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SANTA MARIA WINE COUNTRY IS WINTER WONDERLAND *Fine Wines, Open Roads and Blue Skies Offer Seasonal Touring Magic*

SANTA MARIA, CA—Stash the snow shovel, toss the mittens and grab a wine glass—it's wintertime in the Santa Maria Valley.

Indeed, here on the northern perimeter of the famed Santa Barbara County wine country, there is perhaps no better season to partake in the pastime of wine touring. The summer crowds have waned, the new vintages are released and the weather is frequently fabulous.

"As things quiet down this time of year, you get a lot of one-on-one time in the winery tasting rooms, which is great for learning about wine," said April Tunnell, manager of the Santa Maria Valley Visitor & Convention Bureau. "It is also one of our prettiest seasons here on the Central Coast, with green hills and blue skies."

The Santa Maria Valley Wine Trail is home to some of California's most acclaimed wineries, including **Byron Vineyard & Winery, Cambria Winery & Vineyard, Cottonwood Canyon Vineyard & Winery, Foxen Vineyard, McKeon-Phillips Winery** and **Rancho Sisquoc Winery**. The Santa Maria Valley Wine Trail merges with the Foxen Canyon Wine Trail, which leads south to **Zaca Mesa Winery, Fess Parker Winery, Firestone Vineyard** and dozens of other wineries in the neighboring Santa Ynez Valley.

The Santa Maria Valley boasts a rare "transverse" geography, an east-to-west orientation that channels cool ocean air directly into the valley. The result is one of California's longest growing seasons, which in turn ensures the development of complex, flavorful and exquisitely balanced grapes. Pinot Noir, Syrah and Chardonnay are among the varietals that excel in the region.

In a recent issue of *Food & Wine* magazine, wine authority **Robert M. Parker, Jr.** was asked to "make 12 bold predictions" about the future of wine. Among these, he made the following prediction: "**California's Central Coast will rule America**... Look for wines from California's Central Coast to take their place alongside the hallowed bottlings of Napa and Sonoma valleys. No viticultural region has demonstrated as much progress in quality and potential for greatness as the Central Coast, with its Rhône varietals, and the Santa Barbara region, where the Burgundian varietals Chardonnay and Pinot Noir are planted in its cooler climates."

The Santa Maria Valley Visitor & Convention Bureau now offers a free **Santa Maria Valley Wine Trail map** with information on local wineries. For maps, year-round wine getaway packages and other local wine-related resources, visit www.santamaria.com or call (800) 331-3779 ext. 851.

Serving the greater Santa Maria Valley in the heart of California's Central Coast, the Santa Maria Valley Chamber of Commerce and Visitor & Convention Bureau is a nonprofit association that facilitates local tourism and provides information on the region's many attractions and visitor services. Famed for its fine wines, natural wonders, agricultural heritage and flavorful barbecue, the Santa Maria Valley offers a broad range of cultural, sporting and historical experiences. For information on lodging, dining, tours, attractions and events, please contact the Santa Maria Valley Chamber of Commerce and Visitor & Convention Bureau at (800) 331-3779, or visit www.santamaria.com.

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- See Next Page for More Information on Santa Maria Valley Wines -

WINERIES OF THE SANTA MARIA VALLEY

Located just 10 minutes east of downtown Santa Maria, **Cottonwood Canyon Winery & Vineyard** specializes in limited-production Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and other varietals crafted from its estate and other local vineyards, some of which are available only in the tasting room. The winery's picturesque wine caves are the first of their kind in Santa Barbara County, and are often used as a venue for concerts, dinners and events. The tasting room is open daily. For more information call 805-937-8418 or visit www.cottonwoodcanyon.com. Cottonwood Canyon is located at 3940 Dominion Road in Santa Maria.

Cambria Winery & Vineyard is recognized for its lush, tropical Chardonnay, velvety Pinot Noir and rich, spicy Syrah. A new deck with stunning views will be completed this winter. The tasting room is open on weekends (and weekdays by appointment). For information call 805-937-8091 or visit www.cambriawines.com. Cambria Winery is located at 5475 Chardonnay Lane.

The rural road that snakes toward **Rancho Sisquoc Winery's** rustic tasting room transports visitors to a gentler era. Here, a picturesque 1875 chapel, barn and ranch artifacts invite guests into what the Chumash Indians called "Siaquoc" or gathering place. The winery is open 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily and features picturesque picnic facilities. Call 805-934-4332 or visit www.ranchosisquoc.com for more information. The winery is located at 6600 Foxen Canyon Road in Santa Maria.

Located in an old blacksmith shop, the tranquil, rustic setting of **Foxen Vineyard** is a perfect backdrop for sampling the winery's Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Syrah and Cabernet Franc. A small picnic area graces its grounds and visitors are welcome from noon to 4 p.m. on Friday through Monday. Call 805-937-4251 for more information. Foxen is located at 7200 Foxen Canyon Road.

Founded in 1984 by legendary local winemaker Ken Brown, **Byron Vineyard & Winery** has gained national and international recognition for world-class Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Tasting is by appointment only. For appointments, call 805-937-7288. Byron is located at 5230 Tepusquet Canyon Road.

Art is frequently sold right along with wine at **McKeon-Phillips Winery**. And it's no wonder as owner/winemaker Ardison Phillips is himself an artist who rubbed elbows with such creative luminaries as Warhol and Diebenkorn before becoming a successful restaurateur in the Hollywood Hills. Today, Phillips pairs his passion for art, food and wine through his winery's full, robust and flavorful Cabernets, Sauvignon Blanc, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Cabernet Franc. The McKeon-Phillips tasting room is open weekends from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. and is located at 2115 South Blosser Road, Suite 114 in Santa Maria. Contact 805-928-3025 for information or visit www.mckeonphillipswinery.com.

LOCAL WINE EVENTS

The Santa Maria Valley and neighboring areas play host to several wine events throughout the year. On March 4 -5, 2005, Pinot Noir aficionados will find heaven just up the road in Shell Beach at the **World of Pinot Noir**, a gathering of the Central Coast's and the world's finest Pinot Noir producers. For information, visit www.wopn.com. On April 9, 2005, the **Santa Barbara County Vintners Festival** in the Santa Ynez Valley will showcase more than 50 local wineries. And, the **Autumn Arts Grapes and Grains Festival** in Santa Maria and the **Celebration of Harvest** at Rancho Sisquoc Winery also showcase local wines every autumn. Visit www.santamaria.com for information. Don't forget that the individual wineries also have their own wine classes, winemaker dinners and other special events throughout the year. Contact the wineries directly for details!

WINE & DINE

The Santa Maria Valley is home to numerous restaurants with inspired cuisine and wines to match. Two local standouts are the **Vintner's Bar & Grill** and **Portabella**.

The casually elegant Vintner's Bar & Grill offers contemporary fine dining with a Northern Italian influence. Our extensive wine list features local varietals! The Vintner's Bar & Grill is located at the Radisson Hotel at 3455 Skyway Drive. Phone: 805-928-8000.

Portabella is a new addition to the local dining scene and boasts an excellent wine list that captures the delicious variety of Central Coast wines. Chef Andrew Kossuth presides over an extensive menu of pasta entrees, in addition to beef, veal, chicken, and seafood specialties. Portabella is located at the Holiday Inn & Suites at 2100 North Broadway. Phone: 805-928-6000.

For additional information on local restaurants, visit www.santamaria.com.