



## **Wine and Weed Tours**

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Whether you've heard of them or not, been on one, or know someone who has, wine and weed tours are a growing trend in Wine Country, drawing visitors from around the world to experience not just wine sipping, but weed smoking, too. With the excitement over California's recreational cannabis laws, the cannabis culture is evolving, with several entrepreneurs jumping on the opportunity to start a tour business. But strict regulations and many gray areas to work within can make for a confusing day of tasting.

According to Sonoma County's cannabis ordinance, permits for commercial cannabis activities are only issued when written permission from the property owner or landlord is provided, and tasting, promotional activities and events related to commercial cannabis activities are prohibited. However, several companies are navigating around the system to deliver insightful and memorable wine and weed tours. *NorthBay biz* reached out to the industry's trailblazers to find out what a day of wine-and-weed tasting is like, and how high people are getting.

### **Wine Country Weed Trips**

When Fred Joyce began researching cannabis tourism two years ago, he focused on the Colorado market for his studies. "In the process of developing a business plan, I did a great deal of research for on cannabis tourism, primarily focused on the Denver market since Colorado was the first state to have recreational weed more than four years ago," says Joyce. "Since then, a whole new market segment opened up."

In October 2017, Joyce flew to Denver for his first cannabis tour. "I went on the most successful cannabis operator's tour. I joined a group of 25 adults from all over the U.S., who for the most part visited Denver as 'cannabis tourists' to experience and enjoy a fun three-hour trip to various dispensaries and grows in the metro area," he says. Seven months later, Joyce started his own Sonoma County cannabis and wine tour company, Wine Country Weed Trips.

“We provide door-to-door custom tours for groups of less than six people, and we first visit the largest cannabis dispensary in Northern California, which is generally an eye opener for our out-of-state guests,” says Joyce. He explains that most of his guests are from outside of California. They’re experienced cannabis consumers that don’t have the luxury of stepping into a dispensary at home and legally purchase cannabis products. “They’re looking for a fun trip that includes the best cannabis and wine, which are readily available here in western Sonoma County,” he says.

Joyce then takes the group north, towards Healdsburg, for wine tasting at selected wineries. We reached out to one of Joyce’s preferred wineries for a comment. Still, no word on their participation in weed and wine tours.

“If they prefer craft beer, we go to the brand-new Russian River Brewery and Tap Room in Windsor,” says Joyce. “You might call our four-hour guided tour a ‘happy hour’ with both cannabis and wine available for purchase along the way. We’re facilitators helping out-of-state visitors enjoy the area even more by utilizing our local knowledge.”

But it’s not always a walk in the park for cannabis tour guides, and with the budding industry working out its kinks, there are still challenges to overcome.

### **Challenges and checking the box**

“Last summer, our challenges were in the air with the nearby fires and the terrible smoke-filled skies which lasted until the rains in early November,” says Joyce. “We found that out-of-state visitors were not booking due to what they were seeing on the nightly news regarding the fires in Northern California. You might say we are also dependent on good weather, and not having any major fires in order to keep our target market guests coming.”

### **The future of cannabis**

The cannabis industry is still looking more like the wild west, and the pioneers of the industry are finding their place along the route.

From gold rush to green rush, the budding business sector is sure to be lucrative. It just might take a while. The companies doing business in wine and weed now are helping to shape the industry. “At this point, cannabis tourism in Sonoma County is just getting started with a few 420-friendly bed and breakfasts, hotels, or short-term rental options,” says Joyce. “I see this industry to be far more mature in just a few years when others realize that not everyone who comes to Wine Country is here for wine tasting. Today, we’re just pioneers entering a brand-new vertical with lots of upside potential.”