



Away



A Romantic Escape to Amador County

By Lynn Machon

Planning a weekend getaway is a fantastic way to schedule a break from the demands of everyday life. Whether for singles, couples or families, quick escapes can signal a chance to relax, reconnect and recharge.

Whether you feel like wine tasting or wakeboarding, there are numerous destinations ideal for long weekend trips within just an hour's drive of the Roseville area.

For the first of our monthly "Go Getaway" features, we chose to highlight neighboring Amador County as a romantic retreat for couples. Tucked in the Sierra Nevada foothills, the County boasts a collection of quaint towns, historical landmarks and charming bed and breakfasts, not to mention several of the region's best wineries.

The rolling hills, dotted with majestic oaks, are a scenic patchwork of vineyards and trickling

streams. The region's prominent role in the Gold Rush is preciously preserved with an appreciation for heritage apparent at every turn.

One of the first little towns you'll encounter as you wind down Highway 49 is Amador City. Take a minute to stop and stretch your legs and wander through the antique shops along historical main street. You can't miss Andrae's Bakery and Cheese Shop, (www.andraesbakery.com) offering fresh-baked breads, pastries, sandwiches, coffee and gourmet cheeses at the end of town. With a reputation for quality, many of the shop's loyal customers hail from the Greater Sacramento area. A brick

centerpiece of the town, The Imperial Hotel (www.imperialamador.com), was built in 1879 and is a great place for a casual, yet elegant, dinner. The Imperial has six guest rooms and offers a gourmet breakfast if you choose to make it your overnight destination.

Drive twenty minutes east of Amador City, and you'll discover the picturesque town of Volcano. Rich in Gold Rush era history, the tiny town has buildings dating back to the 1850's. For lodging, book a room at the St. George Hotel (www.stgeorgehotel.com) and enjoy a wonderful dinner featuring fresh local ingredients. Afterward, step into the fun and unique Whiskey Flat Saloon, called one of the top 10 bars in the country by GQ magazine, for a nightcap.

On an alternate evening, you can catch a performance of the Volcano Theater Company (www.volcanothatre.org), either under the stars at the outdoor amphitheater or in the charming cobblestone theater across the street.

For daytime adventure, just outside Volcano you'll find the Black Chasm Cavern (www.cavern-tours.com/BlackRt.htm), designated as a National Natural Landmark. Take a guided walking tour deep underground for a breath-taking display of natural formations such as stalactites, flowstones and the rare helictite crystals. You can also pack a picnic and enjoy a

hike at nearby Chaw'se Indian Grinding Rock State Park (www.parks.ca.gov)

Back down the hill, as you continue your drive along Highway 49, you'll soon find yourself in the middle of picture-perfect main street Sutter Creek. The lovingly restored vintage buildings hide a collection of antique shops, boutiques and art galleries. There's even an old-time ice cream parlor. Choose from several

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quaint B&B's, including the Hanford House, the Grey Gables Inn (www.greygables.com) and Foxes Inn (www.foxesinn.com).

For dinner (and Sunday Brunch, too), Caffè Via D'Oro (www.caffeviadoro.com) serves an excellent selection of international dishes, Susan's Place (www.susansplace.com) offers Mediterranean/Californian cuisine for lunch or dinner, and the Sutter Creek Palace (www.thesuttercreekpalace.com) is known for its fantastic steaks. The American Exchange Hotel also offers nice lodging and its Bellotti's Italian Restaurant is a local favorite. If you want to experience a little local nightlife, The Annex in the basement of the building offers pool tables and karaoke. Visit (www.suttercreek.org) for special events and more details.

Just out of town, spend your day discovering riches. Visit the Sutter Gold Mine (www.caverntours.com) for an underground tour of a real mining operation. Panning for gems is optional, but lots of fun.

Continuing up Highway 49 and through Martell (where there's a drive-thru Starbucks if you need a boost) you'll soon crest the hill to find a panorama of scenic foothills as you drop down into Jackson (www.ci.jackson.ca.us), the county seat of Amador. Jackson's main street hosts an enchanting mix of old and new shops, anchored by The National Hotel, an establishment rich with history and a colorful past.

For romantics, Jackson has several nice bed and breakfasts, including the Windrose Inn & Spa Retreat (www.amadorwindroseinn.com), and Gate House Inn (www.gatehouseinn.com), both on Jackson Gate Road just outside of town. From either place, take a short walk to Teresa's Place Restaurant or Villa Buscalia for a wonderful meal. Time it right and you can enjoy an outdoor performance of Main Street

Theater Works (www.mstw.org) right under the stars at the Kennedy Mine Amphitheater. If you have time, take a fascinating surface tour of the Kennedy Mine and tailing wheels.

You just can't leave Jackson without treating yourself to a famous Moo Burger at family-owned and operated Mel & Faye's Diner (www.melandfayesdiner.com), next to main street.

Moving on to another great town, Ione (www.ione-ca.com). The old Ione Hotel offers an affordable bridal suite perfect for couples, and the hotel restaurant and saloon provides an excellent meal. Complete your weekend with a round of golf at the nearby Castle Oaks Golf Course (www.castleoaksgolf.com). The impressive Preston Castle (www.prestoncastle.com) is a California Registered Historical Landmark, with tours given the first and third Saturday of the month.



Nearby, world class bass and trout fishing is available at Lake Amador (www.lakeamador.com) and Pardee Lake (www.pardeelakerecreation.com). Also, Lake Camanche (www.camancherecreation.com) is a great place for fishing, boating, wakeboarding or enjoying personal watercraft.

Many visitors are drawn to Amador County for wine tasting in the Shenandoah Valley. The appellation, with vintners such as Sobon Estate (www.sobonwine.com) is known for its award-winning Zinfandels among other wines. Visit www.amadorwine.com for a complete map of the more than 40 local wineries. Break up your day of wine tasting with a picnic at the Amador Flower Farm (www.amadorflowerfarm.com) in Plymouth, where 12 acres of gardens feature more than 800 daylily varieties. And don't leave Amador County without spending an evening at Plymouth's Restaurant Taste (www.restauranttaste.com), a true and

somewhat-hidden jewel of the County. Taste's ambiance, décor and cuisine rival any four-star Sacramento, San Francisco or Napa eatery.

With so much to see and do in Amador County, it's a great place to take a romantic getaway. Best of all, it's close enough that you can go back, again and again. For more ideas and details on Amador County, visit www.amadorvisitor.com. ■

How to get there

To reach Amador County from Roseville, follow Sunrise Avenue south (which turns into Sunrise Boulevard), then turn east on Highway 16, or Jackson Road. Follow Highway 16 until it intersects with Highway 49

