

Santa Rosa: Giants, Mud Baths, and Finish Lines

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Two races in Santa Rosa this summer means Northern California will be on display in all its glory for athletes and their families.

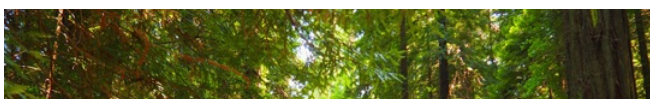
David Landers

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In the middle of the famed region stretching from southern Oregon to San Luis Obispo County, Santa Rosa offers not only a beautiful race setting, but access to Nor Cal's ancient redwood groves, wine country, and the global trendsetter of cities, San Francisco.

Reflecting among the Redwoods

Athletes seeking to calm pre-race jitters can venture into numerous Northern California parks for moments of reflection and focus among groves of majestic redwood trees. "The redwoods, once seen, leave a mark or create a vision that stays with you always," wrote California-native author John Steinbeck, and no wonder—a redwood tree can live up to 2,000 years and reach 350 feet high while growing to a diameter of 16 feet.



Between Crescent City and Orick along the northwest Pacific Coast, the **Redwood National**



the **Redwood National Park** links up with the Prairie Creek, Del Norte Coast, and Jedediah Smith State Parks for some of the oldest, tallest and most pristine redwood ecosystems. Six driving hours away from San

Francisco, those parks receive few visitors, guaranteeing solitude and inspiration.

In contrast, **Muir Woods National Monument**, located 12 miles north of the Golden Gate Bridge, overflows with mobs of visitors eager to take a selfie among the park's redwood groves.

The **Armstrong Redwoods State Natural Reserve** is the easiest option for IRONMAN Santa Rosa athletes to see these living giants.

Twenty-three miles west of Santa Rosa, Armstrong's numerous hiking trails snake among the redwoods, from the self-guided, 1.7 mile Pioneer Nature Trail to a strenuous nine-miler. Arrive as early as possible in the mornings to avoid crowds. You can walk in for free or pay \$10 to drive through the reserve.

Sipping and dipping in wine country

When your coach scheduled an active recovery day, she meant walking around winery tasting rooms and taking mud baths, right?

Sonoma and Napa

A trip to Santa Rosa must include a visit to the region that transformed Northern California into a culinary and economic powerhouse, the Wine Country of **Sonoma** and **Napa** Counties.

An hour east of Santa Rosa, **over 600 wineries produce what is considered some of the best wine in the world.**

Millions of visitors annually sample the different wines at tasting rooms and vineyards alongside outdoor patios serving fresh cheeses, homemade bread, and other locally-sourced foods.



While Wine Country begs visitors to wander among the wineries, planning ahead and making reservations are advisable.

Organized winery tours vary by duration, the number of participants, and transportation mode, and can ensure a stress-free and safe experience. Shake out your race legs with bike tour or go off-road on with a Jeep tour.

Calistoga

The "Hot Springs of the West," the laid-back town of **Calistoga is Wine Country's version of a chill out room.**

Located north of the popular wineries of Napa, Calistoga sits on top of natural hot springs and geysers. Loaded with sodium chloride, sulfur, and other minerals, hot spring pools are known to soothe sore muscles and reduce stress.

Dialing up the relaxation level, volcanic ash and peat from nearby Mount Saint Helena are mixed with the mineral water to create a warm, relaxing mud. Instead of water, tubs are filled with mud for individuals to "soak" in.

Recovering athletes can find hot-water soaks, mineral baths, and mud baths at day spas and overnight resorts that also offer steam baths, blanket wraps, and massages (solo and couples). From California's longest-running spa, the **Indian Springs Resort and Spa**, to the newest boutique hotel, Calistoga offers a range of price and accommodation options.

Celebrating in the City by the Bay

Finishing an IRONMAN calls for a celebration, and San Francisco delivers a party at every corner.

The cultural capital of the Left Coast and urban playground of Northern California, San Francisco saturates the senses. See the Golden Gate Bridge emerge from the fog. Hear cable cars clank. Smell the Pacific Ocean from Baker Beach. Feel the afternoon sun at the Park (aka **Golden Gate Park**). Taste Chinatown's buns, heavy with warm fillings.



For a more casual celebration, you and your travel companions can experience the city's flavors with a stroll through the **Ferry Building**, a California food, and lifestyle marketplace and transportation hub co-existing inside the ferry terminal that has welcomed visitors since 1898.

Looking over San Francisco Bay in the Embarcadero neighborhood, the Ferry

Building marketplace houses award-winning restaurants, one-of-a-kind take-out (needing a taco fix? Head to Cocina Mexicana **Mijita**), and stalls overflowing with local produce, meats, and flowers.

With an Americano from **Blue Bottle Coffee**, watch the arriving ferries before your lunch reservation at **The Slanted Door**, a Vietnamese restaurant loved by local foodies and recognized by the James Beard Foundation. Bring your celebration to a close by sampling the latest ice cream creations at local creamery **Humphry Slocombe**. Is there any other place besides Nor Cal to find Peanut Butter Curry ice cream?

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