

Travel



Anne Chalfant / Contra Costa Times

Only a mile long, Yountville, Calif., has become a gourmet paradise in California's wine country. Wine tastings, of course, are also on the itinerary.

A taste of the Valley

Napa village offers much more than wine

By Anne Z. Cooke and Steve Haggerty

MCCLATCHY-TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

YOUNTVILLE, Calif. — If vineyards at harvest time call to you — grapes plump on the vines, leaves turning red and gold — consider a visit to Yountville, in the heart of California's famed Napa Valley. A country village by this city gal's standards, Yountville is tiny: about 12 blocks long and four blocks wide, an island lapped by rolling vineyards. Washington Street, the main drag, bisects the town, where 3,480 residents count themselves lucky to be making a living from tourism and the wineries that attract connoisseurs from near and far.

Somewhat of a novice regarding Northern California's secret hideaways, I headed there recently expecting to wander along winding lanes through picturesque hills and valleys, fixing the glorious fall colors for future recall. To add purpose to pleasure, I also hoped to stop wherever a friendly sign announced "Tasting Room," suggesting of a winery tour and a chance to buy a recent vintage at the source, a taste of Napa sunshine to warm a chilly evening back home.

In due time, I arrived with friends to discover that while some might call Yountville a



Steve Haggerty / McClatchy-Tribune News Service

Red tulips bloom in the garden in front of the Vintage Inn in Yountville, Calif.

mySA.com

Slideshow: More photos on the Here and There blog at mySA.com/travel.

village, it's a village on steroids, a city in miniature, depending on your definition. Nearly everything a wine-searcher could want is right there, from lodging to dining, a 10-minute walk from end to end.

"You don't need a car at all," said the bell boy at the Vintage Inn, who was leaning against the reception desk smiling, sharing a joke with the clerk

while they awaited early arrivals. "Just park it over there beyond the flower beds. You can walk everywhere."

So walk we did, passing a half-dozen tasting rooms (suburban outposts of distant wineries), fashion emporiums, art galleries, Napa Style (a must-see kitchen and comestibles shop on the Vintage Estate), a flourishing vegetable garden and the Villagio Inn & Spa, next door.

More notable than any of these, however, was Yountville's culinary scene, famous for cornering at least five (or maybe six) Michelin stars. From Bouchon, the bistro and bakery, to

the French Laundry (three stars between just the two), and from Redd Wood (pasta and pizza), Bodega (steaks and Italian specialties) to Bistro Jeanty (pure French), they offered a cornucopia of fine (and expensive) dining surprises.

Our travel credo being, as some guidebook wag described it, "a peaceful night makes the next day bright," we booked rooms in the Vintage Inn, built in 1985 on the Vintage Estate's 23 centrally located acres. There are other lodging choices in Yountville. But the Vintage Inn met our first criteria: a central location. It also won points

Napa continues on J6

You can't resist Cajun, zydeco music

By Wendy Lemlin
FOR THE EXPRESS-NEWS

Hello. My name is Wendy and I'm addicted to dancing to the raucous Cajun and zydeco music of Louisiana.

For those unacquainted with the genres, Cajun music has its roots in the traditions of the French Acadians, who settled southwest Louisiana in the mid-1700s. The music is upbeat and fun, made for dancing and letting loose. Many find the partner dancing similar to western swing, with two steps, waltzes and jitterbug moves. Zydeco, the music of the mixed-race Creole people of the region, takes the airs and waltzes of the Cajuns and infuses them with African, Caribbean and R&B influences, resulting in an eminently danceable sound.

It's impossible to listen to either types of the highly infectious, accordion-driven music and not want
Cajun continues on J6



Wendy Lemlin / For the Express-News

San Antonians Chuck and Shari Levert dance the Cajun two-step at Festival Acadiens et Creoles in Lafayette, La.



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NAPA

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with a large swimming pool and hot tub, both open into the evening for an after-dinner soak. The deal-maker was a no-charge breakfast: a buffet with fruit, cereals, sliced meats, bread, cheese, tomatoes and a chef-manned omelet station.

When an initial inspection of the proposed digs revealed a second-floor room with king bed, puffy quilt, shamefully large tub, two balconies, a fireplace and kitchenette nook, we registered. As for the wine project, we tasted and bought two cabernets at a tasting room across the street. But what to

do about exploring Napa Valley's quaint country roads? Enter the concierge.

"Most of these wineries don't allow drop-in customers," said Christina Richardson, presiding over a desk in the hotel's lounge. "You have to have appointments."

Handing us a map of the 199 wineries in the Napa Valley — most I'd never heard of — she explained that better wineries not only require a reservation, they also charge a fee for a tasting, typically \$25 (or more) per person. It sounds pricey. But that fee pays for two hours with a wine connoisseur who leads the tour, then presides over a "flight" of five or six wines that he/she pours, guiding you

through a comparison and evaluation. At some wineries, like Frog's Leap, a drop-in is more casual. You can sit all afternoon on the porch or on the lawn, drink in the ruffled hills beyond, inspect the vegetable and flower gardens or play beanbag horseshoes with your kids.

So, with four appointments in hand we retrieved the car and were off, to Hess (on rustic Mount Veeder), to Nickel & Nickel (exclusive, organized, welcoming), to Frogs Leap (casual, fun), and to Cakebread (join a group and wait your turn).

Later, Richardson, whose courtesy and professional know-how made our mission a success, booked "his and her"

aroma therapy massages with bath treatments at the Villagio Spa, a 90-minute marathon of kneading and oiling, finishing with an open air soak in bubbly bath water. A rare indulgence for us, it confirmed the old saw that "the couple that plays together, stays together."

Did we weigh down the car's rear wheels with a trunk full of wine? Not quite, but we did buy select labels, complex in the nose and smooth on the tongue. A few were reputed to improve with age, the sort of vintage years you store in the cellar and crack open when your toddler graduates from college.

I've now checked off nine Napa wineries. Just 190 to go. An epic journey begins.



Steve Haggerty / McClatchy-Tribune

Connie Parsons offers a tasting at Napa Style marketplace in the Vintage Estate in Yountville, Calif.

CAJUN

From page J5

to dance for joy.

With a rich musical culture, the city of Lafayette, in the heart of the area of Southwest Louisiana known as Acadiana, offers two weekend music and culture festivals in October. I call it my two-step program.

On Friday and Saturday, the fifth annual Blackpot Festival and Cookoff not only will feature the best in South Louisiana and Americana music, jamming and dancing, but it also will celebrate the art of the local cuisine with a Blackpot cook-off. Contestants will vie for bragging rights in three categories: gravy (including dishes such as sauce, gumbo, etc.), cracklins (aka gardons, or chicharrón), and jambalaya — all of which must be prepared the traditional way in a cast-iron vessel.

Expect some hot Tex-



Courtesy photo

Michael Doucet of Beausoleil performs at Festival Acadiens et Creoles.

Mex flavor among the Cajun, zydeco and other musical performances when San Antonio's Los Texmaniacs, with legendary special guests Flaco Jimenez and Augie Meyers, bring their conjunto sound to headline the Main Stage on Saturday night.

Los Texmaniacs founder Max Baca said, "We were so well-received last year and had such an amazing time that we can't wait to add some Texas spice to the musical pot again, and we are especially proud to have Flaco and Augie joining us. You can call it Cajun Caldo, Tex Mex Gumbo or Chili Louisiane, but we

love playing with our Cajun and Creole 'vatos,' with whom we've recently had the privilege of sharing the stage at other festivals and gatherings around the country. There's a certain connectedness with our music styles, and it feels like we're all one big extended family."

In the covered main stage area, such performers as Corey Ledet, The Revelers, Yvette Landry, Red Stick Ramblers, Pine Leaf Boys, and Leroy Thomas and the Zydeco Roadrunners will provide the tunes that delight dancers. A more intimate stage will feature acoustic

and more subdued entertainment.

Blackpot Festival was founded by local musicians, and camping and jamming are integral components of the festivities. At the festival grounds in the historic Acadian Village, both RV and tent camping are available, and everywhere around the campground musicians will be jamming.

For aficionados like myself, who can never get enough of the music and dancing, there is also the opportunity to indulge at the cultural Blackpot Camp, set for Sunday through Thursday at Lakeview Park in Eunice, La., featuring classes in music, dance and cooking, nightly dances and jams.

Festival Acadiens et Creoles is an annual free, family-friendly three-day extravaganza of music, dancing, culture and dining that attracts visitors from all over the globe.

Held Oct. 11 to 13, non-stop music by more than 40 top Cajun and zydeco bands on five stages had the dance areas packed with happy feet, moving to the sounds of such greats as D.L. Menard and Jimmy C. Newman, as well as perennial favorites like Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys, Geno Delafosse and French Rockin' Boogie, Curley

If You Go:

► Blackpot Festival & Cookoff Acadian Village: 200 Greenleaf Drive, Lafayette, La. Friday, 7 p.m.-midnight; Saturday, 11:30 a.m.-midnight. Tickets: Friday, \$20; Saturday, \$30. Camping: tents, \$10 for two nights; RVs, \$33 per night (three-night minimum). Blackpot festival.com

► Blackpot Camp: Lakeview Park & Beach Campground, Eunice, La. Sunday through Thursday. Tickets: \$40-\$240, plus cost of campsite or hotel. Blackpotfestival.com

WHERE TO STAY:

► The Hotel Acadiana, 1801

W. Pinhook Road, Lafayette, La. 337-233-8120, thehotelacadiana.com

► Staybridge Suites, 129 E. Kaliste Saloom Road, Lafayette, La. 877-238-8889, ihg.com/staybridge/hotels

DON'T MISS:

► Zydeco Breakfast at Café Des Amis, 140 E. Bridge St., Breaux Bridge, La. Saturdays. Bands play 8:30 a.m. to about 11:30 a.m.

VISITOR INFO:

► Lafayette Convention & Visitors Commission, 1400 NW Evangeline Thruway, Lafayette, La. 800-346-1958, LafayetteTravel.com

Taylor and Zydeco Trouble, 2013 Grammy winner The Band Courtbouillon and others.

By the way, it's easy to think of Texas as the center of cowboy culture, but the first cattle drive in what is now the United States actually involved Cajun and Créole cowboys hired in 1765 to work the cattle brought into Louisiana from Mexico. Festival Acadiens et Creoles 2013 was dedicated to honoring the ongoing tradition of the Cajun and Creole cowboy, as exemplified in the memory and music of one of the most prominent of the Creole cowboy musicians, the

late Boozoo Chavis.

Chavis blended his passion for music and horses by organizing musical trail rides, which have come to be signature events in the zydeco world, and performers all throughout the festival paid homage to Boozoo's legacy. As for me, I did my part to recognize the tradition by packing four different pairs of cowboy boots in which to dance!

Come to Lafayette for a music-filled festival and see how habit-forming the joy can be. You might find yourself in a two-step program, and making plans to return for Mardi Gras!

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Harvest Moon Festival: Downtown Square, Granbury, 817-573-5299, www.granbury-square.com. The family-friendly event includes live music, arts and crafts vendors, and a carnival. Free. Saturday.

Food & Wine Fest: Markt-

Platz, downtown Fredericksburg, www.fbgfoodandwinefest.com. The town celebrates the 23rd year of the event with food, entertainment and more than 100 types of wines from 29 Texas wineries. \$20. Noon-7 p.m. Saturday.

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