

Taste the wild Western Sonoma Coast

Located near the Pacific Ocean on the far western edge of Sonoma County, the Western Sonoma Coast wine region specializes in pinot noir, chardonnay and syrah. On the edge of the edge, this is a region where winemakers compete with fog, chill and ocean breezes, often struggling to ripen fruit. The challenging, much cooler coastal climate yields fascinating wines with distinct, high-toned fruit, bright acidity and lower alcohol. Tourism is in its infancy here, but that makes a visit all the more exciting. Use our guide to discover the rugged geography (Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* was filmed here) and gorgeous wines that define this luxuriously rustic wine county adventure.



Where to taste

The overall regional vibe is relaxed and casual. Many wineries don't have formal tasting rooms but will gladly open their doors to visitors if you call ahead. Also, plan on some driving as wineries are not side-by-side as they are in [Napa Valley](#).

Fort Ross

Open seven days a week with no reservations required and just a bit of extra driving, the view here is worth the effort. Perched above the fog line, the tasting room serves up balanced, elegant, minerally-edged pinot noir and chardonnay accompanied by expansive redwood forest and ocean views. Verify hours on the website as they change in winter months. fortrossvineyard.com

Freeman

Budget a full morning visit here and take the three-mile self-guided hike that winds through first and second growth redwood forest, to the Yu-ki Vineyard. You'll enjoy Pacific Ocean views and a full picnic lunch of local cheeses, charcuterie and breads paired with a silky, complex Freeman pinot noir. freemanwinery.com

Hartford

Sample a range of pinot noirs at this family-owned winery which typically produces pinots from the Russian River Valley, Sonoma Coast, Green Valley, Carneros and Anderson Valley appellations. It's a nice opportunity to compare regions and terroirs. hartfordwines.com

Littorai

Budget an afternoon at this winery (by appointment only) and indulge in the Gold Ridge Estate Tour and Tasting. Named for the gold ridge soils that dominate the vineyards, this tour takes a deep dive into the fundamentals of biodynamics with a one-and-a-half-hour tour of the vineyards, gardens and farm. Top it off with a tasting of Littorai's world-class chardonnay and pinot noirs. littorai.com

Marimar

Owner and winemaker Marimar Torres speaks several languages and has authored two cookbooks, but wine is her true passion. Daily tastings offer a range of pinot noir and chardonnay. For a fuller experience, make a reservation for the Tapas and Wine Pairing with VIP Tour (\$55) where you'll experience Marimar's spin on Catalanian cuisine and fine wine. marimarestate.com

SEE MORE: [5 great guided wine tours in Sonoma](#)

Where to eat

Terrapin

Located in Bodega, Terrapin's informal, simple vibe belies this destination's superior cuisine (and their recent Michelin star rating). The menu has a nice range of international influences (think kabocha squash soup, fuyu persimmon and prosciutto salad, pan roasted cod or braised lamb). Lunch is a great value — a perfect intermezzo to a day of winery visits; try the pulled pork sandwich or Mediterranean fish stew. terrapincreekcafe.com

River's End

Andy Peay of Peay Vineyards, and Jasmine Hirsch of Hirsch Vineyards, both recommend the not-to-be-missed spectacular sunset views from this restaurant overlooking the nexus of the Russian River and the Pacific Ocean. Chef Martin keeps the offerings local with smoked filet mignon with Point Reyes blue cheese and walnut butter or sea bass steamed with fresh herbs and finished with an heirloom tomato broth. Indeed, make a full night of it and book one of the quaint waterfront cabins; you'll be serenaded by the ocean sounds and nothing more as they offer no TV, telephone or data ports. ilovesunsets.com

Rocker Oysterfellers

Don't let the casual, affordable menu fool you, this is seriously tasty food. Try the local Dungeness crab and artichoke cakes with Cajun dusted pine nuts or the beer battered fish tacos with apple fennel slaw. Oysters are, of course, pristine and obscenely fresh. rockeroysterfellers.com

Where to stay

Timber Cove

Designed over 50 years ago by architect Richard Clements, who was influenced by Frank Lloyd Wright, this property oozes rustic, intimate luxury. Rooms are a bit like glassed-in treehouses with panoramic views of the Pacific Coastline and the redwood forest. The on-site dining offers breakfast, lunch and dinner... you might not ever leave. timbercoveinn.com

Inn at Occidental

A charming bed and breakfast with uniquely appointed rooms and full harvest breakfast each morning. Located within easy distance of many wineries (and a new redwood forest zip line tour), the owners are on-hand to dish up a custom itinerary that suits your style. innatoccidental.com

Events

The Annual West of West (WOW) Festival: A wine festival featuring the products of the Western Sonoma Coast. The main event is held the first week of August at The Barlow in Sebastopol. westsonomacoast.com/west-of-west-festival

WOW Chicago event on April 9 (the roadshow version for those who can't make the August event). citywinery.com