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WEEKEND GETAWAY: ST. HELENA

BY KAITLYN ELLISON | MAY 26, 2014

On a recent car-free weekend in wine country, we discovered the lesser known pleasures of Napa Valley, from a classic 1960s-style diner to educational adventures in aging caves to a 13th century-inspired castle on a vineyard.



Settle in to Old Napa

I set up base camp at the Wine Country Inn (1152 Lodi Lane), a quintessentially quaint establishment located just off of the St. Helena Highway. The first bed and breakfast to exist in the area, this is a genuine piece of Napa history, with a vintage country feel.

The Inn is all about old-fashioned escape. It's a "TV-free" zone, with plenty of opportunities to savor and enjoy, including cozy nooks, tranquil trails, edible gardens, and a pool-with-a-view. The main building is wood and welcoming, and each room has its own character, with antique furnishings as their common denominator.

Service is exuberant and friendly, headed by a knowledgeable staff that is always ready to lend a hand with everything from dinner reservations (there's a free shuttle to select restaurants so you don't have to drive!) to activity suggestions. Plus, there are plenty of "B&B extras," like daily gourmet breakfast buffets and afternoon wine socials, all included.



Get your oenophile on

Conveniently, the Wine Country Inn lies on the same property as the cult favorite vineyard, **Hourglass Winery**. After his father, who founded the inn, experienced difficulty planting fruit trees and Zinfandel on the land, Jeff Smith learned that the soil was ideal for Cabernet, and enlisted vintner and rocker Bob Foley as winemaker for the label, which generated buzz almost immediately.

The winery itself is located not five minutes away from its vineyards, nestled among the grapevines of its sister site, Blueline Estate Vineyard (Dutch Henry Road). I got the chance to tour the its sleek modern facility and was especially taken with the spectacular "aging caves," which were blown out of a bedrock mountain.

Jeff is one of three guides who leads the reservation-only tours, which last nearly two hours and fully immerse oenophiles in the wine-making process, including tastings of aging wines at rest in the barrel and a current bottled release. Visit hourglasswines.com for more tour information and to make reservations.