

[MyRecipes](#) & [RL Networks](#)

Sunset

[« Return to 18 great California fall trips](#)

18 great California fall trips

It's a perfect time to explore the coast towns, tasting rooms, foodie havens, and natural wonders



Thomas J. Story

Travel guide: Fun fall trips in California

Monterey's Wine Trail

The harvest is on at under-the-radar vineyards tucked against the mountains south of Salinas.

Follow Monterey Country's Wine Trail to the 20 or so wineries along River Road. Along the way, pick up organic broccoli and tomatoes at the [Farm](#), stop for a lunch with a view, and even visit a [ranch](#) where lions and lynxes roam.

[More about Monterey's Wine Trail](#)



Dave Lauridsen

SoCal's Anza-Borrego Desert

Most people visit Anza-Borrego in the spring when desert wildflowers blossom, but fall is an experience unlike any other. Think constellations, fall's cool evening air, and moonrises over the badlands.

The night sky covering this desert 90 miles from San Diego is perfect for star gazing all by your lonesome, or book an adventure tour to share s'mores over a campfire with friends or family.

More: [An after-dark desert escape](#)



Santa Ana Artists Village

Artists started moving into the landmark Santora Building about 15 years ago, and the Village has since grown into a funky fusion of galleries, artist studios, folk art shops, and some seriously good (and cheap) eats.

The Artists Village's 40-plus galleries open their doors along the Second Street Promenade for the First Saturday Art Walk. Peek inside local design workshops as you stroll through Santa Ana's changing fall leaves.

More: [Santa Ana Artists Village](#)

Gina Sabatella



Thomas J. Story

Roam through Ukiah's redwoods

Mendocino County's largest city is best known for its soothing, small-town feel. And autumn explodes with foliage that rivals Vermont's.

Spending the morning hiking through Montgomery Woods State Natural Reserve, then soak the afternoon away in a mineral bath at Vichy Springs Resort.

More: [Unwind in Ukiah, CA](#)



Thomas J. Story

Eastern Sierra fall colors

Autumn's chill in the air offers the perfect excuse to explore Eastern Sierra's hot springs, where you'll be sure to warm up in no time.

More: [How to really soak up fall](#)



Gold Country autumn

In the folded foothills of the Sierra Nevada, California's Gold Country, autumn lingers long into October, offering blue skies, tawny hills, and grapevines tinged fierce red

Good new restaurants are popping up in unexpected places. Even more strikingly, an influx of creative new winemakers has made the Gold Country one of the most fascinating wine regions in the West.

More: [Where to go and what to do](#)

Brown Cannon III



David Zaitz

Catch the golden season at Yosemite

Quiet hikes and lazy picnics are yours for the taking in autumn. Before winter comes, take a long weekend to see the best of what the park has to offer.

Three days are a perfect chunk of time to explore the park's three main areas: Tuolumne Meadows, Yosemite Valley, and Wawona. Plan to stay in the valley—it's central to everything, and reservations are easier to come by at this time of year.

More: [Golden Yosemite](#)



David Fenton

Fall under the Sonoma Coast spell

The rugged stretch of land that runs along Sonoma County's coast inspires grand passions. From the pocket coves of Bodega Bay and windswept bluffs of Sea Ranch to inland pine-covered peaks and ocean-carved sea stacks, the area is marked by layers of fog, gulls, sweetgrass, and wildness.

It's a place where you can tidepool for hours in precious solitude or ride thrilling, frigid waves; a place where delicious wine and cheese are made carefully, lovingly, by hand.

More: [The Sonoma Coast spell](#)



Laguna Beach in the off-season

Now that summer crowds have cleared out of this coastal town 50 miles south of L.A., it's time for a romantic fall getaway.

Here's how to get there, 3 romantic stays, where to eat, and what to do.

More: [Weekend in Laguna Beach](#)

Gina Sabatella



Emily Nathan

Taste your way through Anderson Valley

For farm-fresh food and sublime wine, spend an autumn weekend in California's least known, most beautiful wine country.

More: [Taste your way through Anderson Valley](#)



Noah Webb

Hit the beach at Cardiff-by-the-Sea

Whether you come to catch the surf scene or to retreat into nature along the lagoon's trails, Cardiff is a perfect place to visit as the area's lingering summer finally begins to surrender to fall.

More: [What to see and do in Cardiff](#)



Edna Valley harvest

Wander through this quirky, unassuming wine region just south of San Luis Obispo. The nascent wine region is located in a triangle bordered by Arroyo Grande, Pismo Beach, and San Luis Obispo, and it still retains a distinctive, backroad California charm.

Today it's home to more than 3,000 acres of vineyards and 30 wine labels, including 17 tasting rooms that run the gamut from a former one-room schoolhouse to the stylish Jack Niven Hospitality Center at Edna Valley Vineyard.

At the latter, you can sample Chardonnays in front of picture

Nik Wheeler

windows with views of the valley's most distinctive icon, Islay Peak, an ancient volcanic plug that rose from the ocean floor.

More: [Edna Valley wines](#)



Thomas J. Story

Island-style fun in San Diego

Hawaii may seem a world away, but there are plenty of big waves, tiny bubbles, and tiki-style spots closer to home.

See where you can make your own lei, savor a luau, have an ocean adventure and more, right on the mainland.

More: [Island-style getaway](#)



Chris Leschinsky

Soak up a Santa Rita wine getaway

For beautiful back roads and even better wines, head to these hills in California's Santa Barbara County.

Until receiving designation as an appellation in 2001, this compact region was largely overshadowed by the neighboring Santa Maria and Santa Ynez Valleys. But no more.

Easily explored via a 34-mile loop linking Santa Rosa Road and State 246, the Santa Rita Hills have become a destination for visitors looking for distinctive Pinot Noirs or a lazy drive through the unspoiled country of western Santa Barbara County.

More: [Santa Rita wine getaway](#)



Thomas J. Story

Savor oysters and fall at Tomales Bay

You can find good local food in any number of beautiful places, but in Tomales Bay, on California's North Coast, there's a special kind of seamlessness between the act of eating and just being in nature.

Savor the local bounty as well as the golden beauty of autumn on the coast.

More: [Savor Tomales Bay](#)



Journey through Death Valley

In autumn, the fabled desert park is at its most hauntingly beautiful. Hike, explore, and experience a world unlike any other.

More: [Journey through Death Valley](#)

Brown Cannon III



Gina Sabatella

Vintage California in La Jolla

Fall's a great time to take in this graceful, vintage version of Southern California. Crowds are down, the theater season at the beloved La Jolla Playhouse is in full swing, and there are still plenty of days that carry the last hints of summer's warmth.

And with its rare trees and isolated beaches, La Jolla's Torrey Pines State Reserve offers miles of hiking trails and an unspoiled stretch of coastline.

More: [Where to go and what to do](#)



Rob D. Brodman

Soak up the sea in Pescadero

The stretch of shoreline between Pescadero and San Gregorio seems like the land that time forgot — until you step into a gas station for an outstanding taco or gather heirloom seeds at an updated country store.

Fall's clear days are the perfect reason to take a meandering drive connecting ocean views and small towns.

More: [Great food and views by the sea](#)

Printed from:

<http://www.sunset.com/travel/california/fall-california-trips-00400000055158/>

Copyright © 2012 Sunset Publishing Corporation. All Rights Reserved. Use of this site constitutes acceptance of our [Terms of Use](#) and [Privacy Policy](#) ([Your California Privacy Rights](#)). [Ad Choices](#)