

AT YOUR **LEISURE**
OUT OF TOWN

Wine Time

Ready for that winter escape? The Sonoma Valley Film Festival is the perfect excuse to get away.

BY RACHEL BOWIE



RIGHT ABOUT NOW YOU'VE PROBABLY had it up to here with winters in Boston. You've had to bundle up more times than you care to remember, and your winter boots have definitely seen better days. With at least two months to go before winter makes its exit, you need to book a vacation. Thanks to JetBlue, you're a hop, skip, and a plane ride away from the ideal destination for beating the winter blues: Sonoma, California. This April, Sonoma welcomes visitors to celebrate the 10th Annual Sonoma Valley Film Festival (April 11–15, sonomafilmfest.org), a celebration that pairs the finest in food and wine with more than 75 independent films from around the world.

Unlike others of its kind, the Sonoma Valley Film Festival offers an intimate experience for film and wine lovers alike—one deeply rooted in the people and resources that make Sonoma tick. The concept of Cinema Epicuria (pairing films with gourmet wine and food) is unique to this festival and is made possible thanks to Christopher Sawyer, the film festival's official sommelier—and the only known one in the world.

Although on the same level as other national and international film festivals, Sonoma offers a low-key safe haven for celebrities and VIPs. Past fests have attracted such stars as Robin Williams, Blythe Danner, and Danny Glover, all eager to celebrate the success of the festival in Sonoma. This year, Pixar Animation Studios and animation legend John Lasseter will be honored in a special tribute at the Veterans Memorial Building in downtown

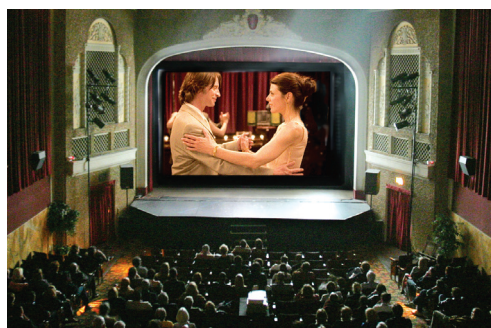
Sonoma. By combining festival screenings with vineyard tours and wine excursions, the Sonoma Valley Film Festival invites visitors to experience the community in Sonoma.

Nestled in the heart of Sonoma Valley, the Lodge at Sonoma (1325 Broadway, 707-935-6600, thelodgeatsonoma.com) provides just the right spot for experiencing all that Sonoma has to offer. The luxurious accommodations at this resort will leave anyone who stays there feeling pampered and rejuvenated. Make a point to stop by for at least one

treatment at the Raindance Spa (707-931-2034) located on site, and follow up that warm-stone massage or mani/pedi with a glass of wine and an afternoon at the private outdoor mineral pools and the Raindance Spa Garden.

Those staying at the lodge should also check out the Carneros Bistro & Wine Bar (707-931-2042) for delectable fare prepared by its chef de cuisine, Janine Falvo. The vibrant space is inviting and the food is sublime (try the Midnight Moon Mac & Cheese). With more than 250 Sonoma County wines available, the restaurant offers a special treat—Sawyer is the sommelier-in-residence. Another restaurant to explore is the General's Daughter (400 West Spain Street, 707-938-4004; thegeneralsdaughter.com), for creations by Chef Preston Dishman.

The food is fantastic, but the film festival's biggest asset is—you guessed it—its location. Home to several of the best wineries in the world, Sonoma makes it easy for visitors to tour the vineyards. The Kunde Estate Winery & Vineyards (9825 Sonoma Hwy, 707-833-5501; kunde.com) has more than 750 acres of grapes and offers breathtaking views of the heart of Sonoma Valley. Other wineries include the St. Francis Winery & Vineyard (100 Pythian Road, 888-675-9463; stfranciswine.com), with its recently added visitors center featuring three tasting bars, and Landmark Vineyards (101 Adobe Canyon Road, 707-833-0053; landmarkwine.com), which offers tours in a horse-drawn wagon on summer weekends. The Benziger Family Winery (1883 London Ranch Road, 888-490-2739; benziger.com) provides an educational tram tour. With so many wineries in Sonoma, remember—pace yourself! ♦



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The breathtaking view from Kunde Estate Winery & Vineyards; a horse-drawn carriage provides a guided tour of Landmark Vineyards; good things in threes; the historic Sebastiani Theatre will play host to film screenings throughout the festival.



photographs by Rebecca Gosselin