California Dreamin': 10 Best Reasons To Go To San Jose

Do you know the way to San Jose? In the heart of California’s high-tech Silicon Valley, vibrant San Jose and its close-knit neighbors deliver abundant diversions: enriching cultural scenes, verdant nature escapes and deliciously divergent cuisines, including Michelin-star restaurant bragging rights (more applause about that below). San Jose is a surprising, soothing and stimulating vacation destination. This cool, innovative haven has long been a hotspot of reinvention — first sprouting as an agricultural mecca, luxurious with farms, vineyards and orchards (thought to be California’s oldest settlement, founded in 1777) and now flourishing as the epicenter
of dot-com expertise, with thousands of growing tech companies, anchored by the headquarters of Google, Apple, Facebook, eBay, Netflix, Yahoo, Intel, Hewlett Packard, Cisco and Tesla. Impactful industry credentials, indeed. San Jose is the third largest city in the state and tenth largest in the USA, home to a high-income, hyper-educated population that basks in the glow of year-round warmth and sunshine, 50 miles south of San Francisco and next door to Los Gatos, Menlo Park, Mountain View, Cupertino, Palo Alto, Santa Clara and Sunnyvale. Here are 10 best bets to buzz about:

1 FOODIE FUN

Brazilian, Korean, Indian, Vietnamese — San Jose's restaurant roster spins from 'round the globe. Favorites are aplenty. Tucked into a historic boarding house, ooh-la-la La Foret wows with its Grand Marnier soufflé. Nemea Greek Taverna, owned by the Tsigaris Family, serves delectable dishes that would make Greece proud. Gracious owners Holly and John Smith please with pit-smoked barbecue and small batch bourbons at Dry Creek Grill, set in a historic Moose Lodge building. For almost four decades the Shah Family has brought the exotic taste of Morocco to Menara Moroccan Restaurant, dressing its dining spaces with colorful fabrics and booking belly dancers to entertain. Since 1977, French-inspired Le Papillon has
garnered multi-accolades and its tasting/prix-fixe menus are sophisticated feasts. Sino, a cavernous and tad-nightclubby eatery on Santana Row founded by chef Chris Yeo excites with its commanding Chinese dedication to inventive dim sum, which means "a little something from the heart." For casual fare, head to San Jose's San Pedro Square Market, a hip food hall with wide medley of morsels, such as Arepa & Mas (Columbian), Chocatoo (Australian dessert bar), Pizza Bocca Lupo and Treatbot (ice cream truck). The brick-walled, woodsy-decorated Farmers Union Restaurant & Bar rocks as an American tavern with more than 50 craft beers on tap and a notable Farmer's Old Fashioned cocktail (Knob Creek Bourbon Whiskey aged for two months with muddled Luxardo cherries and orange pulp in white oak barrel). Other satisfying drinks to clink: Good Karma Artisan Ales & Cafe (an enthusiastic craft beer community supporter with plant-based-only menu) and Paper Plane (concocting cocktails with names such as Oh My My, Pulp Fiction and Riff Raff as well as bites such as Tom Yum Boiled Peanuts, Brussels Sprouts Tacos and Mom's Spaghetti). Adore farmers' markets? There are assortments in San Jose for every taste, every day. Then scoot over to nearby Los Gatos: At The Catamount, in a historic Los Gatos building under a more-than-100-year-old tree, American fare (herbed macaroni 'n' cheese, roasted mussels, grilled swordfish with butter beans) exudes both a relaxing and polished vibe. Decidedly a laid-back hang-out yet tastefully gratifying, The Bywater is influenced by the food, drink and music of New Orleans, where chef-owner David Kinch grew up and trained under chef Paul Prudhomme at Commander's Palace. The Bywater's chef de cuisine David Morgan, who also accrued achievements in NOLA eateries, steadily steers the popular friendly menu. Go for the fried green tomatoes, po' boys, fried chicken, oysters rock-a-fella, gumbo z'herbs and raw bar, washed down with fave fine-tuned cocktails, such as a Sazerac (rye whiskey, armagnac, Herbsaint, Peychaud's bitters) and Devil Cat (gin, Batavia Arrack, Amaro, raspberry, cayenne, lime), snagging a table outdoors if you can. Kinch's significant claim to fame is his first Los Gatos restaurant, Manresa — its culinary-pendulum-swung-in-the-opposite-direction of The Bywater. With chef de cuisine Mitch Lienhard and master sommelier Jim Rollston, this three Michelin-star gastronomic trailblazer gleams. Its tasting menus call for life-affirming celebrations.
Rapturous new culinary kudos hover over San Jose's Little Portugal neighborhood, where ADEGA, an authentic Portuguese restaurant, owned by Carlos and Fernanda Carreira, sparkles a Michelin star (the only Michelin restaurant in San Jose). Chef David Costa, born in Portugal, and pastry chef Jessica Carreira, born in San Jose, create impeccable savories and sweets, presented in three-, five- and seven-course tasting menus, working their masterful talents on such homeland classics as Polvo à Lagareiro (roasted octopus), Caldo Verde (potato soup with greens), Pastel de Bacalhau (salt codfish), Ovos Conventuais (convent sweets made with egg yolks and sugar) and Amêndoa Amarga (almond tart with bittersweet chocolate). Dining here is a feel-good memory maker with a warm ambience. Some of the restaurant's walls are prettily accented with azulejos, Portugal's famous decorative blue tiles. An impressive wine list — certainly among the 100 best restaurant cellars in the USA and one of the preeminent Portuguese wine collections outside of Portugal — shines.

2 VA-VA-VOOM VINEYARDS

Photo credit: © Laura Manske

Savory perfection by chef David Costa at ADEGA, San Jose's first Michelin-star restaurant.
With all the high-tech focus this area elicits, the vineyards and wineries might be side-stepped by some visitors. A mistake. Not only are there glorious grapes to be had, but many of the wineries have fascinating back stories to hear — and property tours as well as wine tastings are gladdening. Among the many prime choices, two are particularly noteworthy. Testarossa Winery and Tasting Room in Los Gatos hails from a historic novitiate (home for seminary students) originally built in 1888, where Jesuits made altar wines and fortified wines (including a popular prize-winning Black Muscat dessert wine similar to a tawny port) for almost 100 years. During Prohibition, production ironically soared. The old stone cellars have been incorporated into the modern-day winery’s expansion. Testarossa means red one in Italian, a salute to the nickname of red-haired Rob Jensen when he was a university student in Italy, who now co-owns the winery with his wife, Diana Jensen. Winemaker Bill Brosseau completes the triumvirate team, leading the creation of small-batch Pinot Noir and Chardonnay wines that have secured 90-plus scores from leading wine publications. The rallying vintner’s song of Ridge Vineyards in Cupertino is about relying on nature and tradition rather than technology. Its anecdote-rich history stretches back to 1885, but officially kicks off as the company it is today in 1962 by partners who were Stanford Research Institute engineers and conjured a praised Monte Bello Cabernet, followed by Zinfandels (with small-scale contributions of Carignan, Chardonnay, Grenache, Petite Sirah and Syrah). Other movers-shakers joined the ranks, including a philosophy major from Stanford, who was pivotal to Ridge’s future. Refreshingly, Ridge’s pre-
industrial mission to pinpoint intensely flavor-packed grapes, limit intervention and encourage the best of what makes each grape best is a success.

3 TECH TERIFFIC

Getting up-close to tech giants can be a thrill for many travelers, cognizant that this is where their daily interactions with Google, Facebook, Apple and many other web-world luminaries cyber-pass through. Understandably, getting onto the securely guarded companies’ campuses is impossible — unless you have a business meeting there or a friend who is an employee. There are several local tour companies, such as personable Traeger Tours, that chauffeur visitors to various front-door gates, as they scope the outside of the buildings, accompanied by ace guides who deftly share stories galore. Sharon Traeger points out such street signs as Hacker Way, Apple Parkway and Infinite Loop, as well as drives past the modest, ranch-style, Los Altos childhood home of Steve Jobs, where, during the mid-1970s, he and Steve Wozniak built the first Apple computer in the garage. If you want a deeper dive (and have deeper wallet resources), Silicon Valley Legends Tour orchestrates further interactive opportunities, for example a day that starts with a presentation at the Silicon Valley Innovation Center, followed by a meeting at Stanford University, and then stops at Google headquarters, the Intel Museum, Apple headquarters and a Tesla experience that includes a Model X test drive,
while interfacing with Silicon Valley doers along the way.

Another tech-savvy, bright idea is San Jose's The Tech Museum of Innovation, a hands-on technology and science museum. Its well-designed, experiential learning exhibits — such as Body Worlds Decoded, Cyber Detectives, Innovations in Healthcare, Reboot Reality and Tech for Global Good — amply engage visitors of all ages.

4 NURTURED BY NATURE

With an astounding network of 60 miles of trails (walking, hiking, biking) and 285 miles of on-street bikeways, San Jose extensively connects residential neighborhoods to places of recreation and work, making it a leader in green commuting. Often commended as one of the healthiest USA cities, San Jose and its vicinity offer dozens of nature-cherished, outdoor activities, such as the 5.5-acre Municipal Rose Garden (4,000 rose shrubs with 189 varieties), 5,242-acre Castle Rock State Park (with giant redwood and fir trees, horseback riding and rock climbing), 3.3-acre Historic Orchard (with more than 200 fruit trees), 4,471-acre Calero Reservoir County Park, 740-acre Alum Rock Park (within a canyon in the foothills of the Diablo Mountain Range), 172-acre Kelley Park (with a butterfly garden and Japanese friendship gardens) and Almaden Lake Park with 65 acres of
land, 30 acres of lake (for peddle boating, fishing, playing horse shoes, volleyball and bocce ball).

5 ART FROM THE HEART

The permanent collection of the San Jose Museum of Art encompasses approximately 2,500 modern and contemporary artworks. Its revolving exhibitions are visually exciting draws. Downtown San Jose's SoFA district embraces art galleries, independent cafes and boutiques lauding local artists and musicians — and hosts a monthly South First Fridays Art Walk, an easy mingling-with-the-locals event. The San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art is an eye-opener; its compelling and challenging works are inspirational. For a much different art focus, Rosicrusian Egyptian Museum & Planetarium harbors the biggest collection of Egyptian artifacts in Western North America. And for a softer look, the San Jose Museum of Quilts & Textiles showcases more than 1,000 works in its permanent collection, and produces shows that center-stage quilt-makers, fiber artists and craft experts.

6 SHOPS THAT POP
San Jose's Santana Row has been likened to Beverly Hills' Rodeo Drive, yet this attractive revitalized downtown area feels much more approachable and affordable with both national big-name stores and one-of-a-kind artisanal shops. Seeking hand-crafted gifts — from artwork to jewelry? Noodle around Makers Market. Want to discover European and Asian shoe and clothing designers? Stop by Boutique Harajuku. Feeling in a fancy mood? Penelope Boutique stocks fabulous frocks — from special occasion dresses to casual statement pieces.

7 SPIRITED AMUSEMENT
Get ready for an out-of-this-world experience at the **Winchester Mystery House**, a mind-boggling, oddity-revered, intriguing 160-room mansion, energetically built from an original two-story, eight-room farmhouse, by wealthy firearm heiress Sarah Winchester, who died in 1922. After the deaths of her infant daughter and husband caused her to believe that she was cursed, Winchester consulted spiritualists and sought to appease the ghosts of people murdered by Winchester rifles. Her constant construction went on for 38 years. It is both spooky and beautiful — with ornate woodwork and stained glass. She obsessed about the number 13 (13-step stairways, 13-paneled windows, 13 bathrooms, 13 ceiling panels in many ceilings; even Winchester’s will had 13 parts which she signed 13 times). Tiny rooms, spider-web motifs, corridors that lead nowhere, a door that opens to a two-story drop, doors that open onto blank walls, stairs that stop at a ceiling, windows facing walls and into other rooms, as well as positioned in a floor. There is a séance room, a sumptuous ballroom built almost entirely without nails and, according to many guides, paranormal activity afloat. Now open to the public with daily tours and featured on a few TV shows, the property has for the first time been used as movie set for the making of CBS Films' **Winchester: The House That Ghosts Built**, a supernatural thriller starring Helen Mirren and Jason Clarke, released February, 2018. See the trailer:
WINCHESTER - Teaser Trailer - HD (Helen Mirren, Jason Clarke)

8 REACH FOR THE STARS

For another kind of out-of-this-world experience, explore the Lick Observatory, owned and operated by the University of California. It is the world's first
permanently occupied mountaintop observatory, galaxy-gazing since 1888. On the awesome 360-degree-view summit of Mount Hamilton in the Diablo Mountain Range just east of San Jose, visitors can glimpse the cosmos directly through the 36-inch great refractor. The observatory has recently partnered with physicist Stephen Hawking on a $100 million breakthrough initiative to seek intelligent life in the universe. Join lively lectures by renowned astronomers. Stare at a stellar collection of photographs and maps. Make a day of it: Before driving the winding road to the peak for a starry-night sojourn, dine en route at the Italian-inspired, farm-to-table Grandview Restaurant in Mount Hamilton, if possible reserving a table on the terrace to readily take in the spectacular sweeping Santa Clara valley view. Its skillful wait staff and pianist, whose music invigorates diners to twirl around the dance floor, make this mountainside retreat a personal high.

9 A TRIO OF HAPPY ECO, EDU, EMO FACTS

San Jose is a pro-ecology superstar, recycling most of its garbage and reducing pollution with its Bring Your Own Bag Ordinance: Grocery stores, pharmacies and other retailers cannot provide plastic bags at checkout. The Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library is the largest joint university-municipal library in the USA (a collaboration of San Jose State University and San Jose Public Library system), which can seat more than 3,500 visitors at the same time and offer public use of 300
computers. Swing by to eye the collection of items about Dr. King and the civil rights movement (there is also free wifi). And according to Glassdoor, a leading job and recruiting site, San Jose workers rank their on-job satisfaction at the tippy-top level of Americans.

10 ALL THE RIGHT NIGHT MOVES

In San Jose: The elegant, 20-story, two-tower Fairmont San Jose (728 guest rooms with 77 suites) garners multiple restaurants, including the heartily recommended The Grill on the Alley (known for its steaks, chops, seafood, fudge brownie pie), as well as the rejuvenating Tova Day Spa, 24-hour fitness center, rooftop pool and gazebo. Chic Hotel Valencia Santana Row (215 guest rooms) spotlights a swanky Vbar cocktail lounge, custom-designed beds covered with Egyptian-cotton linens and a year-round outdoor swimming pool and hot tub. An Art Deco-style building with Spanish Colonial Revival decor, Hotel De Anza, a Destination Hotel (100 guest rooms) on the National Register of Historic Places, heralds a jazz club, Italian restaurant and is notable for the celebrities that have graced its doors since opening in 1931. Dolce Hayes Mansion (214 guest rooms), a posh former private estate designed in Spanish Colonial Revival-style, is on the National Register of Historic Places and sports an outdoor pool, tennis courts, large fitness center and an al fresco lounge ideal for toasting the sun down. In Los Gatos: Hotel Los Gatos & Spa, a
Greystone Hotel (72 spacious guest rooms) radiates both Mediterranean-style flair and California charm in a villa-esque, floral-bedecked, artwork-indulgent layout that includes an outdoor pool with jets-just-right hot tub, comfy bathrobes with slippers, Egyptian-cotton linens and Gilchrist & Soames toiletries; dog-friendly, too, with advance notice. Its Greek Dio Deka restaurant excels. Rally for the Keftethakia (skewered lamb meatballs with flavorful Kefalotiri cheese) and whole Branzino fish with sage and thyme-crusted lemon potatoes, then linger over the Baklava strudel with slow-roasted bananas and vanilla bean gelato. Now you know the way to San Jose.

For more info, go to Visit San Jose and Visit California.

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