

#NORTHAMERICA

Top Things To Do In Napa With Kids: A Complete Guide

Restaurants, wineries, hiking trails, museums, day trips, hotels, and more.

Plus, a sample itinerary!



NORTHAMERICA

UNITEDSTATES

NAPA



By Jacqueline Parisi 1 OCTOBER 2019

Together with Sonoma County, Napa makes up the heartland of California's world-renowned wine region. And if the wine and accompanying food aren't enough of a draw, there's stunning scenery to boot—from sun-drenched green hills to rivers, lakes and mountains.

But with a claim to fame reserved for the 21+ crowd, Napa and its surrounding locales aren't typically top of mind when it comes to family-

friendly travel—a reputation that local experts Martina Kostow and Davis

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[Anderson III](#) are all too eager to dispute.

As a mom to two daughters (six-year-old Daisy and four-year-old Lulu) and marketing communications director for The Restaurant at Meadowood and The Charter Oak in Napa, Kostow—who’s married to chef [Christoper Kostow](#)—knows a thing or two about kid-friendly restaurants, activities and wineries in the Napa region.

As does Anderson, who spent 13 years living in New York as a sommelier/beverage director “everywhere from your little neighborhood wine bar to the heights of places like Eleven Madison Park,” before relocating to Napa three years back. His first foray into the West Coast wine world came in the form of Champagne specialist working on behalf of the Moët Hennessy brands (Dom Pérignon, Veuve Clicquot, Moët & Chandon, Ruinart and Krug) before eventually transitioning into an internal sales role for the prestige accounts of San Francisco.

“I call on all the white tablecloth, Michelin-star style restaurants of San Francisco and do sales to promote Hennessy and Diageo,” Anderson explains. Today, him and his wife have a 15-month-old daughter.

We sat down with both Kostow and Anderson to get their takes on the less-well-known—but as we soon learned, equally as flourishing—family-friendly side of the city. From restaurants to wineries, hiking trails to museums, day trips to hotels, this is what they had to say about traveling to Napa with kids:

Restaurants

1. Boon Fly Café



- Oceania
- South America

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“We’d used Journy before for little, 2-3-day trips here and there, but this was a bigger trip with a lot more things we wanted to fit in and see and do—and it was so easy.”

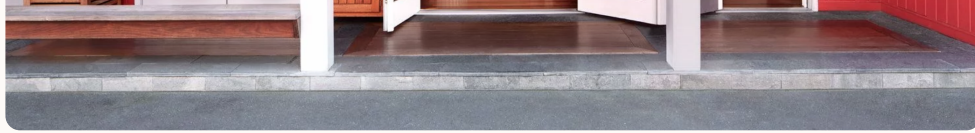
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-  Food & Beverage
-  Family Friendly
-  Outdoor Adventures
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-  Hotels & Accommodations





Top left: Boon Fly Café entrance | Top right: Spacious interior at Boon Fly Café | Bottom: Boon Fly Café's renowned donuts | boonflycafe.com/

"Modern rustic cuisine" is what you'll find at Boon Fly Café, a vibrant restaurant that exudes a contemporary roadhouse atmosphere. Think chicken wings with a honey mustard glaze, crab cakes, hushpuppies, flatbreads, mac 'n cheese and shrimp with grits. But for Anderson, it's all about the brunch.

"They've got great little donuts for kids and Bloody Mary's for adults," he

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tells us. “There’s a lot of stuff overall that can cover all sorts of palates for kids and adults. So you’re really well equipped in a place like that.”

2. Gott’s Roadside



A selection of Gott's favorites | [@gottsroadside](#)

Whenever Kostow has friends in town, she takes them to Gott’s—as much for the burgers as for the al fresco dining experience. “You can sit there on the picnic tables and enjoy a glass of wine and your kids can run around the lawn,” she explains. “And they have a lot of kid-friendly menu items as well—and soft serve ice cream.”

3. Miminashi





Corn fritters, okonomiyaki, and oyakodon (scrambled egg + chicken rice) /

@[chefmininashi](#)

With ethnic food spots few and far between in the Napa region, Kostow doesn't mind making the trek from Calistoga (where she lives) or St. Helena (where she works) to Napa for dinner at Miminashi, a Japanese yakitori restaurant with a diverse selection of vegetables, fish, meat, noodles and rice. "The food is approachable, and they've got all the things that we love but our kids love, too."

Opt for omakase (chef's selection) if your kids are particularly adventurous eaters, or veer towards à la carte if you've got some picky eaters on your hands. Some menu stand-outs include roasted Japanese sweet potato with miso butter, scallion and crème fraîche; corn fritter with shisho, fermented chili and Japanese mayo; okonomiyaki with bacon, napa cabbage and kimchi; and mushroom shio ramen with poached chicken breast, broccoli rabe, braised daikon radish, summer squash, mizuna and onsen egg.

4. The Charter Oak



*Grilled chicken sandwich with ember mayo, iceberg lettuce and onion /
@the_charteroak*

At The Charter Oak, kids don't only get a great outdoor courtyard space to run around when restless—they *also* get play-dough.

"Obviously I'm biased," admits Kostow, "but The Charter Oak is definitely family friendly. All the guests, especially the locals here, bring their families because we're all very open to that sort of dynamic of kids and how they dine. And of course we have highchairs and we accommodate strollers inside and outside."

The food is approachable and elemental. In fact, you won't find a garnish in sight on any of the dishes—from grilled buttermilk brined chicken to smoked and grilled beef shortrib, durum wheat spaghetti and polenta with vegetable bolognese. And because it's meant to be enjoyed family-style, mixing and matching is encouraged. "This way," Kostow tell us, "you can make sure that you're enjoying something that you know is prepared well but positive also that your kids will enjoy theirs."

5. Oxbow Public Market





Oxbow Public Market / [@oxbowpublicmarket](#)

If you've got some picky eaters on hands, make a beeline straight for Oxbow Public Market—which Anderson describes as a smaller Chelsea Market.

"There's a coffee shop, there's four or five different restaurants and there's a lot of space—so if you've got strollers you can have one parent camp out in one spot while another goes and grabs other things," Anderson explains.

With dining that runs the gamut from cupcake spots to oyster bars, you can't go wrong.

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"I was so impressed with the itinerary! It hit all of the main attractions while including plenty of options that gave us flexibility to incorporate the interests of everyone in our group. Journy also found things that I wouldn't have been able to find, really bringing in the special local knowledge."

Leah

Wineries

Just because you're visiting Napa with kids doesn't mean you have to rule out a traditional wine tasting experience since "more wineries are acceptable than you would imagine," says Kostow. Anderson agrees.

"When our daughter was six months old and I was just having her strapped to my chest or in the stroller, most people were really cool."

However, Anderson does suggest calling in advance if the winery is small, or exclusively has a tasting room. In those instances, there's a strong chance that a couple or another party is just a few feet away from you, in which case a crying baby might disrupt their experience. But if it's appointment-only, you're safe.

READ MORE: [The Best Vineyards To Visit In Santa Barbara, According To Master Somm Dustin Wilson](#)

"You might actually have a lot more luck with appointments," explains Anderson, "because those people know you're the only people coming in to see them at the moment. And if your baby cries and you're okay with it, then they're okay with it. And it's not really that big a deal."

Google "family-friendly wineries", and it'll yield thousands of results, but from Kostow and Anderson's personal experience, these are the ones to hit:

1. Gundlach Bundschu



Gundlach Bundschu Winery / @gunbunwine

Gundlach Bundschu was founded in 1858, making it California's oldest family-owned winery. And with a large outdoor space where they host a concert series and movie nights under the stars, it's the perfect spot for families in Napa with kids, Anderson tells us. Walk-ins are welcome, although reservations are recommended.

2. Scribe



Scribe Winery / @scribewinery

Kostow and her husband are members at Scribe, a Sonoma-based,

hacienda-style kid-friendly winery with food that Kostow describes as “super approachable” and a welcoming staff that won’t bat an eye if you pull out your graham crackers or cheddar bunnies for the little ones. Plus, there’s an expansive grassy knoll for kids to run around.

“I’ve taken friends there and we lay out a blanket and our kids just play together while we sit there and have some cheese and crackers and drink some Napa wine and catch up. They’re young,” Kostow says, referring to the owners. “They’re two brothers and one is married with a young child.”

3. ACORN

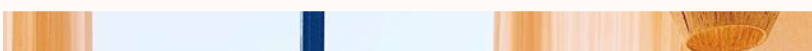


Corn hole at ACORN Winery | [@acornwinery](#)

Although Anderson’s daughter is too young to take advantage of the readily available legos, crayons and corn hole and ACORN Winery in Healdsburg, he’s counting down the days until she can. “The kids receive such a warm welcome,” he says.

Hotels

1. The Sandman





The Sandman / @miranda_cheng

Anderson is a big fan of this Santa Rosa hotel because of how family-friendly it is. "They have an actual family suite with a king bed and a twin bed over a full bunk bed as well," he tells us, "which makes it perfect when you're in Napa with kids."

But don't discount Airbnb either.

"You can get some decent-sized houses, which also gives you the ability to cook," says Anderson. "There are a lot of great deals. I try and stay a little bit further north than actual Napa town proper and move up closer to Calistoga."

Activities

1. The Petrified Forest



The Petrified Forest | @petrifiedforestcalistoga

Set amongst redwood giants that date back 3.4 million years to the Pliocene Epoch, the Petrified Forest in Calistoga is the perfect nature activity to do in Napa with kids—young and older.

“It’s great if you want to strap a baby to your chest for a walk or for when your kids are old enough to like it outside,” says Anderson. “If they’re tired of being dragged to a restaurant and then a winery, this could be some nice outdoor time for them.

If the kids are up for it, take one of their daily guided tours at 11am, 1pm and 3pm.

2. Bothe State Park





Bothe State Park / [@bothestatepark](#)

Kostow and her family are regulars year-round on the hiking trails at Bothe State Park. Being heavily wooded, it provides a welcome respite from the sun—making it the perfect activity for especially hot and sunny days in Napa with kids.

READ MORE: [A Local's Guide To Topanga, California](#)

3. Oat Hill Mine



View of the canyon from Oat Mill Mine trail | @thewineyfoody

The Oat Hill Mine hike is best either for older kids or babies small enough to be strapped on your back, as it rises 1500 feet in elevation over 8.3 miles of an old stage coach route between Calistoga and Pope Valley. For Kostow, the view is worth it.

"It looks down onto the valley once you get through the top of Mount St. Helena," she tells us. "It's beautiful."

4. Safari West



Safari West / @safariwest

Safari West is exactly what you'd expect: a bonafide safari experience on the West Coast—Jeeps and giraffes included. Spend the day exploring the 400-acre property, or camp out overnight for a weekend experience to teach the little ones about conversation and environmental education.

Kids have to be at least four years old to visit, which means Anderson unfortunately hasn't made it there yet, but he's counting down the days until he can. "I am really looking forward to my daughter being old enough to go...they've got it all!"

"Sarah (our trip designer) got right to work delivering superbly tailored itineraries. I was expecting a sterile schedule but received a flexible and well-thought out vacation plan."



Jasmine

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5. Train Town





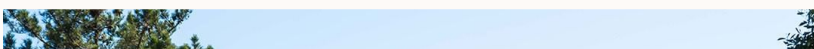
Train Town | [@sonomatraintown](#)

Anderson and Kostow both recommended Train Town, a 10-acre table top railroad in the heart of Sonoma's main plaza complete with a ferris wheel, carousel and mini trains for kids to ride. It's best for kids around the ages of three to five and, as Kostow reminds us, is the perfect way to combine Napa Valley and Sonoma for the full wine country experience.

6. CIA family cooking classes

At the Culinary Institute of America at Copia, Sundays are dubbed "Family Fundays." Bring the whole gang for a kid-friendly cooking class centered around everything from dim sum to eclairs, mac and cheese to ramen.

7. Day trip to Sausalito







Top: Outdoor grounds of the Bay Area Discovery Museum | Bottom:

Toddlers interacting with the exhibits at the museum |

[@bayareadiscoverymuseum](#)

From Napa proper, it takes Kostow just over an hour to drive to one of her favorite getaways: Sausalito, a city in Marin County just north of San Francisco with a great kid-friendly museum, [Bay Area Discovery Museum](#). The STEM and art experiences are tailored to kids aged 0-10.

"At the outdoor children's museum, kids can play and then you can pop into Sausalito to grab a little bit and head back to the valley for your evening festivities," says Kostow. "We go out there a lot because it's so close."

Tips for traveling to Napa with kids

1. Rent a car

"Nothing is as close together as you think it is," explains Anderson. Although ride-sharing services like Uber and Lyft do operate in Napa (especially because of all the wineries), when traveling with kids, it's best to afford yourself the flexibility of having your own car on your own terms.

2. Consider renting gear from BabyQuip

The ultimate hack when traveling to Napa (or anywhere, really) with kids? Keeping the baby gear at home to avoid the hassle of hauling it onto the plane or into the car. Instead, rent it once you arrive. BabyQuip offers everything from cribs to strollers, and even car seats. They'll deliver to the airport, hotel, vacation rental or private residence. They'll even set everything up and pick it back up at the end of your trip. To view their specific offerings in Napa, click [here](#).

3. Commit to either Napa or Sonoma

"You've got to go over the mountain to get to one side or the other," says

Anderson, "so it's not as short a drive as people think. The wineries just stretch on and on. People say Napa and think it's just one area because you can see Napa or Sonoma as a town on a map. But really the wineries keep going further and further north."

4. When planning, make sure to provide an outlet for kids' extra energy

"I think that's key when traveling with kids," says Kostow. "They need to get out their energy, but then you can still have the opportunity to enjoy while you're in that place—which, usually for travelers, tends to be, you know, the food and drink."

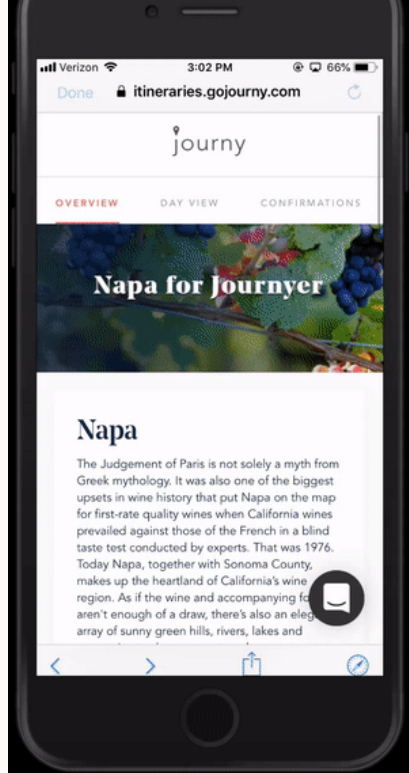
5. When things get tough (as they inevitably will when traveling with kids), remember the benefits

"I'm pro travel with kids," explains Kostow, "the earlier the better, because the more you travel with them, the easier they are to travel with over the course of time because they understand what the routines are—that we're going now, that we're doing this. They learn how to dine out better, how to kind of ebb and flow with the different experiences that you'll have."

You know what's even *better* than pulling off a successful family vacation to Napa? Doing so without any of the work! Leave it to [Journy](#) to build a fully custom itinerary for you. We'll spend time planning around 3pm nap time, finding breakfast spots with nearby playgrounds to run around, making sure every restaurant, winery and activity is stroller accessible...and so much more.

To get a taste for what it's like to travel with us, check out our [Napa and San Francisco sample itinerary](#). Browse by overview, day view, or specific activity/restaurant. Play around with the maps, and note how all confirmations, reservations and tickets are conveniently included in there as well. Because as all parents traveling with kids know, it's the little things that make a BIG difference.





And if you're on the hunt for some *international* family-friendly travel inspiration, look no further. We've got you covered.

- [A Guide To Tokyo With Kids](#)
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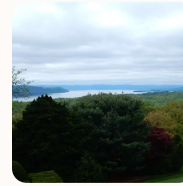
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