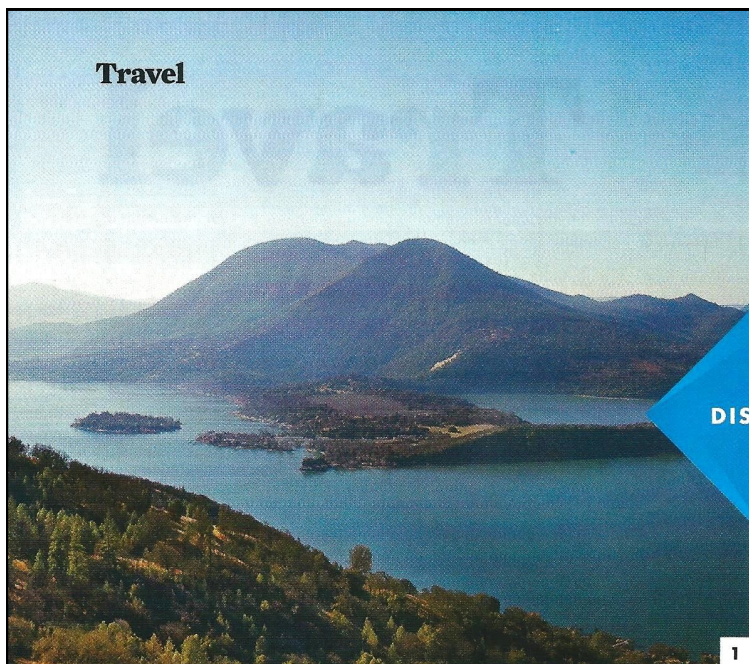
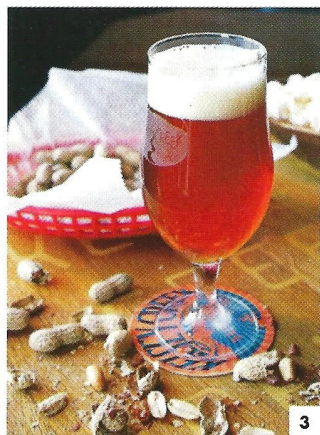


Travel



DISCOVER

1. The life source for Lake County vineyards: the volcanic soils surrounding Clear Lake.
2. A farm-to-table meal at Six Sigma Ranch.
3. Refresh your palate with a pale ale from Kelsey Creek Brewing.
4. Brassfield Estate's sprawling Mediterranean-style tasting room.



A PERFECT DAY IN

LAKE COUNTY, CA

A flight of young tasting rooms makes this unsung lake region the next great Northern California wine destination. *By Sara Schneider*

A vintage view

Hiking to the top of Mt. Konocti, the region's landmark volcano, via the **Wright Peak Summit Trail** means a heart-thumping 3-mile climb of nearly 1,650 feet. But a side trip to the minuscule Downen's Cabin puts the

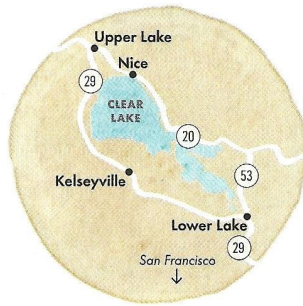
hardship into perspective—Mary Downen, a widow in her late 50s, homesteaded here alone in the early 1900s. At the trail's end, your sweat equity earns you a mountaintop perch with a sweeping view to forever: Clear Lake, Mount

St. Helena, and—on a clear day—Mt. Lassen. If you join a free docent-led tour, you can climb the fire tower at the top, where the views become jaw-dropping. *Tours Apr 12 & 26 (call 707/262-1618 to reserve); konocitrails.com.*

Clear Lake, uncorked

Lake County has a secret: More than a little of the wine coming out of the vineyards ringing the lake has been going into Napa Valley bottles. For decades. Conditions—high elevation,

Travel



GETTING HERE

Lower Lake, Clear Lake's southernmost point, is 102 miles north of San Francisco.

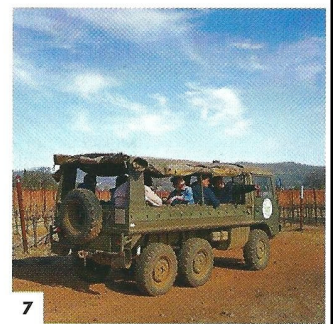
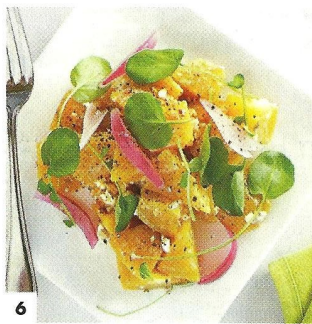
volcanic slopes, day-to-night temperature swings, and the nation's cleanest air—produce wines with intense fruit flavors and elegant structures. Recently, winemakers and growers from the outside have joined the local talent to give Lake County wines (Cabernet, Sauvignon Blanc, Syrah, and Tempranillo) stand-alone quality. Be prepared to drive; the shoreline runs 100-plus miles. You'll find the best views of Mt. Konocti on the lake's north side, from Mediterranean-style **Brassfield Estate** (don't miss the bold, black-fruited Petite Sirah) and the lakeside hacienda of **Ceago** (try the sippable Syrah). In Lower Lake, hit **Gregory Graham** for more great Syrah. *Brassfield*: \$5/flight of 5; 10915 High Valley Rd., Clearlake Oaks; brassfieldestate.com. *Ceago*: \$5/flight of 5; 5115 E. State 20, Nice; ceago.com. *Gregory*: No fee; 13633 Point Lakeview Rd.; ggwines.com.

Tacos, beers, and the Brew Cycle

Local gathering spot **Kelsey Creek Brewing** dispenses the county's best beers—and a most unusual winery (yes, *winery*) tour. The Brew Cycle, a pedal-powered contraption with seats for you and 19 of your best friends, cruises to at least three wineries, including Chacewater, with its characterful Sauvignon Blancs and Petite Sirahs and tasty olive oils. Post-tour, pop in for a selection of ales and seasonal brews. Kelsey serves only popcorn and peanuts, but beer lovers can bring in takeout from John's Market Taqueria across the street. *Tour* \$25/person (8–20 people); 3945 Main St., Kelseyville; kelseycreekbrewing.com.

A tour de force

The 2-mile washboard road leading to the **Six Sigma Ranch** winery is a bit of a bone-rattler, but don't let that discourage you. On the other side, pastoral paradise awaits: a 4,300-acre working ranch dotted with ancient oaks and a stagecoach stop turned tasting room, plus vibrant Sauvignon Blancs and dusty-berried Tempranillo to take the edge off. To fully embrace it, hop in the winery's ATV, for an hourlong tour of the ranch and its high-altitude vineyards. Back at the coach stop, claim a spot on the porch



5. Vineyard views of Mt. Konocti. 6. Saw Shop's golden beet salad with goat cheese. 7. Six Sigma's rugged Pinzgauer. 8. Tasters pedal beneath the bar while a (sober) driver steers the Brew Cycle.

for wine and cheese, and watch Cabernet vines leaf out. *No tasting fee, tour* \$125/group (10 people max.); 13372 Spruce Grove Rd., Lower Lake; sixsigmaranch.com.

Dinner where the locals meet up

If you end the day on the lake's west shore, stop by **Saw Shop Gallery Bistro**, where the winemaking community often gathers to drink one another's wines over pan-seared scallops

and truffle fries. For those winding down on the north shore, try the Tallman Hotel's **Blue Wing Saloon Restaurant**, where microbrews, local wines, and pork chops get a live blues backdrop every Monday night. And if you lose track of time (or overindulge), it's just steps from the historic hotel. *Saw Shop*: \$\$; 3825 Main St., Kelseyville; sawshopbistro.com. *Blue Wing*: \$\$\$; 9520 Main St., Upper Lake; tallmanhotel.com. 🍷

BY THE NUMBERS

32

NUMBER OF WINERIES IN LAKE COUNTY

1

LAKE COUNTY'S NATIONAL RANKING FOR CLEAN AIR

2.5

AGE OF CLEAR LAKE IN MILLIONS OF YEARS