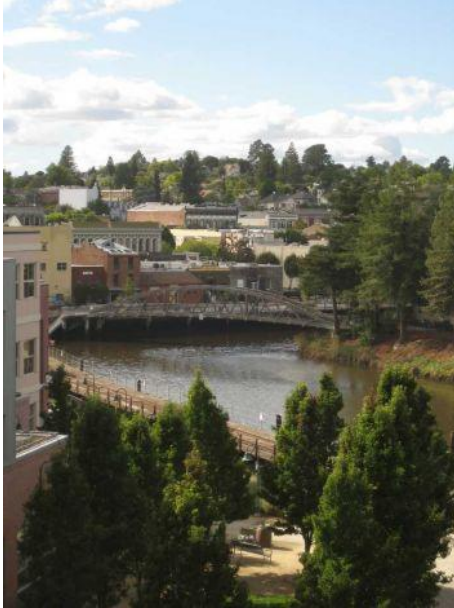


72 Hours or Less: Petaluma, Calif.



Historic California town has an ideal location.

By Kathleen Scott, Special to the Express-News

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The cool air smelled of salt, and the reflection of a pink-ribboned sky floated on the river. People greeted the evening at eateries and shops in the ornate buildings of historic Petaluma, Calif. The tranquil, yet vibrant, scene was the ideal setting for a reunion with a longtime friend.

What's there: The town straddles the Petaluma River in southern Sonoma County, about a half-hour's drive from the Napa Valley to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west. It began when pioneers came for the 1849 California Gold Rush and stayed to seek fortune in farming, manufacturing and commerce along the Petaluma River.

Today, travelers visit to enjoy the feeling of small-town relaxation and old-time history, hunting for treasure in unique shops and antiques stores. The surrounding area beckons with a year-round mild climate for hiking, biking and easy trips to wineries and rugged Pacific beaches.

Don't miss: Stroll through architectural history. In the downtown commercial district, wide sidewalks invite wandering. The area features colorful iron-fronted buildings with ornate pilasters, columns and architectural flourishes in a style popular in the 1860s-1890s. Much of the district is listed on the [National Historic Register](#).

For a look at the home-front, do a neighborhood walking tour of beautifully restored Victorian homes near the commercial district. Or drive down D Street, where large homes known as Egg Baron Mansions reflect the town's history as the one-time egg capital of the United States. Maps and walking tour itineraries: VisitPetaluma.com/heritage-of-petaluma

Shopping: Following Petaluma's reputation as an antiques mecca, we started with [Vintage Bank Antiques](http://VintageBankAntiques.com), in a 1926 bank building with three floors of antiques. 101 Petaluma Blvd., North. VintageBankAntiques.com.

A block away, Riverfront Art Gallery features 21 local painters and photographers. 132 Petaluma Blvd., North. RiverfrontArtGallery.com

Around the corner, Shunzi showcases playful women's wear, some designed by the owner. 141 Kentucky St. shunzi.net

Sweet treat: At LaLa's Creamery, the ice cream is made the by hand from local ingredients. Our favorite: chocolate-raspberry. 134 Petaluma Blvd., North. LaLasCreamery.com

Good eats: Locally roasted coffee, made-from-scratch pastry and a sunrise view of the Petaluma River made Water Street Bistro a favorite for breakfast. 100 Petaluma Blvd., WaterStreetBistro.net

For lunch or a casual dinner, Dempsey's offered good food in a brewpub setting. Wash it down with an Ugly Dog Stout, one of the six house brews. 50 E. Washington St. <http://dempseys.com>

The cozy atmosphere and exquisite Italian specialties at Cucina Paradiso would be ideal for a romantic dinner. 114 Petaluma Blvd., North. CucinaParadisoPetaluma.com

Sweet to drink: The Sonoma Valley Portworks tasting room beguiled us with pours of balanced sweetness in their ports and dessert wines. Free, adults only. 613 Second St. portworks.com

Lodging: If I hadn't stayed with my friend I would have chosen either the boutique Metro Hotel & Cafe in an 1870 mansion. 508 Petaluma Blvd., South, MetroLodging.com

Next time: I'll take a drive up the coast to see birds and seals and have lunch by the ocean.

Info: VisitPetaluma.com

Read more: <http://www.mysanantonio.com/life/travel/article/Among-friends-in-antiquer-s-paradise-2250870.php#ixzz1d8kVbCfx>