

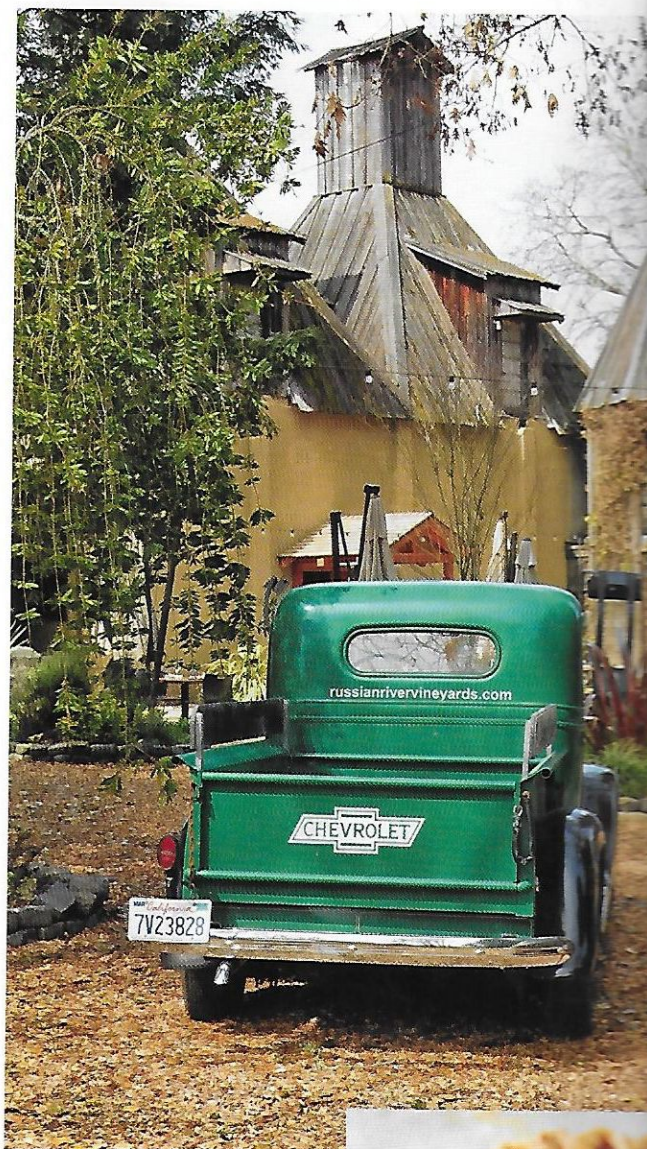
ROAD TRIPPING WINE COUNTRY, CALIFORNIA

'Less than an hour after crossing the Golden Gate Bridge in potato-patch fog, we are cruising along the Carneros Highway, the view a shimmering two-hued strip of land and sky. Kestrels circle above virescent fields crowned with sun-gilt houses, and across the road, row after row of vines unfurl to rolling hills. We're visiting California Wine Country – Sonoma, Napa and Mendocino – home to around 1,200 wineries, with a pre-teen and teenagers (aged 11, 13 and 15) who couldn't be more uninterested in viticulture. The plan was to mix things up a bit; combine (child-friendly) wineries with activities of distraction. The cleverly calculated first stop is a tour of the Jelly Belly factory, a rainbow-coloured candy nirvana, where the three of them grab as many freebies as they can. When we arrive at Frog's Leap Winery in nearby Napa they are still plundering their stash while us grown-ups sip on Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc in the garden. At Safari West, we bounce along a rutted track in a Desert Storm-coloured four-wheel-drive, oohing and aahing at African wildlife such as wildebeests, rhinos and giraffes. It buys us a few hours at the Francis Ford Coppola Winery, which has a swimming pool, bocce court and displays of film props. In Sonoma, we zip-line through redwood groves and fly a kite on the beaches of Bodega Bay. Exhausted, we all fall into the Napa Valley Wine Train that trundles from Napa to St Helena, via Yountville, Rutherford and Oakville. There are burgers at Gott's diner, a skate park near Russian River, the Petrified Forest. When the James Dean lookalike at Cornerstone Gardens tells us we must take the hot-air balloon, we do. Floating in crimson skies at sunset makes us colour mad: jade-green hills, purple shadows on the Mayacamas Mountains, the pearl of dusk. Back at the hotel, all is calm. There are s'mores around the fire-pit for them and Merlot for us, drunk under a star-spangled, grape-black sky.'

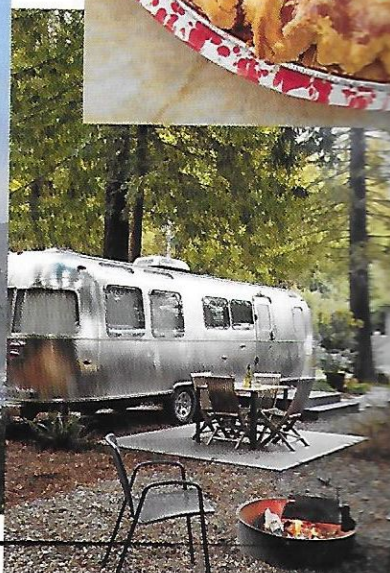
INSIDER TIP 'For those wanting an extra glass at one of the vineyards, there are a number of chauffeur companies in the region that will supply a driver to take you back to your hotel in your own rental car.'

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BY EMMA INGLIS



THE CLEVERLY CALCULATED FIRST STOP IS A TOUR OF A JELLY BEAN FACTORY, A CANDY NIRVANA WHERE THE CHILDREN GRAB AS MANY FREEBIES AS THEY CAN





ROAD TRIPPING

ROCKY MOUNTAINS, CANADA

The red mist descended almost immediately. Ranting at my children wasn't a great start to our Canadian adventure. My advice, in retrospect, is to step away. If a sulky teenager misses seeing a black bear with its cub because they're texting their friends, it's not a big deal. You want to hike to the waterfall and they don't – go without them. The point of a road trip is to pare the rules down to the bare essentials for safety and happiness. Embrace the moment, the untamed, the together times and let the epic drive, framed by sky, wind, sun and stars, do the rest. This journey, cruising along the Icefields Parkway, through the Rocky Mountains towns of Banff, Lake Louise and Jasper, was joyful for the snow-capped forests, piercing glacial lakes, gleaming ice fields and diamond waterfalls that sluiced down jagged cliffs. My kids were less interested in the above but did like whizzing up Sulphur Mountain in a cable car, white-water rafting on the Sunwapta River, taking an Ice Explorer onto the Athabasca Glacier and canoeing on Moraine Lake. Pack for all weathers. The teenage wardrobe of crop tops and itsy-bitsy skirts doesn't cut it in the Rockies. It's not uncommon in the summer months for it to drop to near freezing at night, even if the daytime temperature is mild. Places to stay range from cavernous hotels in the main villages to isolated camps up rugged peaks. Our favourite was Cathedral Mountain Lodge, a cluster of log cabins in Yoho National Park; a scene that could be out of *Legends of the Fall*. The children had their own little house – for them, satisfyingly far away from us – with a chipmunk, who would appear each morning on their porch. Inside was a North American pioneer's fantasy of life on the frontier: roaring log fires, wicker chairs, curious artefacts. Outside, zig-zagging pathways navigated little rockeries bursting with lilac-coloured columbines and harebells; the sound of a river whooshed by in the distance. Adventures included riding, fly fishing and tracking down a grizzly. Hikes were often met with a groan but provided us with some of our most memorable experiences. During those still, simple moments – when the early evening light clung to the tops of mountains and turned streams green with reflected leaves – there was laughter, chatter and the indelible understanding that what illuminates life is not the chasing after but the slowing down and living in the now. EMMA INGLIS turquoiseholidays.co.uk

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