

Pop the Cork

By Jennie Nunn

The best wine regions in North America

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Whether it's a bucolic, perfectly manicured vineyard framed by a lake, a dinner among close friends, a quiet weekend getaway by the coast or even a hostess gift for the consummate chef, just about everywhere you look, wine is in the zeitgeist. For meeting planners in North America, this also means that it no longer requires a long, drawn-out plane ride to a far-flung locale to get a taste of wine country. Wine-producing regions are popping up all over, bringing the grand total to nearly 7,000 wineries; U.S. states, including California, Michigan, New York, Oregon, Texas, Virginia and Washington, as well as neighboring countries Canada and Mexico, boast some of the finest wineries and wine country hotels in the world.

Here are some top places oenophiles can enjoy without the jet lag.

California

In the Golden State, there's no shortage of idyllic wineries that recall the rolling hills of Tuscany and vineyards in Bordeaux. Just 45 minutes north of San Francisco, Sonoma is a go-to destination with more than 7 million annual visitors and a plethora of wineries, such as Cline Cellars, which includes a villa with a dining room that seats up to 16. Another standout is the newly opened Ram's Gate Winery Sonoma designed by architect Howard Backen (of The Napa Valley Reserve fame) and celebrated interior designer Orlando Diaz-Acuzy. Formerly the site of Roche Winery, the 137-acre property has a culinary garden, built-in humidor cabinet with a variety of cigars, and pond surrounded by lawn chairs for picnics and outdoor parties. An extensive food menu features dishes by chef Jason Rose, the culinary maestro behind San Francisco's acclaimed Delfina and Locanda restaurants. "Our first goal was to make the best wines possible," says



Managing Partner Jeffrey O'Neill of his winery, which produces a variety of chardonnays, pinot noirs and syrahs. "Combined with the design, there's a sense of vibrancy here that you don't see at most wineries."

A short drive away, the famous Napa Valley is filled with approximately 400 wineries, not to mention a newly revamped downtown Napa with a crop of tasting rooms and restaurants, such as Morimoto, conceived by Iron Chef Masaharu Morimoto, and Rotisserie & Wine, headed up by celebrity chef Tyler Florence. Lodging options include River Terrace Inn, home to a new dessert lounge at its popular onsite restaurant Cuvée.

About seven miles away, The Carneros Inn has a spa, two restaurants and farmhouse-style bungalows with outdoor porches and rocking chairs. Farther north in St. Helena, Duckhorn Vineyards includes a wine library and produces a variety of merlot, cabernet franc and other wines.

In Yountville, meeting locations include 60-acre Cliff Lede Vineyards, with rooms including a courtyard for groups of up to 150, and Ma(i)sonry, a retreat-inspired winery collective with a restored stone manor. Another don't-miss spot is North Block, formerly Hotel Luca, whose new onsite restaurant, Redd Wood, bears the imprint of popular local interior designer Erin Martin.