

# CALIFORNIA 101

SPRING 2019

## TRAVELERS GUIDE

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# *SLO sipping with furry friends*

## *Wine tasting with your dog in San Luis Obispo*

by Susan Hartzler and Seven

Pet owners will tell you: taking trips with your fur babies isn't always easy.

It's rewarding, but requires careful thought and planning. And that's where writer Susan Hartzler and her dog, Seven, come in.

Here, the experienced travel buddies share their insider tips for exploring some of San Luis Obispo County's dog-friendly wineries.



Photos by Susan Hartzler

*Seven relaxing in the wine barrel dog bed at Ventuex Vineyards.*



Photos by Susan Hartzler

*The California Wine Dog book, open to the page that features the wine dog, Izzy, at Ventuex Vineyards with the bottle of Rescue Red wine made in honor of the rescued pup.*

*Love wine? Love dogs even more?  
Have we got an adventure to share with you.*

My dog, Seven, and I set out on a rainy weekend in search of dog-friendly wineries in San Luis Obispo. Seven brought his pal Bear along, which meant I got to explore the region with Bear's guardian, Penny, who also happens to be a wine connoisseur.

Even in the rain, the scenery of gently rolling hills dotted with lush vineyards took my breath away. We couldn't wait to experience the dog-friendly wineries, many with their own "winery dogs" to greet visitors. While some vineyards allow well-behaved pets in picnic areas, others warmly welcome furry family members into their tasting rooms, where water, tasty dog treats, and lots of attention await the four-legged guests. Word has it that cats (leash trained, of course) and even a pet llama have all shown up at tastings in San Luis Obispo.

*Chamisal Vineyards* \_\_\_\_\_ Our first stop was Chamisal Vineyards. This vineyard is located in a tranquil setting just 10 minutes from downtown San Luis Obispo, in the beautiful Edna Valley. Chamisal is known for their





Photo courtesy of Four Lanterns

*The terraced hills of Four Lanterns is the perfect backdrop for a tasting.*

sustainably produced chardonnay and pinot noir, served in their tasting room straight from the source.

Since 1983, Chamisal Cellars has been making a name for itself on the Central Coast with intense flavors, mouthwatering texture, and impeccable balance. We loved the 2016 Califa Chardonnay, aged 14 months in 40 percent new French oak. This varietal was released May 2018. If you're a fan of white wine, you'll appreciate Califa's aromas of fresh peach, Bosc pear, honeysuckle, and crème brûlée.

Seven loved this winery because of the people he met, both those who poured the wine and those who were sampling it. Customers — including a little girl and her parents — gave Seven and his BFF Bear lots of love and cuddles. Seven was in heaven!

*Venteux Vineyards* \_\_\_\_\_ Next stop: the small, family-owned estate of Venteux Vineyards. Located in the Willow Creek district of Paso Robles, Venteux prides itself on using natural farming and winemaking techniques to showcase the unique land and location of their vineyard. Venteux crafts their award-winning Rhone varietal by growing their grapes on head-trained vines,

then dry farming them with natural yeast fermentation.

Too bad it was raining when we were there because the grounds are absolutely spectacular, with open space to spare. We're talking green rolling hills with grape vines for miles. When the sun is out, you can take your tasting outside and play lawn games. With all that open space, it's not surprising that they host an array of events throughout the year. And not just wine-focused events, either — they offer live music, iconic campouts, and wellness retreats. Venteux's calendar is ever-evolving, with unique events designed to celebrate great wine and great company.

The tasting room is quaint and cozy. Seven curled up in a wine barrel converted into a dog bed, then visited with other patrons who were there to taste the newly released wines and exclusive estate vintages. Venteux releases wines every spring and fall in six to 12-bottle increments.

We particularly liked the 2015 Venteux Paso Robles Grenache. Christine Havens of cellartracker.com described this grenache exquisitely, saying, "Limpid, translucent garnet in the glass, the 2015 Venteux Paso Robles Grenache is native yeast fermented — and





Photo Courtesy of Castoro Cellars

Castoro Cellars boasts a Mediterranean-style tasting room.

one of the more delicate expressions of the varietal I've found in this region. Eccentric rings of black cherry and fresh blackberry tumble from the glass, followed by a glorious and evolving profusion of cigar box, warm spice, dried lavender, sagebrush, ash, earth, and dust. In the mouth, it's nimble, with fine tannins lending structure to a wine that seems more Old World than New—with every element well integrated and precise." Couldn't have said it better ourselves!

### Castoro Cellars \_\_\_\_\_

Another SLO winery in existence since 1983, the Castoro Cellars tasting room is located in the heart of the Paso Robles wine appellation on scenic Highway 46, just off Highway 101. To get into the spacious, Mediterranean-styled tasting room and wine shop, you walk through a long grape arbor. It sets the stage for an enjoyable afternoon tasting their "dam fine wines" (that's their tag line). The surrounding hills and vineyards make for an ideal picnic spot.

For more than 35 years, Castoro Cellars has created a wide array of wines and even makes their own spirits. From bold reds to delicate whites, everyone leaves the Castoro wine tasting room with smiles on their faces. Even dogs. Seven's experience began with some delicious dog treats provided by the nice people who work there. Yum!

On the way out, Seven posed for a picture sitting on top of a wine barrel before jumping off and zooming around the vineyard in the rain. I guess he needed to stretch his legs from the road trip. Seven got away with his crazies because the owner's dog at Castoro Cellars is a fellow Australian Shepherd named Ruby. She wasn't at the vineyard that day, but be sure to look for her when you visit.

Castoro's "dam fine wines" include reds like zinfandel "Zinfusion," tempranillo, syrah, cabernet, pinot noir, and red blends. Notable whites include chardonnay, tango, pinot grigio, sauvignon blanc, and viognier. Everything we tasted at Castoro was spectacular. We even brought a



Photo by Susan Hartzler

Seven poses in front of the grape vines at Castoro Cellars.

Castoro Cellars's picnic area.



Photo Courtesy of Castoro Cellars

Seven gets a warm welcome at Venteux.



Photo by Susan Hartzler

Seven at Chamisal Vineyards.



Photo by Susan Hartzler



bottle of their brandy home with us.

### *Four Lanterns Winery*

Four Lanterns Winery is a family owned and operated boutique winery that creates balanced Rhone and Bordeaux style wines in Paso Robles. The 35-acre property is located on West Highway 46, in the formidable Willow Creek American Viticultural Area. As owners Steve and Jackie Gleason point out, this region's hot days, cool nights, and calcareous soil provide a perfect environment for making wine.

Their tasting room is actually a converted barn serving wine instead of sheltering animals, unless you count the dogs that are allowed inside. It's a comfortable spot with a long wooden bar where you can taste some of their award winning varietals. Four Lanterns Winery specializes in westside Paso estate grown and produced Rhone and Bordeaux style wines.

Their wines are balanced, elegant, and critically acclaimed. We especially liked the 2015 Firelight Syrah. As Four Lanterns notes, the Firelight offers an "intense nose, earthy mid palate, balanced acidity, and medium tannins." But anything you taste there will make your taste buds happy.

### *Cutruzzola Vineyards*

Since we were staying in Cambria, we visited the Cutruzzola Vineyards tasting room in town. They produce Riesling and pinot noir from their estate vineyard located only a few miles from the ocean, just over the coastal mountains.

We got to taste their award-winning boutique wines in the quaint tasting room, nestled among the pines in the West Village. Seven and his buddy Bear were treated to some delicious dog biscuits while we sampled the wine. Both boys were a bit tired from a long weekend and crashed on the cool floor. Good news for me and Penny, because we could sample the wine uninterrupted.

You must try the 2013 Pinot Noir, Gloria Estate. Cherries, plums, spices, and silky tannins make this one structured and distinct. While this wine can be enjoyed now, the winery anticipates it will improve significantly in three to five years. Good things come to those who wait!

*Cutruzzola Vineyards' rolling hillside.*



*Photo courtesy of Cutruzzola Vineyards*



*Photo by Susan Hartzler*

*Seven gives his best model impression in front of Four Lanterns Winery.*

*Seven makes a cute friend and goes behind the scenes at Venteux.*



*Photo by Susan Hartzler*



*Photo by Susan Hartzler*





Photo by Susan Hartzler

*Our furry friend shows off on top of a wine barrel at Castro Cellars, before jumping off and zooming around the spectacular grounds.*

Chamisal Vineyards  
7525 Orcutt Road, San Luis Obispo  
(805) 541-9463  
chamisalvineyards.com

Venteux Vineyards  
1795 Las Tablas Road, Templeton  
(805) 369-0127  
venteuxvineyards.com

Castoro Cellars  
1315 N Bethel Road, Templeton  
(805) 238-0725  
castorocellars.com

## *Madeline's Restaurant and Wine Cellar*

Before 5 pm, Madeline's Restaurant and Wine Cellar in Cambria welcomes well-behaved dogs to its bar, where pet guardians can partake in a wine tasting. While most of the varietals on the menu are from France, they got help recently from Central Coast winemaker Jeff Branco — of Justin Winery fame — to create five wines of their own. These they sourced from across San Luis Obispo County.

Madeline's Petit Verdot is one we loved. You'll smell blackberries, blueberries, and plums, according to Madeline's, which adds, "Flavors of herbal and floral notes such as violet, lilac, lavender, sage, and dried herbs stand out as well as a rustic nuance of smoked meat." New French oak barrels add some vanilla nutty goodness. Yum!

There are many more wineries in San Luis Obispo County that are dog-friendly. Pick up a San Luis Obispo Wine Map at any of the local wineries where you'll see a dog paw print at all the wineries that are dog-friendly. If you're traveling from far away, Seven suggests you check out the pet-friendly Cambria Shores Inn in Moonstone Beach, where we stayed. They welcomed us with a basket filled with doggie goodies, to the delight of Seven. Penny and I were thrilled with the amazing view of the ocean.

With all the affection showered on Seven by staff and fellow wine tasting patrons on our journey, life back in Oxnard seems a bit lackluster for both of us. Time to plan our next adventure. Woof!

Four Lanterns Winery  
2485 West Highway 46, Paso Robles  
(805) 226-5955  
fourlanternswinery.com

Cutruzzola Vineyards  
555 Main Street, Cambria  
(805) 927-2670  
cutruzzolavineyards.com

Madeline's Restaurant and Wine Cellar  
788 Main Street, Cambria  
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