

# Downtown Napa: A River runs through it.

Lee Daley , SF Upscale Travel Examiner

**Thanks to the magnificent restoration of the Napa River** and the new AVIA Napa boutique hotel, downtown Napa, an area once blemished by boarded-up storefronts, has become a thriving six-square block cultural and culinary hot spot attracting visitors who find the area a desirable destination well worth the trek.

**Napa's Riverfront:** The riverfront walk is a great intro to much of what makes downtown Napa such a draw for day trekkers and weekenders. A good place to start your walk is the **Oxbow Public Market**, named for a bend in the river where the market resides.

You may find yourself spending a couple hours here as you graze your way through this gourmand's version of an artisan market. Open stalls and sit down eateries sell organic produce, cheeses, spices, seafood, coffees and teas and of course, wine.

**Oyster lovers** can get their fresh bivalve fix at the Hog Island Oyster Company's counter while, under the same roof, the aroma of fresh baked bread emanating from the Model Bakery permeates the air. En route to the bakery, peruse the cheese offerings at the Oxbow Cheese Merchant's showcase, perhaps stopping to pick up a glass of wine from the Oxbow Wine Merchant. Consume your pick-up picnic on the scenic outdoor deck before meandering back through the market where your organic ice cream dessert from Three Twins Ice Cream Company awaits.

**After leaving the Oxbow,** follow the riverfront walkway to the historic Napa Mill Complex which overlooks a spacious plaza. Within the complex are an upscale hotel, spa, restaurants, specialty shops and outdoor dining venues. One of the first to walk along this cosmopolitan promenade when it officially opened back in 2008 was folk singer Arlo Guthrie who was in town to perform at the nearby Napa Valley Opera House.

**Want more insight into the rich history of the Napa Valley?** The Napa Walking Tour is a three-hour walking time machine guided by historian, actor and beer/wine expert George Webber. The personable Mr. Webber focuses his tours on the region's colorful Gold Rush and Prohibition Eras. See many of Napa's restored Victorian architectural grand dames, examples of the area's Queen Anne, Italianate and Colonial Revival masterpieces. The tour includes a wine tasting and humorous lecture as Webber impersonates Doctor Vine at a downtown winery. Webber completes the tour with a leisurely walk along the riverfront. For more information and reservations, call Webber at 707-694-5097.

Even though it flows through the city's downtown, visitors to this urban area can still get out on the water and enjoy the river's diverse ecosystem with an easy canoe or kayak ride. **Napa Valley Adventure Tours** offers rentals for all manner of paddlers from the neophyte to the most experienced along with instructions on ways to enjoy a relaxing sojourn up and down the river.

**Ready to sample some of Napa's finest wines at a reasonable price?** Take a break from your river walk or canoe ride by sampling boutique wines at one of Napa Downtown tasting bars. The Taste of Napa Wine Card sells for just \$25 and offers wine tastings at a dozen downtown tasting bars, all within walking distance. Using your card, the initial tasting will cost just ten cents. Quite a bargain, the card can be used on several occasions and is good through the end of the year. Taste Napa Downtown is available on line from the **Napa Visitors Center** by calling 707-257-0322 or online.

Any review of Downtown Napa must include the beloved **Napa Valley Opera House** which dates back to 1879. The beautifully restored Italianate Victorian theatre with its intimate atmosphere offers up a wide range of events from musicals and concerts to original plays and comedy acts. Check the schedule for your next visit to the area at [napavalleyoperahouse.org](http://napavalleyoperahouse.org).

**Spend the Night:** Right in the heart of downtown and a pivotal player in Downtown Napa's renaissance, the AVIA boutique hotel offers that pampered hotel experience we all look for when we want to feel we have had a restorative yet invigorating escape. Treat yourself to one of AVIA's suites with its romantic fireplace and footed in-room tub. The hotel is steps away from the all Downtown Napa destinations.

Beginning in March, AVIA introduces its Second Sunday Supper Club, a monthly culinary event which includes a four-course wine pairing dinner accompanied by lively conversation, all hosted by Chef Chris Aiken. Supper Club guests will receive a 20% discount off best available rates should they choose to spend the night. For reservations, call 707-224-3900. For room reservations, book the Second Sunday Supper Club rates online at [www.aviahotels.com/stay/SSSC/](http://www.aviahotels.com/stay/SSSC/)

Downtown Napa is an easy 60 minute drive northeast of San Francisco. For more information about visiting Downtown Napa, visit: [www.napadowntown.com](http://www.napadowntown.com)