat well in this cradle of working farms, vegetable gardens, farm markets and farm-to-fork restaurants. To cultivate an interest in eating healthy, interesting foods, families can tour the campus of the Culinary Institute of America (cia.chef.edu/visiting-california) in St. Helena and stop at the campus gift shop and the Ghirardelli Chocolate Discovery Center.

At Kollar Chocolates (kollarchocolates.com) in Yountville, chocolatier Chris Kollar creates his signature creations behind a glass wall so visitors can see how they are made, and he often hands out samples.

As for accommodations, the Carneros Inn (thecarnerosinn.com) in Napa is a luxury resort with residential cottages, one- and two-bedroom room suites and villas that are ideal for families. Families can swim at Otto's Pool, which has a separate children's pool.

Set on 1,200 acres, Silverado Resort & Spa (silveradoresort.com) in Napa has something for everyone: two championship golf courses, a putting green, 13 tennis courts, 10 swimming pools, a jogging trail and more. There also are summer camps for kids and teens, ages 6-10 and 8-14.

For visitor guides and additional information, go to visitnapavalley.com. Levine is a freelance reporter.



PHOTOS BY JEROME LEVINE/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Napa-area attractions that appeal to families include the Castello di Amorosa in Calistoga, top; the di Rosa art gallery, where peacocks roam, above; and the Napa Valley Wine Train, where visitors get an overview of the region.



TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS