

Getaway to Downtown Napa—finally!

The first time I arrived in Napa County, I followed the signs to downtown Napa, looked around at the ghost town of turn of the century Victorians and wondered where I was. With the arrival of some seriously innovative visionaries, the walkable Downtown Napa has seemingly overnight become a destination in its own right.

Where to stay: The Napa River Inn complex, located in the historic Napa Mill, offers luxurious rooms that combine shades of mustard and merlot with views of the river. Cozy, yet well-appointed, these rooms cater to folks wanting fine bedding, breakfast in bed and a friendly community setting. For food, the complex houses Celadon restaurant, which serves global comfort food; Angele, a French country restaurant on the waterfront; Sweetie Pie's, a casual place for pastries and breakfast, and the Napa General Store, for sit down breakfast and lunch of wood-fired pizzas and sandwiches. Here you'll also get to enjoy wine tasting and live jazz at Silo's. Make sure to sign up for George Weber's historic walking tour of the Napa Mill on Saturday mornings (\$10 for adults, free for kids).

What to do: Walk to the Oxbow Public Market for a Ritual Coffee Roasters latte and a Pica Pica arepa. These can both be enjoyed on the deck overlooking the river. You might spare some time to stroll the market, paying special attention to the Olive Press (which makes remarkable olive oil out of local fruit).

Next up take a two hour tour of the Napa Mill and learn the history of downtown Napa from George Weber, a true historian.

By that point, you might want to get started sipping and swirling. My choice in downtown Napa is the Bounty Hunter. This funky old west storefront pairs fine wines with BBQ and shows off Napa's casual vibe.

But you might want to hold off on the barbeque, because next up you'll be heading to BarBer's'Q. This wildly popular ode to meat and spicy sauce serves the best barbeque in Northern California. Really!

If you are game for more wine tasting, drive to Artesa, Hess or Darioush for unique tasting rooms and one-of-a-kind wines. Or head back to downtown Napa to stroll in and out of the tasting rooms in and around Oxbow.

For dinner, you don't want to miss out on Ubuntu—the vegetable restaurant that converts carnivores. Sit inside the spacious dining room, sipping on local biodynamic wines and enjoy Jeremy Fox's tasting menu. The specialty of the house is the cauliflower claypot—which should be illegal it is so good. But I promise, every single thing I have ever had here has been divine. They grow their own veggies and serve them up right after being plucked from the field. You will not be disappointed.

Have a nightcap at Silo's, where you can sip dessert wine and listen to live jazz; or take a bottle back to your private balcony and stargaze, feeling grateful that Napa has arrived like the diva who came late to the party, but made the soiree all the better for her flair and sass,