

TRAVEL

DAYS OF Wine

Napa, Sonoma Valleys pick up for grape harvest

By TESSA DE CARLO
NEW YORK TIMES SYNDICATE

The end of summer is bittersweet in many parts of the world, but in California's wine country it's the most exciting time of the year.

The grape harvest, which gets under way in August, hits full tilt by September, with wineries shaking off their summer torpor and rushing to capture the flavor of the new vintage.

There's no better place to observe these annual rites than the Napa and Sonoma valleys, which lie next to one another about an hour north of San Francisco.

While Napa Valley can claim more wineries, more famous names and more glamour, Sonoma Valley has more rural charm, more history and equally wonderful wines.

Sonoma Valley, also known as the Valley of the Moon, includes the historic town of Sonoma, whose beautiful tree-shaded plaza was the site of both the last of old California's Franciscan missions and the 1846 Bear Flag Revolt, which marked the beginning of California's independence from Mexico.

To the north along Highway 12 are the even smaller towns of Kenwood and Glen Ellen.

On the other side of the Mayacmas mountain range the city of Napa is home to the majority of Napa Valley's people, but the vineyards and wineries are farther north, in and between Yountville, Oakville, Rutherford, St. Helena and Calistoga.

Since both places are popular destinations during harvest time, reservations are essential, particularly on weekends.

Events

The Valley of the Moon Vintage Festival, P.O. Box 652, Sonoma, Calif. 95476, (707-996-2109), takes place the weekend of Sept. 26 and 27 in the Sonoma Plaza.

The festival begins with the blessing of the new grapes and includes a parade, wine-tasting and food booths, music, marionettes and other entertainment, and a water fight between rival fire-fighting units. This year a special musical pageant (tickets, \$8) will dramatize the town's history.

The Sonoma Valley Shakespeare Festival at Gundlach Bundschu Winery, 2000 Denmark St., Sonoma, includes a performance of "Pericles" (Sept. 26). Tickets cost \$15 and performances begin at 6:30 p.m. The winery encourages audience

members to bring a picnic dinner and also sells wine and picnic items. For tickets and more information contact Odyssey Theater, P.O. Box 727, Sonoma, Calif. 95476, (707-996-2145).

Another winery, Burns Vista, 18300 Old Winery Road, will be the setting for the Sonoma Vintage Theater's production of "The Taming of the Shrew" Sept. 27. Tickets, \$10, and picnic-table seating in the winery's pretty courtyard encourages alfresco wining and dining before the play begins at 6 p.m.

The gate opens at 5 p.m. and tickets are available at the gate, or they may be ordered from Sonoma Vintage Theater, P.O. Box 312, Sonoma, Calif. 95476, (707-939-1369).

Sightseeing

Most wineries welcome visitors, although some smaller ones require an appointment, and many offer tours. Tastings are usually free on the Sonoma side of the mountains, while Napa wineries often charge a fee of \$2 to \$5.

A good general introduction to how wine is made is offered by the 45-minute tour at the Robert Mondavi Winery, 7801 St. Helena Highway, Oakville, (707-963-9611). The tour, including wine-tasting, is free, but it's wise to make an appointment.

The Sonoma Plaza would be worth a visit even if there were no wine in the vicinity. Picture-book pretty and surrounded by interesting shops and restaurants, it is central to the historic district and includes a monument marking the spot where the Bear Flag Revolt began. Across the street is a series of charming restorations that make up Sonoma State Historic Park, (707-938-1619).

The Mission San Francisco Solano de Sonoma at the north end of the plaza on the corner of First Street East and East Spain Street was built in 1824, the only California mission established under Mexican rather than Spanish rule. Alongside are the pueblo's barracks, which now house a small museum about Sonoma life in the mission era.

Also on Spain Street are the restored Toscano Hotel and, a short walk from the plaza, the elegant house and grounds of Gen. Mariano Vallejo, the town's Mexican commander. The sites are open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily and the admission fee of \$2 covers them all.



From the vines: The scene at scores of wineries in the Napa and Sonoma Valleys is 100 percent sunshine and natural beauty — often good enough for a picnic.

COURTESY OF SONOMA COUNTY CONVENTION AND VISITORS BUREAU

See Europe by car - your own

By EVERETT POTTER
SPECIAL WRITER



Some travelers go abroad to buy a new European-made automobile. They may choose to buy a Volvo or Mercedes-Benz in Europe, drive it home and then have it shipped back to the United States. This can be a cost-effective move.

"The biggest savings the consumer will realize is the elimination of the cost of a rental car for their vacation," says Nancy Nette, manager of Volvo's overseas Delivery Program.

Anyone who has recently rented a car in Europe knows it's common to be charged \$400 a week or more for a mid-size car. That price may not even include a country's value-added tax.

In France, for example, the value-added tax on car rentals is 16.6 percent. The rental price is usually higher if the driver requires an automatic transmission.

Secondly, European-made cars are cheaper in Europe. The discounts aren't as big as those of 10 or 15 years ago, when the dollar was

strong. But there is an immediate savings.

It can amount to between 10 percent and 15 percent off the U.S. list price for the same automobile.

But buyers who used to go to Munich to purchase a BMW model that was only available in Europe will now find that BMW and most other automakers no longer make different models for each side of the Atlantic.

Still, the idea of buying a car overseas appeals to many drivers, who have romantic images of speeding down the autobahn or crossing the Alps.

Volvo's Overseas Delivery Program is now 30 years old. In 1961, under the plan, 500 cars were sold at discounts of 12 percent to 16 percent off U.S. prices. Those sales are expected to climb in 1992, as the U.S. economy slowly improves.

Here's how Volvo's program works. A buyer goes to a local Volvo dealer to actually purchase a car, such as the popular 240 GLE with an automatic transmission.

The base price is \$22,528 in the United States and \$19,070 in Sweden, which means a savings of \$3,458. (California's most adds \$125 for the car to meet the state's emission-control standards).

That price includes free ship-

ment to the United States from Gothenburg, Sweden, U.S. Customs Duty, home shipment and port-clearance fees.

For further information contact Volvo Cars of North America, Overseas Delivery Program, P.O. Box 913, Rockleigh, N.J. 07647 or call (800) 631-1667.

BMW's European Delivery Program is similar to Volvo's, but the buyer pays duty on the car when it is brought back.

"The best reason to buy a BMW in Munich is to be able to drive your own car under European driving conditions," says Tom McGurn, a spokesman for BMW.

Prices are also lower. The 1992 BMW 318i sedan, the least-expensive model, is \$22,900 in the United States and \$20,400 in Germany. Local BMW dealers handle the sales.

For further information contact BMW of North America, 300 Chestnut Ridge Road, Woodcliff Lake, N.J. 07675 or call (800) 532-0831.

Mercedes-Benz's European Delivery Program is the most extensive of any European automaker.

For further information contact the Mercedes-Benz European Delivery Program, P.O. Box 751017, Memphis, Tenn. 38175 or call (800) 245-7001.

\$49 PER ROOM PER NIGHT
Beachfront Getaways

From now till October 15, say YES to the U.P. and 2000 feet of private beach right outside your door! The U.S. 2, just 20 minutes west of Mackinac Island on Lake Michigan, you'll enjoy spectacular sunsets and scenic day trips along one of the top 10 Fall color routes in America.

Your \$194/week front getaway includes: • Overnight to 64 accommodations • Private heated pool and sauna • Racquetball courts • Evening bonfires on the beach

Ask about our luxury waterfront condominium rentals from 1995 night.

1-800-638-6371

Clearwater
HOTEL & CONDOMINIUMS
BREVORT, MICHIGAN

BIRMINGHAM COMMUNITY HOUSE
Invites You to Preview

THE CRYSTAL HARMONY
A Luxurious Ship for the Sophisticated Traveler

— PLEASE JOIN US ON —

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 1992
7:00 P.M.

BIRMINGHAM COMMUNITY HOUSE
380 South Bates • Birmingham, Michigan
CALL FOR INFORMATION: (313) 644-5832

RANI TRAVEL INC.
INTERNATIONAL, DOMESTIC & CORPORATE
28880 SOUTHFIELD ROAD, SUITE 282
LATHRUP VILLAGE, MI 48076
(313) 557-5300
FAX (313) 557-0440

• DOMESTIC & INTERNATIONAL
• CRUISES
• HONEYMOON PACKAGES
• LOW GROUP RATES
• PACKAGE TOURS
• HOTEL & MOTEL RESERVATIONS
• CAR RENTALS
• SENIOR DISCOUNTS
• CORPORATE ACCOUNTS WITH SPECIAL DISCOUNTS
• INSTANT TICKET DELIVERY
• ALL MAJOR CREDIT CARDS ACCEPTED
• FULLY COMPUTERIZED

DOMESTIC DISCOUNT
1st UP TO 20% TICKET
11th OFF 20% - 40% TICKET
11th OVER 40%
RANI TRAVEL INC.
(313) 557-5300
OFFER EXPIRES 12-31-92