

# trip report: CALIFORNIA WINE COUNTRY

A brief weekend in the California Wine Country began as we gathered at the Oakland Airport. Once assembled we headed north via motor coach to Healdsburg and the lovely northern Sonoma Valley. The weather followed the Chamber of Commerce description providing great conditions to be outdoors all weekend. We arrived at the hotel where Gail and Andy Lang joined us after a drive from their home in San Diego. Due to my luggage not arriving with our party items, our gathering party was changed to a complimentary wine tasting which the hotel hosted. Free wine is always good to share and Ron Hayes



Photo credit: Marianne Pearce, Ledson Winery (The Castle)

captured that with great photos, as always!!

Friday morning the group boarded our motor coach to our first stop at Ledson Vineyards. "The Castle,"

as it is known, made for an impressive beginning – we sat at picnic tables under huge oak trees surrounded by vineyards full of grapes ready for harvesting. The Wine Sommelier presented 7 wines, explaining in detail the differences and ways to enjoy each. If you look closely at the photo of the group in front of the Castle taken at the end of our lunch, you might see some really happy and giddy people (so much wine and it was only stop #1).

We then headed to the Wilson Winery Tasting Room north of Healdsburg where we enjoyed their selections as we sat on the patio overlooking a valley of vineyards. We were wined and dined again and as you can see in the photo, Carmen Mikhail and Jean Hoepfel were even in-



Photo credit: Ron Hayes, Hoola-hoop pros

spired to Hoola-hoop. That brought back memories for everyone! We weren't having too much fun at all! Our next stop was only a few minutes away, but the group managed to take a brief nap (wine induced maybe?) and then rallied for our final tour. The Mi-

chelle-Schlumberger Winery was chosen because of its Houston connection. Our guide began the tour with a visit to the grape laden vines. Jackie Potosky was seen picking samples that were set for harvesting the next week. Touring the pro-



Photo credit: Linda Kuper, Jackie Potosky in the vineyard

cessing area was a very interesting learning experience and provided a brief respite we enjoyed before more wines and snacks. The group helped Stan and Linda Kuper enjoy a beautiful anniversary photo op in the gardens (Thanks to the group for a lovely moment!) The winery hosts were so accommodating and even allowed us to choose some of the wines to taste. We chose a Port for a final selection (a very appropriate ending to our day of tastings!)

Almost exhausted, we returned to town for dinner and relaxing. Judy Schiro and Ron Hayes had arranged for a dinner at the Thai Orchid and Ross Baker, Tor Lileng, Jackie Potosky, Debra Edwards, Ruth Fowler, Marianne Pearce and JoAnn McClain joined



Photo credit: Linda Kuper, Cindy Thompson at the river in Healdsburg

them. This was just one of the great restaurants that Healdsburg had to offer.

Saturday was a beautiful day and this "free" day was enjoyed by all in various ways –a coastal trip, a visit to the county fair, exploring the Farmer's Market at the Plaza and a walk to the river in Healdsburg.



Photo credit: Ross Baker, Sonoma County Harvest Festival



Ron, Judy, Ross, Tor, Marianne, Jackie and JoAnn rented a car to explore outside Healdsburg. They stopped in Santa Rosa at the Sonoma County Harvest Festival and this is where Ross and Tor decided to spend the day. Ross and Tor experienced samplings of wine and foods from the area. Ross stated "I'd frequently say when I walked to another wineries' table: I'll taste the wines judged "Double Gold", please". This event alone should be a nice enticement to run a trip to this region again soon! I think that means he had a great time.

Ron, Judy, Marianne, Jackie and JoAnn continued to Bodega Bay on the Pacific Coast for a seafood meal (not a repeat place to visit! !) You should see the photos, however, that Ron and Marianne took along the way. Linda Walden and Trish Davenport tried to visit the red woods nearby. The Farmer's Market in Healdsburg was the destination for Carmen and Jean. Again there were many local specialties to enjoy—this really was the continuing theme all weekend! !

Cindy and Larry Thomson joined Stan and Linda for a casual lunch on the plaza and decided to take the short (10 minute) walk to the river recommended by several locals. Boy were we given wrong info!

Our 10 minute walk took closer to 45 minutes (the advisor was much younger than us – oops!) It was a lovely walk and the time spent on the banks of the river was worth the trip. Of course after the walk back we had to stop for a wine tasting at La Crema (this is what you do in the wine country, right?).

Sundays should be enjoyed having champagne so we began our day at Domaine Carneros (home of in-



Photo credit: Judy Schiro, Monticello Winery

credible sparkling wines). Located in the southern end of the Napa Valley, it has beautiful grounds, a lovely tasting room (building), and incredible staff. We sampled their best sparkling wines and I know this because the group purchased many cases. We learned the history of their wines as well as a packaging secret – ask one of our group about the long foil wrapper on the bottle. We then coached to the Monticello Winery where we enjoyed our lunch in the shade of large trees and a view of the Monticello replica. The owners are from Virginia thus the name.

Again with full tummies and a little wine buzz we traveled to our last stop—Baldacci Family Vineyards and Caves where we shared wines on their patio and then toured the caves in which the wines are stored. There were kegs with dates from the prior week – too fresh for us to taste!!

Our wonderful, fun-loving group only scratched the surface on this trip – visiting 6 of over 200 wineries in the area. I'm sure there are more stories to tell by my fellow travelers, so talk to them and learn more about the area and maybe you will be in-

spired to organize the next trip to the CALIFORNIA WINE COUNTRY!!!

Cheers and thanks to all who experienced this fun trip.....

**Linda Kuper**

*Trip Coordinator*



Photo credit: Ron Hayes, Baldacci Winery and caves