

Northern California weekend

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Day trip Ukiah

Why go now: Autumn in this throwback burg explodes with foliage that rivals Vermont's.

Think small: Ukiah—population 16,000—may be the largest city in Mendocino County (and in neighboring Lake County, for that matter), but the place is as small-town as it gets. **What it has:** 19th-century architecture, charming tree-lined neighborhoods, and a laid-back vibe. **What it doesn't have:** The bustling feel of its wine country neighbors.

Change is afoot: This month, the 10,500-square-foot epicurean marketplace Branches (180 Airport Park Blvd.; branchesrestaurant.com) hits town, with a bakery, pub, steakhouse, and butcher shop. **Why here?** Owner Munther Massarweh calls Ukiah "a diamond in the rough." **Bumper crops:** Bartlett pears and (unofficially) marijuana. **Drink a pint:** At Ukiah Brewing Company (6102 S. State St.; 707/468-5898), the nation's first certified organic brewpub, where cowboys and farmers clink glasses with lawyers and police officers. **Best way to bone up before your visit:** "Ukiah," a song on the Doobie Brothers' 1973 album, *The Captain and Me*.

BY MATT VELLANO

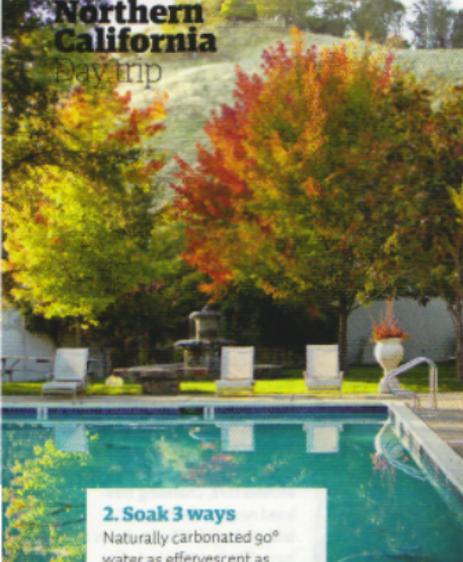
PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS J. STORY

1. Hike a hidden redwood grove

Montgomery Woods State Natural Reserve's 2,700 acres are virtually unknown to nonlocals. But this is one of the best places around to take in the quiet of a coastal redwood forest. A 3-mile round-trip trail follows Montgomery Creek to groves that have never been logged. On Orr Springs Rd., 15 miles northwest of Ukiah; parks.ca.gov or 707/537-5804.

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2. Soak 3 ways

Naturally carbonated 90° water as effervescent as Champagne bubbles up into the indoor and outdoor mineral baths at **Vichy Springs Resort**. If it's chilly, sink into the 104° hot pool; on a warm afternoon, splash in the vast 80° swimming pool (pictured). Like the views of the wooded hillside? So did Mark Twain and Jack London, who used to soak here. Memo to nudists: All public areas are swimsuit-only. From \$30; vichysprings.com or 707/462-9515.

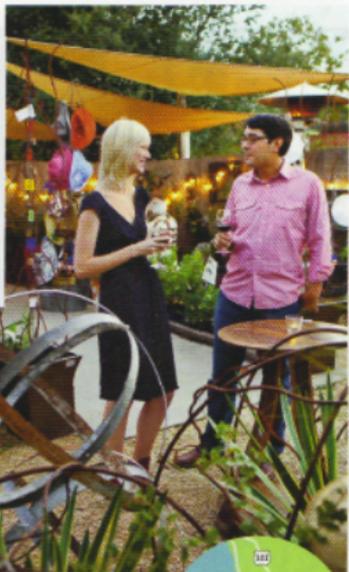
Make it a weekend



Just outside town, the 500-acre **Long Valley Ranch** is a private retreat of only two rentals. A cottage called DogTrot sits on a ridge and has a big master suite with an outdoor Japanese soaking tub for two. The larger Glass House has an open kitchen and a long glass wall overlooking a lake. Both welcome dogs. From \$300; 3-night weekend minimum; sheepdung.com

3. Sip, shop, shovel

In a tiny refurbished shoe-repair shop, **Tierra** is part tasting room, part gallery, part garden store. The owners sell artwork and jewelry from local artists, and pour wines from Mendocino County wineries. Out back, a courtyard overflows with plants and trinkets for the yard. \$5 tasting; 312 N. School St.; artgardenwine.com or 707/468-7936.



4. Pound the pavement

Downtown is best explored on foot, especially now, when fall color shows up in spectacular splashes. Don't miss the boutiques on **School Street** or the piles of squash at the Saturday morning farmers' market (S. School and E. Clay Streets; mcfarm.org/ukiahhs.html).



Getting to Ukiah

It's 115 miles north of San Francisco (46 miles north of Healdsburg) and 145 miles northwest of Sacramento.

3 more reasons to make the drive

LUNCH WITH THE MONKS

The City of Ten Thousand Buddhas is a sanatorium turned Buddhist community, complete with a temple. Locals come for the lush gardens and an Asian-style vegan lunch at **Jyun Kang Vegetarian Restaurant**. \$; 11:30–3; 4951 Bodhi Way, Talmage (3 miles east of Ukiah, across U.S. 101); cttbusa.org

A SIP OF FINE BRANDY

Fans swear the Pinot Noir-based elixirs from **Germain-Robin** outdo brands from more famous places like Cognac and Armagnac. At an unlikely warehouse in an office park south of Ukiah, get free tastes of everything—including the \$350-per-bottle Anno Domini. Call 800/782-8145 for an appointment.

A CIVILIZED DINNER

Special-night spot **Patrona** works with nearby farmers to load the dishes on its bistro menu with super-fresh produce. Case in point: duck breast with a fig and brandy sauce, served with McFadden Farm wild rice and local carrots and zucchini. \$5; closed Sun; 130 W. Stanley St.; 707/462-9181.