

Sonoma wine hike: Head to Glen Ellen for wine tasting and vineyard trails

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Winter in Wine Country is a glorious affair, a way to escape the drearies while soaking in a little more sunshine in the Sonoma Valley. With warm weather beaming nearly all year round, it's never a bad time to step out into nature before stepping into the tasting room. And the tiny town of Glen Ellen is the perfect place to do both.

One of California's most famous authors once called this village in the Valley of the Moon home. Today, Jack London State Historic Park is named after him. Heed your own call of the wild and start your morning with a trek through the park, where ruins and old gravesites beckon the curious.

Two quick trails offer a take-it-easy approach, starting with a 1-mile trail that starts at the museum parking lot and winds its way down to the Wolf House ruins, all that's left of a 26-room estate destroyed by fire in 1913, just before London and his wife, Charmian, could move in. A rickety staircase allows for a closer look at the home, which boasted nine fireplaces and many large rooms for entertaining.



Scenic vistas, hiking trails and historic buildings dot the 1,400-acre Jack London State Historic Park in Glen Ellen. (Courtesy Tom Deininger)

Jack London's gravesite is on a spur just off the main trail. Nearby, you'll find the graves of two children who died on the property before London took it over. Despite never having known the children, London felt a kinship to their spirits and asked to be buried near them.

The second historic trail, dubbed Beauty Ranch, takes visitors to several structures, including the Pig Palace, built to hold 200 hogs, as well as barns, silos, a cottage and the ruins of the Kohler and Frohling winery building.

Post-hike, head to Glen Ellen's Benziger Winery and get off your feet. While there are several tour and tasting options at this biodynamic estate, the 75-minute tractor tour is perhaps the best way to learn about the property's innovative farming practices, which includes planting a garden of plants designed

to keep insects away from the vineyards. The tractor tram tour rides through the vineyards, proffers panoramic views of the nearby mountains and ends back at the winery for a tasting of four wines.

Glen Ellen's Benziger Winery offers guided tram tractor tours of the vineyards. (Benziger Family Winery)

If exploring Jack London's literary history is at the top of your to-do list, but you want someone else to do the planning, Active Wine Adventures offers a Sonoma Call of the Wild hiking tour that includes stops at London's ranch, vineyards and other historic sites with a focus on stories from his life. It's an easy hike, about 3.5 miles roundtrip. And the tour ends with a wine tasting and vineyard lunch.

More hike + wine options

If you prefer your hikes on the floral side, rather than the literary side, head for the 25-acre Sonoma Botanical Garden — formerly known as Quarryhill — where the year-round blossoms represent the flora of California, as well as China, Japan, Tibet, Yunnan, India and Nepal. More than 90 percent of the Asian collection was grown from seeds collected during yearly expeditions into these regions.

Afterward, stop off at Mayo Family Winery, a scant half mile away, to sample a flight of six wines. Or, if you've worked up an appetite, Les Pascals Patisserie is the place to go. The authentic French bakery, owned by Pascal and Pascale Merle, serves decadent pastries (the chocolate croissants are divine), sandwiches (prosciutto and brie!) and quiche.

A more challenging hike awaits in nearby Kenwood at Kunde Estate, where fourth generation wine grower Jeff and Roberta Kunde and their dogs, Cooper and Kalie, will join you for a trek through the estate and vineyard, passing oak woodlands, native grasslands and chaparral as you head up the Mayacamas Mountains. The moderately strenuous, four-hour hike concludes with a wine tasting and wine country lunch. Dogs are welcome on leash.

And the parkland surrounding Sonoma's Bartholomew Estate Vineyards & Winery offers a windmill, a lively duck pond and a three-mile trail for guests to stroll on their own. The trail, which is rated moderate to difficult, weaves through mature oaks, madrones, redwoods and vineyards before cresting at a view of the San Francisco Bay. Afterward, stop into the tasting room to taste wines sourced from the vineyard's certified-organic vines.

If You Go

Jack London State Historic Park: \$10 per vehicle entry fee. This historic park is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily at 2400 London Ranch Road in Glen Ellen; <https://jacklondonpark.com>.

Benziger Winery Tractor Tram Tour: This winery estate tour (\$10-\$35) is offered at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. Friday-Sunday at the winery, 1883 London Ranch Road, Glen Ellen; www.benziger.com.

Active Wine Adventure: This tour company offers guided wine hikes, including a Sonoma Call of the Wild Tour year round. The tour is \$169 per person (plus lunch and tasting fees); www.activewineadventures.com.

Sonoma Botanical Garden: Admission is \$8-\$12. The gardens are open from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily except Tuesdays at 12841 Highway 12 in Glen Ellen; <https://sonomabg.org>.

Mayo Family Winery: Tastings are \$25 per person. Open from 10:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. daily at 13101 Arnold Drive in Glen Ellen; www.mayofamilywinery.com.

Les Pascals Patisserie: Opens at 7 a.m. weekends, 6 a.m. weekdays (closed Wednesdays) at 13758 Arnold Drive in Glen Ellen; www.lespascalspatisserie.com.

Kunde Family Winery Estate Hike: This winery on Highway 12 in nearby Kenwood offers dog-friendly estate hikes that include lunch and wine tasting (\$90) and more casual estate hikes (\$40, BYO sack lunch) throughout the year. Find 2022 hike dates posted soon at www.kunde.com.

Bartholomew Estate Vineyards & Winery: The park and trails are open from 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily at 1000 Vineyard Lane in Sonoma. Book a wine tasting reservation at www.bartholomewestate.com.