

Outdoor activities

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This Town in California's Central Valley Is the Perfect Napa Alternative

Lodi is known as the "Winegrape Capital of the World."

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Photo courtesy of Visit Lodi

Located between Sacramento to the north and Stockton to the south, Lodi is ideally situated for a weekend visit from anywhere in the [Bay Area](#). This lush farmland that was originally inhabited by the Miwok people was settled by Europeans who came west during the [gold rush](#) of the 1850s. You can see flashes of this history when walking beneath Lodi's iconic Mission Arch and



through the quaint downtown. While the city has a strong agricultural heritage, producing almonds, apricots, and peaches, its significant winegrape production led to Lodi's moniker, the "Winegrape Capital of the World."

I visited Lodi for a weekend of wine tasting with a friend and was impressed by the top-notch food, uncrowded tasting rooms, and plentiful opportunities for outdoor recreation. With dozens of visits to Napa and Sonoma under my belt, I'm used to dealing with traffic and booking dinner reservations weeks in advance when planning a wine tasting weekend. The exact opposite was my experience in Lodi. Here, you'll find 85+ boutique wineries with relaxed tasting rooms where even dogs (and sometimes kids) are welcome.

Those who wish to visit Lodi with their four-legged friends will find plenty of spots that welcome dogs, from outdoor tasting rooms to the garden patios of restaurants downtown. Here are all the ways to maximize your weekend in Lodi.

Travel time

1 hour and 30 minutes from San Francisco



Photo courtesy of Coldani Olive Ranch - Calivirgin - Lodi Ca Olive Oil

If you only do one thing: Enjoy a wine and olive oil tasting

Just a short drive outside of downtown Lodi is the [Calivines Winery and Olive Mill](#), where you can book a wine and olive oil tasting inside the expansive tasting room or on the large patio where leashed dogs are welcome. On a sunny day, you'll likely find families playing oversized lawn games and soaking in the vitamin D; plus, on weekends, the property often hosts live music to encourage visitors to stay for a while.

When I visited, we spent a few hours enjoying the ambiance, chatting with the knowledgeable staff at Calivines, making our way through a wine flight, and tasting some nibbles featuring flavored olive oils and balsamic vinegar produced on-site. We particularly enjoyed the pesto popcorn—warm popcorn tossed with Calivirgin Bountiful Basil Olive Oil and Guilty Garlic Olive Oil sprinkled with sea salt.

While most flavored olive oil is made by mixing essences or flavorings with regular olive oil, Calivirgin uses a specialized process where fresh produce, herbs, or citrus are crushed together with the olives to extract the oils from both products. This creates a much brighter flavor profile that's perfect for bread dipping or drizzling over pasta or even desserts. You can sample some of the various flavors at the self-serve olive oil bar or select an olive oil tasting to go along with your wine tasting. Bottles are available for purchase, and they make great gifts.



Photo courtesy of Visit Lodi

Fill the weekend with

Walking tours

The best way to take in Lodi's small-town charm is to spend a few hours walking through the downtown area. Head to the Lodi Visitor's Center to grab a map that will show you the locations of the many murals painted for Lodi's 100th anniversary depicting scenes from the town's history. The "Yo Soy Lodi" mural is a recent addition and features Latine members of the Lodi community.

If you want to learn even more about the area's history, [book a free walking tour](#) with Lodi's official town docent, Alane Dashner. When we got to the meeting place for our tour, we easily spotted Alane approaching us, as she was dressed from head to toe as a suffragette with a hat adorned with grapes. She shared with us the surprising fact that Prohibition actually benefited the Lodi winegrape industry because a provision allowed all heads of household to produce up to 200 gallons of wine for their own personal consumption, causing Lodi growers to ship their grapes all over the country for home production.

Head out of downtown just a bit, and you'll pass Lodi Lake and the park that surrounds it. There's even a small strip of sandy beach that's a perfect spot to spread out your picnic blanket on a hot day. You'll find a few nature trails and short hiking paths leading from the parking lot that are a fun option if Fido needs some exercise.

If you are looking for a relaxing activity that kids and dogs can join in, reserve a kayak or stand-up paddleboard from the [Lodi Boathouse](#) and head out on the lake. You can set out on your own if you feel comfortable or book a private or group tour that will take you through the tranquil Mokelumne River to see birds and other critters that live there. Sunset and full moon paddles are also available, so time your visit right if you want to take advantage of those.

Other tasting rooms

With so many wineries to choose from in Lodi, you'll want to plan a visit to at least a few tasting rooms while you're in town. Dogs are welcome at a good amount of wineries with outdoor seating areas, like [Intercoastal Vineyards](#), which even offers its own canned wine called "Canpanion," a combination of the words "canine" and "companion." The garden setting at [Block 21 Winery](#) is a great place to relax with friends and enjoy the floral scent in the air as you share a bottle of wine.



Photo courtesy of Ruby's Bakery and Cafe

Where to eat and drink in Lodi

To start your day: Ruby's Bakery and Cafe was so good we ate there twice during our weekend in Lodi. The welcoming staff were more than willing to help us choose the perfect pastry. Don't miss out on the Sugar Buns: they have a crunchy-sweet exterior, and the inside is croissant dough with the perfect hint of cinnamon and orange. For a savory option, the rosemary ham and gruyere croissant was a favorite, as was the Avocado Toast.

For a dog-friendly pint: The expansive menu at Lodi Beer Co. will have you struggling to choose just one entree, so we suggest starting with the Deep Fried Brussels sprouts and the Bleu Fries. There's plenty of patio seating that's perfect for pet parents and those who want to soak in the Lodi sunshine. Just down the street is IDOL Beer Works, where you'll often find a food truck parked out front for those who want some food with their blood orange beer or IPA.

For an al fresco dinner: Snag a spot in the garden at The Dancing Fox and get the slightly spicy Mediterranean hummus to share; it goes great with their Old Vine Zinfandel. The wood-fired pizzas are an easy choice, and the Taratata pizza with house-made fennel sausage, salami, and black olives is a favorite.

For post-dinner drinks and live music: DJs and live performers take the stage on Fridays and Saturdays at [Five Window Beer Co.](#). Get a taste of their offerings with the beer flight, and then go home with a growler of your favorite. This spot also offers wood-fired pizzas for those who get the late night munchies.



Photo courtesy of Wine & Roses Hotel.Restaurant.Spa

Where to stay in Lodi

For spa vibes and a stellar onsite restaurant: If you want a boutique property that covers all the bases, [Wine & Roses Hotel](#) should be your pick. Not only do they have large spa-inspired rooms (with some allowing dogs), but the onsite Towne House Restaurant has the perfect cozy vibe after an active day in Lodi. We enjoyed afternoon happy hour on the patio with visiting winery Block 21 before our meal. For those looking for ultimate relaxation, book an aromatherapy massage at the property's spa and then head over to the heated pool and hot tub.

Pet-friendly with a pool: I'm a sucker for a complimentary breakfast buffet, and you'll get that and more at Lodi's [Hampton Inn and Suites](#). There's an outdoor pool for guests, and rooms allow dogs and cats (with an extra fee). Book a suite for even more room to spread out. Another great option with similar vibes and large-sized rooms is the [Holiday Inn Express](#). Don't miss out on trying the pancake machine at breakfast.

Kate Loweth is a Thrillist contributor.