

Budget Travel

SAN FRANCISCO: WINE TASTING IN THE CITY



For many, a San Francisco vacation isn't complete without a day of wine tasting up in Napa or Sonoma. But you can find great wine without even leaving the city—particularly in Fisherman's Wharf, where there are numerous tasting rooms.

The Winery Collective is San Francisco's first multi-winery tasting room (Courtesy Winery Collective)

At Ghiradelli Square there are two tasting rooms. Wattle Creek Winery is a small family-owned Sonoma vineyard; Cellar 360 boasts more than 200 wines (including a good selection of bottles under \$20), wine classes, a food tasting menu with items like bruschetta with roasted figs and goat cheese, and an outdoor patio. Pair a trip to one of these tasting rooms with a trip to nearby Cannery, where the Winery Collective is located. The Collective is San Francisco's first multi-winery tasting room, with wines from dozens of California's small boutique wineries, like the award-winning Sol Rouge and Gregory Graham.

My favorite, though, is the more social Press Club at the Yerba Buena Arts Center, in downtown. It has a hip lounge where you can enjoy sipping on wine from eight of Northern California's most acclaimed small wineries, plus seasonal small plates made with ingredients from Napa Valley and after-hour parties on Friday and Saturday nights.

Any wine tasting is a guaranteed good time, but knowing a little etiquette can make the somewhat formal environment less daunting. Here are a couple do's and don'ts to get you started:

DO

Taste in this order: whites, then reds, and finally dessert wines. Always go from dry to sweet (which the pourer will help you with). You can always skip a wine, or ask to try only one kind—say, reds only.

Use the provided crackers and water to cleanse your palate in between tastings so that you can really appreciate the different flavors. Water can also be used to rinse your glass if you don't get a new one.

Use the tasting sheets that most places offer—can you taste blackberry? Coffee? Flowers? This is a fun exercise for even the newest wine drinkers.

Ask the host questions. There's no need to be a wine connoisseur to have a good time.

Toss unwanted wine in the bucket on the counter. This is not seen as an insult—hey, there's a lot of wine to get through!

DON'T

Pour the wine yourself.

Spit directly into the bucket. Instead ask for a small Dixie cup.

Ask for a second taste unless you are sure you'll buy a bottle. It's considered rude to drink more than offered.

Treat the provided snacks as an all-you-can-eat buffet.

Chew gum or smoke a cigarette right before tasting, since it will destroy the wine's flavor.

Bring wine from elsewhere for a picnic (this goes for the Napa and Sonoma wineries, as well).

Feel like you have to tip or even buy a bottle. Some, but not all, tasting rooms charge a tasting fee, anyway, to cover the cost of service and free booze.