

Roman Holiday: How a Scooter Getaway Changed my Life

Written by Jessica Prokup



If I had one thing in common with Audrey Hepburn's [Princess Anne](#), it was being overwhelmed by a demanding job. But I did fall for a newsman, careen around on a scooter and escape from responsibility for a couple of days. Although, unlike Hepburn, I didn't begin my adventure knocked out on tranquilizers.

Last summer, I'd started re-dating an old boyfriend, a motojournalist named Brian. He'd been invited to go on a Vespa tour of Northern California wineries and asked me to come along. I spend a lot of time on two wheels, but rarely on scooters; I love commuting and canyon carving on my GSX-R. Still, a little roaming on step-throughs sounded pretty relaxing, as it included traipsing around wine country, eating fine meals and curling up in romantic hotels. That is, depending on how much I liked spending two days on tiny wheels and shacking up with my once ex-boyfriend...for the first time in five years. Tally ho!

We decided to make a full motorcycle journey out of the trip, going to and from wine country on bigger bikes. Leaving L.A. early on a Sunday morning, we rode north primarily on byways,

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winding over mountain passes from coast to valley, with farms and vineyards and psychotic temperature changes along the way. The roads varied between sweepers and tight corners, sometimes rollercoasting through broad farmland. I'd borrowed a [Suzuki Gladius](#) for the trip, which was fun in the twisties but deprived me of wind protection at higher speeds, and I was fried by the time we reached the Bay area that evening. We collapsed in a hotel in Santa Rosa, about 50 miles north of San Francisco, and barely said goodnight before falling asleep.

Twist and Go

Santa Rosa is home to [Revolution Moto](#) (a scooter boutique) and [Wine Country Vespa](#) (a scooter tour company) owned by a couple (Roy and Johnna Gattinella) who love scooters, Italian lifestyle and wine. They are very hard not to like. Both self-described corporate refugees, they've done what many of us daydream about: dropping out of the rat race and starting their own business. The one that's a labor of love.

We met Roy and Johnna at the shop on Monday morning. Though I was stiff from the previous day, I felt revived and excited, like a real person on a real vacation, something I don't experience much. Sipping espresso, we chose our rides, a [GTS 250](#) and an [LX 150](#). A plush seat, storage space and an automatic tranny seemed like manna from heaven after hammering over 500 miles on a naked sportbike. Still, they were awfully *small*. And pastel.

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After some leisurely chatting and a little paperwork, it was time to go. The other couple in our group, a cute pair of 20-something newlyweds, were riding two-up. With Roy in the lead, Johnna riding sweep and the chase van bringing up the rear, we began our caravan through downtown Santa Rosa. I felt a bit silly, but I kind of liked being perched on the little scoot, with small twists of throttle and easy, mindless maneuvering. I couldn't help giggling in my helmet at the Vespa crusade, our little troupe buzzing about town in formation. We passed a few motorcycles but nobody waved at us.

Small Pleasures

Before long the landscape turned from city to country, and I breathed a sigh of relief. Enveloped in a fragrant blue sky, I unwound, one by one, every tight fiber of muscle, every tense thread of mind. We rolled past long stretches of grapevines. Green slopes fringed with oaks and pines. Perfect quilts of farmland. There I was, relaxed and happy, turning off the hard part of me that must shift and throttle and lean. All that was left was a quiet little motor, a comfortable seat and an open road amid beautiful scenery.



Our first stop was [Matanzas Creek Winery](#), which has stunning lavender gardens. The manager walked us through their process of creating bath and home products, then led us to the airy tasting room, where we sipped wine and enjoyed the view through enormous glass

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windows. Afterwards, seated against cushioned chairs on the deck, we snacked on organic apples and Perrier. pleasures, this is not the trip for you.

If you don't enjoy small

We left the winery and headed east towards Kenwood, winding along tiny tree-lined roads with sharp curves and endless ruts. The kind of ride that quickly gets hairy on a bike but made me laugh on the scooter. Eventually we landed at [Chateau St. Jean](#), a grand estate with a stately mansion and perfectly manicured gardens. After visiting the shop and exploring the grounds, we sat at picnic tables beneath giant old trees with a spread of fresh bread, cheeses, salads and fruit. Time was relaxed, everything was easy. Plenty of moments to wander off and cuddle on a bench, rediscovering someone I was once close to.

Our ride now took us south towards [Figone's](#) in Glen Ellen, an olive oil company with a rich heritage in Napa Valley and a European-inspired tasting bar/boutique. We dipped crusty bread into fruit- and herb-flavored olive oils and balsamic vinegars, and were given a tour of the oil-making side of the shop. By the time we heard about the annual community olive-oil pressing, I was ready to relocate to Napa.

Our last stop was the [MacArthur Place Inn & Spa](#) in Sonoma, an historic estate turned romantic resort. Flagstone walkways wind around fountains, sculptures and benches, ensuring that a) it feels like a sanctuary, and b) I got lost. Our little group relaxed in the library with wine and cheese, and we hit that point with a tour group when you start telling embarrassing stories. I was literally crying with laughter. We all walked to a café for dinner, and then went back to our suites, alone at last. Fireplace, whirlpool, giant comforter, evening glow. People, I melted.

Into the Sunset

I began the second day on the back of Brian's scooter, so I could shoot photos for his magazine story. This had the potential to suck. Two motorcyclists, one big and one stubborn, crammed on a 250cc Vespa can make for a very long day. But aside from bottoming the suspension, which either compressed my spine or caused my butt to part ways with the seat, it was one of the nicest rides I've

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"I can't remember if this is chateau St. Jean or W

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