



Insider's Guide to **PLEASANTON**



► It's hard not to use "pleasant" to describe Pleasanton. After all, the city is quiet and pretty, with a plethora of parks and patio dining, and the ridgeline along its western border is dotted with old oaks. Its history, though, can veer toward the dramatic.

Local lore plays up the city's mid-1800s Wild West identity as Alisal, a small road stop frequented by horse-driving Gold Rush prospectors—and a draw for desperados and *bandoleros*. It earned the title "The Most Desperate Town in the West." Some say there were shoot-outs in the street. Some say Joaquin Murrieta, the inspiration for the masked vigilante Zorro, committed crimes here.

Historians are iffy on the accuracy of all that. But you can still find horse hitches along Pleasanton's Main Street, where historic buildings now hold banks, hair salons, and fine-dining destinations, and residents stroll leisurely under twinkling lights. Consistently ranking among the most desirable places to live in California, the Pleasanton of today boasts top-rated schools, community-focused fun, and easy access for commuters to Silicon Valley.

CITY SERIES

Once a Wild West hideout, this beautiful city is one of the most desirable places to live in the state.

WRITTEN BY LEEANNE JONES

ILLUSTRATION BY FAGOSTUDIO



FUN FACTS

Impress your friends with fascinating Pleasanton history and trivia.



CHEER FOR BEER

Major thoroughfare Hopyard Road is named for a nearly forgotten part of Pleasanton's history. In the early 1900s, approximately 2,000 acres of hops grew here, the vines winding up trellises and the flowers picked and kiln-dried for making beer. The harvest was shipped around the world, including to Guinness in Ireland. While the hopyards were gone by the 1920s—World War I, labor strikes, and Prohibition all played a part—the spirit lives on at many local establishments. The most obvious: the Hop Yard American Alehouse and Grill (located on Hopyard), which serves up burgers and sandwiches alongside 31 mostly Northern California beers on tap.

AND THEY'RE OFF

Built in 1858, the Pleasanton Fairgrounds Racetrack is one of the oldest of its kind in the United States. The one-mile oval hosts thoroughbred, quarter horse, and Arabian racing events and has seen its share of stars. Legendary champion Seabiscuit trained here in 1936, shortly before winning his first two big races; and Russell Baze, the winningest jockey in North American history, celebrated his 7,000th and 12,000th victories at the track. Take in the spectacle from the dining lounge, trackside patio, or grandstand seating. Also on the property is the Pleasanton Off-Track Betting facility, where risk-takers watch and wager on live satellite horse racing all year long.

WORKIN' NINE TO FIVE

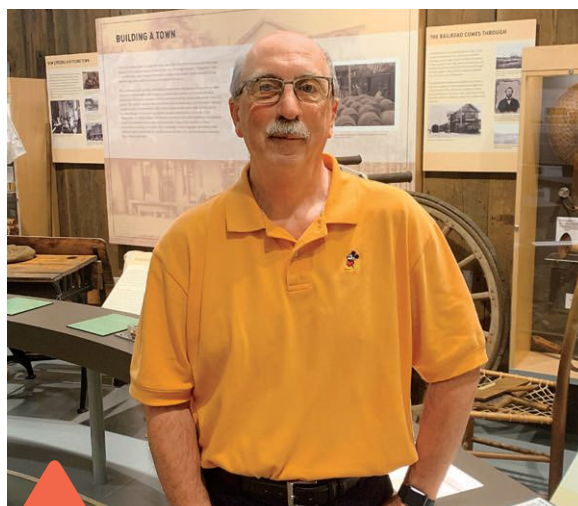
Pleasanton's southeast location in the greater Bay Area makes it an ideal suburban base for big-city commuting. At the intersection of the 580 and 680 freeways, it's a straight shot south to Silicon Valley or west to Oakland or San Francisco. Those avoiding traffic

can take BART from one of two stations, or the ACE (Altamont Corridor Express) train that runs from the San Joaquin Valley to San Jose. But there are plenty of jobs here, too. Major companies based in Pleasanton include finance and HR management software maker Workday, grocer Safeway, medical products manufacturer Roche Molecular Diagnostics, mortgage application software maker Ellie Mae, gift card distributor Blackhawk Network Holdings, and cloud computing company Veeva Systems. The 875-acre Hacienda Business Park is occupied by 650 companies employing 18,000 people and is located adjacent to the Dublin/Pleasanton BART station, the terminus of the Dublin/Pleasanton–Daly City line.

WHO'S WHO

Several famous people grew up in Pleasanton or currently call it home. Among them are *Dilbert* cartoonist Scott Adams, San Francisco Giants shortstop Brandon Crawford, professional golfer Paula Creamer, Tower of Power drummer David Garibaldi, football coach and sportscaster John Madden, NFL quarterback Sean Mannion, and movie and TV star Gabrielle Union. But perhaps the biggest name associated with the city is Phoebe Apperson Hearst, mother of William Randolph Hearst, the newspaper publisher and builder of Hearst Castle. Phoebe had her own sprawling estate in Pleasanton, the 50-room Spanish Moorish-style Hacienda del Pozo de Verona, designed by A. C. Schweinfurth, with additions by Julia Morgan. Today, the Club at Castlewood sits on the property, but the original building was mostly destroyed by a fire in 1969.

OPPOSITE: THE PLEASANTON FAIRGROUNDS RACETRACK IS ONE OF THE OLDEST HORSE-RACING SITES IN THE UNITED STATES. **THIS PAGE:** JIM DEMERSMAN IS THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE MUSEUM ON MAIN, LOCATED IN DOWNTOWN PLEASANTON.



Living History

As executive director of the Museum on Main, Jim Demersman oversees the beloved institution in the heart of downtown Pleasanton. During his 12 years at the museum, attendance has grown from 9,000 to 30,000 visitors per year, a sign that Tri-Valley residents are as fascinated by the region's history as they are by its future as a high-tech hub.

"Pleasanton really respects its historic heritage," says Demersman. "There are not a lot of cities in the Bay Area that have a historic downtown like ours. This city's mothers and fathers have worked hard to save that historic feel."

Q: What are some of the most surprising things about Pleasanton's history?

A: Many people don't know that the community was developed by immigrants. For example, John Kottinger was an immigrant from Austria. He married into the Bernal family, a Mexican family who had the land grant out here. Kottinger realized the transcontinental railroad would be coming through this area and it would be ripe for development.

A lot of people think the Tri-Valley was never as diverse as it is now, but that's not the case. At one point, Pleasanton had a Chinatown—there was a block full of Chinese businesses. It was really flourishing in the mid-1880s.

Q: How did the Museum on Main come to be?

A: In the 1960s, there was a group who wanted to make sure the area's history was recognized, so the Amador-Livermore Valley Historical Society was formed in 1963. In the mid-1970s, the historical society was offered the Heritage House in the center of the county fairgrounds. Then, in 1983, the city offered the building on Main Street to develop into the museum.

We opened here in 1984. The building was built in 1914 and was the town hall, council chambers, and a library over the years. It was the police department for many years. My office used to be a jail cell.

Q: What can visitors expect to see at the museum?

A: We reinstalled our permanent history gallery in 2019, after hearing what the community was looking for. They wanted to see more artifacts and photographs from different parts of our history, and to use more technology. We have really increased these areas. We have more than 1,000 photos on display, and we have interactive exhibitions that show how the community has grown.

Q: What do you have planned for the rest of the year?

A: We host temporary exhibitions in addition to our permanent history gallery. Through August 14, we will have *Stitching California*, a traveling fiber arts exhibit. Next will be a photo exhibit called *The Pleasanton Ones*. Some of our biggest attractions are the Ghost Walk events in late October. In November and December, we are having people build famous buildings from the area with LEGO® [bricks], which should be a lot of fun. —**Peter Crooks**

The Museum on Main is open Tues.–Sat., 10 a.m.–4 p.m., at 603 Main Street in Pleasanton. museumonmain.org.



OUT AND ABOUT

From ridgeline hikes to county fair fun, Pleasanton offers something for everyone.



WE HEART THE ARTS

The cultural heart of the city is the Firehouse Arts Center, a converted 1929 fire station housing a 221-seat theater, a fine art gallery, and classroom space for art and music lessons. The adjacent Lions Wayside Park is the scene for outdoor concerts and the free summer run of Shakespeare in the Park. Also in Pleasanton is Tommy T's Comedy Club, where the biggest names in the industry have come through for stand-up performances. Think you have what it takes? Sign up for a four-minute trial at an open mic night, happening the first Tuesday of every month.

SHOP TILL YOU DROP

Main Street is a delightful shopping destination, with strollable sidewalks and independent shops. Fuel up with a latte at literary-inspired Inklings Coffee and Tea, then pop into Murphy's Paw (dog food and fashion), American Harvest (antiques and decor), Therapy (unique gifts), or Towne Center Books (bookstore with author events and a large children's section). Across town, Stoneridge Shopping Center includes national retailers such as Macy's, Coach, and Apple. Pleasanton is the corporate home of Safeway grocery stores, and Lucky California recently debuted its new flagship location here—a renovated older store with a walk-in beer cooler, custom charcuterie-board making, and an eatery and drinkery with an outdoor patio. Gene's Fine Foods is a longtime community treasure noted for its meat selection.

GET FESTIVE

Pleasanton is known regionally as the home of the Alameda County Fair. The 270-acre fairgrounds come alive each summer (for 2021, it has been moved to October) with

carnival rides, pig races, fireworks, and funnel cakes. The rest of the year, the site hosts hundreds of large-scale events from dog shows to baby gear swaps to a Halloween haunted house. Downtown, the weekly farmers market has fresh produce, flower bouquets, and sourdough bread year-round. Annual events such as arts and antiques fairs close Main Street to traffic, but during the pandemic new weekend street closures allowed restaurants to expand patio dining—a treat that will continue through September 6.



BACK IN TIME

California history comes alive at Alviso Adobe Community Park, where you can see the original 1854 adobe house constructed on Rancho Santa Rita, the 12,000-acre Mexican land grant here. The park grounds include historic milking barn and bunkhouse re-creations and environmental tours. Kids can check out a pair of binoculars and a backpack stuffed with activities and treasures. The Museum on Main, located downtown, displays local artifacts and hosts free summer walking tours. On August 7 or September 11, join docents in exploring the historic homes and buildings of downtown—some rumored to be haunted.



THE GREAT OUTDOORS

A 1,600-foot ridgeline runs along the western boundary of Pleasanton, and getting up on top of it is a challenging and rewarding adventure. Access the trailhead on Foothill Road, then hike up an occasionally switchbacking trail to the top, where you'll find frog ponds, cattle-grazing land, and views of the Tri-Valley. Down in the valley itself, cool off at Shadow Cliffs Regional Recreation Area. The former gravel quarry has an 80-acre lake that is a summer draw for swimming, boating, fishing, and relaxing in the sand or picnic areas. Nearby, the Pleasanton BMX Park welcomes cyclists of all ages to navigate dirt mounds and berms.

FUN FOR KIDS

Youth athletes from around the region play games and tournaments at Ken Mercer Sports Park. It has 40 fields for soccer,

baseball, softball, football, and volleyball, plus batting cages, a skateboard park, three playgrounds, and a paved walking path around the perimeter. It will also be the site of Pleasanton's first all-abilities playground. Speaking of playgrounds, two others in the city boast epic slides: Mission Hills Park has a 50-foot metal chute with room for two, and Del Prado Park has a large concrete slide and pieces of old cardboard always sitting nearby, to amp up the speed. Just outside the city, in unincorporated Sunol, the Niles Canyon Railway offers tours of the canyon on steam and diesel trains.

FUN FOR KIDS AT HEART

At the new Limitless Axes and Ales, you can book a private axe-throwing range and channel your inner Gimli or Thor while sipping on beer. Want something lower-key? Check out the championship golf courses at Callippe Preserve and the Club at Castlewood, or visit the Pleasanton Golf Center, which has a nine-hole course in the middle of a horse-racing track and a 50-bay driving range.

OPPOSITE: THE CITY OF PLEASANTON LIGHTS UP AT NIGHT. **THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT:** THE ALAMEDA COUNTY FAIR, COMPLETE WITH CARNIVAL RIDES, TYPICALLY OPENS EVERY SUMMER; ENJOY THE LAKE VIEWS AT SHADOW CLIFFS REGIONAL RECREATION AREA.



GOOD EATS

Where to indulge, on Main Street and beyond.



Blossom Vegan Restaurant

Tucked away in a strip mall near the 580 freeway, this hidden gem serves up meatless meals with Vietnamese and Chinese flavors. Even devoted carnivores will enjoy dishes such as mushu-mushu (cabbage, carrot, and avocado wrapped in paratha) and spicy potato curry (soy chicken, tofu, potato, and onion in coconut curry sauce). (925) 399-5232.

Blue Agave Club

Main Street is lined with patio dining options, but Blue Agave's large front "yard" behind a white picket fence is arguably the best. Plus, there's often live music. Sit down to high-end Mexican dishes such as camarones Xochitl (shrimp sautéed in corn and cuitlacoche sauce) or a big steak topped with pomegranate chipotle. Don't forget to order a blue agave tequila margarita. blueagaveclub.com.

Eddie Papa's American Hangout

Explore regional dishes from around the United States in this cavernous restaurant: chicken and waffles from New York's Harlem, Kansas City baby back ribs, New Orleans jambalaya, loco moco from Hawaii, Nashville hot chicken, and Fog City tetrazzini. The fun continues when the bill arrives topped with a puffy cloud of cotton candy. eddiepapas.com.

Porky's Pizza Palace

After 55 years in San Leandro, Porky's Pizza expanded to a second location—in the Valenziano family's Pleasanton hometown. The classic parlor is known for its authentic hand-tossed dough and fun flavors like bacon cheddar cheeseburger and buffalo grilled chicken. The family-friendly space has lots of seating both indoors and outside (post-game weekend grub, anyone?), many sports-streaming screens, and a little arcade. porkyspizzapalace.com.



Hap's Original

A retro neon sign with a horse on top leads hungry diners to this New York-style steak and seafood destination that has been a fixture just off Main Street for 20-plus years. Get settled into the white-tablecloth dining room, select from a 300-plus wine list, and then dig into a center-cut filet, Australian lamb chop, or cedar-planked salmon. hapsoriginal.com.

Meadowlark Dairy

Truly unique, this drive-through dairy offers grocery staples and soft-serve ice cream. Pull through for a convenient pickup of milk, eggs, deli meats, chips, or flour and sugar (very popular at the height of the COVID stay-at-home order)—and a cone. Standard

flavors like chocolate, vanilla, and strawberry are joined by a rotating cast of specials, from snickerdoodle to birthday cake, which you can mix and match. Don't miss local collabs, like Story Coffee ice cream or Salt Craft "cinnacones." meadowlarkdairy.com.

Oyo

Like its colorful logo, Oyo made a bright and bold entrance on the downtown dining scene when it launched in 2019. The menu explores the flavors of the ancestral homelands of the Guyanese people, such as jerk chicken from the Caribbean, curry goat from East Asia, pepper pot from West Africa, and South American paella. A tropical banana bread pudding with coconut ice cream and pineapple glaze makes a sweet finish. oyopleasanton.com.

SideTrack Bar and Grill

Burgers and sandwiches are elevated here—but still hit the spot. Burgers feature wagyu beef, egg buns, and fun flavor combos, such as the Pancho Villa with roasted jalapeño and poblano, avocado, and pepper Jack. Sandwiches range from a classic Cubano to salmon with arugula and lemon aioli. Be sure to upgrade your side of fries to spicy tater "todds," a zippy take on tater tots. sidetrackeats.com.



The Press, an Artisan Cafe

This tiny and trendy space serves up big flavors when it comes to bread. For breakfast, try a thick whole wheat sour-dough toastini. There's an avocado, goat cheese, and orange option, and a seasonal strawberry caprese with house-made ricotta. Lunch brings tasty paninis (each served alongside a spring mixed salad), such as roasted turkey pesto with provolone or bacon with dill and three cheeses. Or just pop

in for a latte, like the Hor-Chaga with chaga mushroom powder, cinnamon, and oat milk. thepressartisancafe.com.

Sabio on Main

Choose your adventure at this Spanish- and global-inspired hot spot with a stunning interior. The a la carte menu includes deviled eggs topped with smoked sturgeon, a dry-aged burger with pork belly, and artichoke and oyster mushroom strata. There's a monthly changing three-course menu, as well as a five-course menu and a long wine list for pairing. sabiopleasanton.com.

Sultan's Kebab

This popular Mediterranean eatery has previously expanded its footprint in the Koll Center complex and opened a second location in Danville, and rumor has it a third location is headed for Walnut Creek. Shish kebabs and shawarma plates come with buttery rice pilaf and a generous heap of hummus; fresh salads and wraps are also on offer. When ordering at the counter, it's hard to ignore the dessert case of baklava, including a chocolate iteration. sultanskebabpleasanton.com. ■

OPPOSITE: MEADOWLARK DAIRY WAS FOUNDED BACK IN THE EARLY 1900S; **THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT:** PORKY'S PIZZA PALACE FEATURES INVENTIVE FLAVORS; ORDER A REUBEN SANDWICH WITH FRIES AT SIDETRACK BAR AND GRILL.