

A Perfect Day in San Rafael

By **Sarah Medina** on April 05, 2014 8:00 AM

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Photo via Keep Marin Marin

Just across the Golden Gate Bridge are small towns ripe for adventure. Each weekend, we'll highlight a stretch of pavement where you could spend an entire day and night. This week: San Rafael.

Admire

It's hard to visit this sleepy town without taking notice of the historic **Mission San Rafael Arcangel**. Founded in 1817, the church served as a medical sister-mission to Mission Dolores to treat sick Native Americans throughout the Bay Area – making it California's first sanitarium. It became a full mission in its own right in 1822. The space has a chaotic history, including serving as John C. Fremont's headquarters during the pivotal **Bear Flag Revolt**. See the beautiful old church for yourself, its open daily from 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Market

The **Marin County Civic Center** was the last commission for famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The expansive complex stretches across two valleys just east of the 101 and you can't miss its distinctive pink stucco walls, blue roof, and scalloped balconies. Head to the center just to admire the architecture, but stay for the third largest **farmers market** in California hosted in the parking lot of the historic building every Sunday at 8:00 a.m. Nearly 200 local farmers and artisans gather here in the summer to sell their wares. If you're looking for a weekday escape, this is the place to be Thursday mornings from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. for all your lunchtime needs. You can get fresh fruits and veggies, gourmet breads, coffee, and pastries while walking through the colorful aisles of vendors.

Drink

Looking for somewhere to refuel after a long day? You'll find farm to table tapas and local wines galore at the recently revamped **Vin Antico**. Nab a window table for views of the pedestrian scene outside while still taking in the gorgeous open kitchen. Braised short ribs, flatbread, rabbit served two ways, roasted chicken, brown rice risotto, and the burger with tomato ketchup jam are all worth trying paired with a glass of wine from the extensive collection. And make sure to finish off the meal with a bite of apple upside down cake with

bourbon sauce and freshly whipped cream. Happy hour is Tuesday-Friday, 4:30 - 6:00 p.m.

Eat

Just steps from the [California Film Institute](#) – stop by for a flick before or after dinner – **Il Davide** features a full bar, wood furnishings, and scrumptious Italian fare. The menu includes gourmet offerings like potato gnocchi with lamb shank, veal topped with lemon sauce, and ravioli stuffed with butternut squash, ricotta and mascarpone cheese. It's the perfect spot for date night. If you're in the mood for something a little more casual, **Sol Food** is a family-friendly, colorful, Puerto Rican restaurant with hearty drinks served in Mason jars and specials every day of the week. Just need a snack? Opt for one of their variations of fried platanos.

Party

The stylish **Fenix** venue sports marble floors, tables for dining, and a backlit bar, all in the color palette of the mythological phoenix. The main room doubles as a nightclub, with intimate, lounge-style seating in front of a large stage that hosts rock 'n' roll cover bands and up-and-comers alike. But feel free to come here just for the cheeky food. With pun-filled names like "We Got the Beet," "Bad to the Bone," and "Sweet Home South Carolina," you can't go wrong with any of the flavorful small plates and entrees. Music plays most nights and at Sunday brunch. Check out the calendar [here](#).

Hike

Alright, so this hike is not exactly near San Rafael, but if you're in Marin County at all, it's too good to pass up. Take the path less traveled to **Muir Woods** and enjoy the area's natural treasures without the crowds. Bootjack Trail is a backdoor route that starts from the Pantoll parking lot and runs parallel to Redwood Creek, crossing it from left to right, over bridges and along natural rock steps—mostly under the redwood canopy. The second half of the hike goes through Muir Woods and along the Ben Johnson Trail. Bring along some snacks for a picnic in sunny Van Wyck Meadow. Park at the Pantoll parking lot in Mount Tamalpais State Park, off of Panoramic Highway. Start on the Alpine Trail behind the bus stop at the driveway entrance to the parking lot. Go about a half-mile to the Bootjack Trail, turn right and descend 1.5 miles into Muir Woods. Turn right, go across Bridge 4 and hike up the Ben Johnson Trail for about a mile. Continue one-third of a mile on the Stapelveldt Trail up to the Pantoll parking lot. Get more information [here](#).

For more one-stop adventure ideas, check out [all our Weekend Warriors](#).