



Murrieta, California Travel Guide: Where to Eat, Stay, and Play

Murrieta is a bit of a Southern California hidden gem. It is located about an hour north of San Diego, but feels a world away from the hustle and bustle of the city.

Here, you'll find rolling hills dotted with horse pastures, sprawling vineyards, picturesque mineral springs, charming restaurants, and plenty of outdoor adventures.

We spent a weekend exploring this beautiful area in partnership with [Explore Murrieta](#), and it surprised us in the best way possible. Keep reading to discover the best places to eat, stay, and play during a weekend in Murrieta, California!

How to Spend the Perfect Weekend in Murrieta, California

The Best Things to Do in Murrieta

Hot Air Balloon Ride

This was our first time riding in a hot air balloon, and I have to admit that I was a little nervous. However, the whole experience was nothing short of magical, and I would do it again in a heartbeat!

We booked the experience through [Magical Adventure Balloon Rides](#), and it began with an early morning wake-up call. We met at a parking lot at 6 am, then were picked up and driven to the launch site, where we watched the fascinating inflation process.

It began with a cold inflation using a large fan to blow the balloon open. Then came the hot inflation, where propane burners heated the air inside the balloon, slowly bringing it upright and getting it ready for takeoff.

Soon, it was time to climb aboard, and we gently began rising above the countryside. I was impressed with how smooth the ride was. There wasn't any turbulence or bumps like what you experience in an airplane.

The scenery was spectacular as the early morning light broke through the clouds and illuminated the landscape. It was so peaceful as we floated over wine country vineyards, the placid waters of Lake Skinner, and picturesque countryside estates.

Then we got an extra-special surprise. Our pilot climbed through the cloud layer and took us up to 7,000 feet, where we floated above the clouds. Being suspended in the open air above a blanket of pillowy clouds was unlike anything I've ever experienced before. It was a surreal moment that I'll never forget!

One of the most interesting things about hot air ballooning is that the pilot doesn't actually steer the balloon in the traditional sense. The wind determines the direction of travel, while the pilot controls the balloon's altitude. By moving between different wind layers at various heights, they can influence the balloon's direction and navigate in a general direction.

With that being said, the landing location is different every time. A ground crew follows the balloon throughout the flight and meets you wherever you land. In our case, we landed in the front yard of a farmhouse. It was very exciting and entertaining for the neighbors to watch!

The actual flight lasted about an hour, but the entire experience took around three hours from start to finish, so plan accordingly.

Murrieta Hot Springs

We were so impressed with the beautiful property and amenities at [Murrieta Hot Springs](#).

The sprawling 46-acre resort dates back to 1903, when it began as a Mineral Mud Bath House. Today, it has expanded to include more than 50 geothermal soaking pools, cold plunges, swimming pools, and water features.

The property is beautifully landscaped with towering palm trees, blooming gardens, and a serene lake. You can find everything, from large swimming pools lined with lounge chairs to secluded coves and even concrete soaking tubs situated on the edge of the lake.

I especially loved the Panoramic Sauna located on the top floor of the Bathhouse. The windows overlooking the pool are just beautiful.

If you're hungry, there are a few different restaurants, cafes, and bars throughout the property. We grabbed lunch at [Cafe Azuli](#), a poolside cafe serving healthy dishes that are packed with flavor.

I loved the Ancient Grain Power Bowl with quinoa, sweet potato, arugula, pickled red onions, cherry tomatoes, diced avocado, toasted pecans, and an orange tahini dressing.

I also ordered a mocktail from the Tortoise Shell, and sipping it poolside made me feel like we'd been transported to a resort in Mexico!

The hot springs are open 24 hours a day. [Overnight guests](#) have access to the hot springs throughout their stay, but you can also purchase a day pass if you're not staying at the resort.

The mineral-rich geothermal water comes from a natural underground source that provides wellness benefits. We felt so relaxed and rejuvenated after spending the day here!

Susie Q Ranch

We went on a sunset trail ride at [Susie Q Ranch](#), and it was the perfect way to end the day!

Susie Q Ranch is a woman-owned business run by Susie herself. The ranch began offering guided trail rides in 2004 and has built an excellent reputation over the past 20+ years.

The ranch is home to a herd of incredibly sweet horses. I rode Spirit, who was so gentle, calm, and easy to ride.

When we first arrived, we met our amazing trail guide, Karen, and got acquainted with the horses. After being fitted with helmets, we mounted up and headed out onto the trail.

Our 75-minute ride took us through a nearby nature preserve, where we enjoyed rolling hills and panoramic views of the surrounding landscape.

We especially loved riding in the evening when the golden light began to wash over the hills. It was incredibly peaceful to be out in nature, soaking in the warm evening glow with nothing but the rhythmic sound of the horses' hooves echoing in the air.

When we returned to the ranch, we treated the horses to a giant carrot stick before saying our goodbyes. It was such a memorable experience!

Callaway Vineyard

Murrieta sits in the picturesque Temecula Valley, Southern California's premier wine country. The landscape reminds me so much of Tuscany, with a patchwork of vineyards scattered across the hillsides and rows of Italian Cypress trees lining the roads.

The valley is home to 47 wineries, including Callaway Vineyard, which was founded in 1974 as the first winery in Temecula Valley.

Callaway is perched on a hilltop with panoramic views over the surrounding vineyards. It draws visitors from near and far for its wine-tasting experiences. Even if you don't drink wine, you can still enjoy a winery & estate tour and a decadent meal at Meritage Restaurant.

A Few More Recommendations:

- **Tenaja Falls:** This seasonal 150-foot waterfall is located in San Mateo Canyon Wilderness Area and can be reached by a 1.5-mile out-and-back trail.
- **Greer Ranch:** This is one of the best places to go mountain biking near Murrieta, with a network of groomed trails, berms, and jumps.

- **Santa Rosa Plateau Ecological Reserve:** This 9,000-acre reserve offers hiking trails, beautiful scenery, and diverse wildlife.
- **E-bike Rentals:** [Rent an e-bike](#) and ride through the heart of Temecula Valley's wine country.

The Best Places to Eat in Murrieta

Downtown PUBlic

Our favorite meal in Murrieta was at [Downtown PUBlic](#), Murrieta's first gastropub.

We loved the romantic outdoor patio with firepits at the tables and string lights hanging overhead. It was such a cozy setting for a fall evening.

The food was every bit as impressive as the ambiance. We started with the Tomato Addiction, and it truly was addictive! Think chewy sourdough topped with creamy brie and seasoned sautéed tomatoes. It was divine.

My husband ordered the Soy Honey Salmon, a sesame-crusting salmon that was pan-seared and served over a bed of garlic fried rice, then drizzled with a sweet and savory soy-honey glaze. He absolutely loved it!

I went with the Orecchiette Mac & Cheese. I learned to make orecchiette pasta in Italy this past summer, so I was especially excited to try it, and it did not disappoint. The pasta was tossed in a creamy aged Gouda and white cheddar sauce and topped with toasted sourdough crumbs. It was the ultimate comfort dish for a crisp fall evening gathered around the fire.

Honeycutt Farms Cafe

[Honeycutt Farms Cafe](#) has been a beloved staple in the Murrieta community since 1990. The cafe is now under new ownership, and they have done a wonderful job refreshing both the space and the menu while maintaining its welcoming, down-home charm.

If you're looking for hearty comfort dishes made from scratch using fresh ingredients, this is the place to go.

Honeycutt Farms Cafe is open for both breakfast and lunch, but we stopped in to try the breakfast menu. I ordered the Peach Perfect French Toast, topped with caramelized peaches, fresh blueberries, and freshly whipped sweetened cream. It was every bit as indulgent as it sounds!

My husband went with the Diced Honeycutt Ham & Eggs, served with seasoned potatoes and a warm biscuit smothered in gravy. We both loved our meals and left feeling full, happy, and satisfied!

Be sure to browse their selection of specialty packaged goods before you leave. They make great souvenirs or gifts, with options like butter pecan syrup, hot honey, blackberry butter,

and bacon brittle.

Nonno's Ristorante

[Nonno's Ristorante](#) is the perfect spot for a romantic date night, with a cozy atmosphere and delicious Italian cuisine.

We were impressed by how authentic everything tasted. We visited Italy a few months earlier, and this meal was just as good as the meals we ate there! The dishes are made with high-quality ingredients, many of which are locally sourced whenever possible, and you can taste the freshness in every bite.

I love handmade ravioli, so when our waiter told us that one of the evening's specials was butternut squash ravioli with toasted walnuts and pancetta, it was an immediate yes for me! The combination of sweet, creamy squash with the salty pancetta and crunchy walnuts was incredible.

We also ordered the lobster & shrimp ravioli and Caprese di Burrata, which were both incredibly flavorful and delicious.

For dessert, we shared the crème brûlée. It was perfectly rich and creamy, with a satisfying caramelized sugar topping. It totally hit the spot!

The Crafted Scone

I'll be honest, [The Crafted Scone](#) has some of the best scones I've ever tasted. This charming boutique bakeshop was opened by Amanda in 2020, and every recipe was created and perfected in her own home kitchen. She absolutely nailed it!

They offer a delicious variety of traditional and creative scone flavors, all baked fresh daily. I ordered the Salted Brown Butter Scone, and it was everything a scone should be. It was perfectly moist, buttery, and crumbly with a sweetened glaze. It practically melted in my mouth!

My husband ordered the Turkey Sconewich, made with an herb and onion scone filled with turkey, Havarti cheese, lettuce, tomato, and mango chutney. It was so delicious and filling!

A Few More Recommendations:

- **Calhoun Family Texas Barbecue:** The best Texas-style BBQ outside of Texas! Order the smoked ribs with a side of brisket baked beans, and sweet potato pie for dessert.
- **8 Bit Brewing Company:** Enjoy a burger, craft beer, and arcade games at this unique brewery.
- **Sharon's Creole Kitchen:** If you're craving some Southern fare, the Cajun dishes at Sharon's Creole Kitchen will transport you to the streets of New Orleans!
- **Kan Zaman Restaurant:** This casual spot serves authentic Mediterranean and Middle Eastern dishes. Their specialties are kabobs, shawarma platters, and freshly baked pita

bread served with homemade hummus.

Where to Stay in Murrieta

We are loyal Marriott fans and enjoyed staying at the Courtyard Marriott during our visit. As always, the service was excellent, the rooms were clean and comfortable, and the location couldn't be beat. We were within about a 15-minute drive of all the attractions and restaurants we visited during our stay, making it a convenient home base for exploring Murrieta and the surrounding area.

The hotel features modern guest rooms, an outdoor pool, hot tub, fitness center, and rooftop lounge. The rooftop appeared to be undergoing renovations during our visit, but once completed, it looks like it will be a great spot to relax, with outdoor seating, fire pits, and panoramic views.

Final Thoughts

If you're planning a trip to San Diego, I highly recommend making the hour-or-so drive to Murrieta and experiencing a different side of Southern California. With unique outdoor activities, a thriving food scene, and beautiful weather year-round, it's the perfect spot for a weekend getaway.

We loved the variety of experiences Murrieta offered during our stay. There is something for everyone, from a sunrise hot air balloon ride and a relaxing soak in the hot springs to horseback riding through the countryside at sunset, exploring local wineries, and enjoying incredible meals at local restaurants.

And while Murrieta makes a great getaway from San Diego, it's also an easy destination for a weekend road trip from other parts of Southern California and even Arizona. Whether you're looking for an adventurous escape, a romantic couples' getaway, or simply a chance to slow down and enjoy some good food and beautiful scenery, Murrieta has plenty to offer.

After spending a few days exploring the area, we left feeling like we had discovered a true hidden gem in Southern California, and we can't wait to return!