



Wine Trails: Half Moon Bay



The scenery is spectacular, the pace is unhurried and the wines are worth a visit to Half Moon Bay, south of San Francisco.
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For years, I never made the trip to Half Moon Bay because everyone made it seem like it was a trip to another planet. Rubbish. Leave Napa a little before 10 a.m. and you can be sitting on the deck at Sam's Chowder House having a lobster roll by noon or in town having one of the world's best fish tacos at a little local spot called the Flying Fish Grill or snacking on homemade soup and authentic pork mole tamales at Chez Shea. And you can be tasting wine at Thomas Fogarty Winery up in the hills 20 minutes later.

This is the perfect day trip, but the best bet is to reserve a room at the Beach House with a fireplace and a view of the bay, schedule a couples' massage for the next morning and take your time — there is a lot to do in what is essentially a small town. If you are up for an oceangoing adventure you can book a moonlight kayaking trip with HMB Kayak or try your hand sportfishing or crabbing with Huck Finn. Home to the famous and upcoming Mavericks surf competition, the town also boasts first-rate restaurants with enterprising and surprising wine lists, a brewery/restaurant, a whole Main Street of small and sometimes quirky shops, and, oh yes, wineries. Not wineries like in Napa or Sonoma where they seem to pop up every hundred yards (or less) but scattered about. Discovering them is half the fun. Sampling the wine is the other half.

For good local information, visit the Half Moon Bay Wine and Cheese on Main Street (behind the Moonside Bakery & Cafe) where not only do they have an excellent selection of wine (and, of course, cheese) they also have innovative tasting and pairings and can direct you to wineries you might otherwise have missed. Your first stop has to be La Nebbia Winery, right past the award-winning farm stands and still within city limits. It is historic and fun and just funky enough to make it more than memorable. And the wines are very, very nice. On a nice day you can play bocce or have a picnic out back, or stay inside in the rustic cottage that houses their compact tasting room and lean against the bar and try the wines. Afterwards, for a totally different, but equally enjoyable, experience, head up the hill to where Thomas Fogarty Winery sits at 2,000 feet above sea level. The view is as you would imagine; the whole tasting experience sophisticated but not stuffy.

Other wineries that are easily within reach include Ridge Vineyards (above Cupertino), David Bruce (to the south), Cooper-Garrod Vineyard (above Saratoga), Bonny Doon (Santa Cruz Mountains) and at least a dozen others. This is not like going from one winery to another on the Silverado Trail. It is more like crisscrossing Napa and Sonoma to find wineries, but the scenery is spectacular, the pace is unhurried and the wines are worth it. One caveat is to call first, since not every winery is open daily.

Back in Half Moon Bay, a couple of restaurants beckon for dinner. If you want to try a wine that is not from the Golden State, go to Pasta Moon with its all-Italian wine list (and 50 or more by the glass) and authentic Italian cuisine. Sure, it is great to support California winemakers, but a nice Italian barolo or a little pinot grigio isn't going to hurt anybody.

Or try Cetrella, a very handsome spot in what used to be the old Half Moon Bay Growers Association building. The kitchen turns out amazing dishes that they call Mediterranean but go far beyond that. On my visit, I just turned the meal over to the chef and not one dish disappointed. They also have a very nice wine list (including two wines named Cetrella Private Cellars) and a full bar. They serve dinner and Sunday brunch and unfortunately are closed until May 1.

On a more casual note, drive toward Pillar Point (where the fishing boats dock) and the Half Moon Bay Brewing Company. The old saying “It takes a lot of beer to make good wine” has a corollary here: make good beer and serve good wine. On a nice day there is an expansive patio with an ocean view, and the interior meanders from room to room in the manor of the old coastal restaurants. Mark Hamilton is the new chef and he has rejuvenated the menu; be sure to look at the specials list and save room for dessert.

No matter what your focus, Half Moon Bay offers a blend of outdoor activities (in addition to the ones already mentioned there is a long walking trail that is dog-friendly plus horseback riding and cycling), the total relaxation option, ecotourism, restaurants and shops, and, yes, enough wineries within an hour or less to keep any wine lover happy.

For more information go to www.visithalfmoonbay.org.

La Nebbia Winery

12341 Hwy. 92
Half Moon Bay
(650) 726-9463

Thomas Fogarty Winery

19501 Skyline
Woodside
(650) 851-6777

Half Moon Bay Brewing Company

390 Capistrano Road
Princeton-by-the-Sea
(650) 728-2739

Pasta Moon

315 Main St.

Half Moon Bay

(650) 726-5125

Cetrella Restaurant

845 Main St.

Half Moon Bay

(650) 726-4291

Beach House

4100 North Cabrillo Hwy.

Half Moon Bay

(650) 712-0220