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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 11, 2013

Five Great California Wine and Snow Country Road Trips *Wine Tasting and Winter Sports Make the Perfect Pairing*

SAN FRANCISCO, California — Heading to the slopes this winter? Although a glass of California wine by the fire is blissful after a day of skiing or snowboarding, why not also experience the places where that wine is made?

Many winter resort enthusiasts in California add to their adventures by pairing a wine country day trip with their getaway. Whether on the way to or from great snow destinations like **Lake Tahoe, Mammoth, Bear Valley, Big Bear** and **Yosemite National Park**, or even during a trip, there are many great wine regions to savor.



First snow in an Amador County vineyard.
Amador Vintners Association photo

California's High Sierra "Gold Rush" country is where the world comes to play, where one can admire spectacular snow-capped mountains while sipping a glass of California wine. Wine lovers can also enjoy the nearby wine regions and wines of the [Sierra Foothills](#) and [Inland Valleys](#) as well as [Southern California](#), which offers some surprising high altitude vineyards as well as great ski spots. Although the vines are dormant, winter is a good time to visit because with the hectic bustle of harvest complete, one has a good chance of meeting the winemakers.

To help inspire wine lovers to add more flavor to their winter getaways, Wine Institute—with the help of some winter fun-loving winemakers and growers—suggests these [five wine and snow country road trip ideas](#). For more inspiration on California wines and wine regions go to www.discovercaliforniawines.com.

LAKE TAHOE

Visitors to the High Sierra region at this time of year can taste the new vintage at winter barrel tastings, or take special tours or wine blending classes. Many vineyards are located at 1,500 to 3,000 feet, with the warm summer days and cool nights producing distinctive [Zinfandel](#),

[Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah and Chardonnay](#). They can also enjoy the area's charming California Gold Rush attractions, dotted along or near historic Highway 49, from gold panning sites to ghost towns.



Daniel Vu of Heitz Wine Cellars.

In the High Sierra, Lake Tahoe is a favorite quick winter getaway for winery insiders from Napa Valley, such as Daniel Vu at Heitz Wine Cellars: "I love to snowboard and Lake Tahoe is a close and beautiful drive away." Any weekend he's free, he packs his gear and a few bottles of Cabernet and heads for the hills!

If North Lake Tahoe is your destination, check out the nearby wineries of [Nevada County](#), where visitors can also relive another era on the historic Nevada County Railroad, enjoy fresh powder at Sugar Bowl Resort, or experience California Gold Rush history at the Northstar Mining Museum or by walking the streets of Nevada City. The historic downtown corridor looks nearly the same as it did over 100 years ago, and visitors can treat themselves to handmade ice cream, local chocolates, local artisan gifts as well as wine.

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Over in [Placer County](#), winemaking came the same year as gold was discovered—1848. Many miners became vintners as the region slowly transformed from Gold Country to farmland, and many of those families are still making wine today. Old Town Auburn is a must-see, boasting a dozen sites on the National Register of Historic Places, taverns, galleries and antique stores. Don't miss the [Holidays in the Hills Wine Tour](#), Dec. 14 & 15, featuring an open-house tasting at 17 wineries along the Placer County Wine Trail.

Those traveling to South Lake Tahoe will want to see [Amador County](#), featuring several gold country towns such as Jackson, Sutter Creek, Amador City, and Dry Town. Stroll narrow sidewalks, old saloon buildings and one-room school houses. Amador wineries take advantage of year-long sunny weather by providing many outdoor venues to enjoy wine, art, concerts and picnics. The [Fair Play Wine Trail](#) is a must, with wineries producing at some of the highest elevations in California, yielding deeply flavorful wines from an amazingly diverse range of grape varieties. The "West End" wineries will hold a [Holiday Open House](#), Dec. 14 & 15, with small bites paired with signature wines. During the first weekend in March, 37 regional wineries will host [Behind the Cellar Door](#), offering educational seminars on all aspects of winemaking as well as imaginative food and wine pairings.

[El Dorado County](#) is another fantastic option, sitting on the north end of California's famed Mother Lode, the 120-mile gold vein discovered in the late 1840s which became the **epicenter**

of the **Gold Rush**. Today, the region is better known for its **historic towns like El Dorado**, with its quaint shops, restaurants and art. Frank Hildebrand of Placerville's



Winemaker Frank Hildebrand of Narrow Gate Vineyards

[Narrow Gate Vineyards](#) says winter marks the beginning of the winemaking season, when they “do a lot of cellar work and get our first glimpse of the quality of the vintage.” For Frank and his family, winter is a special time. “We get to entertain more, get the fireplaces fired up, and enjoy our big reds with braised dishes! El Dorado wine country is all about altitude so snow is normal for us at 2500–2700 feet.” At **Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park** in Coloma, visitors can visit Gold Rush starter James Marshall’s cabin, museum and gift shop, Sutter’s Mill, the original gold discovery site, historic churches, a schoolhouse and blacksmith shop and try gold panning and more. Thirty-two wineries will host [Passport Weekends](#) April 5 & 6 and 12&13, featuring wine and food pairings, barrel tastings, local art and music.

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK



Dutton-Goldfield winemaker Dan Goldfield

Known as a nirvana for rock climbers and hikers in the summer and fall, **Yosemite National Park** is becoming more popular as a winter getaway, with great skiing, snowshoeing and snowtubing at **Badger Pass Ski Area**. It’s a favorite getaway for Sonoma winemaker Dan Goldfield of [Dutton-Goldfield Winery](#), who likes to take advantage of winter winery downtime for snowy treks with his son, Jamie. The park’s famed Ahwahnee Hotel hosts [Vintners’ Holidays](#) each weekend from mid-November to early December, featuring wine tastings and seminars by regional and statewide winemakers, including intimate receptions with the artisans and wine-paired dinners.

Just 40 minutes southwest of the park is [Madera County](#), one of the [Inland Valleys’](#) American Viticultural Areas. The county, known as the gateway to Yosemite, is also known for **historic towns such as Oakhurst**, home to numerous museums which explore the area's past. The **Coarsegold Historic Museum** brims with artifacts and history including an old schoolhouse with authentic furnishings, while nearby visitors can try their luck at gold panning. The **California State Gem & Mineral Museum** lets visitors discover the riches of the mining era and see the “Fricot Nugget”, a rare, 13-pound crystalline gold specimen. Just off Highway 41 in **Fish Camp in Mariposa County**, take a ride on the **historic Yosemite Mountain Sugar Pine Railroad**, a four-mile ride with magnificent views of the **Sierra National Forest**. Wine lovers can taste their way through the region on the [Madera Wine Trail](#), where wineries will host their annual [Wine and Chocolate Weekend](#) Feb. 8 & 9, offering chocolate pairings, music and art.

Those heading to the park via the San Francisco Bay area or Sacramento can stop at [Lodi and the Delta](#) wine region, known for its Zinfandel, Viognier and other varietals. A great way to explore the [Lodi Wine Trail](#) in one stop is the **Lodi Wine & Visitor Center**, featuring various interactive exhibits and displays, plus a tasting bar boasting 200 of the region's offerings. Lodi will host its [Wine and Chocolate Weekend](#) Feb. 8 & 9, including barrel tasting, blending classes and chances to win a wine country getaway.

BEAR VALLEY

Winter sports in Bear Valley pair well with [Calaveras County](#) wines. The region boasts 21 tasting rooms in historic gold rush towns bordered by giant sequoia trees—and was made famous by Mark Twain's story "The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County." Winter sports are popular in the county itself, which also offers opportunities to go hiking, caving at **Mercer Caverns**, antiquing and exploring the stately sequoias at **Calaveras Big Trees State Park**. If time permits, stay in the allegedly haunted **Murphys Historic Hotel and Saloon** which looks just like it did when it opened in 1856. If you're in town Dec. 7 & 8, don't miss the [Calaveras Holiday Festival of Wines](#), celebrating local wines, "get-into-the-mood" holiday music and culinary delights.

MAMMOTH LAKES

In addition to [Madera County](#), winter revelers to Mammoth Lakes ski resort can check out the [San Joaquin Valley](#), the state's largest wine region and agricultural capital. **Fresno** is a popular stop in this region, which is also close to **Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks**. Fresno offers winter sports plus bustling casinos, as well as shopping and dining in great historic places like Old Town Clovis. The 10 [Fresno Wine Journey wineries](#) are a must-taste for wine lovers, and located near the **Fresno County Blossom Trail**, a 62-mile self-guided motor tour featuring blossoming stone fruit orchards, citrus groves, vineyards and points of interest—all peaking late February to mid-March.

BIG BEAR AND PALM SPRINGS

Most people associate Southern California with **surfing and celebrities**, but it also offers surprising winter wonderlands within a short drive of off-the-beaten path wine regions. For those heading to **Big Bear Lake** or **Palm Springs** for snow sports (**yes, you can cross country ski in Palm Springs up in Mount San Jacinto State Park via the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway**), a wine country respite is nearby in [Temecula Valley](#). Tempered by coastal fog, this warm region is best known for its Italian and Rhône varietals. **Old Town Temecula is great for shopping and tasting room hopping**, while the entire region is popular for wine immersion activities and **hot air balloon rides over vineyards**. The [World of Wine Winter Barrel Tasting](#) event takes place March 1-2 and features 35 passport tastings, gourmet food pairings, live music and a fun winery cork sculpture contest.

Those who want to venture down to **San Diego** can pair wines with beaches and world-famous attractions such as the **historic Gaslamp Quarter** and the **San Diego Zoo**. The San Diego wine region has been growing grapes longer than any region in the state, since 1779, when Franciscan missionaries under the direction of Father Junípero Serra planted California's first sustained vineyard at Mission San Diego. It is also home to [Shadow Mountain Vineyards](#), California's highest-elevation vineyard, at 4,400 feet! This Nov. 18-24 don't miss the [San Diego](#)

[Bay Wine & Food Festival](#), a seven-day epicurean experience with more than 20 citywide events, celebrity chefs from across the nation, wine and cooking classes, chef dinners, Cooking Light and Health Magazine's The Fit Foodie 5K/10K run, and multiple tasting events throughout the week.

For [more ideas on these and other California wine country road trips](#), including California wines, wine regions and winery activities—from tastings to tours, picnics, concerts, bocce ball and more—go to www.discovercaliforniawines.com.

About Wine Institute

Wine Institute is the association of 1,000 California wineries and wine-related businesses dedicated to enhancing the environment for the responsible production, consumption and enjoyment of wine. California is the fourth largest wine producer in the world, making 90 percent of all U.S. wine and three out of every five bottles enjoyed in the U.S. Each year, 21 million tourists visit wine regions throughout the state to explore and enjoy the wines, the cuisine and cultural offerings associated with California's signature industry. Go to: www.discovercaliforniawines.com for more information.

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