



The beauty of the Temecula Valley surrounds the many winery tasting rooms.

Simply Smart Travel

Temecula: The Best Wine Region You Never Heard Of

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Most wine enthusiasts know and enjoy wines from California's Napa and Sonoma Valleys. Many wines from these regions can be found at local wine retailers and many of the vintages have taken top honors in prestigious international wine competitions.

But there is another California region that you probably never heard of that also produces fine wines that win competitions. That region is the Temecula Valley, located between San Diego and Los Angeles.



Many Temecula wineries have banquet rooms that have appropriate wine ambiance.

Temecula means "the land of sunshine and mist" and the valley is aptly named because it enjoys warm days (not hot) and nightly sea fogs that travel 22 miles from the Pacific through the mountain passes and fill the valley with a moist cooling mist. The result: great wine grape growing conditions that have attracted some great winemakers who are starting to produce some memorable wines on the approximately 1,900 acres under cultivation at around 2,000 feet above sea level. More than 40 producing wineries take advantage of the Mediterranean climate and well-drained soil to produce some excellent vintages.

Starting with pioneers like Joe Hart, whose Hart Wineries dates back to 1970, canny Temecula wine makers have been buying acreage, planting grapes and making fine wines at a steady pace. Today, Temecula's wineries produce wine that is so locally popular in wine-conscious California that virtually all of the valley's production is



Winemaker Phil Baily talks about the winemaking process in front of one of his stainless steel fermenting tanks.

consumed in the many tasting rooms in the valley, nearby restaurants and by members of the various wine clubs of each winery. Adapting to conditions, valley growers specialize in Rhone-style varietals such as Syrah, Vigonier, Petit Syrah and “hot weather” grapes such as Zinfandel, Cabernet Sauvignon and Cabernet Franc to produce their memorable wines.

Living On The Suncoast magazine and Simply Smart Travel staff journeyed to Temecula in June to visit wineries, meet with winemakers and sample some of the valley’s best. One of the particularly noteworthy stops we made was at the Baily Winery where winemaker Phil Baily provided us with a “library tasting” of various vintages of Cabernet Sauvignon, showing how his wines have matured over the years.

We also enjoyed the spectacular views and the restaurant at the Callaway Winery and a wide variety of memorable vintages at Robert Renzoni Vineyards, Leoness Cellars, Monte De Oro Winery, Wilson Creek Winery, Wiens Family Cellars and Wilson Creek Winery.

Exploring Temecula At A Glance

- **Mobility Level:** If you book one of the winery tours, people of all mobility levels will do fine as long as they can enter and exit buses or vans.
- **Senior Travel Considerations:** None. Temecula can be enjoyed by people of any age and is a great destination for over-50 travelers.
- **When To Go:** With its perennial warm days and cool nights, Temecula is a good place to visit year-round. To avoid crowds at the wineries or Old Town, visit on weekdays.
- **Where To Stay:** The area has many good B&B’s, national hotel franchises and resorts.
- **Special Travel Interests:** wine.



BEFORE YOU GO

For a list of wineries and area attractions and self-guided tour suggestions, check www.temeculawines.org, www.visitemeculavalley.com and temecula.winecountry.com.

GETTING THERE

Los Angeles’ Ontario airport is only 53 miles away and San Diego’s Lindbergh Field is 60 miles to the south. Amtrak and commuter trains serve Oceanside, about 22 miles away and I-15 goes through the Temecula Valley.

GETTING AROUND

While you can drive to the wineries, I recommend using one of the many tour and limo services that allow you to enjoy the scenery and the wine without worrying about driving while intoxicated. For choices, check www.temeculawines.org/plan-your-trip/transportation.php

WHEN YOU ARE THERE

If You Have Two or Three Days:

Must-sees for a short trip are:

- Old Town Temecula with its restaurants and shops. We loved the burgers at Mad Madeline.
- Visiting several wineries. Don’t try to visit more than three or four in a day so you can enjoy the process.

If You Have Several Days

In addition to the above:

- Visit nearby Oceanside, on the Pacific Ocean. From there, you can catch a Coaster Commuter train to San Diego and explore its waterfront and Old Town,
- Take a dawn or dusk hot air balloon ride over the valley. See www.temeculawines.org/plan-your-trip/activities.php
- Visit more wineries.
- Try your gambling luck at nearby Pechanga Resort & Casino.



Dave Wiens was a very knowledgeable tasting room host at Wiens Family Cellars



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