

# Historic Petaluma of American Graffiti and arm-wrestling Snoopy fame

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The movie theater in Petaluma. Photo / P. Dolinski

The historic [town of Petaluma](#), California sounds familiar as the setting of the movie *American Graffiti* and the setting for the Snoopy's World Arm Wrestling Championships, but it will surprise the visitor with its history and its contemporary attractions.

While just a short drive north of San Francisco, many of its buildings escaped the destruction of the 1906 earthquake. Petaluma's Historic Downtown is on the National Register of Historic Places for its array of Victorian homes and commercial buildings. The self-guided walking tour includes homes in a variety of architectural styles, ranging from 1860 to 1925, all within a few short blocks.

The Petaluma Historical Library & Museum is located in one of the first [Carnegie Library](#) buildings in California, with wood paneling, twin staircases, and a stained glass dome. The Petaluma Arts Center is housed in the Historic Railway Express Building which was built in 1914.

This is a town which appreciates and preserves its heritage. In 1971 they passed the Petaluma Plan to limit the number of building permits so they could manage the uncontrolled growth that the counties north of San Francisco were experiencing. The town was taken to court over the

plan, but won the case in federal court, and has been able to maintain its appeal and preserve its individuality.

Film makers as early as 1911 found this Victorian riverfront town the perfect setting. The list of films includes *Basic Instinct*, *Peggy Sue Got Married*, and *Flubber*, but is topped by the iconic 1973 film, [American Graffiti](#). The famous cop car scene was filmed on a parking lot downtown next to the movie theater, and the main drag was perfect for cruising. The town has an annual [Salute to American Graffiti](#) celebration which attracts movie fans from around the world.

The World Arm Wrestling Championships were held in Petaluma from 1952 – 2003, so that is where Peanuts cartoon beagle Snoopy headed to compete. [Charles Schultz](#) lived in nearby Santa Rosa where the museum dedicated to his work and life is located. Bill Melendez, Peanuts animator and “voice” of Snoopy lived in Petaluma, along with a long list of other musicians, actors, critics, and writers.

While Petaluma is no longer the egg capital of the world, it celebrates its agricultural heritage in April of each year with the Butter and Eggs Day parade and festival.

Tourists often visit on their way to nearby San Francisco, while visiting the surrounding wine country, or heading up the Pacific coastline, but Petaluma is more than just a stop along the way. It is a delightful destination, but as it has been called “The Perfect Small Town,” and the “Best Home Town in California,” be prepared to enjoy a lovely dinner and wonder why you have to leave.

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