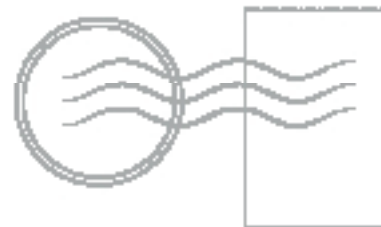




# POSTCARD

## Sacramento



The 'farm-to-fork capital' of the US is surrounded by some of California's best orchards and wineries – without the hype of Napa Valley, finds **Laura French**

"This region is what Napa was 30 years ago," says Teena Wilkins, co-owner of Viña Castellano – a scenic winery tucked into the Sierra Foothills, a 40-minute drive north of Californian capital Sacramento. "Here in Placer County, you can come to our wineries and breweries and talk to the winemakers themselves," she says. "It's a convivial experience." Standing in front of a mirror-perfect lake, with topaz-blue reflections bouncing off the surface and emerald vines stretching in all directions, I can certainly see the appeal.

Teena tells us about the history of the vineyard – a project launched in 1999 with her late father, Gabe Mendez, and inspired by the vineyards of Castile in Spain (where her family hails from). It's now one of 20 wineries on the Placer County Wine Trail, located about a two-hour drive from Napa Valley yet drawing a fraction of the visitors.

You can taste the vineyard's delicious produce at Viña Castellano's stone cellar. We're treated to a flight of tempranillo, syrah and monastrell reds in barrel-shaped tables surrounded by rock-hewn walls. It's a memorable experience, made all the better by meeting the people who created the wines.

It's not the only family-style food experience I have on my trip. On another day, I visit Il Fiorello olive oil farm in Suisun Valley. Owners Ann and Mark Sievers welcome us by serving local cheeses, wild mushroom pasta and melt-in-the-mouth olive-oil gelato against a backdrop of rolling hills.

We also visit the nearby Caymus-Suisun vineyard, which opened in 2022 – the second winery from the Wagner family, who founded the original Caymus Vineyards in the Napa Valley 50 year earlier. While sampling wines surrounded by colourful fruit orchards, wine educator Rodrigo Leora tells us more about the region. "The Suisun Valley has been AVA [American Viticultural Area]-recognised since 1982, but it's still relatively undiscovered," he says. "It reminds Chuck [Wagner] of what Napa was in the 1970s: families working together, and producers helping each other out to build something special."

I leave wondering why more visitors don't explore this scenic stretch of the Golden State, where vineyards and farms surround you at every turn and families welcome you with open arms – but for now, I'm happy it's still something of a secret. **TW**



### BOOK IT

North America Travel Service can pair four nights at The Citizen Hotel Autograph Collection in Sacramento with three nights at Hotel Abri in San Francisco from £1,519 per person in September. The price is based on two adults sharing, and includes flights and car hire. [northamericatravel.service.co.uk](http://northamericatravel.service.co.uk)



TOP: Laura explores Viña Castellano  
ABOVE: A tasting on the Placer County Wine Trail

PICTURES: Chantel Elder; Erik Bergen/Placer County