

Find Your Happy!



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Visitor's Guide



Find your happy in Mendocino County!

Start a vacation or weekend by packing a bag and heading to a destination with so many great places to explore and adventures to have. No matter where you come from, your first impression of Mendocino County is one of outstanding natural beauty: a drive into the county from the north reveals redwood forests and rivers, from the east, travel through rolling hills to the promise of the ocean, and from the south, spy verdant vineyards and the blue and gold of distant mountains. This is what we offer... a promise of awe at the foot of a redwood tree, a gasp at the sight of a breaching whale, a sigh of pleasure from a sip of wine, hand-crafted from century-old vines... and our welcome.

The county's large geographical area is broadly divided into distinct areas, each with their own unique characteristics and commonalities found in fine wining and dining, outdoor recreation, and experiences.



Coastline

Coastline

Wild and scenic is an understated description of Mendocino County’s coastline. From the placid mouth of the Garcia River to the towering mountains of the Lost Coast to the quaint village of Mendocino, the coastal region invites you to revel in its landscape and history. Sometimes shrouded by a fine layer of ocean fog and other times crystal clear, the coast offers a bevy of B&Bs and inns appealing to couples in search of a quiet getaway. Families feel at home at a vacation rental or kid-friendly hotel/motel. With beaches galore all the way up the coast, there’s plenty of relaxing, paddling, whale and seal watching, and hiking for all ages.

Albion

Once a thriving logging “doghole” on the coast, Albion teemed with activity in the late 1800s into the early part of the 20th century. At low tide, you can still see remnants of the 1,200-foot long railroad that stretched out into Albion Bay. Nowadays, the village has just 168 inhabitants, some of whom live in the two lanes of original houses perched above the south side of the Albion River.

On the north side of the iconic Albion River Bridge—the only wooden bridge remaining on Highway 1—drive down to beach and check out the bridge close up. The bridge is 1,000 feet long, stands 170 feet high and, in 2017, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Caspar

Bounded on three sides by state parks, Caspar is home to the 1909 Point Cabrillo Light Station to the south, Jug Handle State Natural Reserve to the north, and its coast forms Caspar Headlands State Beach.

Elk

Head south from Albion on Highway 1 crossing the Navarro River at its mouth and you’ll enter the bustling metropolis of Elk (pop. 208). This tiny town actually has two names: Greenwood and Elk. The original moniker of Greenwood originated with the four brothers who founded the settlement around 1852. However, when the town grew large enough to need a post office in 1887, they discovered the name had already been taken. A herd of local elk provided the inspiration for a new name and so the town became Elk. Today, a sign hangs near the old post office door that reads “Elk Post Office, Greenwood, California.”

Watch for whales from the clifftops above Greenwood State Beach, cruise the two cemeteries in town, drink in the views of Cuffey’s Cove, and take a history lesson at the museum.

Fort Bragg

The biggest little city on the Mendocino coast, Fort Bragg is home to the world-famous Skunk Train line with its trains and Railbikes, the extraordinary Glass Beach, and plenty of ocean views from the Noyo Headlands Trail that stretches the entire length of the town. At the spectacular Mendocino Coast Botanical Gardens, trails wind through 47 breathtaking acres of gardens, native forests, and wildflowers. Some of its rhododendrons are more than 20 feet tall.

A one-time lumber company throughway, the Old Haul Road starts at Pudding Creek Bridge and runs north to Ten Mile River in MacKerricher State Park, passing Lake Cleone, tidepools, and basking seals. Just east of Fort Bragg, 50,000-acre Jackson State Forest boasts groves of old-growth redwoods, as well as interpretive walks and miles of trails.

Downtown Fort Bragg bustles with specialty retail shops and boutiques, and restaurants to suit all tastes and budgets. Noyo Harbor is a working port with a marina where you can board a sport fishing boat or whale-watching cruise, or take a leisurely ride upstream on Noyo River where wildlife abounds. Enjoy dining in or above the harbor area where you can watch playful seals poke their snouts above the water and bask on the docks.

Gualala

Gualala (pronounced wa-LA-la), on Highway 1, is the southern gateway to Mendocino County just over the Gualala River from Sea Ranch in Sonoma County. The town is home to the Gualala Arts Center, which hosts art exhibits, music events, and fairs and festivals year-round in the lush grounds. Gualala Point Regional Park is the gateway to Sonoma County and provides recreation opportunities such as rafting and kayaking. The town is dotted outstanding restaurants, galleries, and lodging.

Little River

This tiny dot on the map a few miles south of Mendocino houses one of the coast’s crown jewels, Van Damme State Park, which stretches from the beach back through the lush Fern Canyon to the Pygmy Forest where mature, cone-bearing cypress and pine trees stand six inches to eight feet tall. The park’s ten miles of trails go along the fern-carpeted canyon of Little River. The beach is popular with divers and is a great place to kayak through the sea caves in the diverse marine habitat.

Manchester

Droves of driftwood scatter the five-mile arc of the beach expanse at Manchester State Park, where there’s opportunity for plenty of outdoor activities. A great way to explore the beach is on horseback with one of Ross Ranch’s expert guides.

Mendocino

There’s quaint and then there’s Mendocino. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the architecture, water towers, and stunning location evoke the landscape of 19th century Cape Cod.

Every building embodies the village’s unique history, with its houses weathered by salt, air, fog, and wind. Gardens filled with lush foliage and bright blooms spill over the weathered fences of superbly maintained houses. Many vintage buildings, including the iconic water towers, have found new life as B&Bs, shops, restaurants, and museums. Founded in 1959, the Mendocino Arts Center is a hub for creative expression, drawing visitors and artists from around the world.

The historic red church—with its stained-glass windows still intact—is now an organic co-op grocery. And nature is just a step away at Mendocino Headlands State Park where the only sounds are the crashing waves and the flapping wings and calls of seabirds. Big River is Northern California’s biggest undeveloped estuary. Explore its 7,334 acres of wetlands and forest in one of Catch A Canoe’s outriggers or by bicycle along the haul road.

A short drive north leads to **Russian Gulch State Park**

Point Arena

The smallest city in the county (pop. 453), Point Arena is home to the 1,665-acre Point Arena-Stornetta Public Lands, which is the only on-shore portion of the 1,100-long California Coastal National Monument. Situated on the closest point of land to the Hawaiian Islands, the Point Arena Lighthouse is well worth the 115 foot-climb (145 steps) to the top for the stunning 360-degree views and an interactive docent-led tour. In spring and late fall, this is a great place to spot passing whales on their journey along the great whale highway. Stroll Point Arena’s main street to discover eclectic shops, a French patisserie, and the giraffes at B. Bryan Preserve or head to the wharf for great pizza, seafood and ocean views.

Westport

Situated about 15 miles north of Fort Bragg, Westport is a tiny town with just 60 inhabitants. A great spot to sit and gaze westward and watch the sun sink behind the sea arch. Camp or hike at Westport-Union Landing State Park with more than three miles of rugged coastline. Travel north on Highway 1 to access the wild and scenic Lost Coast and Sinkyone Wilderness State Park.



Forest

Forest

Mendocino County is filled with wondrous groves of old-growth redwoods and wooded areas that line the rivers that wind through the county. Head to the forest and bask in the cathedral-like setting created by the redwood behemoths. Or take a summertime float on the Navarro River as it wends its way through Anderson Valley.

Boonville

Founded in 1862, Boonville is the “bahlest” town in the county located in bucolic Anderson Valley, home to world-class Pinot Noirs and Alsace varietals, great beer at solar-powered Anderson Valley Brewing Company, and plenty of sheep. While you’re here, brush up on your Boontling in order to converse with the locals. Boontling is the argot invented when the area was an isolated community to keep bright-lighters and fog-eaters in the dark!

Philo

If you blinked, you might miss the tiny town of Philo located in the very heart of Anderson Valley. The town might be small (pop. 349) but it’s the center of great wine tasting and intriguing lodging options. The nexus of “downtown” is Lemon’s Market, a mainstay for over 40 years. Home to Hendy Woods with the wandering Navarro River and groves of giant trees, make Philo a stop on your journey through beautiful Anderson Valley.

Yorkville

Fifteen serpentine miles beyond Cloverdale, and you’re in the picturesque Yorkville Highlands, known by the cognoscenti as “Les Petits Tetons,” an appellation that consists of approximately 40,000 acres straddling Highway 128 between the Alexander Valley to the southeast and the Anderson Valley to the northwest. Three wine tasting rooms make this area a great place to stop as you enter the county on Highway 128.





Inland

